

Thinking within the bubbles: a satire on standardized testing

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PSAT, SAT, STAR, CAHSEE.

.. Terms that send children to the Shrine of Standardized Testing thanking the Standardized Testing gods for the wonderful creation of such a beautiful testing system that enables all aspects of a student to be fairly and thoroughly evaluated. Of all the standardized tests in America, SAT owns the headlines and even monopolized tutor centers. Ask any college counselor about the most important criteria for being admitted into good colleges. They will repeat “ grades” about six times, “ GPA” about five times, “ extra curricular” about three times, and “ SAT” about twenty-one times.

Taking advantage of the significance of the SAT, companies have released all studying tools imaginable into the market, and made SAT preparation a multi-billion dollar business. There’s even an app for that. Since standardized testing can be so profitable, then why bother with the STAR and the CAHSEE? Those standardized tests are definitely less money-making! “ Well,” replies the omniscient teacher, “ because the school curriculum is build upon those petty little tests!” Upholding the “ teach to the test” spirit, the central belief of the standardized testing religion, everyday learning is prep for standardized tests. The nature of standardized testing embodies humans’ natural inclination toward laziness and high achievement. Both teachers and students get the best of both worlds: minimal work and high test scores.

But after so much trouble and effort of preparing students for these tests, the objective of the test comes into question. What will the test scores tell anyone? The results obviously reveal the test-taking skills of students, of

how well they could fill in scantrons (students were assigned to play the “Fruit Ninja” game on their smartphones every weekend. It trains students to fill in scantrons more precisely and more efficiently.) and pick from five choices of answers (students are constantly given five choices for everything: food menu, spouses, life decisions, etc.). Standardized testing has made life so much easier for students, teachers, and society.

It is not an exaggeration to say that it benefits the world as well. By limiting the knowledge that students obtain by applying stringent curriculums for classes, teachers can put in minimal effort in lesson planning, since the teaching standards have already laid out what teachers are to teach for the next year or so; As a result, society will have a less confusing way to determine whom to hire for what job: all people have the same mindset and knowledge! There will also be no more bullying because all students will be standardized by the same knowledge and nobody would be labelled “nerd” or “geek” because of their superior intellect; “superior intellect” would not exist. Discriminating terms like “outstanding” and “elite” will be diminished. With that, one may conclude that standardized testing will inadvertently lead to universal equality and peace on earth, and everyone will go to heaven. The issue of “over-testing” comes into question with all these standardized tests. Because of the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) policy, signed by our honourable C student President George W.

Bush, the number of standardized tests skyrocketed and all fifty states of America are required to test students annually. Schools whose test average are below standard could face closure or state involvement. Nobody wants

that. So to make sure students are keeping up with their studies, teachers have heavily emphasised the state standards and obsessively teach to the test, fulfilling their duties to uphold the virtue of standardized testing, and students are constantly being tested with easy-to-grade multiple choice scantrons. Besides, scantron tests are way cheaper, since they do not require hiring human graders.

Who needs human graders when standardized testing can easily subdue free thinking and limit choices? Think inside the choices! Standardized testing is not an American specialty; it's used all around the world. According to Times magazine, Korea, ranking number one in Reading, Maths and Science, uses standardized testing, though infrequently. Maybe that's why they got such a lonely number. "One" is a very sad number that nobody likes. Finland, ranking second in the same categories, tries to limit standardized testing.

Their reluctance to test the heck out of students earned them a mere second in education in the world. Isn't that such a sad number? Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Australia, Poland, Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, United Kingdom, Germany, all European countries... they all have sad, small numbers that they would never be proud of.

And then there's the proud and glorious United States, parading about its frequent standardized testing system, standing thirty-third in education rankings in 2009. Thirty-three is a nice number indeed, the repetition of the prime number three, and if divided by itself, another prime number eleven, unchangeable, stubborn. But regardless of such a positive ranking, thirty-three, Americans insist that they are the best, embracing the large number "

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thirty-three” while fending off the international American stereotype of burger-eating, lazy, stupid, stubborn, arrogant morons. The positive response and absolute acceptance of standardized testing in America has proven its value in education. In the wake of this devastating financial crisis, the only solution to maintaining quality American education is to increase standardized testing that is obviously cheap and effective, requiring minimal effort to grade.

We must save money by substituting high cost, human-graded test (that allows for human biases in grading too!) with the low cost, thought-limiting scantron tests. Investing in a grading machine is so much cheaper and cheaper than hiring a human with opinions. In every classroom, the same material will be taught with no variation, in a few years, universal equality will be achieved and there will be no more wars. Everyone will see situations in the same light. All we need to achieve such sophisticated level of thinking are scantrons, number two pencils, and maybe an occasional eraser or two.