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Science Notes - Standardized Tests Negatively Impact Classroom Instruction

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SCIENCE NOTES

Standardized Tests Negatively Impact Classroom Instruction

Researchers from Boston College recently completed a three-year, 1 million-dollar study sponsored by the National Science Foundation. They confirmed the belief that most standardized and textbook tests emphasize low-level thinking and knowledge and that they exert a profound, mostly negative effect on classroom instruction.

In science, the researchers found that 75 percent of the items on the standardized tests and 90 percent of the items in the textbook tests examine students' recall of facts and routine applications.

The tests included the California Achievement Test, the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Survey of Basic Skills of Science Research Associates, the Stanford Achievement Test and the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Their copyright dates were from 1985 to 1990. Texts were chosen from Addison-Wesley, Holt, Houghton-Mifflin, Merrill, Prentice-Hall, Scott-Foresman and Silver Burdett. A questionnaire was sent to 2,229 math and science teachers in grades 4-12, and 199 math and science teachers were interviewed.

A significant number of teachers were found to "teach toward the test." This was especially true in classrooms with large numbers of minority students. Teachers reported that the tests fragmented their curricula and compromised their ideas about good teaching.

Copies of the summary documents and technical reports related to the study, "The Influence of Testing and Teaching Math and Science in Grades 4-12," are available from the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy, 323 Campton Hall, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.

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