

Standardized testing vs. education through freedom

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Paulo Freire's "problem-posing" teaching method is shown in "The Banking Concept of Education" through clear contradictions to the "banking method". He makes several arguments against the banking method by attacking common teaching faux pas and explaining his method of problem-posing education, where the teacher-student relationship is of equal partnership. Freire also argues that the use of the banking method makes teachers more concerned with getting information out to the students than worrying if they understand it or not. Instead of "educating through the practice of freedom" (Freire 327), standardized tests like the Regents in New York and the MCAS in Massachusetts, "educates [students] as the practice of domination" (Freire, 327), limiting them to a strict, inanimate curriculum. Starting with the class of 2003, a high school graduation requirement for students who attend school in Massachusetts is to pass the MCAS as sophomores. Because of this statewide test, the No Child Left Behind Act was passed so that every student in Massachusetts, regardless of socio-economic status, would hopefully be given the same education. Along with being adapted to a new curriculum, teachers were faced with losing their jobs. If the state thought that too many students weren't passing the MCAS, their teacher would have to go through re-training, or possibly even lose his or her job. Although the New York State regents were not instated because of this Act, it also has the same goals as the MCAS. With this Act in place, a teacher is ordered to follow a set curriculum given by the state. A specific curriculum is made according to the guidelines of the standardized test, so that every student in every school will be taught the same information. Because of this, the teacher is more concerned with pounding knowledge into the students so

they “ record, memorize, and repeat” what they are taught (Freire 319). Contrary to Freire’s problem-posing philosophy of teaching, the idea of the MCAS seems to mirror “ The Banking Concept” of education. This way of teaching turns students into “‘ receptacles’ to be ‘ filled’ by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is” (Freire 319). Freire goes on to say that “ education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor... the teacher makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘ banking’ concept of education” (Freire 319). In the same way, students today are filled with the information tested in the Regents and MCAS, omitting anything else not in the curriculum. Most teachers are against the idea of the standardized tests. Their job as teachers is to enlighten the students, and enhance their knowledge to the best of their ability. These tests put restraints on this. In order to save his or her job, a teacher must use the banking approach to education, and narrate to students the sometimes dull material in the curriculum. “ The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Freire 320). In this case, it is not the teacher, but the state that chooses the content, and not the student but the teacher who is forced to adapt to it. “ Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize,) fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality” (Freire, 321). This brings about Freire’s idea of “ oppression” in the educational hierarchy. In the student-teacher relationship, the students are the

oppressed, and teachers become the oppressors. But as you move up the educational ladder, the teachers, having to change their teaching style and abide by a certain curriculum, become the oppressed and the school committee, devising a curriculum with information they deem to be important, become oppressors. "The more the oppressed can be led to adapt to the situation, the more easily they can be dominated" (Freire 321). In contrast to Freire's idea of "education through freedom" (Freire 327), these standardized tests practice "education through domination" (Freire 327). Like the banking concept, these tests have the capability to "minimize or annul the students' creative power" (Freire 320) by only introducing them to the necessary content of the curriculum. Since the Regents and the MCAS were put into place, the amounts of field trips and hands-on ways of learning have plummeted. Students no longer go on trips to the science museum, aquarium, or even to the library as often due to this method of "education through domination." Freire believed that each student should have the ability to learn through realistic experiences, and not "'receive' the world as passive entities" (323). For example, when I was in second grade, we would take field trips to the local pond; once in the fall to bury a pop-sicle stick, and once in the spring to go find the stick with a map we drew. Even though this field trip really had nothing to do with any academic subject, it was a hands-on activity that I enjoyed learning. Because of the Regents, even students in second grade have a specific curriculum to learn, eliminating trips to The Crestwood pond, Yonkers NY. Elementary students are forced to sit in dull classrooms all day so they can be prepared for a test not to come for almost a decade ahead. When a teacher's role is to "regulate the way the world "

enters into' the students", he is forced to fill the students with " information which he [the state] considers to constitute true knowledge" (Freire 322). Just because a student is filled with information, it does not make him or her knowledgeable. " Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention" (Freire 319), not through narration and the banking method. Freire's philosophy of teaching contradicts the idea of standardized testing. Essentially, these tests along with the banking method of education puts restrictions on what students are taught, and instead of guiding their path to becoming a creative individual, it makes students conform to a basic education. Works Cited Freire, Paulo. " The Banking Concept of Education. " A World of Ideas. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2006. 318-331.