***“Standardized Frenzy”***

***By***

***Alyson Bradley***

***Characters***

* *Alfie Kohn as Keen Kong*
* *Herbert Walberg as Hubert Shame*
* *Daniel Dawer as Danny Fueler*
* *Derrick Meader as Dear Tick*
* *Alyson Bradley (myself) as Alyson A-Dub Wallace*
* *Sharon L. Nichols as Sharice Nickels*

**The following is a piece from the DC103 radio show at Gladiator Radio Studios on Tuesday, March 20,2012, as a part of the evening coverage show. The following conversation was recorded ON AIR as follows…**

*\*Alyson “A-Dub” is greeting radio listeners leading into a break from on air music play. She is about to begin the entertainment coverage segment of the evening show. \**

**Alyson:**

Alright DC, once again, good evening, I’m your host Alyson A-Dub Wallace and you’re listening to DC103 on this wonderful Tuesday. To all of you who may be traveling in the *crazy, crazy* traffic out there we will get back to the music momentarily - I have some requests and hot new stuff on the way for you but first I NEED to talk about this hot, new show that’s been gaining traction on ABC and all over Twitter! Yea you may know it but if you don’t you definitely need to get to know it! That’s right I’m talking about SCANDAL and all of its scandal-ousness

*(laughs)*

This show shadows a powerful, political DC fixer, Olivia Pope, played by Kerry Washington, who is having a slightly inappropriate relationship with the married president played by Tony Goldwyn. Guys I’m so serious if you have not yet checked out this show, YOU MUST!! You’ll overdose on juicy drama and steamy romance. And who doesn’t love that stuff and NO I’m not saying that just because I am a woman! Plus the stars of the show live-tweet with the fans on Thursday nights at 10pm when the show airs on ABC. So go ahead DC and get your much-needed dose of “dromance”! Tune in, set your DVRs, grab your wine and popcorn and enjoy this show because you definitely cannot afford to miss out!

*\*Cuts to paid advertisements\**

*\*Resumes on air music play for 20 minutes\**

*\*Alyson comes out of on air music play, once again leading listeners into a break and the educational coverage segment of the evening show. \**

*The following conversation took place at Gladiator Radio Studios ON AIR*

**Tuesday, March 20,2012, as a part of the evening coverage show on DC103**

*between host, Alyson “A-Dub” Wallace, renowned educational activist*

*and author, Keen Kong, well-known “standardized test-lover”, Hubert Shame,*

*well-known “standardized test-hater”, Danny Fueler, the ever so neutral, Dear Tick,*

*and last but not least, the wonderful, powerful and very opinionated Sharice Nickels.*

**Alyson:**

Alright, Alright, alright!! DC you know who it is, your host Aly “A-Dub” here this Thursday evening. You are listening to your very own DC103 as we wind down the evening. And we are now about to move into the educational coverage segment of our show tonight and I believe I have a very thought provoking topic for all of you students, parents and parents to be out there!

Standardized testing has become “ole faithful” for the educational system now. Schools seemingly have began to put our students through more hours of testing than schooling so what is the deal? What do these tests do for our students? Are these tests meaningless or are they actually helping? Should they be used to define and categorize the intelligence of our students? Are these tests even accurate representations of a students understanding in a course? Why are we so dependent on these things? And last but not least, are there any other methods to evaluation other than these standard tests? Americans want answers to this highly debated topic and we at DC103 are determined to inquire about this matter for our listeners and the American people.

I have here in the studio with me, renowned educational activist Keen Kong…

**Keen Kong:**

*(Sternly)*

Good evening.

**Alyson:**

… Hubert Shame, an avid standardized test supporter… Good evening sir…

**Hubert Shame:**

*(Authoritative)*

Evening.

**Alyson:**

**…** the wonderful, powerful and very opinionated Sharice Nickels… *(Laughs)*

**Sharice Nickels:**

*(Laughs)*

Helloooo!

**Alyson:**

... the handsome Danny Fueler…

**Danny:**

*(smiles)*

Why thank you Alyson and Good evening DC

**Alyson:**

*(smiles)*

…And lastly, in the studio I have the ever so neutral, peacekeeper Dear Tick.

**Dear Tick:**

(hysterically laughs)

Hahahaha Good Evening Everyone.

**Alyson:**

So with that said, let’s get on with the program and examine this “standardized frenzy occurring in our schools.” Would anyone like to begin?

**Dear Tick:**

Umm… yes Alyson I’ll head this discussion but let me first start off by saying thank you for allowing me to be here…

**Alyson:**

You’re very welcome.

**Dear Tick:**

Okay so the American people have grown quite inquisitive - as have you, yourself Alyson- as to the purpose of standardized testing and its contribution to the school systems as a whole. Let me first, start off by saying this... standardized testing is definitely not on its way out any time in the near future due to imposed state and federal standards, however, reform may be exercised. See, what many people do not understand is that standardized testing is not the bad guy nor is it the good guy -its just what it is- standardized testing. And like anything in this world it has benefits and drawbacks, pros and cons. However, that does not mean that it should be the sole answer in schools nor should it be written off as some bad plague in the system.

**Keen Kong:**

I see the point that you are trying to make Dear and, in some ways, I do agree with you. While standardized testing, in my opinion, has become the ONLY way in the school system, it is not only the tests that are all bad but also, also, the standards on which the tests are built upon-

**Hubert Shame:**

-And those standards are what Kong?

**Keen Kong:**

Well… before you interrupted sir I was going to go into more detail. Any who, standardized testing is much more than the 50 multiple choice questions that our children, much like ourselves in school, were forced to answer. Standardized testing is a state mandated process that is the result of the strict curriculum in schools and the “paint-by-the-numbers” learning methods and material enforced in the schools. With that said, Tick I think that even you have to admit that the so-called pros of standardized testing are overpowered by the cons. Strict curriculums based off of tests and “no-brainer” material along with 10 paged tests testing mere memorization are not the answer and no perpetual pros can override that major con.

**Alyson:**

Whew! Great point Kong! There is a major deficit in the pro/con department where standardized testing is concerned. The system seems to want people under the conception that the testing is helping more than it is hindering because it provides guidance in the classroom of what needs to be taught, however, all that I hear, more than anything else is that it aids in accurate comparisons between different schools, states and sub-groups or, in other words, other students! Comparisons? Sounds more like competition to me. It’s pressuring children to want to get higher scores so that they wont be classified as dumber than their peers or socially separated from those around them at the hand of those test scores but it is not motivating them to learn. These tests are becoming a mandated pain and I honestly don’t see how they are helping anything! And I think that the states know this but they have just grown so dependent on them to test the students in the system so that they won’t have to invest time and money into finding other ways to evaluate these students. Not to mention that standardized testing is VERY FAST AND EFFICIENT, which, to the system is a godsend, considering the microwave economy we live in now where everybody wants everything fast. Classic case of instant gratification.

**Dear Tick:**

I can’t say that I agree fully with your statements Alyson or even you Mr. Kong. I definitely feel as if standardized testing along with strict curriculum in the classroom can be beneficial. Strict curriculums not only keep the students focused on what matters but it also ensures that the teachers are teaching from a non-biased point of view. Teachers can be easily evaluated through the use of a strict curriculum partnered with testing because it allows the “people in control” to monitor performance in the classroom as this has brought down a lot of unproductive teachers and poorly ran schools. Also, comparison allows for improvement! It allows the Board to be able to sit down and evaluate the performance on these tests and brainstorm on ways to increase, both, understanding and scores.

**Hubert Shame:**

Thank you for pointing that out Dear because I have found that throughout all my years of work almost 99.999 % of people can only focus on the BAD in standardized testing. People do not understand that nothing is nowhere near perfect, however, I must say that standardized testing is as damn near it as we may ever get. Why are we at war against something that helps our children and us. Standardized tests hold teachers and students accountable in the classrooms and they help to measure progress in teaching and learning which is much needed these days when everything is monitored in some fashion.

**Danny Fueler:**

With all do respect Mr. Shame, just because EVERYTHING to hear you say it is monitored and accounted for in the current day does not mean that both our own as well our children’s intelligence and cognitive abilities can or should be thrust into that same exact pile. Students are human beings not robots or computers and neither their mental processes nor their intelligence can be defined by a Scantron sheet, a number two pencil and a series of vague questions. Students are not numbers, stats or animals and should not be treated as such. Because that’s basically what standardized testing is. A conjured method to place students in a hierarchal set-up where the “smartest students” who receive the highest scores indicate the best students and schools as opposed to the “supposed non-smart students” who receive the lowest scores thus indicating the less fortunate schools and students-

**Alyson:**

-Can I just interject at my own will and shed a little bit of my thoughts? Being both a part-time student and a mother myself I have always questioned the integrity of standardized testing and its effectiveness in the school system. I definitely do not feel as if it serves as an accurate representation of the cognitive abilities of students and I also feel as if it has adverse affects on the students taking these tests. The states say these tests motivate students to want to do well both in the class and on the assessments themselves, however, according to personal experience and after talking to my child, other children, and even adult students, I have found that these tests and strict curriculums subject these students to more STRESS than anything. Now in adults that may be feasible but in young children ?! They know what stress is already?! And it’s not because of their personal lives its because of school. The place that we as parents send our children to learn and grow but to also be children in their own right! I just don’t find that acceptable guys I am so sorry but I don’t!

**Sharice Nickels:**

You have nothing to apologize about Alyson! I definitely agree with you and I may take it to another level saying this but I think that this type of testing is actually beginning to corrupt schools-

**Hubert Shame:**

Ahhhhh!!! Object! You took it to the next century with that statement! That is just pure rubbish!

**Sharice Nickels:**

Say what you will but I feel as if there is nothing GOOD to come out of the institution of standardized testing. It utilizes pressure to motivate students for God’s sake! It is a toxic threat and incentive system that is providing more threat than incentive ! The crazy thing is that the state is convinced that they are doing right by these students when really they are not ! They are focusing more on what student can bubble in the right letters and gain the highest score more so than they are focused on the method that the student executes in order to arrive at that right or wrong answer. And given the fact that people sometimes accidently bubble in the wrong letters when they know the right answers, wouldn’t that lead one to question- just as Alyson proposed- the accuracy of standardized testing?!

\**Phones begin to ring indicating callers into the station\**

**Alyson:**

Okay ! I’m sorry to interrupt but I think we are going to take a quick caller. So we have Caller #1. Caller One what’s your name and your thoughts on this discussion ?

**Caller One:**Hi Alyson, my name is Danielle and I am a freshman in college. I would first like to say that I feel like Hubert is being very rude ON AIR however that is beside the point. I’m definitely feeling what you and Sharice have to say about standardized testing. I have been taking standardized tests since before I remember honestly. And they all seemed the same-rushed and irrelevant. I was extremely stressed before and after the test and during it I was solely focused on getting it over with that I didn’t even really focus on doing well even though I knew all the material and how to apply it. The reason why I’m saying all of this is to show just how pointless I think that standardized testing is. I got a pretty bad score on that test and I was fairly embarrassed however, a week later in class review, I knew more than my peers did that passed. I think that this is the primary difference between memorization and actually learning material. Standardized testing definitely does not measure a students comprehension of a course it just measures how well a person tests and remembers essentially because that’s all I feel my peers did. Something definitely needs to be done about these testing methods!

**Alyson:**

I definitely agree with you there! Thank you so much for calling in Danielle! I think we have enough time to take one more caller to end our segment so Caller #2 what’s your name and questions or thoughts on the topic?

**Caller Two:**

Uh… yea. Hey DC103 its Josh here. I’m a single father of two and also a teacher at Shaw Elementary and I just want to know what are some of the alternatives to standardized testing? What else is out there?

**Alyson:**

Wow! Great question Josh! I feel as if there are plenty of other ways to evaluate students, their learning and their growth in schools. For example, based upon my own research I have found portfolio-based assignments to be a promising option. What do you all think?

**Danny Fueler:**

Well Alyson I see that you’ve been reading my articles

*(laughs)*

**Alyson:**

*(laughs)*

What can I say Danny? You’re a terribly good source for me.

**Danny Fueler:**

Well Josh, portfolio-based assignments are definitely an option. They are done through the compilation of samples of a student’s work and reflections upon that work into a portfolio over the course of a school year. This method gives teachers a deeper insight into the student’s progress in learning. Also though, you have something called performance exams that are not used that often. They require students to demonstrate what they’ve learned through hands-on application. This includes activities such as science fairs, debates and stimulation.

**Sharice Nickels:**

Definitely! Any kind of portfolio or project based assessment is the answer. They encourage students to be creative in their assessments and to reveal to their instructors what they really do know and understand and how they will apply this material in real life. In these assessments, the answers are not already there on the paper for the students- they have to create them and this is what’s most important, as it will benefit them throughout their years of school and problem solving.

**Dear Tick:**

I think that we are all in agreement that the portfolio and project based assessments are probably the best alternative methods to standardized testing. However, that still does not mean that standardized testing should not be used at all it should just be used in conjunction with these two other methods. Once again people, we have to focus on the fact that standardized testing is not the only bully here, but people are just making it seem that way- it still has some good to offer. But yes, the portfolio based assessments and application projects could also prove successful.

**Keen Kong:**

My suggestion is that we not solely focus on changing the institution of testing but also the strict curriculum that is imposed upon our students. We should reform the curriculum and refresh the material that we are teaching. New curriculum and material just may open new doors for our students and maybe even give them that little more of “push” they may need to succeed and even “motivate and interest” them in doing well in the classrooms!

**Hubert Shame:**

I honestly feel like the best alternative choice to standardized testing is STANDARDIZED TESTING! If it ain’t broke don’t fix it. There is nothing wrong with the institution of standardized testing. They help pinpoint students’ weaknesses so that educator may work even more diligently to improve these students’ performances through tutoring and alternative assignments. Saying NO to standardized testing is like saying no to a doctor’s diagnosis. Don’t work to get rid of the truth just because it’s not what you like or want to hear. Instead work to make the most out of the truth and IMPROVE performance.

**Alyson:**

Alright well that is all the time we have left for tonight ladies and gentleman. I would like to thank you all for coming to talk with me. I feel like you have all given me insight into the institution of standardized testing- the GOOD and the BAD – which is something that I really appreciate. Because of your taking the time to come out tonight to the station, the American people and I have gained some answers to our questions and expounded upon our curiosities as far as standardized testing is concerned. Thanks for coming through and providing scholarly opinions on this issue that I may apply this discussion to my arsenal of information as motivation to further inquire.

DC I am so sorry that we did not have time to answer all of the burning questions as far as this matter is concerned but my guests will be back next Tuesday at the same time if you are interested in joining us for the continuation of this conversation. I would like to also thank the listeners and callers for providing us with your opinions, questions and concerns. Once again, you are listening to DC103 “All Things You” and I am your host, Aly A-Dub Wallace. Have a great rest of the night, travel safe and put that phone down if you are driving!! Until next time, I’m signing off. Goodnight and God Bless. MIGHTY GLADIATORS – WE DO THIS!

*\*Music begins playing\**

***The END***

***Academic Conversation Part Two***

Standardized testing has become a highly debated topic in relation to the educational system in this day and age. Some feel that it is pointless while others feel as if it is a significant addition to the educational system. However, in my opinion, standardized testing is nothing more than a high stakes labeling and number game that is imposed upon students from the time that they are young to the time that they exit school. This hunch that I possess as far as standardized testing is concerned leads me into the basis of my inquiry; is standardized testing the right solution in evaluating student’s abilities and understanding in a course or objective?

In support of my argument, Alfie Kohn also feels as if standardized testing serves a negative purpose in the school system, that is, if it serves any purpose at all. He states that testing has now evolved into an institution that is used to judge children, teachers and schools while serving as the basis for failing students and deciding where money should be spent. According to research, testing was, in the past, only used to place children and to pinpoint what help it was that they needed in the classroom. However, now school is a place where the students are subjected to more standardized testing and stress than learning and the purpose of this testing is nothing more than a labeling fiasco. For example, in his writing, Kohn suggests that testing has become nothing more than a mere commercialized issue in which test scores are used to track, calculate and define success or failure (Kohn, 2000).

So, then, why is something as complex and universal as the process of learning and application simply measured by bubbling in answers on a Scantron sheet? Also, how can these sheets be used to define a student’s potential success and failure? Some individuals, such as Herbert Walberg, who avidly support standardized testing, may greatly disagree with the viewpoint on standardized testing shared by myself and Alfie Kohn. Walberg insists that standardized testing holds teachers and students responsible for their performance in the classroom as either the educators or the educated. He seems to believe that standardized testing allows for the progress in both teaching and learning to be measured. Also, Walberg thinks that, in some miraculous way, standardized testing throughout one’s school career will better prepare them for future educational, occupational and professional goals (Walberg, 2011). I guess, then, that this is one way that standardized testing can be used to define a student’s success and failure. However, assuming that at least thirteen years of testing will be able to prepare an individual for future success is something that I just do not understand nor agree with because I do not see how a life of testing can have any hand in one’s future success or failure at all.

However, according to Alfie Kohn, the tests are not the only problem when it comes to standardized testing; it is also the stress and the standards on which the tests, themselves, are built upon. Alfie Kohn suggests that in an effort to create teacher proof curriculums, the system is creating more mechanical learning plans and, in turn, taking all of the personality, interest and inclusion out of the classroom and learning. Moreover, in an effort to prepare students for these outlandish tests, the entire process of teaching has become a race to cover a large amount of information in a short amount of time, which, in turn, has a negative impact on students testing performance. These standards have consequently dumbed down the classrooms, teachers and students and made education into a drill and practice approach (Kohn, 2004). Unfortunately, in this approach students are forced to remember and rehearse information that they will ineffably “dump” out of their minds after the tests. This information, alone, could challenge those who think that standardized testing is the “right solution”. How can the system evaluate a student’s progress in learning and understanding if the student really is not learning at all? If all that has become of the standardized testing premise today is remembering and rehearsing then who is to say that high scores aren’t just a mirage and the product of some fantastic rehearsal and that low test scores are the product of the exact opposite. To sum it all up, in my opinion, standardized testing only can test how well students remember and rehearse and not what they actually know, understand or learn in a course.

Stress is also a large contributing factor that can negatively affect a student’s performance on a test supporting my argument that standardized testing is not the “right solution to evaluation”. On this matter I am sure that Derrick Meador would agree. According to Meader, an unfortunate con of standardized tests can create a lot of stress on, not only the students, but also the educators even causing some to quit because of the amount of stress that is imposed upon them to teach students the test material (Meador, N.d.). Therefore if standardized tests stress out the educators who don’t even have to take the tests, imagine the amount of stress that it inflicts upon the students! Based upon a survey that I composed of fifteen students, all fifteen of them answered “yes” to the question “Did you experience any form of testing anxiety or stress before taking a standardized test?” (Bradley, 2013). This survey alone, illustrates just how much stress and standardized testing performance go hand and hand. According to the survey, of the fifteen students who all answered yes to experiencing testing anxiety and stress, ten of them admitted that they were not pleased with their performance or felt that they could have done better. From this evidence, it could be concluded that stress does in fact have some effect on a student’s testing performance, which could, in turn, affects their scores. With that said, standardized testing cannot be used to evaluate a student’s full capabilities and understanding in a course or objective because it does not capture all of these aspects in a multiple choice exam that is being taken by anxiety stricken and stressed out students who are not testing to their full potential or capability.

According to Daniel Dawer, things have hit an all time worse in the educational community and they will only get worse. He claims that, instead of helping, excessive testing has transformed schools into “factories” where testing strategies and rote skills have begin to override the need for deeper learning (Dawer, N.d.). This means that instead of worrying about teaching students material that they can apply in the real world, the school system is focusing on teaching students how to test better through memorization using repetition. However, Derrick Meador and Herbert Walberg would probably disagree with Dawer’s opinion that standardized testing has become the unhelpful source of commotion in the educational system. Meader would argue that standardized testing has its benefits just as much as it has its drawbacks. He would suggest that standardized testing allows for student’s test performances around the world to be compared in order to gather data to help develop programs and services directed in improving scores (Meader, N.d.). In agreement with Meador, Walberg would also argue that standardized tests can provide a great deal of information on how schools function and what can be done to improve them while, also, arguing that standardized testing does not only measure facts that can easily be memorized; but that they, also, are able to assess advanced understanding and judgment. This is done through questions placed on these tests that require students to select the best idea from a group of different choices- not the correct- but the best choice (Walberg, N.d.).

Unfortunately, the truth is that most students do not like standardized tests, however, because that is mostly all that is made available to them, it seems they do not really have a say nor do they have in influence in the ongoing debate of the effectiveness of standardized testing. According to my survey, all fifteen of the surveyed students expressed a form of hatred or dislike for standardized testing mostly because they feel that they are a waste of time or that they do not reflect how well they are doing in a particular class or course topic. However, some students also pointed out that even though they do hate standardized tests, they know that they have to take them so they really have no choice (Bradley, 2013). This is a sad realization because, in a figurative manner, we have backed our students into a corner of multiple choice, stress, repetition and silence. They don’t even feel as if standardized tests are the correct way to evaluate their understanding, however, we are still subjecting them to this testing because, as Walberg would argue, the tests are cheap and time efficient (Walberg, N.d.). However, in the process, we are torturing our students and treating them like figureheads in the eye of education- silencing them- as if they do not have a say in what works best for them.

So if standardized testing is, debatably, not the “right solution” what would be the best alternative to standardized testing? Sharon Nichols proposes that the best alternatives to standardized testing would be portfolio-based assessments as well as performance exams and end-of course examinations compiled by the teachers themselves (Nichols and Berliner, 2007). I believe, as I am sure that Kohn, Dawer and Meader would agree and that Walberg would disagree that these types of assessments are suitable alternatives because they not only focus on what the students have learned, but also on what they are being taught. Portfolio based assessments involve the collecting of samples of a student’s work over a school year in order to assess their improvement in a course. This type of assessment could shed more light on a student’s learning in course. Moreover, performance exams are things such as projects and science fairs where the students are forced to merge learned material and application together in order to create a product. This type of learning will illustrate just how well the students can take what they have learned and apply it to real life situations. And finally, end of course examinations that are compiled by the teachers themselves will allow for more discussion amongst teachers about curriculum content and student capabilities and how to further improve these factors in the classroom, not to mention that it puts teachers back in control of what they teach and test upon instead of leaving the decision to anonymous standardized test makers (Nichols and Berliner, 2007).

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