

Education interview essay

Economics



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Public education in America is faced with numerous challenges especially in regards to upholding high standards and ensuring that the national goals are achieved. The quality of public education depends on a number of factors but most important of all is the effectiveness of teaching taking place in schools. There is a growing trend and anxiety amongst stakeholders in the American public about the effectiveness of learning in public schools.

Of special concern is the concept of test, which requires teachers to achieve certain standards in terms of performance of students in the subjects they teach. The tests are as important to the teachers as they are to the students given the fact that, how the students perform in the tests can make or break a teacher's career. This is bringing fresh challenges especially on how sustainable the test concept is in terms of effectiveness. There is already a lot of opposition especially from parents and the public who feel that, teachers are just concerned about drilling the students for tests and not really following curriculum requirements. This leads to the question as to what extent tests indicate subject mastery. Although there are no studies, which associate tests with poor mastery of content, there is a likelihood of a strong positive relationship between the emphasis on tests and poor education standards considering the fact that, education is more than passing tests with good grades. This is especially the case for lower grades because the young learners may take education to mean passing tests.

The tests are nevertheless crucial as performance measurement tools but the question is how they are administered. To better understand the subject of accountability amongst teachers, the author interviewed three teachers, John, Douglas and Mike. Most of the teachers expressed that, the national

tests are influencing the way they teach. This can be explained by the fact that, the teachers always spare some time to prepare their students adequately for the tests. Results of the tests have a bearing to the teachers in that, they may reflect negatively on the teachers because it may imply that such teachers are ineffective. Whenever the students perform well in the tests, it is usually an indicator that a teacher is doing his/her work adequately. As John noted in the interview, to him, teaching the 6th grade to tests is a priority. John noted that, every test time, he dedicates the month prior to the test to specifically teaching students to tests.

This is a clear indication that, during such periods, the social studies have to suffer and emphasis given to the reading skills. For John, teaching social studies must also incorporate government studies as well as the roles of the American presidency. John noted that, teaching students on the functions and roles of different branches of the government is important in that, it prepares students to better understand their country.

In addition, learning about the presidency is essential in that, learners are able to appreciate the importance of the roles the executive plays in America. Another teacher, Mike who was interviewed noted that, comprehension is essential to students. To make sure that his students comprehend properly, the teacher confined that he encourages class participation of all learners by letting the learners to do role-playing. According to Mike, this is important to the 6th graders in that they are able to internalize better and therefore achieve maximum subject mastery.

Mike noted that, teaching to the test is not an easy task for him due to the fact that his, is an integrated class which includes some auditory students. The challenge comes in that, preparing the whole class requires that the teacher use different teaching methodologies, which is time consuming. Mike overcomes the difficulties of teaching an integrated class by preparing sample questions which are later used by the auditory students at home to prepare for exams at their own pace. Mike felt that, the most important topics that should be included in the grade 6 classes are economy and monetary studies. Mike also noted that, economy is important to students especially in this generation where money drives every aspect of life and the earlier the children understand about money, the better. Mike also noted the fact that, if children are taught about simple economic concepts such as economic growth, economic activities, and economic challenges, the better they are able to understand important economic issues later in life. As a result of integrating money matters in the social studies, most children will be disciplined in terms of budgeting.

As such, children will be less likely to make unrealistic financial demands to their parents. Mike also noted during the interview that, social studies should incorporate lessons about Gross National Product something, which is likely to make the young students well-versed with economic issues facing America from a young age. In the third interview, the participant, Douglas was a retired teacher during whose teaching days national tests had not been introduced.

However, Douglas supported the national tests arguing that they were good performance measures to determine the extent to which students had gone

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in as far as academic performance was concerned. (Kosar, 2005) agrees with the sentiments of Douglas by noting that, they form a basis of a source of reliable and valid data on the progress of learners in as far as American students are concerned. Douglas views echoed of (Tyack, 2003) that here is a need for a curriculum to guide teachers.

According to Douglas, this is what really matters as teachers are well trained and can always tell when children are grasping what they are being taught and when they are not. Douglas noted that, a curriculum would put the necessary checks and balances to ensure that schools and teachers in particular, do not over reach their mandate and always adhere to predetermined guidelines and also to ensure that, teachers fulfill their duties as the ones mandated with achieving a literate society. Douglas was of the opinion that, any good teacher should prepare students both academically and in terms of motivational levels to make sure that, such students are ready not only for tests but to move on to the next level of education.

According to Douglas, education should develop confidence amongst the students to make sure that, they are able to excel socially and academically. Douglas suggested that, the American history should be included in social studies. According to Douglas, American history would equip the young learners with basic facts about their country and therefore make sure that, the young Americans grow up while appreciating their country. In conclusion, all the interviewees had suggested on how tests should be done with the majority supporting the administration of tests as important for the learners.

However, the interviewees called for moderation in the administration of tests to ensure that, tests do not take away the focus from learning to

testing. Interviewees suggested that, American history, economy, money, GNP branches of government as well as the presidency should be included in the social studies but in a way that does not burden the already ' pressured' students. ReferenceKosar, K. R. 2005. Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards. Rienner.

Pp. 121-125 Personal Interviews with Teachers; Douglas, Mike and John.

Tyack, D. 2003. Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society.

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