

Testing, Tracking, and Grading: The Woeful Trinity

*with supplementary quotations
of Rudolf Steiner added in 2008*

Ronald Milito

1994

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My observations and reflections on twenty years of teaching science and mathematics from fifth grade through university level inexorably lead me to the conclusion: testing, tracking, and grading strangle attempts to achieve the true goal of education—the development of all human potential slumbering within each individuality. I maintain this despite whatever good intentions may have motivated the introduction of these practices, which clearly were not needed by the great teachers of humanity. All knowledge presupposes two great pillars: observation and thinking.¹ So it is with the evaluation of anything. The penchant for scientific research and experimental proof in education has weakened our faith in our own powers. Many prefer to rely upon statistical studies, conveniently forgetting that even these must spring from observation and thinking. In my analysis, I appeal to the reader to activate his own powers and relentlessly pursue a thought to its final consequences. As Rudolf Steiner states: “One must be able to confront the idea in living experience, or else fall into bondage to it.”² In this manner we must enter into the interlocking dynamics of testing, tracking, and grading.

Let us start with grades. A proponent of grading once argued that grades are necessary in order to let students know how they are doing. Why can we not tell students how they are doing by constructive criticism of their work? Furthermore, is it not conceivable that there are aspects of the student’s development that should not be pointed out? In fact, the proponent of grades mentioned above worked with very young students who did not receive grades. So how did students know how they were doing? Or their teachers for that matter? How many of us really need a grade to know how we are doing when we attempt to master something? The real questions are whether we form a meaningful connection with the activity and whether it contributes to the comprehensive unfolding of our being. In this light, grades are at best contrived and, in their more negative action, impede our proper connection to the activity. As Steiner puts it: “Every education is self-education, and as teachers we can only provide the most favorable conditions in which, through our agency, the child can educate itself in accordance with its own destiny. This is the attitude the teacher should have towards the child, and it can be developed only through an ever-growing awareness of this fact.”³

The proponents of grades cannot bring themselves to penetrate all the way to the kernel of their thought. When they face the reality of the students who can’t respond to their grading, they save the appearance of grading by inventing the tracking system. Students are sorted into different tracks based on their inherent ability and then graded accordingly. We are then set to wondering what a middle track A means in terms of the upper track grades? Is it an upper track B? We track so that students won’t suffer from a true grading, but now they must suffer from realizing that they are inherently less able. It gets worse when we then restrict the concepts that we may teach to those on the lower tracks and thus deny them the chance to even try. This so-called separate but equal is now being challenged as a veritable apartheid and being successfully overcome in the public sector.⁴ This serves to verify Steiner’s educational philosophy which does not group students by ability as a general practice.

Ironically, a number of proponents of grades would agree with me about the tender nature of the human soul, but only in the younger years. A non-Waldorf school that I worked at did not have grades until fifth grade. A number of Waldorf schools do not give grades until seventh grade. When asked why they ever start, it is asserted that sooner or later students must be prepared for the real world of high school and college where grades will be given. Furthermore, there is a fear that parents will lose confidence in the school. Recently, the Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School in New York State decided to give up grading students because of the concern that students were more interested in grades than the subject matter. So far, the school has found that college acceptance of its students has not been reduced. In fact, some colleges are more interested by the no-grade policy and the emphasis on displaying work through a portfolio. So much for imagined fears. It should also be pointed out that we have here another example of how the behavioristic model of extrinsic reward and punishment with grades can backfire and lessen the intrinsic reward of working with the subject.⁵ I have experienced extreme cases of students who would drive themselves to achieve high grades and high honors, but who had little interest in the subject. One, in particular, was even partially amused at his own condition.

To further reveal the contradictory elements of grad-

ing, I offer the following story of a private school that wished to introduce computers to its students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. A special computer lab was set up and the students were all to visit it, but the school's board decreed that no grades were to be given because they didn't want any possibility of a negative experience with the computer. Why didn't the same logic apply to any other subject? To complete the irony of the situation, the computer teacher was unhappy because no grades could be given out. This removed a handle for controlling student behavior. Furthermore, it seemed to the teacher that there was less status in teaching an ungraded subject. I would have rejoiced at such freedom in my subject.

In the desire to succeed at school, a student may turn to cheating. If this goes undetected, we are fostering serious miseducation. During the freshman final exams at college, I was shocked to see how many attempted to cheat. During my junior year college organic chemistry laboratory course, which was filled with pre-med students, I was shocked again to find out how many were falsifying their experimental results. One day they were caught because the professor gave us a different starting compound without our knowing about it. Most of the class claimed to have synthesized the expected product, but, of course, this was impossible. The honest ones obtained and reported a strange result, knowing it would mean a poor grade. Current surveys in *Science* magazine reveal that a shocking number of scientists falsify data under the pressure to get or keep funding.⁶ The controversy surrounding Robert Gallo's claim to have independently discovered the putative AIDS virus demonstrates that even scientists in the highest positions may be distorting information.⁷

At this point it should become clear that grades and degrees may determine future employment. This, in turn, may explain why many students have adopted what I call the legalistic-consumer approach to education. Many colleges and high schools require that a course outline and grading policy be clearly spelled out. A copy is kept on file with the administration in case of a complaint or legal challenge. Taking such an adversarial position at the beginning seems antithetical to what is supposed to transpire between the students and the teacher. It also leads to a more restricted presentation, since students are supposed to have everything spelled out and unplanned explorations may cause anxiety. Perhaps the most specific reply to the question of what will be on a test would be to give the test out in advance. My experience with community college students has revealed some very narrow individuals who want to know as little as possible and make as much money as possible. Fortunately, I have also encountered students who are really becoming interested in knowledge for the first time in their lives.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I recall an

undergraduate course in educational philosophy in which we were never told how we would be graded. In our discussions the professor would like to emphasize that real certainty in knowledge is not possible. I would quite naively ask him how he could be sure of that? At the end of the course we had to visit his office and tell him what our grade should be, which certainly did not inspire the students to act in an objective selfless fashion. I guess with respect to his grading his motto was correct, "Certainty in knowledge is not possible." Today such a course would be impossible under the legalistic mode. But assignment of my legalistic students to such a course would serve as an excellent punishment for their philistinism. The introduction of the pass-fail courses in college was, in my opinion, an attempt to loosen the stranglehold of grades and to encourage students to attempt courses that they would otherwise avoid, but this strategy was limited. Another phenomenon that occurred on college campuses was grade inflation. Was this an attempt by teachers to encourage their students to begin to explore and to open up? We were once notified by the university administration that an inordinate amount of A's were being given out. The so-called soft subjects such as human development, education, and so on were the main culprits. Were these the professors most sensitive to the human condition? The hard sciences such as physics and mathematics participated in grade inflation insofar as they had graduate departments. In graduate school it is necessary to get a B in order to pass a course. It is reasoned that since the best students from the undergraduate level have gone on to graduate school the standards should be higher. Therefore it is acceptable to give all A's and B's in graduate courses.

Another way to ameliorate the destructive effect of grades is to institute the practice of learning to mastery, that is, allowing students to test and re-test until they achieve the level of mastery needed. But it can be argued that since there is a limit to how different from each other successive tests can be, learning to mastery is tantamount to being shown a test beforehand. In contrast, some teachers I have worked with would never let students keep their exams since that would give away the questions and eventually other students would accumulate these and not learn anything but the content of the tests. So again we can ask ourselves, What does a grade really mean? Those of the more scientific-critical-analytical school want departmental tests so that students with one professor won't get off any easier than students with another professor. Then an A has a more reliable meaning. This logic carried through to the bitter end leads us to national standards and testing. The drawback is that each teacher may start teaching to the test, and you can be sure that the legalistic consumers will exert great pressure for this.

And what will happen to spontaneity? When I was a practice teacher, my biology students became intensely

interested in probability during a unit on genetics. My supervising teacher was amazed at the student interest and allowed us some time, but it had to be limited because we had to cover the topics needed for the New York State Regents Exam. Thus I witnessed the turning off of student interest for the sake of statewide standards. Therefore, to those who are calling for national standards and tests I give the challenge of explaining why statewide standards have failed to prevent New York from experiencing the problems besetting education in general. Is it intelligent to apply to the whole country what has not worked locally? In the drive for uniformity, we will experience a decreased tolerance for individuality. As an example, I refer to a science teacher who once boasted to me that where he taught, he and his colleagues kept each other honest by checking with each other daily to be sure that they were teaching the same page in the text on the same day. I have dubbed this the Lieutenant Scheisskopf approach after the character in Joseph Heller's satirical novel on war, *Catch-22*. Scheisskopf was so obsessed with marching that he fantasized nailing his men to wooden beams to insure perfect rows. One day, by mistake, he is promoted to general, and his first command in spite of the exigencies of war is "Everybody march!"⁸ National standards will no more heal what's ailing education than adopting 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit as a national standard for body temperature. Nor will standardized tests achieve any more than standardized thermometers. Just as illness calls for a physician's local insight, so education needs the insight of a teacher. However, while determining the temperature of a person has no effect on him, the assessment of the student can have major effects and in ways that are easy to miss. How does a multiple choice test affect an expanding consciousness or the unfolding of genius? What does testing in any form do to a person? The analytical scientist may ask what man is and proceed to develop a means to measure him, but what if man is in a state of becoming? Could our testing not then create as well as uncover? Psychologists repeatedly learn and forget the influences of expectation and setting. Industrial psychologists discovered that just the effect on workers of being watched by experimenters improved productivity no matter how work conditions were altered. Anyone could have told them that workers work harder when the boss walks by. In the social breakdown syndrome, it was discovered that patients in big institutionalized settings became dehumanized. Scientists testing drugs on human beings discovered the placebo effect whereby both doctors' and patients' expectations can alleviate or induce symptoms. Behaviorists discovered that rewarding children for doing things that they nor-



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mally did could transfer their interest to the reward and actually lessen their initial interest in the subject. And so it goes on.

Many years ago Banesh Hoffman revealed many of the fallacies in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) type of testing. It is frightening to realize that this type of testing may actually be selecting against a certain kind of human being. "It is not the presence of defective questions that make multiple-choice tests bad. Such questions merely make them worse. Even if all questions were impeccable, the deep student would still be at a disadvantage. He would see more in a question than his more superficial competitors would ever dream was in it, and would expend more time and mental energy than they in answering it. That is the way that his mind works. That is, indeed, his special merit. But the multiple-choice tests are concerned solely with the candidate's choice of answer, and not with his reasons for his choice. Thus they ignore that elusive yet crucial thing we call quality."⁹

Despite Hoffman's invaluable contribution, he can only call for tests that can give creativity and reason a chance. But how can wide-scale tests be in any other form than the objective type? What other kind of test could be administered uniformly over a whole nation and graded by machine? Hoffman does not enter into the dynamic set up by any form of testing for grading. What about sensitive creative souls that don't respond well to testing despite the type of test? Consider the following comments by Rudolf Steiner in this regard:

Speaking of failing an exam—and here I am speaking to specialists in education—I do believe that it would be possible to make even a professor of botany, however clever he might be, fail in his own subject—if such were one's intention! I really believe such a thing to be possible, for anyone could fail in an exam. In this chapter of life also, some peculiar facts have come to light. There lived, for instance, a Robert Hamerling, an Austrian poet, whose use of the German language was later acclaimed the highest level any Austrian writer could possibly reach. The results of his exam certificate, qualifying him for a teaching position at an Austrian Gymnasium, make inter-*

* Editor's note: An academic school preparatory to a university.

esting reading: Greek—excellent; Latin—excellent; German language and essay writing—hardly capable of teaching this subject in the lower classes of a middle school. You actually find this written in Hamerling's teaching certificate! So you see, this matter of failing or passing an exam is quite a tricky business.... There are some who struggle through to become famous poets, despite having bad exam results in their main subject. But not everyone is able to do so. For many, a failed graduation exam means being cast out of the stream of life."¹⁰

So we see that the penchant for national standards and tests working against the evolution of what is needed in education has a clear-cut historical precedent. Steiner gives other examples in order to inspire the teachers of the first Waldorf school to carry out their mission in spite of the massive national forces working around and against them.

*If you look at his [Goethe's] spelling when he was even much older than seven or eight, you will find it full of quite outrageous mistakes. And from his way of writing, it is easy to deduce that today [1923] far more is expected of an eight year old child—if "more" be the right word—than what Goethe, at that time aged seventeen, managed to achieve, naturally only with regard to spelling. This surely goes to show that there is also another way of judging the situation. For Goethe owed a great deal to the fact that even at the age of seventeen he was still liable to make spelling errors because, not having been fettered too much to rigid rules, his inner being could remain flexible with regard to the unfolding of certain soul forces.*¹¹

Steiner points to another case with the example of the monk, Gregor Mendel, the founder of the science of genetics, a science often used to justify tracking:

Mendel failed his [teaching] exam brilliantly, which meant that he was incapable of becoming a teacher at a Gymnasium. But there existed an Austrian regulation permitting failed candidates to retake their exams after a certain period of time. Gregor Mendel did so and again failed brilliantly. I believe that today even in Austria such a person would never be able to find a teaching position in a Gymnasium. However, in those days regulations were a little less stringent. At that time, due to a shortage of teachers, even failed candidates were sometimes employed as teachers, and so, at long last, Gregor Mendel did become a teacher in a Gymnasium, although he had failed his exam twice. But since this had been made possible only by the grace of the headmaster, he was considered to be a second-rate staff member by his colleagues and, according to the rules governing middle school teachers, he was not entitled to add "Dr. phil." to his name. Successful exam candidates usually write these abbreviated degrees after their names In the case of Gregor Mendel these letters were missing, the

*omission pointing out his inferior position but after his death this same individual was hailed as one of the greatest naturalists.*¹²

We can present Charles Darwin as another example of a poor student who succeeded in spite of his apparent deficiency. Alan Moorehead points out that for Darwin, "School, certainly, had not been much of a success; he had always been below average and Julian Huxley is probably right when he says that with today's standards he would never have got into a modern university. At the local school in Shrewsbury they had tried without success to drum classics into him, and then he had gone on to study medicine at Edinburgh, which was a failure; among other things he could not stand the sight of blood."¹³ And as for mathematics, Moorehead quotes from a letter that Darwin wrote to a friend: "I suppose you are two fathoms deep in mathematics and if you are, then God help you, for so am I, only with this difference, I stick fast in the mud at the bottom and there I shall remain." The SAT would certainly have selected out Darwin in today's struggle for the survival of the academically fittest, and it seems unlikely that one of the greatest geniuses in researching electricity, Michael Faraday, would have fared much better. Daniel J. Boorstin reports the following:

*Like the Copernican Revolution in astronomy, the "Field" Revolution in physics would defy common sense If Michael Faraday had been trained in mathematics, he might not have been so ready for his surprising new vision. The son of a poor blacksmith on the outskirts of London, Faraday had to earn his own way from an early age He had almost no formal education—"little more than the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic at a common day school"—but at the age of thirteen he luckily found employment with a friendly French emigré printer and bookbinder, a M. Riebau. Among the books that came to Riebau's shop for binding was *The Improvement of the Mind*, by the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, whose system of self-improvement Faraday followed by keeping the commonplace book that would eventually become his famous laboratory notebook.*¹⁴

Later on, Boorstin reiterates in regard to Faraday's field concept, "At this point it was lucky that Faraday was not a sophisticated mathematician. For then he might have followed the conventional path Faraday's naive vision saw something else."¹⁵

In regard to Wilhelm Roentgen, the discoverer of X-rays, we find that he was "excluded from teaching at a Gymnasium, and only by a special kindness of an influential person was he allowed to gain a teaching post at all."¹⁶ If one considers all of the ramifications of the discovery of X-rays for biology, medicine, physics, and astronomy, it is simply staggering to see how close we came to a setback in these fields. Other cases could be cited to show that standardized testing constitutes a

clear and present danger. It may be objected that true genius will always prevail, but that is a risky assumption. How many are lost or damaged, genius or not, for each one who successfully runs the gauntlet of testing? Let us ask ourselves again when the tenderness of youth is tough enough to take the grading and the testing.

Let us see what is the direct action of testing on the health of human beings from the perspective Steiner provides to the teachers about to start the first Waldorf School:

The more you merely skim along in your reading, the less you exert yourselves to take in what you read with really deep interest—the more you will be furthering the decay of substance within you. But the more you follow what you read with interest and warmth of feeling, the more you will be furthering the blood activity, that is, you will be preventing mental activity from disturbing your sleep. When you have to cram for an examination you are assimilating a great deal in opposition to your interest. For if we only assimilated what aroused our interest we should not get through our examinations under modern conditions. It follows that cramming for an examination disturbs sleep and brings disorder into our normal life. This must be specially borne in mind where children are concerned. Therefore, for children, it is best of all and most in accordance with an educational ideal, if we omit cramming for examinations. That is, we should omit examinations altogether and let the school year finish as it began. As teachers we must feel it our duty to ask ourselves: Why should the child undergo a test at all? I have always had him before me and I know quite well what he knows and what he does not know. Of course under present-day conditions this must remain an ideal for the time being. And I must beg you not to direct your rebel natures too forcibly against the outside world. Your criticism of our present-day civilization you must turn inwards like a goad, so that you may work slowly in these things—towards making people learn to think differently; then external social conditions will change their present form.¹⁷

And in 1912, seven years prior to the founding of the first Waldorf School, Steiner cited cramming for exams as a source of nervousness:

It is extremely harmful for our time that many of the men who hold high and responsible positions in public life have had to study as one does today. There are whole branches of learning that are taught in such a way that throughout the entire school year the student will be unable to spend his time and energy really thinking through what he has heard from his professors. As a result, when he is faced with an exam, he is forced to cram for it. This cramming, however, is dreadful because it provides no real connection of interest of the soul with the subject matter

that the student is to be examined in. No wonder the prevailing opinion of the student often is one of wanting to forget as soon as possible what he has just had to learn!

What are the consequences of these educational methods? In some respects, men are no doubt receiving the training needed to take part in public life. But as a result of their schooling they are not inwardly united with their work. They feel remote from it. Now there is nothing worse than to feel remote in your heart from the things you have to do with your head. It is not only repugnant to sensitive people, but it also acts most adversely on the strength of the ether body. Thus, because of the tenuous interest that may exist in the core of a person's soul for his professional pursuits, his ether body is gradually weakened."¹⁸

Readers of the materialistic orientation may balk at the idea of an ether body. In an earlier time both scientists and philosophers postulated the existence of a life force, a supersensible entity that brings an organizing activity into lifeless matter, but today most scientists reject such a postulate as unscientific. For Steiner the ether body is not a postulate but an experience. Accordingly, he laid a thorough epistemological basis for intelligently dealing with both the sensible and the supersensible.^{19,20} Only after doing so did he publish his results of supersensible research on man's higher members, of which the ether body is only one.²¹ He also explained how an individual can safely and morally develop his own ability to perceive such entities, and he went even further by showing how a person can learn to read the actions and conditions of the higher members of man through the effects they have on the physical body. He encouraged doctors and teachers to work in this way to best help their patients and students, and he expected that both of these professions would unite in a true education. Much of what he indicates could be tested in practice if there were a will to do so, but it is also possible for a healthy sense for truth to understand the results of spiritual research.

In regard to cramming for exams, let us recall the often quoted phrase that "to educate is to light a fire, not to fill a bucket." Although this phrase sounds good at graduation ceremonies, the reality is that most prefer the fill and spill approach: fill them up with knowledge, then stand back as they regurgitate it on a test. We fret about self-destructive disorders, such as bulimia, that prey on adolescents, yet we encourage such on the soul level and reward those who succumb. We are fascinated with psychosomatic illnesses, the role of stress, and how we can bring about healing through positive imagery and enhancing self-esteem, but we can't seem to recognize the impact that education has on health. Let us consider the feelings that students have during an exam. How many times have I seen students who clearly knew the material freeze and become literally stupefied, totally unable to respond to hints that normally would have set

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them in motion on similar problems during regular class work. Is this a healthy thing to do to children or to anybody for that matter? What is the source of this paralyzing fear? Is it the fact that the student could be found wanting and cast out of the stream of life? How nightmarish that a beloved teacher could be a party to this? Steiner advocates giving children concepts that can grow with them and that may only become fully comprehensible years later.²² Seen in this light, strict objectives and goals actually harm the development of the student.

Sometimes, when my older students ask what is going to be on a test I am compelled to give, I tell them that I am not giving the real test; the real test will come from life. It won't be a review sheet, it won't be multiple choice with the correct answer present, there may not be a retest if you don't do well, and no grades will be given. ▲

Notes:

1. Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity: Fundamentals of a Modern View of the World* (Rudolf Steiner Publications, West Nyack, New York, 1963), p. 87.
2. Steiner, p. 285.

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3. Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education* (The Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, 1988), p. 145.
4. John O'Neil, "Can Separate Be Equal," *Curriculum Update* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Update, June 1993).
5. Ronald Millito, "Homework Is a Sacred Cow," *The Threefold Review* (Issue No. 8), pp. 35-40.
6. *Science*, March 27, 1992. See also Christopher Anderson, "Growing Up in Public," *Nature* (January 2, 1992), Vol. 355, p. 6.
7. John Crewdson, "The Great AIDS Quest," *Chicago Tribune Special Report* (Nov. 19, 1989).
8. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (Dell Publications Co., Inc., New York, 1955).
9. Banesh Hoffman, *The Tyranny of Testing* (Collier Books, New York, 1962).
10. Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, p. 161.
11. Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, p. 153.
12. Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, p. 153.
13. Alan Moorehead, *Darwin and the Beagle* (Penguin Books, New York, 1971), pp. 13-18.
14. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Discoverers* (Vintage Books, New York, 1983), p. 679.
15. Boorstin, p. 681.
16. Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, p. 153.
17. Rudolf Steiner, *The Study of Man* (Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1966), p. 180 f.
18. Rudolf Steiner, *Overcoming Nervousness* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, 1969), p. 9.
19. Rudolf Steiner, *A Theory of Knowledge Based on Goethe's World Conception* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, 1968).
20. Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*.
21. Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man* (Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, 1971), pp. 13-19.
22. Rudolf Steiner, *The Essentials of Education* (Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1968), p. 43.

from Discussions With Teachers Rudolf Steiner
with the teachers at the first Waldorf School
August 21 through September 6, 1919
Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, U.S.A 1997

2008
supplement
P.1

A question about school books.

RUDOLF STEINER: You will have to look at those commonly used. But the less we need to use books the better. We only need printed books when the children have to take public examinations. We have to be clear about how we want to reach our goal in education. Ideally we should have no examinations at all. The final exams are a compromise with the authorities. Prior to puberty, dread of examinations can become the driving impulse of the whole physiological and psychological constitution of the child. The best thing would be to get rid of all examinations. The children would then become much more quick-witted.

Someone asked whether reports should be provided.

RUDOLF STEINER: As long as children remain in the same school, what is the purpose of writing reports? Provide them when they leave school. Constant reports are not vitally important to education. Remarks about various individual subjects could be given freely and without any specific form.

Necessary communication with the parents is in some cases also a kind of grading, but that cannot be entirely avoided. It may also prove necessary, for example, for a pupil to stay in the same grade and repeat the year's work (something we should naturally handle somewhat differently than is usual); this may be necessary occasionally, but in our way of teaching it should be avoided whenever possible. Let's make it our practice to correct our students so that they are really *helped* by the correction.

In arithmetic, for example, if we do not stress what the child *cannot* do, but instead work with the student so that in the end the child *can* do it—following the opposite of the principle used until now—then “being unable” to do something will not play the large role it now does. Thus in our whole teaching, the passion for passing judgment that teachers acquire by marking grades for the children every day in a notebook should be transformed into an effort to help the children over and over, every moment. Do away with all your grades and placements. If there is something that the student cannot do, the teachers should give themselves the bad mark as well as the pupil, because they have not yet succeeded in teaching the student how to do it.

Reports have a place, as I have said, as communication with the parents and to meet the demand of the outside world; in this sense we must follow the usual custom. I don't need to enlarge on this, but in school we must make it felt that reports are very insignificant to us. We must spread this feeling throughout the school so that it becomes a kind of moral atmosphere.

pp 25-26

Discussion One

pp 178-179

Discussion
Fifteen

from Spiritual Science As A Foundation
For Social Forms

seventeen lectures by Rudolf Steiner, 1920
Anthroposophic Press/Rudolf Steiner Press 1986

pp 3-4
Lecture I

Now, when we ended the first year something happened that seemed to be only an exterior matter, but, as I am about to explain, it was an event that had great inner significance. A complete innovation took place. It concerned the report cards.

The report card system is truly one of the most miserable aspects of our schools. In a superficial, groping manner, teachers must grade their students from 1, 2, 3, 4 to 5 and so on,* a procedure that stifles the very nature of schools in a most appalling way. Our report cards are based on actual educational psychology, on an absolutely practical application of human psychology. At the end of the first school year, the teachers were at the point where they were able to write a report card for every child corresponding to its own character and capabilities, individually indicating the possibility for continued growth and progress. No report card was like any other. There were no numbers indicating grades. Instead, through the teacher's individual insight into his pupil, the student received a characterization of his personality. Already in the course of the first school year, the teachers had so intimately sought to deepen their understanding of every child's soul that they were able to write

into the report card an accompanying verse suited to each recipient's individual character.

These report cards are an innovation. Do not conclude, however, that it can be imitated or readily introduced somewhere else, because this change has been brought about by the whole spirit of the Waldorf School and is based on the fact that the most intensive educational psychology was practiced during the first school year.

*Note by translator: In the German educational system, the grade of 1 is equivalent to an A; 4 is a D and 5 would indicate a failing grade.