

Babbling about education

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Recalling from personal experience, I feel that everyone has something to complain about the American education system: “ students nowadays are only concerned with pop culture,” “ we need to have better teachers,” “ the education system is too test-oriented.

” I have heard quite frequently that the American high school graduates are underperforming in colleges and the students from our public schooling system are far behind in academics than those from other nations, namely China, Korea, and Japan. I am not here to refute or affirm any of these specific assertions. For simplicity’s sake, let’s just skip the cause(s) and jump to the conclusion that our education system is not perfect. The presence of a problem logically calls for a solution. Although the problems with our education system (that I purposefully skipped) are numerous and diverse, there seems to exist a tendency in the reactions of the leaders of the nation: from Bush’s “ No Child Left Behind” policy to Obama’s “ Race to the Top” (RTTT), these education “ reforms” all place an heavy emphasis on measuring student performance in standardized tests.

Recently, Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, says that she will urge her members to adopt a form of teacher evaluation partly based on students’ achievement on standardized tests. HOLD ON! Are we looking for a magical cure for a problem far too complex? Has the “ administration” run out of imaginative ideas so that the only thing it can think of is to demote students to numbers? To demote education to statistics? Yes, I understand that 1) school districts are having financial problems and therefore lured by possibility of receiving enormous grants from RTTT initiative; 2) an “ objective” measure like test scores is certainly

much easier to evaluate than the more complicated, holistic measures.

Money and facility, however, should not bend principles. I expect high school to be a place where people receive a genuine education, not a machine that molds them into mechanical test-takers. I came from China, a country whose heavily test-oriented “ education” system is exactly like the aforementioned molding machine. This system has been deplored for decades because what it produces are not creative, free human beings but docile slaves of academics who can memorize pages of literature with ease but know nothing of its meaning.

If China’s failed education system already proves to us that focusing on test prep does not contribute to education but rather take away from it, then how is it responsible to trade students’ opportunity to be educated for money that the school districts might not even get? No, I am not supporting the eradication of “ testing” in schools. In fact, I am pretty good at things like that for without it I would have never been inducted into the National Honor Society considering I am a fairly unimaginative, poorly educated person. Instead, my solution to the education problem is a cliché that I mentioned in the beginning of this article: we need more good teachers. A good teacher inspires, not instructs. He teaches from the heart, not from the textbooks.

A good teacher goes beyond the curriculum and teaches his students what it takes to be a thinking human being, not a test-taking machine. But I also understand the difficulty on the part of the teachers because we live in a society that makes a fetish of protocols, guidelines, and other “ objective measures” such as standardized testing scores. So yes, we need better teachers, but I don’t blame the teachers because their freedom and

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imagination are chained to the same rigid, bureaucratic schooling system as much as we are. God bless America.