

The education system: all work, no pay

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Everyone knows that one kid—the one who furiously scrawls PowerPoint notes while the entire class is busy drooling on their desks, falls out of his chair in eagerness to answer questions, checks his test ten times because he's paranoid of missing even one point, and pees his pants with excitement at the mention of "extra credit." Stephen is that one kid. He not only strives to have perfect grades, but to make the teacher fall in love with him.

Complete with excellent academics, athletic achievements, musical talent, countless volunteer hours, and multiple leadership positions, he is the kid that made every mother poke her own children and say, "Why can't you be more like him?" Most students assume that Stephen has super powers. "He just like, knows the answers," exclaims Molly.

"He must have these magical powers that just allow him to like, get it. It's not like us where we have to think. He just knows." Others, less impressed, mutter, "He has no life and just reads books and studies all day." Regardless of what they think of him, all the students know they can rely on Stephen to do the homework. "I copy from Stephen all the time!" Marcus, a boy with bright blue boxers peeping out from gravity-seduced pants, admits shamelessly.

"Why would I spend hours on homework when I can take five minutes to copy it down and receive a higher score? And who needs to know that stuff anyway—just sit by Stephen on test day!" Not one student sees this kid as anything but a homework machine. No one really likes him. Despite his popularity in the five minutes before an assignment is due, Stephen sits alone in the cafeteria—heck, he stopped eating lunch after the first week of school because of the verbal harassment he got from unappreciative

classmates. Instead, Stephen spends his lunchtime in the quiet sanctuary of the library, clenching his dying stomach, deliriously working on next month's assignments. Not one of his classmate notices that he doesn't eat lunch—his absence doesn't even register in their self-obsessed minds.

However, this socially rejected kid is the savior of his entire class. He has the one thing that everyone wants: not knowledge, but answers. And all good things should be shared, right? There are many ways to share. With food, you give some to others and starve a little inside—because of this unfortunate kickback, people refuse to gift food and instead opt to trade and barter. But with test answers, sharing benefits everyone.

The mechanics of the “ copying technique” are pretty simple—it works like a ripple. Those immediately around Stephen glance over at his answers and fill in their papers. From there, a silent game of “ telephone” takes place—each student copies the one next to him or her until every single test has been filled. There is also the “ copy and paste every question in your cell phone” technique. This method, however, takes a considerable amount of time and is reserved for only when Stephen skips over a question.

In which case, it is one hell of a question and only the almightyGooglecan save everyone. Like being able to take a doggy bag home, copying is not confined within the classroom. Pictures of tests are secretly taken and sent out and answers are memorized and spread by mouth or by text. Older students learn to save papers, and teachers who recycle homework and tests over the years will find their assignments used in a student version of an illegal drug trade.

Dig a little deeper and you'll see students make legal binding contracts like "you give me math answers and I'll tell you the English essay prompt". These agreements are to be taken seriously—you never know what these "A+" hungry demons will do for answers. And as always, there are a couple of students with so-called "integrity"—but they never last long. After a couple of tests they'll take a peek at their grades, cry, and follow the rest of the copying crowd. After all, honor is a small price for a pretty report card. Within a year of high school, it is guaranteed that every student will have caught on to the copying game.

Years two and three mark the entrance to the dark tunnel of misery. Life begins to grow somber as the AP, PSAT, SAT, ACT, and all-the-acronyms-you-can-think-of tests bombard students, one after another. However, it is a stressful time for no one but Stephen. Come the dreaded AP Literature test day, the frantic scrawling of a hundred students buzzes comfortingly in the proctors' ears. Little do they know, an undercover game of "Copy Stephen's Entire Essay" is taking place.

There are people who question the existence of students who are bold enough to copy a federal exam. Upon asking Ashley if she felt any shame in violating the honesty contract she signed before taking the test, she unabashedly responds, "Well, I didn't get caught, did I? I'm just being smart and using my resources. Everyone knows that school teaches you nothing but how to pass classes." Unfortunately, Ashley is only one of the many students that feel this way about school. Most are rather proud of their copying skills and even brag about how they received full marks on the AP Government exam when they didn't even know the government was a tree

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and had three branches. Judgment day arrives after all the tests are complete.

Stephen, the only hard-working student of his entire class, eagerly awaits his final grades and the valedictorian announcement. To his disappointment, he not only failed to be the first of his class, but he even missed the top ten percent mark. The same results await him after college applications. After four years of skipping lunch to work, cramming in study sessions, and pulling all-nighters to complete group projects, he didn't get accepted to any of his desired colleges. How did Stephen, the hardest worker of his class, fail to achieve anything he worked for? Is it a coincidence that those who copied off him trumped him with his own knowledge? Schools are failing to educate students on the importance of honesty and integrity.

Unbeknownst to teachers, students all over the nation are engaging in the act of copying right now. And why wouldn't they copy? None of the teachers bother reinforcing the rules, and the students only receive rewards for their wrongdoing. Not only do they benefit from copying, but they are also hurting the students who actually work. There are far too many students like Stephen who are robbed of not only their grades, but also their opportunities to achieve a scholarship, attend a prestigious college, and access a brighter future. Teachers need to both engage students and instill a sense of morality in them.

Schools need to change their priority from training students to "memorize" information to teaching them to open their minds and practice working with honesty and purpose. My mom always taught me to choose quality over

quantity—has the education system missed out on this basic, infancy rule? It is not the quantity of information that students memorize that counts, but the quality of knowledge, experience, and principles students gain.

Education is the fundamental foundation of our nation. What will happen when the future is overrun by lazy, self-centered students who were never taught the importance of hard work and integrity? Won't they continue to procrastinate and leech off others? Oh wait. What's this about outsourcing and importation problems causing national debt, growing financial issues, and economic tension?