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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

In blood one day he framed a strategy

On news of Peter Porter's death (my favourite modern-day poet), my thoughts turned to one of his poems: 'Silkworms Work and Love to Death': a title typical of his dry, enigmatic style.

For Porter's poem replace 'silkworms' with 'poets' and, for my purposes, if you'll excuse the gigantic pretension 'writers'.

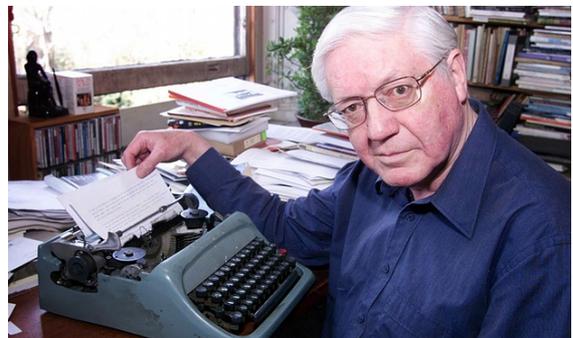
The poem is a mildly-emotional, off-key, unrhymed sonnet by an old man determined to keep writing (we can be sure), to enjoy writing, but, as the poem communicates, contemplating the need to hold back, alter his perspective.

There are a number of reasons why a silkworm is a fitting metaphor, but the one with most appeal comes from the silkworm being unable to fly: hinting at Porter's frustration at the nature of his connection with the public world.

He says '*He feared the public knew the thing he was*', meaning its mind about him was closed.

The second and final verse I find most telling:

*In blood one day he framed a strategy,
The curt unpitied sadness of a sage
He read about at some South China Court
Who slated certainty and cut up sights
To keep them small – Of course you must still write,
The Master wrote, but little that you mean:
Your paper should not die to prove your words.*



The Court sage suggests looking at it things in small parts, writing allusively, and being less outspoken – no doubt a sensible behaviour given the powers of an emperor. But what is Porter really suggesting?

The first two lines '*In blood one day he framed a strategy / The curt unpitied sadness of a sage*' – with the reference to '*blood*' and the '*curt unpitied sadness*' – suggest that though Porter had a new strategy for writing, it wasn't something easily arrived at. '*Of course you must still write/ ... but little that you mean/ Your paper should not die to prove your words.*' But does Porter really intend to hold back on truth as he sees it? In the poem – yes – but in reality? The poem gains its tension from that unanswered question.

The poem reminded me (at a fantastically more prosaic level, of course) of the response to a recent posting titled: '*21st century education has come to mean a system organised for success on the basis of widespread cheating.*'

The word 'cheating' was too strong for some people, as was the directness of the tone throughout.

Though not exactly replicating the issue in Peter Porter's poem, I have decided to rewrite the posting in a quieter, refracted style. This is not to write in caricature but to provide a device allowing me to return to a

significant education issue (after all, silkworms metamorphose) in a modified way. I have not compromised on the truth but who knows the sage might have a point in recommending a less confrontational style, and that is what I have attempted, on this occasion at least.

What follows is considerably abbreviated from the original posting.

High stakes assessment being crucial to the success of the current education system

High stakes assessment, and in particular, **of the sort that that leaves the institutions concerned largely in charge of the testing and marking**, is crucial to the 'success' of education institutions from state primary schools, charter schools, state secondary schools at Level 2 NCEA, charter schools which presently only go up to Level 2 NCEA, polytechs, wananga, and to some extent universities; and for the immediate future to state school clusters, multi-nationals involved in those clusters, and iwi schools.

High stakes assessment means education institutions, consciously or unconsciously, find ways in the implementation, marking, or reporting of assessment, to lift the levels of students' results beyond that they would otherwise have attained.

The government has declared Level 2 NCEA to be the key indicator of the degree of success of the New Zealand education system. It has also approved a system in which the testing and marking for that level, in particular, is left largely to schools (as is national standards in state and other schools).

The process of lifting students' results beyond that they would otherwise have attained in NCEA means no signal is being sent throughout the school system that many primary students are arriving at secondary considerably unprepared for success other than through high stakes assessment. In response, secondary has been unable to undertake sufficient remedial action for a number of reasons including the size of the challenge, wrong priorities, and lack of funding.

In primary, high stakes assessment – as represented by national standards – means no early warning system is being emitted about the likelihood of those many primary students arriving at secondary school considerably unprepared for success other than through the high stakes assessment referred to. This unpreparedness, it is vital to point out, is significantly contributed to by the destructiveness of national standards on the richness of learning.

It is a perfect paradigm of a 'kind of success' designed to mute dissatisfaction with education, allow the implementation of a certain ideology of education, and to reduce demand on the government for expenditure on education.

It is a kind of success that bears most heavily on Maori and Pasifika children and children from lower socio-economic levels who, in particular, from their first day at school, need real education success, and close individual attention from then on in – all particularly important to them because many don't have the cultural capital to kick on, irrespective of the quality of education.

Much talk at the official level in education, sloganeering, special mention in regulation, and imposition on schools to do more for Maori, Pasifika children, and those from lower socio-economic levels – creating a feeling that success is sincerely sought and on the verge of being achieved – but never being so as a reality anywhere sufficient to prepare them for success at secondary school except that provided through high stakes assessment. When these students reach Level 2 NCEA, high stakes assessment transmogrifies into practice that has them diverted to hospitality, and such like, which they almost invariably pass (though with special assistance if required) adding up to a NCEA success. For students average and above, high stakes assessment makes Level 2 NCEA, no matter its expression, a cakewalk.

The lack of preparation in primary school for secondary education is most seriously demonstrated in children's lack of development in intellectual challenge and flexible thinking. The lack of genuine academic success by students at secondary school serving to blight the life and vocational prospects of many. The opportunities available to phony education institutions and to private providers through high stakes assessment success is proving hugely disruptive to education overall. The lack of signals being sent throughout the education system means the right education structures are not being put in place – in other words, ones likely to lead to real success – the right policies, the right curriculum practices, and the right amount of funding. However, for the moment, the success emanating from high stakes assessment, judged on media, public, and political response, seems to have been deemed sufficient.

Peter Porter: Your poetry did *'not die to prove your words'*, it lives and the words forever vibrant.

