Dear Ms. Sippy,

In my mind I have been going over all of the possible inquiry topics that I could use for my project and I still cannot decide on just one because I feel like some would either be difficult to perform primary research on or that some would not examine issues from all sides of the spectrum. In other words, I am finding it hard to settle upon one topic because I think that I would either run into discrepancies concerning bias or my method of primary research. However, at the time being I am planning on focusing my inquiry on the subject of testing. I feel like from the time that we are thrust into school until the time that we exit, we are subjected to standardized tests that are used in an attempt to define each individual student’s comprehension of an objective or overall topic. The use of standardized testing has become a common denominator in the educational system that is supposed to illustrate the students understanding, however, I believe that standardized testing does not accurately represent an individuals comprehension and that it is merely a system of scholastic labeling that subjects students to academic competition in an attempt to make them want to perform better in the classrooms. My potential topics of inquiry are “How does the scholastic labeling/grouping of testing performance influence the students perception of him or herself of a student?” Do the students feel like good or bad students as a result of their testing performance? Do the students feel more inclined to want to perform well on standardized test and in class in order to earn “good grades or high rankings?” Do the students feel as if they are prepared enough by their teachers to perform well on these standardized tests? Finally, how much of the responsibility do these students feel is on their teachers to ensure that they do well on standardized testing? I am interested in these topics of inquiry mainly because I was once that student working endlessly and stressing over a test that would define my comprehension in a course that I thought I did well in. I was once the student that did not perform well on standardized tests, not because I was not smart enough or did not understand, but because I was worried about the label that my performance on that test would place on my academic standing and overall image as a student. Also, I was that student that studied material given to me by my teacher day and night. However, I found that, on the day of the test none of that material benefitted me and I, in turn, felt that in some way I had been short changed by my teacher. All of these points of inquiry are what I hope to touch down on and address in my project in order to examine how the institution of testing really affects students and their perceptions of themselves. I also hope to tie in some of the readings that we have been discussing in class. For example, we have read pieces by Mark Edmondson and Mike Rose along with other authors and have examined the educational system from different points of view. However, the most important thing we have discussed and also one of the points I hope to incorporate into my inquiry is the responsibility of learning and education as it pertains to both the student and the teacher. I feel like this is a very important topic because it is something that can and has been heavily debated in the world of scholastic journals and critiques and it is something I feel very passionate about addressing. From Edmondson’s point of view the process of learning and expounding upon knowledge has become more of the students responsibility whereas from Rose’s point of view the student is the blob of clay that is to be by the teacher and while both of these viewpoints are nicely worded I don’t find either of them to be accurate. To me, education is a partnership between the one imparting most of the knowledge and the one receiving that knowledge in a dynamic equilibrium setting where they both can learn something from one another. The responsibility is 50/50 essentially when it comes to learning and I hope to incorporate this in my inquiry about testing because just as education should be a 50/50 contribution between teacher and student, so should standardized test preparation. The educational system should take more caution in ensuring that these students that they are rigorously testing are in fact properly being prepared by these teachers that are supposed to be teaching them all that they will need to know to do well on these complicated tests. I plan to begin this inquiry by doing some background research on standardized testing and its uses just to help support my inquiry for example, I hope to research how standardized testing came about and what were the original purposes for it? In my primary research I plan to randomly select a sample of students and have them to complete a questionnaire of questions inquiring into their perspectives on standardized testing, test preparation in the classroom and how their potential or actual test performance altered or affected their viewpoints of themselves as students. I feel that the only people who would know how they were prepared for a test or how a test made them feel about themselves are the people who actually have had to take them in the past and this is why I chose to conduct my primary research in a survey form. I hope to discover some correlation between the labeling/grouping conspiracy of testing and the student’s perspectives of themselves as I do between the level of preparation in the classroom on a test versus home preparation and how preparation affects test performance as a whole. However, any comments or constructive criticism are welcome.

Thank You,

Alyson Bradley