

support for *Supplementary Units* withered in the face of a resurgent conservatism during the early stages of the Cold War.

There is much to admire about *Worthy Piece of Work*. It meticulously uses archival sources and oral histories to uncover the creative strategies African Americans devised to counter racist curricula. The book reminds us of Black women teachers' political acumen and the many hats they often wear. Morgan was not only an instructor, but also an educational creative and thought leader. Hines makes it clear that he writes an "educational biography" (xiv) and thus more intimate aspects of Morgan's life are not included. This may be due not only to the available source base but also Black women's "culture of dissemblance," which shielded the more private aspects of their lives from public view.³

The book also makes clear parallels to our current historical moment where curricula centring marginalized people are under constant attack. It forces us to consider if the power structure is even concerned with uncovering historical truths, particularly if they threaten existing systems of privilege. We are reminded that windows of opportunity have been regrettably short, particularly when compared to periods of backlash. Yet despite these challenges, Morgan's pioneering efforts are not in vain. We see traces of her imprint in the flowering of Black studies programs in the 1960s and 1970s and even our current efforts to decolonize the curriculum. It is a telling commentary of American democracy, that this work is just as deserving of our efforts as it was in Morgan's day.

Worth Kamili Hayes
Morehouse College

Jack Schneider and Ethan L. Hutt

*Off the Mark: How Grades, Ratings, and Rankings Undermine Learning
(But Don't Have To)*

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Schneider and Hutt's *Off the Mark: How Grades, Ratings, and Rankings Undermine Learning (But Don't Have To)* provides an overview of three central assessment "technologies"—grades, tests, and student records—and the manner in which they shape the American educational system in K–12 and post-secondary contexts. The book examines their function as forms of motivation, communication, and synchronization, detailing central problems and challenges. The narrative offered in this text is both measured and complex: "crucial interventions" can provide solutions while at the same time presenting additional challenges (111). While assessment in American classrooms may, indeed, be broken, "the key to reform," Schneider and

3 Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 4, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912.

Hutt stress, “is not to reinvent the system, but to recalibrate it” (112); “we need to orient ourselves away from trying to *solve* the problem and toward understanding and *managing* it” (240).

The book, organized into three sections, contains eight chapters. Section 1 problematizes assessment technology. In chapter 1, Schneider and Hutt provide astute insight into the coalescence of grading and market values, explaining that grades have been reduced to commodities to be collected as “compensation” for work and exchanged for further goods—acceptance to university, credentials, and/or a “successful future” (23). In this high-stakes, future-focused model, the authors argue, grades serve to measure potential more than they communicate present performance. In chapter 2, the implications of standardized testing in K–12 classrooms are detailed, inclusive of common critiques—teaching to the test, the “narrowing” of curriculum, limiting focus to mathematics and reading, reducing or eliminating teacher professional judgment and autonomy—and potential merits—providing diagnostic data, reducing bias, and documenting inequity (51). Chapter 3 characterizes transcripts as reductionist assessment tools, with the authors providing a contextual overview of the development of credit hours and majors and minors. Here, Schneider and Hutt encourage the reader to consider how, while narrow and limited in scope, transcripts also level the playing field in universalizing and prescribing a single system of measurement. A central message throughout the first section of the text is an important one: problems with these technologies are systemic, rather than individual; parents, teachers, and students should not be faulted for attempting to learn how to use assessment technologies effectively, even if done in an attempt to gain advantages.

In section 2, the historical and contemporary justification for the present moment of assessment in the United States is offered. Chapter 4 provides a chronological overview of the development of the three assessment technologies that is markedly deep and broad in scope, making it my favourite of the book. The genesis and progression of these assessment tools is nuanced with the tensions that emerge when solutions are posed. One example detailed in the chapter is standardized tests. While initially introduced to reduce workload for school inspectors and provide a means for comparing schools, the inception of the rather lucrative testing industry has resulted in the widespread creation and adoption of tests; the standardization of instruments and hence, comparison, becomes a challenge when states and districts have a number of options from which to choose. In chapter 5, Schneider and Hutt dive into assessment culture, identifying three reasons that Americans seem willing to comply with assessment practices, as they have been described: exposure, bureaucracy, and utility value. In short, investment into these assessment tools continues because participants take comfort in the familiar, quantifiable information is easy for bureaucracies to work with, and assessment tools serve those who know how to play the “game” well—those with the most influence.

The third and final section explores alternatives. In chapter 6, Schneider and Hutt paint a compelling portrait of the impact of colonialism and globalization on the creation of an “isomorphic” global student assessment culture, one that is largely

high-stakes and rooted in competition (138). The voices of secondary teachers round out the chapter, speaking to dissatisfaction and of imagined changes. What is interesting about this chapter is Schneider and Hutt's narrativizing around the work they initially sought out to do—presenting differing approaches to assessment across international contexts—and their discovery of an assessment “monoculture” (158). This chapter might have been strengthened by expanding upon data collection, explaining how the literature review was conducted, which countries were included and excluded from analysis, and how Fulbright scholars were recruited and interviewed. That said, I appreciate that to do so would change the presentation of the text's argument, and may have the unintended consequence of dissuading the lay reader from engaging with the text; one of the clear strengths of the book is its accessibility.

In chapter 7, Schneider and Hutt provide a table that summarizes the “current problems” with assessment and their “root causes:” “gaming” and “construct validity;” “weaponization” and “permanence;” “informational thinness” and “compression;” “extrinsic motivation” and “commodification;” and “inequity” and “manipulability” (161). The terms and descriptions offered to shape the discussion of assessment alternatives were immensely helpful, and might have been offered earlier in the book as a central anchor or guidepost regarding the systemic nature of these assessment technologies. The remainder of the chapter outlines alternative approaches, namely, larger-scale approaches to “authentic assessment,” “portfolio assessments,” “narrative evaluations,” “pass/fail and contract grading systems” and “micro-credentialing and competency-based education” (163–198).

In chapter 8, Schneider and Hutt provide steps toward learning-centred reform. Step one centres on communication, step two, motivating students intrinsically rather than extrinsically, and step three, the “synchronization functions” of the assessment system. As one example of communication-based reform, classrooms should focus on short-haul communication, transferring a “thick description of student abilities” from student, teacher, and parent (217).

Off the Mark: How Grades, Ratings, and Rankings Undermine Learning (But Don't Have To) contributes to a broader conversation about the assessment landscape in the United States, with a unique focus on the interconnectedness of grades, tests, and student records. While the text could have been complemented by a deeper examination of the classroom-based assessment practices taking place in early elementary classrooms, I believe that this work, in its present form, could serve as a foundational text for lay readers and educators interested in gaining a better understanding of the assessment landscape in the United States.

Cristyne Hébert
University of Regina