

# Can You Hear Us? Voices Raised against Standardized Testing by Novice Teachers

Sumita Bhattacharyya\*, Mary Junot, Hillary Clark  
Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, USA  
Email: \*sumita.crazyb@gmail.com

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The most common criticism of standardized testing is that teachers find themselves “teaching to the test” instead of teaching the various content and skill areas of the curriculum. In recent years, standardized tests have become the predominant tool used to determine a student’s progress, to promote or retain a student at the current grade level, and to identify if a learning disability exists. The main problem with standardized tests is that they inhibit the kind of education that matters the most, preparing young people with “higher order thinking skills” to compete in a global economy. Does “teaching to the test”, an integral part of standardized tests, really increase student capabilities and knowledge, or does it simply put more pressure on teachers and students? Teachers want their students to excel on their standardized tests for both their benefit, as well as the benefit of their students. High scores become even more important because the school district uses individual school test scores to evaluate each school. In many cases, school ratings are now linked to funding and teacher evaluation. Novice teachers are the next generation of educators who will be teaching school children. These enthusiastic, optimistic young professionals have a unique perspective that has not been tainted by the educational bureaucracy. In this paper some novice teachers who were presently teaching voiced their concerns and opinions against standardized tests.

*Keywords:* Standardized Testing; Must Cover Curriculum; Teaching to the Test; New Teachers’ Vulnerability

## Introduction

There has always been some debates about standardized testing and its advantages and disadvantages. These debates raise several critical questions about the role and value of standardized tests. For instance, is the score on one standardized test a true assessment of a student’s knowledge and skills? There is much evidence that proves the opposite. Many experts now say that standardized testing actually does more harm to the quality of education that students are receiving (Haney & Lyons, 1993; Reborra, 2012; Keogh, Pendergast, & Diamond, 2012). The overwhelming emphasis on testing leads to the neglect of other dimension of teaching and learning (Shepard, 1991; Wolf, LeMahiue, & Eresh, 1992). The counterargument is that testing is the only way to accurately assess the education system and promote reforms. The differences between proponents and opponents have sparked vigorous debates that have created confusing crosscurrent leaving many educators feeling rudderless (Kumeh, 2011; Wallace, & Irons, 2010).

A standardized test makes assumptions about what every child is learning and the experiences that have led to that knowledge. Federal funding is now tied to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Law that sets standards for schools to meet regarding student progress. Consequently, the schools put a great deal of importance on the test. The content that is important for the test gets special attention in classroom teaching.

\*Corresponding author.

Teachers put added stress on those items in order for the students to pass the test (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007).

This paper is based on unstructured interviews with an opportunistic sample of some school teachers, all of whom have graduated from teaching college within last three years. Our purpose is not to conduct a formal survey, but to obtain an understanding of their experience in implementing of their experience in implementing the NCLB curriculum. The expertise of these teachers may or may not be representative of other teachers’ experience. The study may none the less have significance for a wide ranging concern about teaching/learning and development of student capabilities.

## Rationale

We interviewed eleven teachers, as noted above, all of whom we described as novice teachers, being in the job for three years or less. Our reasoning for selecting novice teachers was twofold. First, we were aware of the high attrition rate of novice teachers. Fifty percent leave the teaching career in the very first year on the job (Herman & Golan, 1993). Does standardized testing, an essential part of NCLB curriculum, play a role in such an important decision? This question is prompted by the observation that, fresh out of college, the novice teachers tend to believe in the purpose of school education as inculcating “good” habits and citizenship, and developing sustained capacity for learning. Such a view of education may be frustrated by

standardized testing, and may prompt an early exit from the profession (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007).

Secondly, no curriculum can be successfully implemented without the teachers' enthusiastic commitment to it. We wanted to get a sense of the teachers' commitment to NCLB; were they enthusiastically behind it, or were they implementing it because they had to do. In the following pages we focus on these two questions, and their wider ramifications.

### Standardized Testing

NCLB requires satisfactory student achievement in three academic areas: reading, math and science. The achievement is measured by standardized testing which is uniformly applied in all public schools. The test results are computer scored. The rationale for it is to establish uniform benchmarks of student achievement. Our teachers are certified of such testing as are numerous other commentators of NCLB (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). We can note right away that the teachers' criticisms were echoes of what other critics have been saying. But hearing them directly from teachers had an affective immediacy (Sambar, 2001).

### Academic Concerns

#### Teaching to the Tests

The standardized tests and to score well in them have become an all-consuming force in the schools. On the scores depend the school ranking, in the district, even in and funding region, and these are widely covered by the media. Persistent low scores may attract severe penalties for the school. Pressure builds up in the school board and percolates down to the teachers. The teachers under pressure concentrate on teaching to the test to better course as well as their own reputation (Wallace & Irons, 2010). Inevitably this leads to the neglect of other dimensions of learning beyond the testing areas. Since the tests are on reading, math and science other subjects come to be neglected. Citizenship inculcating "good" habits and development of a sustained capacity for learning are given short shrift. For our interlocutors this is the most dispiriting aspect of teaching experience. The values they learned in college seem completely naïve and idealistic in the "real world".

A second line of criticism is that standardized testing (and scoring) is insensitive to the diversity of our student population. The diversity is not only in diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Different socio ethnic backgrounds as well make a crucial difference (Hedges & Nowell, 1998). Students from educated families have an advantage. Their parents provide books and other educational paraphernalia at home. Such families' expectation of their children, and support for them (emotional, aspirational and in various other forms) set them apart from students of low socio economic and un- or ill-educated families (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Differently advantaged or disadvantaged students call for different approaches to teaching them. Standardized testing makes them impossible.

Thirdly, standardized testing is insensitive to individual students' learning style. It is well established in learning theories (Sternberg, 1998) that there are great variation in the way students learn. The pressure to teaching to the test and improve scores disable the teachers to be attentive to such differences. Teaching to the tests results in standardized teaching. The resulting poor scores of such students may stigmatize capable

students for the rest of their academic lives and the teachers as well for their "poor" performance (Sternberg, 1998).

Fourthly, not all students do well in tests. Quite capable students may do poorly in tests, thus bringing blame on themselves as well as on their teachers (Wolf, LeMahieu, & Eresh, 1992).

Standardized tests are one of many resources that can be used to evaluate student progress. When used alone, standardized tests do not present a clear picture of student knowledge and skills. One major problem is when teachers begin "teaching to the test". Most teachers would say that their main job is to foster a love for learning (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Teachers accomplish this task by encouraging their students to think critically and take their knowledge and skills outside the classroom and into adulthood. Standardized test scores promote rote memorization at the expense of critical thinking skills, pressuring teachers to spend most of their instructional time teaching testing material (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Because of the risk of lower test scores, teachers rarely deviate from testing curriculum even if they have to eliminate other important subject matter content. As a result those items in the curriculum are considered "unworthy" and remain uncovered (Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010; Hom, 2003).

### Implementation of NCLB Policy and the Novice Teachers

The novice teachers, relatively fresh out of college, however, think differently. The concept behind the NCLB policy is that teachers and schools have to be held accountable for student learning. The policy-makers assumed that the best way to check accountability was with standardized testing. The creators of NCLB justified their reasoning for this assumption because every student in the state would take identical test and be given the same instructions thus validating the test results. The goal of NCLB is to reach 100% reading and math proficiency by 2014.

According to Ezer, Gilat and Sagee (2010) recent graduates of teacher education programs indicate "that the component perceived as most important to the teacher's role is delivering universal values, followed by educating toward appropriate behavior and prevention of violence, and developing the pupils' unique personal abilities" (p. 401). This difference in the perception of the role of teachers may be extremely significant in the development of our students.

In response to the NCLB policy, one 5th grade science teacher reported that she was required to "teach to the test" during instructional time. As mandated by NCLB, to receive Reading First funds, requires two hours for reading, math coursework required one hour of instruction every day. As she expressed "I feel like my students do not get enough time for science and social studies. Those subjects get pushed away to the periphery. We are always emphasizing math and reading." She was candid as she continued to share her feelings on the issue, our scores in these two subject areas may be increasing but we're not creating students who will be adequately prepared to face all kinds of challenges that our nation is facing, like global warming, climate change, stem cell, or energy issues.

Let's assume that by emphasizing reading and math, students' scores in the respective areas will increase. But sadly enough, the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), should that the increased time spent on reading and mathematics is not making better readers and mathematicians. For many children, those who used to engage themselves in activities like

reading for their own pleasure no longer choose to do so when those same activities are extrinsically rewarded (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

### The Reliability and Validity of Standardized Tests

To begin with, “Are standardized tests reliable?” America is a vast country with very diverse cultures. Since standardized testing is used on a wide variety of children throughout the nation, it does not take into consideration that “one test does not fit all”. Standards and commonalities within a state are used to develop standardized tests. The culturally diverse areas and common biases in a region are not considered. Even when using statistical tools to reduce bias, guarantees of a bias-free test form or content is not assured. Yet, despite the built-in bias the tests continue to be used by testing organizations. Even with differences in the item content and claims by test-makers that the same things are being measured, the result usually produces very mixed results (Kumeh, 2011; Poham, 2001).

Amrein & Berliner (2002) reported that despite the ongoing changes in standardized testing for decades, the structure of the test has remained the same. High-stakes testing uses multiple-choice formatting with only one correct answer. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe a student may know the answer, but he or she may be unable to articulate it in the way that it is written on the paper. These kinds of test questions do not promote critical thinking skills and the ability to solve real-world problems. Instead they promote test specific curriculum using outdated instructional methods (Kohn, 2004).

Furthermore, this kind of standardized test encourages school districts to implement rote and drill bundled programs. These low-level learning experiences lend themselves to more low income children spending time completing worksheets and falling further behind the more affluent students who are getting practical experiences that help develop a real understanding of the material (Shepard, 2000).

Several studies have indicated that student assessment should include various forms of testing, class projects, self-reflections, research assignments, demonstrations, and displays (Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010). A 5th grade teacher insisted that Content related activities would give a better picture of student understanding (Hom, 2003; Neil, 2003; Sambar, 2001). An article by Anthony Reborra (2012) discusses how many teachers agree that standardized testing does not portray how much students know. He states: “Most teachers do not believe standardized tests have significant value as measures of student performance” (p. 14). Reborra further explains what teachers believe will accurately assess student knowledge: “teachers see ongoing formative assessments, class participation, and performance on class assignments as much more important measures of student learning” (p. 14).

Standardized tests are only objective in terms of scoring, because they are machine tallied. The type of test, the content and structure, the number of test items, the choice of the right response, the instructions given, and the test results and their use are all decisions made by subjective administrators (Boser, 2000). Therefore, how can standardized tests be truly labeled as objective?

Additionally, non-instructional factors play an important role in student achievement on standardized tests. Standardized tests tend to overlook family home situations, parents’ educational backgrounds, communities, and poverty rates, in an attempt to

put all students on equal education levels (Sambar, 2001). Poham (2001) argues that standardized assessments measure general knowledge that is gained in most middle-and upper-class homes where resources are readily available. Similarly, a novice English teacher noted that “... standardized tests are just so unfair. The students I teach from high- and middle-class families have more knowledge and skills than my students from low-income families. It became obvious that standardized test scores are comparable to technology in the home and the availability of books”.

A standardized test is said to be completely reliable only if the results are the same the next time the test is taken. But an individual’s score on a standardized test can change each time the test is taken due to the student’s physical, mental, or emotional state. This leads to inaccurate student test scores (Boser, 2000).

The next question is how valid are these tests? Standardized test results have major implications in a student’s present life and possibly future career—all from one test score. Schrag (2000) reports that there are many variables determine a student’s test score. The particular test, how many times a student takes that test, whether test instructions are complete, and the comfort of the test setting are a few of the variables that can influence a test score. When asked the teacher who is in her 2nd year of teaching became emotional School achievement is a function of different factors. Only certain parts are under the influence of schools but not all. “... Schools can influence the quality or quantity of instruction, motivation and positive learning environment. But how about their family and home environment? The standardized scores don’t consider the complexity of achievement. Thus standardized scores lack in proper interpretation. It practically oversimplifies the nature of the scores.”

Do standardized tests accurately measure our students’ level of ability or does coaching to improve these test scores taint the validity of the results? As we understand it, the general purpose of standardized testing is not to measure on what level a student can read, but the student’s comprehension of the given material. The test is merely an instrument of instruction, and should not be the focus of the evaluation. But the problem comes in when standardized tests are used to determine curriculum. The process of preparing the students for the test reduces the time available for instruction and narrows the curricular topics and methods of instruction. This in turn limits the instructional materials that a teacher can use especially if they are not similar to standardized testing formats. Studies suggest that even though test scores tend to improve when students are “taught the test”, the overall level of student learning does not improve (Shepard, 2000; Smith & Fey, 2000). Tenth grade teacher in her 2nd year expressed the same frustration, “Unfortunately we feel helpless in making changes. We will lose our job or government funding if the NCLB Acts are not satisfied.” Seventh grade teacher in his 3rd year of teaching said the same thing but in a different way. He said, “School administrators engage the staff for a few times in a year discussing ways to improve test scores, publicly let teachers know how their students performed compared to other. Thus we feel intimidated.”

As a result, it is becoming increasingly questionable as to the validity of standardized testing.

Despite the perceived invalidity of the tests, testing is continued due to our society’s desire to measure education. Teachers are motivated to engage students in the learning process in

the classroom. To accomplish this task, teachers must involve students in a variety of learning activities where they can to apply the knowledge learned, an important assessment tool (Kulm & Stuessy, 1992). However, as stated by the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2007), standardized tests are not evaluating these skills. Since instruction is based on what is expected in standardized tests, students are not learning real-life skills needed for success in post-secondary institutions and the workplace. But the standardized multiple choice test costs less than the standardized essay writing test. The reason is obvious.

Further research by Amrein and Berliner (2002) indicated standardized testing is not the answer to improved testing scores. After analyzing data from 18 states where high-stakes testing was implemented, in all but one case, there was no significant increase in scores. Additionally, in one case the scores actually fell. This supports what some researchers believe, standardized tests yield few benefits to student learning while neglecting higher-order thinking skills. One novice teacher expressed the same concern, "I ask them to look at the answer options to the question and then ask them to look for the answer from the text book. This backward strategy is really working for me and my students also feel confident." Neil (2003) also reported similar cases where he found that students did not remember what they had read, even though they may have responded correctly to the test item, indicating once again the unreliability of the test scores. This is an indication of a lack of basic skills needed for success after high school.

The purpose of having high standards is that not everyone will meet the standard. Nonetheless, schools get frustrated when all of their students are unable to improve their scores (Sambar, 2001). Kohn (2004) explains that the standardized tests are norm-referenced, and therefore were never intended to measure the quality of a student's education. These tests are meant to, and should, rank students amongst one another, not rate their content knowledge. As a result, standardized tests are refocusing classroom attention to test-taking skills (The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2007).

### **The Value of Standardized Testing**

Do these high stake academic standardized tests have any redeeming value? Do they accurately assess student learning with improved curricular choices? Linn and Herman (1997) complained that the students are taught to master test taking skills and are coached on the competencies measured on the exam. This leads one to wonder where the students will learn the rest of the educationally important but untested information. Will removing these vital skills from being taught in the classroom in order to spend more time teaching test competencies be a wise long-term decision? Some teachers now feel as if they will be held personally liable for the testing results. Logically, every teacher any student has ever had should be held equally responsible since learning is a building process. However, this degree of liability could never be measured. Instead, the "blame-game" would ensue.

### **Cheating: Who to Blame?**

Evidence from an extensive study conducted by Smith (1991) suggested that standardized tests raise the anxiety level of educators because of public notification, and sometimes parent ridicule, of school test scores. Since teachers are under so much

stress to keep their jobs many of them are quitting. Lou Anne Johnson (2011) describes the reasons why teachers are quitting when she states, "They quit because they expect to teach, not shuffle endless paperwork, and spend weeks of their 'free' time learning how to teach to the test" (p. 29). Teachers think the standardized tests are used against them especially when their students receive a low rank on the test. Wallace and Irons (2010) confirm that belief by stating "school accountability and teacher effectiveness are often measured through student performance on high stakes tests" (p. 166). In addition, novice teachers are leaving the profession because they lack classroom resources, parental support, and professional development that all affect testing outcomes (Keogh, Garvis, Pendergast, & Diamond, 2012). Another novice teacher who is in her 2nd year high school chemistry teacher notes, "... school test rankings and scores are publicized to parents, local media outlets, on the internet, and throughout the school district. If the scores don't indicate improvement, the school's reputation is at risk. It can't help but raise a teacher's anxiety level. Recently we read in a newspaper that a teacher was caught while helping students with the answers during the test. The teacher was fired. Who is to blame?"

Are we placing such a high emphasis on these tests that teachers and school administrators are forced to cheat in order to save their jobs? Nationwide, stories indicating tampering with tests have been popping up in the news. After Michelle Rhee started "tying student scores to principals' and teachers' employment," one school in Washington DC was suspected of changing students' test scores in order to show improvement. Although this cheating dates back to 2008, some of the details in the case were just recently released. The principal of the DC school was walking by an office when she saw three staffers with students' test booklets. The principal "noticed that the erasers were down and the pencil points were up." She told her superiors about the situation and was quickly urged to stay quiet and to "respect the legacy that had been built [at their school]" (Toppo, 2013).

There have been prominent cheating scandals in other cities as well. Schools in Atlanta, Georgia have been under investigation for several years. Recently, a once prominent National Superintendent of the Year, Beverly Hall, and other Atlanta school professionals were indicted by a grand jury. At first glance, one might wonder how such a prominent woman, as well as her colleagues, could be involved in a test-tampering scandal. One theory is that the educators cheated to reap financial rewards associated with higher student test scores (Brumback, 2013). Teachers at a school in Brooklyn, NY, were also accused of cheating in a similar fashion in May of 2012 (Morales, 2012). Furthermore, in an article titled "California Education Rankings: 23 Schools Stripped of API Ratings for Cheating" (2012) the Huffington Post reported that the California Department of Education took action against schools suspected of cheating and exhibiting questionable test results. With so much on the line for standardized test scores, what can we really expect from our teachers and administrators? Are some of them merely cheating so that their low-income schools will get the proper funding they need to succeed?

### **Who Is Hurt the Most by These Practices**

Our next question is who is hurt the most by these practices? The numbers indicate that students from low-income and mi-

minority-groups suffer the most from high-stakes testing through failure to pass to the next grade level and remediation programs. They are subjected to curriculum using rote memorization and practice drills, the same outdated teaching methods that got them to this point. Then we wonder why so many low-income and minority groups suffer from low self-esteem and in many cases fail to graduate from high school (Hom, 2003). Conversely, upper and middle income white students are often guided to higher level coursework and honors programs where more current teaching methods are implemented to enhance critical thinking skills. Hom (2003) believes that minority groups, culturally diverse populations with limited English language skills, and those students with learning disabilities suffer the most as a result of high-stakes testing.

With all these questions, should we continue to use state-mandated high-stakes testing to determine student knowledge and progress? Studies have found that although narrowed over time, substantial differences in test scores still exist (Hedges & Nowell, 1998; Madaus, & Clarke, 2001). Lower level and minority students are affected the most by the added pressure put on teachers to increase test scores. A ninth grade science teacher teaching in an inner city school said, "the norm-referenced tests, although well-intentioned, give a distinct advantage to upper and middle-class students whose parents tend to be well educated themselves. This leaves minority students, less likely to come from homes where education is valued and resources are available, to fail required exit examinations and dropout of school before graduation."

If states continue to support high-stakes testing as the only method to access student knowledge and growth, the results will be devastating. For example, Hedges and Nowell (1998) report that the percentage of African Americans with high standardized test scores is under represented when compared to other races and remains the same even after years of mandatory testing. Similarly, Madaus and Clarke (2001) documented that the average proficiency for White students was four years ahead of African American performance and that Hispanic performance continued to lag behind the White student population (Hedges & Nowell, 1998). They pointed out that "test score differences between Whites and minorities may be real. But inability to measure the other predictors of performance, on which Blacks and Hispanics seem to be far less disadvantaged, poses a huge social problem" (p. 162).

Americans like tests so much that they have gradually structured society around them. For many children, the testing phenomenon begins in their early school career. Head Start children are tested before entry into the four-year old's program. Kindergartners are tested to see if they are ready to begin school. Before entering first grade, students are already on the testing roller coaster. Why are we so obsessed with standardized tests? Some policy makers believe that a number is not a true indicator of knowledge gained (Sternberg, 1998). But this syndrome is very common in our society. Parents want their children to succeed in school and not be at the bottom of the class. If their children are experiencing learning difficulties, parents expect the school system to address the issue and bring up their child's test score (Haney, Madaus & Lyons, 1993). However, with any ranking, someone has to be at the top and someone has to be at the bottom.

The problem is not in the tests themselves but in how radically the results are used. Strauss (2006) made an interesting observation: "Why is it that no one questions the validity of

standardized test scores when the results are high? Only when the scores are low do people start questioning the effectiveness of the school staff" (p. A09). The point is that there are no easy solutions when it comes to standardized testing. Another novice teacher shared his thoughts using a metaphor "to give a real-life example of how unreliable a one-time high-stakes test is. Think about a doctor who is trying to treat a patient. Would the doctor use the results from one test to determine treatment for the patient or would he examine the issue thoroughly and order a battery of tests to determine a treatment plan?"

Although standardized testing was issued with good intentions, very few can argue that it has yielded the intended effects. The push for standardized testing has gotten stronger, but have there been any positive results? As of 2012, the US educational programs ranked 17th out of 50 other countries. The US was out-ranked by Finland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, the UK, Canada, and Germany, to name a few. From these results it is interesting to note that the country that placed first, Finland, has been the most outspoken against standardized testing. Finland, along with many other countries, has instead put an emphasis on having good teachers and trusting those teachers with their students' academic growth (Gayathri, 2012). The cultures which respect teachers and place education high on their priority list are performing better in the classroom and producing thoughtful students and citizens for the progress their country. Gayathri (2012) also noted that "Having a better [teacher] is statistically linked not only to higher income later in life but to a range of social results, including lower chances of teenage pregnancy and a greater tendency to save for their own retirement." If better teachers are what we need, why are we instead focusing our attention on standardized test scores? Why don't teachers have a strong support system to help them pursue challenging goals, persevere in the classroom, and cope with adverse conditions (Clark, 2012; Darwin, 2012)? The typical standardized test does not only deter students from learning, but deters teachers from teaching and actually causes many novice teachers to quit the profession (Darvin, 2012).

## Discussion

In this paper we have not tried to evaluate the grounds for the novice teachers' antipathy to the NCLB Curriculum. It would seem obvious however if test scores are the only measure to determine teacher accountability, test scores are bound to become the teacher's sole concern especially for the novice teachers concern about their reputation and performance. Teaching to the test is the natural result which leads to the neglect non testing areas thus gravely limiting the scope of learning. Whatever their validity the novice teachers concerns should be heeded by policy makers. Testing has not given conclusive evidence of bettering student performance. The evidence is quite mixed: students from low socio economic families continue to lag behind students of higher income families (Amrein, & Berliner, 2002; Hedges & Nowell, 1998). Indeed in some areas the testing has made performance worst. This raises a very important issue. The burden and responsibility for improving our children learning have mostly fallen on the teachers, with little policy attention to multitude of other factors that impinge on education (Clark, 2012).

Finally by removing the high stakes from standardized tests may stop temptation to cheat and return testing to its original and diagnose rightfully where schools and students need im-

provement (Brumback, 2013).

Thus, the debate about the advantages and disadvantages of standardized testing will rage on for years, and considering the numerous stake holders in academic preparation and presentation, we see no end in sight. Unfortunately, neither educators nor politicians can agree on how to incorporate other forms of assessment to create a better balance for ranking students. Standardized testing in the classroom is here to stay for the long term (Linn & Herman, 1997).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that teachers' concern should be taken very seriously in formulating our education policies. Teachers are the front line workers in the education enterprise. In crucial respect our future lies in their hands. Their feedback should be a major ingredient in any revision or adjustment of NCLB. Their job dissatisfaction has been a major cause of high attrition rate among Novice teachers (Ezer et al., 2010). As they leave their teaching jobs after a small number of years, they are replaced by fresh batch of novice teachers, many of whom also quit teaching after short number of years (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007). We may thus be depriving ourselves of genuinely gifted high quality teachers, those who are not happy about teaching to the test (Clark, 2012).

The question we thus face here is, as a country, are we prepared to say that hiring the best teachers will be our top priority? Or will we always instead put our emphasis and money towards standardized testing? Classrooms in which "teaching to test" takes priority over "learning to learn" will not create a positive learning environment. However, if our society is not prepared to do away with standardized testing, we must at least make its conditions better. The first step would be to make the teachers confident about the test. Information on content specifications is essential for teacher preparation. It is imperative to provide teachers with a clear description of knowledge and skills of specific content standards asked in the test. Test makers must include all stake holders—instructional specialists, curriculum developers, and most importantly, the teachers. The curriculum developers and the teachers together should prioritize the important skills that the students should learn and what will be tested. Finally, there should be a panel of reviewers who will rigorously examine the appropriateness of the test.

In today's competitive world, we are constantly being evaluated in our home life, our employment, and by society in general. Being judged has become the norm. Do we ever stop to think about whether a "number" is the most important thing in life? It seems that more effort should be focused on our knowledge and skills and how we use these resources to lead productive, fulfilling lives with our families, our coworkers, and the larger society to which we contribute.

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