

東吳大學 103 學年度轉學生(含進修學士班轉學生)招生考試試題

第 1 頁，共 2 頁

系級	英文學系（進修學士班）三年級	考試時間	100 分鐘
科目	英文寫作	本科總分	100 分

In Taiwan and throughout the world, we hear that education is supposed to increase students' competitiveness. However, Alfie Kohn, the author of the following article, argues that we should conceptualize education as collaboration, instead of competition. Read the article and see if you agree or disagree with him. Then write an essay to discuss whether education should be conceptualized as collaboration or competition. (100%)

Against “Competitiveness”

Why Good Teachers Aren't Thinking About the Global Economy

Retrieved from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/competitiveness.htm> on June 30, 2014.

Here are some phrases that might reassure us if they were used to defend a particular education policy: “excitement about learning” . . . “deeper thinking about questions that matter” . . . “promoting social and moral development” . . . “democratic society.”

And here's a phrase that ought to make us wince and back away slowly: “competitiveness in a 21st-century global economy.”

For years, champions of high-stakes testing and mandatory curriculum standards have invoked a need to ratchet up the skills of future employees and, by extension, the revenues of U.S. corporations....

Various strands of evidence have converged to challenge the claim that the state of our economy is a function of how good our schools are at preparing tomorrow's workers. For individual students, school achievement is only weakly related to subsequent workplace performance. And for nations, there's little correlation between average test scores and economic vigor.

Schools make a tempting scapegoat when a company's financial results are disappointing or when the economy as a whole falters. But an employee's educational background is only one of many factors that determine his or her productivity. Worker productivity, in turn, is only one of many factors that determine corporate profitability. And corporate profitability is only one of many factors that determine the state of the economy – particularly the employment picture. Does anyone seriously believe, for example, that the main reason U.S. companies are shipping jobs by the millions to Mexico and Asia is because they believe those countries' schools are better?

But let's talk about values, not just facts. Is the main mission of schools really to prepare children to be productive workers who will do their part to increase the profitability of their future employers? Every time education is described as an “investment,” or schools are discussed in the context of the “global economy,” a loud alarm ought to go off, reminding us of the moral and practical implications of giving an answer in dollars to a question about schools. As Jonathan Kozol recently reminded us, good teachers “refuse to see their pupils as . . . pint-sized deficits or assets for America's economy into whom they are expected to pump ‘added value.’”

Lending an even more noxious twist to the habit of seeing education in purely economic terms is the use of the word “competitiveness,” which implies that our goals should be framed in terms of beating others rather than doing well. When the topic is globalization, it's commonly assumed that competition is unavoidable: For one enterprise (or country) to succeed, another must fail. But even if this were true – and economists Paul Krugman and the late David Gordon have separately argued it probably isn't -- why in the world would we accept the same zero-sum mentality with respect to learning?

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第 2 頁，共 2 頁

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Consider the sport of ranking the U.S. against other nations on standardized tests. Once we've debunked the myth that test scores predict economic success, why would we worry about our country's standing as measured by those scores? To say that our students are first, or tenth, on a list provides no useful information about how much they know or how good our schools are. If all the countries did reasonably well in absolute terms, there would be no shame in (and, perhaps, no statistical significance to) being at the bottom. If all the countries did poorly, there would be no glory in being at the top. Exclamatory headlines about how "our" schools are doing compared to "theirs" suggest that we're less concerned with the quality of education than with whether we can chant, "We're Number One!"

An essay published on this page last year reported that U.S. students are doing better in mathematics than earlier generations did. Was the author moved by this fact to express delight, or at least relief? On the contrary, he pronounced the current state of affairs "disturbing" because children in other countries are also doing well – and that, by definition, is considered bad news.

Likewise, the *New York Times* warned in the late 1990s that "American high school graduation rates, for generations the highest in the world, have slipped below those of most industrialized countries." Actually, on most measures, the U.S. is doing better than ever in terms of the proportion of our adults who finish school. But again we were invited to fret because progress had been made by other countries, too, meaning we were no longer king of the mountain.

What if we just ignored the status of students in other countries? That wouldn't be especially neighborly, but at least we wouldn't be viewing the gains of children in other lands as a troubling development. Better yet, rather than defending whatever policies will ostensibly help our graduates to "compete," we could make decisions on the basis of what will help them *collaborate* effectively. Educators, too, might think in terms of working with – and learning from – their counterparts in other countries.

Even beyond the moral justification for transcending reflexive rivalry, Janet Swenson at Michigan State University points out that "we'll all benefit from the best education we can provide to every child on the face of this planet. Do you care if it's a child in Africa who finds a cure for cancer rather than a child in your country?" she asks.

It took me awhile to realize that at the core of the current "tougher standards" movement is a worldview characterized by artificial scarcity -- along with the assumption that schooling is ultimately about economic outcomes. A more reasonable and humane perspective is always hard to come by when we're told that we're in a race. The prospects for critical thought are particularly bleak if the race never ends.

Sadder still, the same competitive mindset shows up as district is pitted against district, school against school, student against student. Several years ago, one superintendent in the Northeast vowed that his city's test scores would "never be last again" in his state. Like so many others, he was confusing higher scores with better learning. But this appalling statement also implied that his students didn't have to improve; as long as kids in another community fared even more poorly, he would be satisfied. Such a position is not only intellectually indefensible (because of its focus on *relative* performance) but morally bankrupt (because of its indifference to the welfare of children in other places).

Almost any policy, it seems, no matter how harmful, can be rationalized in the name of "competitiveness" by politicians and corporate executives, or by journalists whose imaginations are flatter than the world about which they write. But educators ought to aim higher. Our loyalty, after all, is not to corporations but to children. Our chief concern – our "bottom line," if you must -- is not victory for some but learning for all.