



equity
free market

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Hannan contends that, “Life isn’t fair. And you know what? It can’t be. Here’s the problem. The word “fair” doesn’t mean justice or equity or, indeed, anything very specific. Instead, it has become a sort of all-purpose statement of moral superiority – superiority tinged, paradoxically, with victimhood.” Why isn’t life fair? Explain. Why can’t life be fair? Explain. What factors do you think have contributed to the word ‘fair’ becoming a sort of all-purpose statement of moral superiority (tinged with victimhood)?
- Later in the video, Mr. Hannan explains that, “In recent years, though, something odd has happened. Adults have started using the word in much the same way that teenagers do. More than in any previous generation, people today retain their teenage sense of self-centeredness. They use ‘It’s not fair’ as a catch-all complaint- as an assertion of wounded entitlement.” Why do you think that so many more adults today retain their teen sense of self-centeredness? Explain. What do you think Mr. Hannan means by the phrase ‘wounded entitlement?’ Explain.
- Mr. Hannan goes on to point out that, “That’s the beauty of it. ‘Fair’ doesn’t ultimately mean ‘proportionate’, or ‘impartial’ or ‘equal.’ You can use it to mean almost any positive thing you like.” What do you think Mr. Hannan means by this? Explain.
- After providing the example of the cake and how it might be ‘fairly’ apportioned, Mr. Hannan asks, “...how can we judge someone else’s economic worth? You might want bakers to be paid more than bankers. I might want teachers to be paid more than movie stars. Since we all have our own preferences, the only way to measure the economic value of a service is to see how much others are prepared to pay for it.” Do you agree with Mr. Hannan’s assertion that this is the only way to measure the economic value of a good or service? Why or why not? Why is it so important to eliminate preferences in terms of valuing a good or service? Explain.
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Hannan states, “That’s what the market does: it aggregates our preferences. It doesn’t ask us, in the abstract, what we think someone else deserves. It tests, in reality, how many hours of our own labor we are prepared to put in in exchange for a product or a service.” Why is that feature of the free market- the fact that goods and services are NOT exchanged based on the subjective view of ‘who supposedly deserves what and how much’ so important to a free society? Do you agree that people being able to decide for themselves how much they are willing to exchange for a good or service is more ‘fair’ than people being compelled to exchange a certain amount on the basis of what the provider of the good or service supposedly deserves? Why or why not?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Special Education Students

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Why it’s ‘idiotic’ to force special education students to take standardized tests,” then answer the questions that follow.

- Who is Chanel M. Quintero, and what does she do? What percentage of students in the school have special needs? What time does her job start every day, and what time does she leave her house? What does she teach her students? What types of students does she teach, and how many at a time? What was Ms. Quintero’s purpose for writing in the blog? What was the system for rating teachers last year, and how did Ms. Quintero score? Why did Ms. Quintero get a rating of ‘developing?’ Why couldn’t Ms. Quintero do enough actual teaching in her classroom? What is Ms. Quintero doing this year?
- Do you think that the rating system for Ms. Quintero was ‘fair?’ Why or why not? Do you think asking special education students to perform at the same standard as general education students is ‘fair?’ Why or why not? Considering that everyone is truly unique (and therefore inherently unequal), that no two people are ever exactly alike, don’t you think that each person deserves to be valued for their uniqueness- isn’t that what makes them special? Why or why not? Do you agree that treating everyone the same actually devalues everyone? Why or why not? Wouldn’t treating all of the children in a classroom the same way be disrespectful to the students who are different, who have different needs and abilities, and who respond differently to different learning or disciplinary approaches? If no, why not? If yes, then would you agree that treating all of the students the same way would actually be ‘unfair?’ Explain.
- Why do you think that some people have developed such an obsession with everything having to be ‘fair?’ Do you think that the obsession with fairness is what drives Progressives to value equality over everything else, and to value equality under every condition and circumstance- to the point of absurdity, such as when they argue that a frail, disabled woman should have the same opportunity to become a firefighter as anyone else, or when they argue that a white male should be treated as an Asian female if he identifies as such? Why or why not? Why do you think that some people refuse to accept the fact that life isn’t fair and never will be- that there will always be someone wealthier, better looking, more talented or skilled in a certain area, etc... than they will ever be? Explain. Do you think that ‘fairness’ should have more to do with equality or with merit- e.g. should a youth soccer coach spend the same amount of time coaching a kid that has zero interest in soccer or getting better as with a kid who puts forth effort and ‘deserves’ the coach’s help? Explain.



QUIZ

WHAT IS FAIR?

1. The word 'fair' doesn't mean _____.
 - a. justice
 - b. equity
 - c. anything specific
 - d. all of the above

2. What is the beauty of the word 'fair?'
 - a. it helps one to bring clarity to a complaint
 - b. it clearly identifies one as a victim of inequality
 - c. it gives one the cover of ambiguity
 - d. it sounds nice when used often

3. One can use the term 'fair' to mean almost any positive thing one likes.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. What is the only just way to distribute a cake?
 - a. to give each person a slice commensurate with the amount that they claim to want it
 - b. to see how much a person is willing to pay for their slice
 - c. to match the size of each slice to the proportionate size of each person's waistline
 - d. to make all of the slices the same size, no matter what

5. Only the free market economic system _____.
 - a. aggregates our preferences
 - b. compels us to figure out how many hours of our own labor we are prepared to put in in exchange for a product or a service.
 - c. gives everyone the same rights, since everyone's money is all equally valued
 - d. all of the above



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

WHAT IS FAIR?

1. The word 'fair' doesn't mean _____.
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 - d. all of the above

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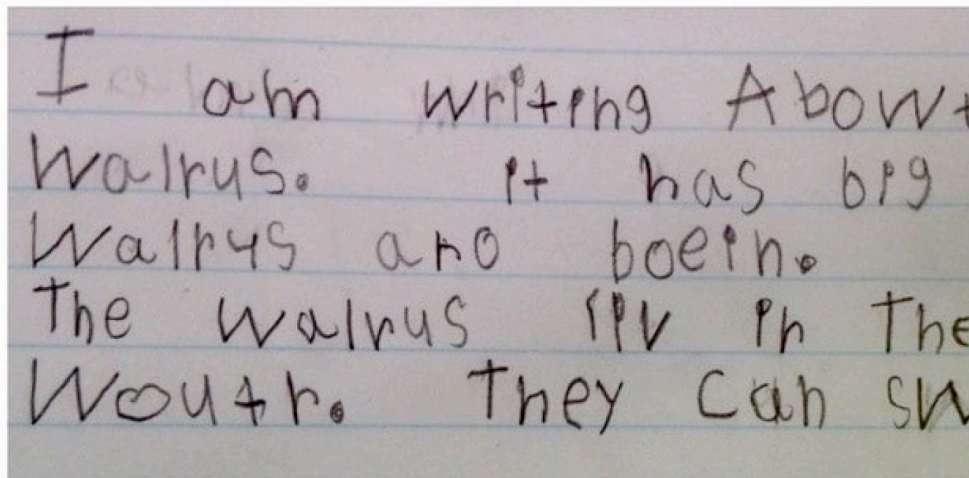
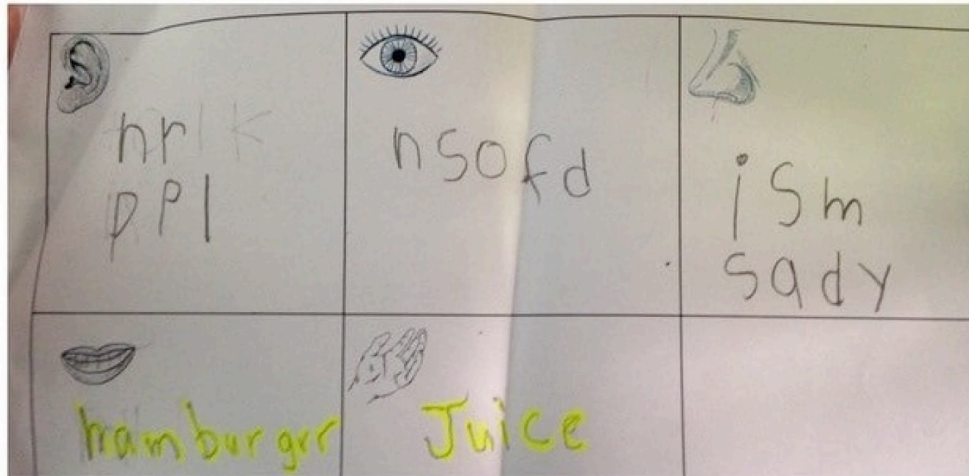
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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/10/05/special-education-teacher-why-its-idiotic-to-force-my-students-to-take-standardized-tests/>

Why it's 'idiotic' to force special education students to take standardized tests



The top picture is from November of last year, and the bottom is from this January. Both pictures show work of the same student.

By

Valerie Strauss

Reporter

Oct. 5, 2015 at 1:00 a.m. PDT

This is the remarkable story of the challenges facing one special education teacher in New York City whose days are difficult, not only

because of the nature of her job, but also because the system used to evaluate her and her colleagues uses the scores of tests her students are required to take — but sometimes can barely understand. Her story is not singular; many special education teachers in New York and across the country face similar issues that often go unappreciated in school communities.

The teacher is Chanel M. Quintero, who works in New York City's District 9, one of the poorest congressional districts in the country. Quintero has been a classroom-based teacher, but this year she works on a school-wide basis, with tasks that include working with students in crisis and helping teachers implement behavior plans.

Last year, she said, her class included students with autism, speech and language impairments, emotional disturbances and intellectual and learning disabilities. Many came from transient homes and shelters, and their lives were affected by instability and abuse. A few were almost completely nonverbal, and several were chronically absent. Skill levels of students ranged from pre-K to third grade. Among the things she worked on with her students was toilet training and making eye contact when speaking to another person. For much of the school year she was pregnant, and when she ran into health issues, she chose to keep working to help her students.

Quintero's school is in the South Bronx, a few blocks from Yankee Stadium. Her school houses kindergarten through fifth grade and includes general education and special education classes. General-education class sizes range from 28 to 31 students, and the school offers self-contained classes (which are legally mandated to have no more than 12 students and one teacher) and "Integrated Co-Teaching" (which means one general education teacher and one special education teacher) to meet the needs of students with special needs who have Individual Education Programs, called IEPs. Self-contained special-education class sizes range from 10 to 14 students. Of the 713 students at the school: 23 percent have special needs, 24 percent are English Language Learners, 68 percent are Hispanic, 28 percent are black, 1 percent is Asian, and 1 percent is white.

Quintero's story is best told in her own words. She wrote the

following about the futility of testing her special education students on the [Badass Teachers Association blog](#), and I am publishing it with permission.

The impact of tests, both on a local and state measure have come hammering down on me and many of my special ed colleagues this year. To say that I am enraged/upset/saddened/taken aback is an understatement.

The amount of hours I put into teaching is insane. I leave my house at 5:30 every morning to make sure I can get a parking space and prep for the day. (FYI my day doesn't start until 8:20 according to my contract.) In my career (and this is every year), I am potty training, teaching self hygiene, teaching self regulation, executive functioning, how to SPEAK for God's sake. I teach children how to hold a pencil, write their name, the fundamentals that they need and more.

On top of that, I teach a ridiculous curriculum, mandated by NYS [New York State], to a self-contained class of what has been kindergarten through third-graders, sometimes all in one class. I have taught class sizes from 12 to 17, when there were only supposed to be 12. This past year, my class was a mix of children with autism, children who are emotionally disturbed and unmedicated, children with speech and language impairments, and children who are learning disabled. In the time they were with me, these children made progress beyond your wildest dreams, and that is because of me and my team, not some ridiculous curriculum.

According to my rating, my teaching was effective, and the same went for my state measures. Where I apparently "fail" as a teacher is on my local measure. My children, as described above, were asked to take a writing exam in which they listened to and took notes on an informational text. From there they took their notes and were expected to write a paragraph or more relating to the topic. My children did as they were asked, to the best of their ability, when most came to me in the beginning unable to accurately write their name.

I am not sharing this to garner sympathy or cry "poor me," but rather to expose what this profession has become and how discombobulated this system is. I also want others to know that they are not alone when it comes to these ridiculous score adjustments.

I asked Quintero to provide more details, and she explained that the system for rating teachers last year included three parts: teacher evaluations (60 percent of the rating), state measures (20 percent), and local measures (20 percent). The state and local measures are usually student test scores. Each teacher is rated — either highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective — depending on their cumulative percentage from each of the three sections. Teacher evaluations were conducted within the school by either the principal or assistant principal.

In the beginning of each year, a committee selects which grade (group of students) will account for the state measures. The panel is also responsible for selecting the local measure that is part of the evaluation score. Classroom observations periodically occur throughout the year, and, depending on a teacher's rating, he or she is able to choose from a few options regarding the number of observations and the formality of lessons to be observed. In June, teachers receive a preliminary rating and their final rating in September, when the next school year is beginning.

Quintero's evaluations throughout the 2014-2015 school year consistently showed effective methods of teaching practices, and upon leaving in June, she was rated "effective." After she checked her e-mail shortly before the first day of the 2015-16 school year, she learned that she was actually rated as "developing." Why? She wrote in an e-mail:

Reading my scores on the chart, it was clear that I was rated "effective" in both my teaching practices and on the state measure, which meant that my observations indicated that I was effective in the classroom and that the students whom were selected as our performance indicator for the state test had made enough progress to land us in the effective range. As I laid eyes on the last block in the score chart, my heart dropped. Developing. It hit me like a ton of bricks. Our committee at school had chosen the MOSL (Measures of Student Learning) as our local measure and this is where my students apparently struggled to perform.

Her students were asked to complete the writing task as she described above. They had spent months practicing myriad skills needed to even attempt to begin what was asked of them. She wrote:

My class last year was comprised of students with autism, students with speech and language impairments, students with emotional disturbances (unmedicated), intellectual disabilities (formally known as mental retardation), and students with learning disabilities. Some students were in first grade, some were in second grade, and some were in third grade.

In that classroom, we worked on toilet training, speaking in complete sentences, making eye contact when speaking, sitting in a chair, sitting on a carpet, maintaining personal space, handling materials correctly, coping skills for anger and frustration, buttoning and zipping clothing, how to hold a pencil and apply pressure in order to write, how to use sign language to ask for a break or more time, essentially basic skills that were needed in order to function within a community school.

This was all in addition to the academic skills that were expected from them (as compared with their typically developing peers in general education classes) and the academic skill sets they were working on for their developmental level. (Skill levels ranged from beginning of pre-K to the beginning of second grade) Most of my students had behavior intervention plans, as the behaviors they demonstrated severely impeded on their ability to learn within a classroom.

Many of my students came from transient homes, shelters, instability and abuse. A couple of my students were nearly nonverbal, speaking in fragments of sentences, only a couple of words, or sometimes just pointing. Several of my children also had such issues with attendance that there were months where they were absent more than they were present. The beginning months of the school year worked on self regulation, functional skills and following routines without panicking if there was a change. The students in my class last year relied on consistency and a schedule so much that even the slightest turn off the beaten path would send their world into a downward spiral, leaving some students in crisis.

And during these moments of crisis, there was no one to call to come and handle the situation so that I would be able to keep teaching. It wasn't an issue of staff within the building not caring; it was simply a matter of not having enough people on hand to take care of the situation. So, there were many days where I would begin teaching, but then have to switch hats and become a counselor, a mother, a clown, a confidant, or someone other than a teacher in order to regain my students' interest and keep them going. Yet the general expectation was that these students would somehow miraculously be "fixed" and performing at grade level by the time the tests rolled out.

In addition to all of the above, I was also pregnant and experiencing complications. I was diagnosed with a subchorionic hematoma at 14 weeks gestation, and the recommendation was that I discontinue working and focus on the well-being of myself and my child. After seeing a specialist and discussing things with my husband, I decided to take a leap of faith and keep working until I was no longer able to — either from the complication or because I was ready to deliver.

As much as I wanted to be home and focusing on myself and the baby, I couldn't leave my other babies at school. They were upset by even the smallest change in our schedule, such as reading centers only lasting 12 minutes instead of 15 before we rotated. How could I walk out on them, unable to tell them when I would be returning? With a due date of March 4th, I worked until February 27th. Despite delivering on March 13th, I returned to work after April break last year; my son had just turned a month old.

While I was gone, I remained in heavy contact with their substitute teacher and e-mailed lesson plans for each week to ensure that my students maintained their path to success that we had fought and worked so hard for. I e-mailed, sent text messages, and called parents while I was on maternity leave to receive updates on my students and to check in with the children themselves. We shared points of frustration, the children told me where they were struggling (as best they could), and I passed this information on to the staff in my room so that we could bend and flex with each child as we navigated this time of change.

My students made such progress that there were many days I was moved to tears. I was able to get children whom couldn't spell their names to write in three-word sentences. I

was able to take children from making letter strings to writing paragraphs.
(See photo above. The top picture is from November of 2014, and the bottom picture is from January 2015. Both pictures are from the same student.)

Yet because we were compared to another school (that wasn't openly disclosed to us), my students didn't make significant enough progress to warrant a rating above "developing." These are students whom receive occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, speech and language services, and are placed in a special class because it has been determined that they are not typically developing and need an alternative method of instruction to bring out the best in them. They are given the best opportunity of learning possible given what we are working with, yet it isn't good enough.

The situation within my classroom is not an isolated incident within my school. All over the building, my colleagues are experiencing something similar, if not worse. We are fortunate though, as our administration has begun to listen to our voices and real change is underway. As a team, the administrators and special education department worked together to restructure the self-contained classes, obtain a grant for a behavior therapist, and designate a position for crisis intervention.

This year, I am not teaching a class but hold the position of SAVE Room operator [a SAVE room houses students who have been suspended or removed from their classrooms] and IEP teacher. Essentially, I partake in crisis intervention and work with students in crisis. I also help teachers implement behavior plans, teach skill sets to students and handle situations with students in crisis. This allows the students to receive the help that they need and for the teachers to be able to keep teaching. I am that set of hands that I needed last year when students were in crisis.

Even though we are only a few weeks into school, the creation of this position has produced a marked level in the increase of instructional time in the classes that have students in crisis. I can only hope that me being vocal about my ratings to friends, family and my administration will continue to make a gateway for change. Change not only in how my colleagues and I are evaluated, but change in how heavily idiotic testing is carried out for children with special needs.



Valerie Strauss

Valerie Strauss is an education writer who authors The Answer Sheet blog. She came to The Washington Post as an assistant foreign editor for Asia in 1987 and weekend foreign desk editor after working for Reuters as national security editor and a military/foreign affairs reporter on Capitol Hill. She also previously worked at UPI and the LA Times.