

I have had the immense fortune of being able to be in front of children for 25 years, as of this year, as a teacher in many different capacities. It truly humbles me to know that for 25 years, parents have entrusted my professionalism, training, care, creativity, and judgment when it comes to their children. My experiences include both regular/general education, and special education. I've been able to teach in public schools but I've also taught two years in private schools, as well as overseas in New Zealand and China. I've been in front of children, college students, and adults. I have loved almost every minute of it.

We all know teachers tend to be a bit more caring than others' are required to be in their jobs. We are the ones to kiss little boo-boos from the playground, give hugs when a best friend is mean, help tie shoes, do some hand-over-hand guiding when those darn scissors get the most of a little second grader. We are the ones to offer some tough love when writing is not up to par, or math problems can be done better. We are the ones who wipe tears, offer hugs, and offer empathy and part of our lunch when a little one comes without breakfast.

For most of my career, I have taught kids who have special needs; mostly kids with what the profession calls "specific learning disabilities." This means my students are below the achievement gap, as indicated by ability testing, in reading and/or math. In some schools, they are pulled out for either or both classes and taught a separate or modified curriculum. In some schools, they are mainstreamed, or in the regular class along with me, where I accommodate their lessons according to their learning needs. But no matter the learning environment, the one thing I have consistently heard from my student with learning disabilities is, "I am stupid."

One of my students this year had tears in his eyes when he asked me why he was "retarded." I told him he wasn't at all...he just learned differently. His response was, "Then why am I in the retarded class and all my friends are in the other class?" My students get angry that we are reading texts written for 2nd and 3rd graders when their friends are reading big, fat, thick chapter books. But what big, fat, thick chapter book is out there for kids who read at such a low level? My students KNOW they are different, and from that, they conclude they are retarded, or stupid. And when they say "retarded," they are talking about the purest sense of the word, not the slang, unacceptable colloquialism that is so common today.

Everyday part of my job is to remind my students they are beautiful, smart, capable, amazing, creative, and worthy. Everyday I work HARD to show them the ways they CAN instead of the ways they can't. They are all too aware of how they can't. And it's not right. Our educational system is set up to show kids what they can't do. Especially when it comes to testing.

My middle school students, who read between a high first grade level to a high third grade level will have to sit for hours and weeks being forced to read material on a test in all core subject areas: reading, math, science, and social studies that will give them a score. Sure, we can say the score doesn't matter. We can say it doesn't affect the kids, and only has meaning for the school or the administration or the teachers. But in reality, we all know kids want to make adults happy. Especially adults who care. My students know I care about them, and when they sit in front of that test, trying their hardest to make me happy and do their best, they will only

be reminded that they are stupid. That they can't read. That they are behind their peers. And their feelings of inadequacy or being retarded will only be pushed further into their heads. For a student who is capable of reading Junie B Jones and being forced to read about Ansel Adams, taking this test will only make them feel worse about themselves. I love what Diane Ravitch says, "Sometimes, the most brilliant and intelligent minds do not shine on standardized tests because they do not have standardized minds."

My students are far from standardized. Just look at their IEPs. Even better, come spend a few hours in my classroom and see how they can draw, hear how they can rebuild an engine, how they take care of their sick mothers or grandmothers, how they handle a horse no one else in their family can handle, how they can cook for their family of eight. As a matter of fact, come spend a day with any student in any school and see how not one student is standardized. Isn't that what we teach them all the time? That they are unique and individual, and not like any one other person on this planet? Why would we change our tune for testing? We shouldn't change it.

Some people will argue this and say testing shows achievement. It shows learning. As a teacher, who has taught for a very long time, I am here to tell you it does not. And if you are an educator, you already know that. If you are a parent, or a community member, you need to hear and understand it. It is one test. Taken in one day (mind you, each subject area is taken each day, culminating into days and days of testing). Results are not given to teachers in a timely manner, and if/when they are given, they are not diagnostic or useful. They only give us one moment in time showing us either Johnny failed or shined on that day. Nothing more, nothing less. There is no achievement in testing. Just pure, and total failure.

The following are reasons that I object to standardized testing in general and especially for the learning disabled children I serve as it developmentally, psychosocially, and professionally wrong to test these students on an academic level we know is well above their ability.

I object to the inhumane test environment imposed upon us. This single test will potentially rank and sort children so that labels of failure may be applied and the door will open for takeover of public schools by private interest groups in the name of 'accountability'.

I object to treating my students like guinea pigs in an experiment that has not produced any real learning gains but will increase drop-out rates, decrease motivation and will increase anxiety disorders leading to what we've already seen: increased suicide among teenagers for the incredible pressure they are put under.

I object to the use of Pearson's set "cut-scores" predicting $\frac{2}{3}$ of our kids. These scores will not inform our instruction but will discourage the incredibly hard-working school staff and diminish brave innovation in coming school years.

I object to the lack of trust in classroom experts which has been replaced by faith in test publishers devoid of teaching experience and who deny the whole child's uniqueness.

I object to the time stolen as testing becomes the main goal of my reading, writing and math instruction.

I object to the fact that SC PASS and SC because by failing this test students will lose faith in their individuality, self-worth and higher education or career prospects. Confidence is key to perseverance.

I object to the use of SC PASS and SC READY or any standardized assessment that directly correlates to family income. Students of color, English learners, and those with low socio-economic status are disproportionately harmed by standardized testing and yet we continue to increase it-often IN THE NAME OF CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP. This is ludicrous.

I object to the lack of transparency on test items and scoring mechanisms; that teachers and parents are not permitted to view the test or the answers their students write is insulting to the people who know a child best. Teacher assessment data and report cards are disregarded by accountability 'experts' who strive to label students for their own purposes.

I object to the misuse of precious revenue spent on SBA scoring, on practice tests, on required test materials, on contracts with test-prep corporations' consultants and on staff time for training to teach to the test as well as training for administering the test.

I object to how financial backers for the corporate takeover of education are funding campaigns for candidates who will support SBA testing using billions of dollars earned on the backs of hard-working taxpayers whose children are harmed by this test.

I object to the undemocratic process of adopting testing and South Carolina State Standards whereby members of society, notably parents and educators, have not been engaged in ethical discourse around the ultimate purpose of public education and whether or not new standards may or may not solve the real problems impacting education.

I object to forcing children to sit through hours of bubble tests when they don't even understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. This is inhumane.

I object to children who are just learning to speak, read, and write in English being forced to take standardized tests using English academic language and culturally biased language.

I object to forcing children with special needs to take standardized grade level tests when they have already proven to be 1 ½ to 2 years behind typical peers via a formal evaluation using standardized tests.

I respectfully request that my students not be required to take the SC PASS and SC READY, which goes against my professional conscience.

With Best Regards and in Sincerity,

Tracie Happel, M.S., ABD
Teacher