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School tests harm science education

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0809/080924-tests.html>

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THE ARTICLE

Making schoolchildren take tests is harming students' interest in science, as well as having a negative impact on kids' natural curiosity. This is the conclusion of a British university report into science teaching and testing in primary schools. Researchers from Durham University warned that too many schools were teaching science just so students could pass tests. There is a lot of pressure for students to get to better schools. The experts said there was very little real science teaching going on that encouraged students to find out things for themselves. Learning by doing, experimenting and seeing should be at the heart of all physics, chemistry and biology lessons. The Durham University team found the opposite; that there was little hands-on, practical work taking place in Britain's schools.

Lead researcher Professor Peter Tymms said it was important to develop new approaches to primary school science. He compared today's teaching with that of the past sixty years and found that testing was harming children's natural desire to ask questions about science: "We suspect that the current national approach to science in primary schools is not impacting on children's scientific thought and curiosity as much as is possible," he said. Professor Tymms made it clear what schools and science teachers need to focus on, saying: "The purpose of science in primary schools should be to foster a sense of curiosity and positive attitudes in the young child. It should also guide the child in solving problems to do with the physical, natural and human worlds."

WARM-UPS

1. TESTS: Walk around the class and talk to other students about tests. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

schoolchildren / science / curiosity / testing / pressure / experimenting / hands-on / new approaches / desire / asking questions / solving problems / physical worlds

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. CURIOSITY: Were you very curious as a child? Complete this table and talk about it with your partner(s). Change partners and share your ideas.

Curious about...	Why (not)?	Now?
Science		
The body		
Insects		
The Universe		
Other countries		
God		

4. CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT: Students A strongly believe children should always ask questions; Students B strongly believe children ask too many questions already. Change partners again and talk about your roles and conversations.

5. TESTING TESTS: Were you good at taking tests? Give yourself a score from 10 (absolutely brilliant) to 1 (totally rubbish) for your test-taking abilities in the subjects below. Talk to your partner(s) about your scores.

_____ Science	_____ Literature
_____ English	_____ Maths
_____ History	_____ Your language
_____ Geography	_____ Other _____

6. SCIENCE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'science'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. School science tests have injured dozens of schoolchildren in England. T / F
- b. Many schools teach children science just to pass science tests. T / F
- c. Experts said British children were learning a lot in science lessons. T / F
- d. Researchers said British schoolchildren were doing lots of experiments. T / F
- e. A professor said schools needed to use techniques from 60 years ago. T / F
- f. The professor said children were asking many questions about science. T / F
- g. The professor said science lessons should encourage curiosity. T / F
- h. The professor said science should be about problem-solving. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. harming | a. effect |
| 2. impact | b. reason |
| 3. curiosity | c. motivated |
| 4. encouraged | d. encourage |
| 5. taking place | e. methods |
| 6. approaches | f. damaging |
| 7. desire | g. guess |
| 8. suspect | h. happening |
| 9. purpose | i. enthusiasm |
| 10. foster | j. interest |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. students' interest | a. going on |
| 2. kids' natural | b. doing |
| 3. there was very little real science teaching | c. develop new approaches |
| 4. Learning by | d. in science |
| 5. hands-on, | e. of curiosity |
| 6. it was important to | f. practical work |
| 7. children's natural desire | g. curiosity |
| 8. impacting on children's scientific | h. human worlds |
| 9. foster a sense | i. to ask questions |
| 10. natural and | j. thought |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Making schoolchildren take tests is _____ students' interest in science, as well as having a negative impact on kids' natural curiosity. This is the conclusion of a British university _____ into science teaching and testing in primary schools. Researchers from Durham University _____ that too many schools were teaching science just so students could _____ tests. There is a lot of pressure for students to get to better schools. The experts said there was very little real science teaching _____ on that encouraged students to find out things for themselves. Learning by _____, experimenting and seeing should be at the _____ of all physics, chemistry and biology lessons. The Durham University team found the opposite; that there was little _____ -on, practical work taking place in Britain's schools.

doing
warned
hands
harming
going
report
heart
pass

Lead researcher Professor Peter Tymms said it was important to _____ new approaches to primary school science. He compared today's teaching with that of the _____ sixty years and found that testing was harming children's natural desire to _____ questions about science: "We suspect that the current national approach to science in primary schools is not impacting on children's scientific _____ and curiosity as much as is possible," he said. Professor Tymms made it _____ what schools and science teachers need to _____ on, saying: "The purpose of science in primary schools should be to foster a _____ of curiosity and positive attitudes in the young child. It should also _____ the child in solving problems to do with the physical, natural and human worlds."

sense
thought
focus
past
guide
clear
develop
ask

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

Making schoolchildren take tests is harming students' _____, as well as having a negative _____ natural curiosity. This is the conclusion of a British university _____ teaching and testing in primary schools. Researchers from Durham University warned that too many schools were teaching _____ students could pass tests. There is a lot of pressure for students to get to better schools. The experts said there was very little real science teaching _____ encouraged students to find out things for themselves. Learning by doing, experimenting and seeing should _____ all physics, chemistry and biology lessons. The Durham University team found the opposite; that there was little hands-on, practical work _____ Britain's schools.

Lead researcher Professor Peter Tymms said it was important to develop _____ primary school science. He compared today's teaching with that of _____ years and found that testing was harming children's natural _____ questions about science: "We suspect that the current national approach to science in primary schools is not impacting on children's scientific thought and curiosity _____ possible," he said. Professor Tymms made it clear what schools and science teachers need _____, saying: "The purpose of science in primary schools should be to foster _____ curiosity and positive attitudes in the young child. It should also _____ in solving problems to do with the physical, natural and human worlds."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'science' and 'test'.

science	test
----------------	-------------

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• harming• natural• just• experts• heart• hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop• sixty• suspect• clear• foster• guide
--	--

STUDENT TEST SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about tests in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

SCHOOL TEST DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) What springs to mind when you hear the word 'test'?
- c) Are you good at taking tests?
- d) Do you have a special technique for taking tests?
- e) What do you do on the day of an important test?
- f) Were you interested in science as a child?
- g) What should children do in science lessons?
- h) Did you find things out for yourself at school?
- i) Was there a lot of hands-on work in your science classes?
- j) Do you think tests help children learn?

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SCHOOL TEST DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Do you take anything special into a test?
- c) Do you think education today is a lot better than it was 60 years ago?
- d) Did you ask a lot of questions in class when you were at school?
- e) What is more important for children – curiosity or learning?
- f) What's the most important thing schools need to focus on?
- g) What do you think is the purpose of science in primary schools?
- h) Did going to school foster your curiosity?
- i) Is science the most important thing children should learn?
- j) What questions would you like to ask Professor Peter Tymms?

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LANGUAGE

Making schoolchildren (1) _____ tests is harming students' interest in science, as well as having a negative impact (2) _____ kids' natural curiosity. This is the conclusion of a British university report (3) _____ science teaching and testing in primary schools. Researchers from Durham University warned that too many schools were teaching science just so students could pass tests. There is a lot of (4) _____ for students to get to better schools. The experts said there was very little real science teaching going on that encouraged students to find out things (5) _____ themselves. Learning by doing, experimenting and seeing should be at the heart of all physics, chemistry and biology lessons. The Durham University team found the opposite; that there was little (6) _____ -on, practical work taking place in Britain's schools.

Lead researcher Professor Peter Tymms said it was important to develop new approaches to primary school science. He (7) _____ today's teaching with that of the past sixty years and found that testing was harming children's natural (8) _____ to ask questions about science: "We suspect that the current national approach to science in primary schools is not impacting on children's scientific thought and curiosity as much as (9) _____ possible," he said. Professor Tymms made it (10) _____ what schools and science teachers need to focus on, saying: "The purpose of science in primary schools should be to foster a (11) _____ of curiosity and positive attitudes in the young child. It should also guide the child in (12) _____ problems to do with the physical, natural and human worlds."

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. | (a) take | (b) taking | (c) took | (d) taken |
| 2. | (a) by | (b) on | (c) at | (d) to |
| 3. | (a) about to | (b) onto | (c) into | (d) to |
| 4. | (a) pressurize | (b) pressed | (c) pressing | (d) pressure |
| 5. | (a) on | (b) so | (c) at | (d) for |
| 6. | (a) heels | (b) head | (c) hands | (d) heart |
| 7. | (a) compared | (b) comparison | (c) compare | (d) comparing |
| 8. | (a) destiny | (b) desire | (c) describe | (d) design |
| 9. | (a) be | (b) are | (c) is | (d) being |
| 10. | (a) clear | (b) clearly | (c) clears | (d) clarity |
| 11. | (a) senses | (b) senseless | (c) nonsense | (d) sense |
| 12. | (a) solution | (b) solving | (c) soluble | (d) solve |

HOMework

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about science in schools. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. SCIENCE: Make a poster about how important it is for children to study science. What kind of science do today's students need to study to help develop your country? Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. TESTING: Write a magazine article about school tests. Include imaginary interviews with an educator who believes tests harm curiosity and creativity, and a teacher who thinks tests in education are essential.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. DIARY / JOURNAL: You are a primary school student. Write your thoughts about your science lessons and science tests. What would you like to change? Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

6. LETTER: Write a letter to Professor Peter Tymms. Ask him three questions about his research. Make three suggestions on what schools need to do to make students more curious and more intelligent. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. F e. F f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------|----|------------|
| 1. | harming | a. | damaging |
| 2. | impact | b. | effect |
| 3. | curiosity | c. | interest |
| 4. | encouraged | d. | motivated |
| 5. | taking place | e. | happening |
| 6. | approaches | f. | methods |
| 7. | desire | g. | enthusiasm |
| 8. | suspect | h. | guess |
| 9. | purpose | i. | reason |
| 10. | foster | j. | encourage |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | | | |
|-----|---|----|------------------------|
| 1. | students' interest | a. | in science |
| 2. | kids' natural | b. | curiosity |
| 3. | there was very little real science teaching | c. | going on |
| 4. | Learning by | d. | doing |
| 5. | hands-on, | e. | practical work |
| 6. | it was important to | f. | develop new approaches |
| 7. | children's natural desire | g. | to ask questions |
| 8. | impacting on children's scientific | h. | human worlds |
| 9. | foster a sense | i. | of curiosity |
| 10. | natural and | j. | thought |

GAP FILL:

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LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - b 3 - c 4 - d 5 - d 6 - c 7 - a 8 - b 9 - c 10 - a 11 - d 12 - b