

Opinion

Testing teachers won't solve education's problems

Too many tests this week? Definitely — 210,000 too many. And to teachers, no less. The Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT) literally "dogged" teachers Monday into lapping the state government's feet to hold on to their jobs. Collared into taking this literacy test to measure their reading and writing skills, Texas teachers are breathing no easier now while they wait for the results of an impersonal exam that wasted their time and our money. In the midst of Gov. White's ballooning education reform dreams, teachers themselves may lose that dogged will to keep pushing students up — too busy looking over their shoulder for fear the state will pull them down.



Cynthia Gay

Oh come now, it's just one test, the Texas Education Agency says. Why all the irritating prattle about a few multiple choice questions and a 150-word essay, a test that's supposedly so simple only 5 percent of our teachers should fail? As test-bummed college students, we could easily scratch our heads at all this ruckus stirred by an exam testing such skills as grade school grammar and spelling. But think back to that #1/*SAT that pried open for us the imposing doors of ivory towers across Amer-

ica. Maybe you were an "A" student and bombed The Test. You made it to college all right, but you'd swear on the Bible that test was no mirror of your smarts, your savvy and your will to survive the system.

Likewise, too much is riding on this exam for teachers, who already endure an obstacle course of testing to win their certification in the first place. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) stipulates that teachers pass both the Pre-Professional Skills Test, a literary test similar to TECAT, and the EXCET Exam before they can even look at their license to teach. At Texas A&M, future teachers must also sail past an English Proficiency Exam and three graduated checking points that make sure students are qualified first for Teacher Education classes, second for student teaching and finally for that degree and certification to teach.

So now state legislators are spoon-feeding teachers and Texas taxpayers into accepting just one more test, one more miracle worker from House Bill 72. Readily admitting TECAT does not measure teacher competency, the TEA also has in the works a yearly set of four classroom appraisals of teachers, two per semester by local school administrators. With these on-the-spot critiques regularly taking place at each public school, there's simply no need for the state to get back in the act of evaluating teachers with one more test that's tedious, expensive and solves nothing.

"We may be entering into an era of over-testing," said Dr. William Peters, head of the Educational Curriculum and Instruction Department at A&M. And like a magnet, the threat of TECAT failure has attracted a swamp of preparatory classes which Texas teachers have been rushing too throughout the past year, resulting in the devaluation of the ultimate evaluation. For these courses build confidence more than anything, but budding quizzmanship is no sign of a good teacher.

Entangling confusion with costs, the school districts are paying for all these preparatory courses to assuage teachers' testing fears. Add to that the \$4.7 million spent by our state government Monday just to administer this test to thousands of teachers. Add to that the costs incurred in legal fees when Texas teachers tried to get the TECAT ruled unconstitutional. And more lawsuits are likely to follow.

A common concern abounds that black and Hispanic teachers will fare the worst on this exam. The Dallas Independent School District has been administering a preemployment test like TECAT for the past five years. "Despite higher failure rate, minority teachers were hired because the district is under court order to boost the number of black and Hispanic teachers," The Houston Chronicle reported, adding that the district must also hire low-scoring

white applicants to avoid charges of reverse discrimination. If test results on a statewide scale heel after this trend, we may see law suits and prejudice charges galore. It's becoming a never-ending cycle — one minute the state draws an unbending line and the next minute it must make excuses for failure.

But hold everything, Gov. White says this illustrious literacy exam is the beginning of a "new economy" in Texas as the state moves away from dependence on oil and gas. Our teachers will help build this economy "with greater pride because they passed that test," White says. Now, how he expects a test that is costing so much and doing so little to inaugurate the solving of Texas' economic woes is beyond comprehension — pure political rhetoric at its finest.

As if dishing up more doubt to cover White's piece of cake, Peters cited the testing policy of the Education Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, N.J., which gives similar literacy exams. But there's one hitch. These exams can't be used to exclude teachers from their profession. With all its research and experimentation, ETS does not deem its tests reliable or valid enough to cost a teacher his or her job — which exactly contradicts what the state of Texas is attempting with TECAT.

"I don't know any teachers we have on our staff that I hope fail so we can get rid of them," says Navasota Superintendent John Webb, echoing the views

of scores of dubious administrators. While many parts of Texas are reeling on a teacher shortage, the absurdly hands administrators wanted excuse to cull their ranks. We aren't giving our school principals the credit for evaluating their school staffs and recognizing their

Once again, we're allowing government to step in as the great panacea for our students' slipping performance. The problems begin in the home. However, when parents neglect both encouragement and to discipline their children, No wonder Dad and Mom are carting kids off to school to knock out with the teacher for 7 hours a day. This, teachers suffer low pay, low training and potential low esteem 10 years later when the strains of "and Circumstance" greet the graduates and their parents, their ability is thrust solidly back in the

ly's hands. Although we make patsies of our parents, true responsibility remains at the front doorstep throughout these proverbial educating years, never leaving home until the 18-year-old does. Education cannot be vastly improved unless parents evaluate, or rather test themselves, their children and their own — instead of depending on government and teachers to do the dirty work.

Cynthia Gay is a junior journalism major and a weekly columnist for The Battalion.

... so what's the point of tests

So many Texas teachers were sufficiently upset about having to take the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers (TECAT) Monday that I've begun to think there might be something to their complaints.



Michelle Powe

Why should a teacher who already has earned his or her teaching certificate have to take another test in order to keep that certificate? Why should a teacher have to be tested on his knowledge at all? Having to take an exam which may dictate your future is unnerving, to say the least. And in this trying world we live in who needs the extra pressure?

To put an end to all this unnecessary emotional strain I propose that tests be abolished — all tests.

No more sweaty palms or upset stomachs that come with worrying about failing. No one will fail because no one will be tested. High school students won't

have to take the SATs to get into college. Why should they have to take a test to prove what they have learned from certificate-wielding teachers? A high school diploma will be all the clout any kid needs to get into the college of his choice, or to get the job of his choice.

No more nerve-wrecking job interviews or employment exams. Why should anyone have to prove what he knows or what he is capable of? This is the land of opportunity. Everyone ought to be able to do anything he wants for a living.

You want to be an airline pilot? Sure! Can you start Monday? An air traffic controller? Great! We can never have too many air traffic controllers.

People won't have to take tests to get into law school or medical school. They won't have to take tests while they're in school. For that matter, why should they have to have a certificate from such schools to practice law or medicine. You want to be doctor? Can you play golf?

No more tests for drivers' licenses. Anyone who can get their hands on a motor vehicle can drive it.

No more try-outs for sports teams. Too much pressure is put on athletes anxious to make the cuts. Just let everyone play.

No more entrance requirements for the military academies or the armed services. Let everyone join.

Let's abolish all qualification restrictions for any job. What purpose do they serve? You want to run for president of the United States, but you're afraid of the fact that you're only 14 years old might be a hindrance? Nonsense! Have some self-confidence. What possible difference could a few years make?

Why should people be discriminated against and prevented from getting certain jobs just because they aren't qualified? That's not very nice.

Wouldn't the world be a much happier place if everyone got to do what he or she wanted to do? No more pressures, no more hurt feelings. After all, it shouldn't matter if a person is qualified for the job. All that should matter is that everyone get his own way.

Michelle Powe is a senior journalism major and the editor for The Battalion.

Ignorance no excuse for Holocaust

Among the causes to which Kurt Waldheim has devoted his life, ignorance is surely one. Asked to account for his years as a Nazi soldier, he said he never knew about the atrocities being committed around him. Asked how he could not, he answers that he still does not know. For almost 45 years, the former U.N. secretary general has pursued ignorance as if it were truth. He thinks it will set him free.



Richard Cohen

The charges against Waldheim are several. The first is that he was an early Nazi recruit. Not true Waldheim says. The second charge is that Waldheim served both in Yugoslavia and Greece under Gen. Alexander Lohr, who was later executed as a war criminal. In Yugoslavia, Lohr's forces committed atrocities. In Greece they were responsible for, among other things, the deportation of 42,000 Jews from the city of Salonika to extermination camps in Poland.

To the last charge, Waldheim says not guilty. He was merely a staff officer to Lohr, an occasional translator, and not only did he have nothing to do with the expulsion of the Jews, but he did not even know about it. Confronted by the New York Times, Waldheim confessed not just innocence, but ignorance as well.

"I regret these things deeply," he said, referring to the deportation of the

Salonika Jews while he was there. "But I have to repeat that it is really the first time I hear that such things have happened. I never heard or learned anything of this while I was there. I hear for the first time that there were deportations of Jews from there."

It could be that Kurt Waldheim worked for the very Nazi general who organized the expulsion of the Jews of Salonika and never heard a thing to make him suspicious. It could be that almost half of Salonika's residents vanished — much of the merchant class — and Waldheim did not notice. It could be that the butcher went, the shoemaker, too, the lawyer in his office, the doctor in his clinic, the haberdasher in his store — and still Waldheim took no notice. The children were gone off the street, the old men from the park and the wind banged the shutters of empty homes, but Kurt Waldheim walked by, noticing nothing. It could be. But it could not be.

Or it could be that he did notice. But what could he do? He was a mere cog in a huge killing machine — a soldier in the army, not a race-hater in the SS, not a sadist for the Gestapo torture chambers. Europe was a vast charnel house and everywhere the innocent were being murdered. To admit casual complicity for what happened during the war is almost to earn moral immunity now. What could one person do? What would you have done?

But the measure of the man can be taken in his proclamation of ignorance. Here is the self-confessed dumbbell in all his glory — a person who boasts no knowledge of history as if that frees him from its consequences. In Waldheim's

case, a great crime took place under his nose and he smelled nothing. He was, he insists, the three monkeys rolled into one. Stop picking on him.

Even in the awful annals of the Holocaust, the saga of the Jews of Greece is a special horror. It was a very long way from Salonika to the killing camps of Poland. The Jews of Salonika — men and women, children and the aged, the pious and the cynical, the jaded and the romantic — were put into trains and shipped across Europe. The journey took days and all this time the Jews of Salonika went without water or food, without toilets or baths — in some cases without air to breathe. By the times the trains reached the camps, many of the Jews were already dead. They suffered terribly and the Jewish community, 500 years old and renowned throughout Europe, was no more.

After the war, Kurt Waldheim became a world leader. He is now running for the president of Austria. It is barely acceptable for him to say he was oblivious to mass murder when he was a junior officer; it is not acceptable for him to say he spent a life that way. As a man and as a political leader, it was his obligation to find out what happened during the war, to see what, in his modest way, he made possible — to know and, in the telling phrase of Arthur Koestler, "to be haunted by his knowledge."

But Waldheim says nothing haunted him. He proclaims his innocence by confessing ignorance. But what it really comes down to is indifference — an inadvertent confession of guilt. It is what made the Holocaust possible.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group.

Mail Call

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length but will make every effort to maintain the author's meaning. Each letter must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

Beware of thieves

EDITOR:
To the thief who stole my backpack from Sbisa on Monday, I would like you to consider just what you got out of breaking the law. You stole an obsolete, six-year-old Radio Shack computer, a check book which you cannot use, a Management 211 text, a TAMU paycheck, some notes and some computer program listings. All of this will provide you with maybe \$15 if you sell it, and possibly a few minutes of enjoyment from tinkering with a poor computer I doubt you have the mentality to use. You risked being thrown out of the University for that?

Now what did I lose? I lost the notes and the text book I needed to study for a test I would take in two days, programs I needed to turn in during class I would have in two hours, time and money stopping payment checks, a pocket computer which I had become familiar with even if it was worth much and a ragged but functional backpack.

To the people who eat at Sbisa: Don't make the same mistake I did. The manager at Sbisa told me that a backpack is stolen almost every day. It's an inconvenience to carry your pack with you when the lockers are full, but it is not nearly as inconvenient as having it stolen by a student wanting to make 15 bucks.

Joseph Gish

Guns can be fun

EDITOR:
This letter is in response to Michelle Powe's article, "Basement arsenal don't defend traditional values," in the Mar. 7 edition of The Battalion.

I have an AR-15 which is the semi-automatic version of the M-16, and a sawed-off 12-gauge shotgun, which I carry in my pick-up. With these weapons I pay for my way through college. During breaks in the school year I am traveling to Angola, Afghanistan and other countries in need of hired guns. All that I require is the right price. Yep, I can make enough money to pay all my college expenses and have plenty left over.

But seriously, folks,
I do actually own an AR-15 and a sawed-off shotgun. The shotgun is legal as hell, so don't get anymore ideas about people overstepping the law. I guess you have never shot an automatic or semi-automatic gun. They happen to be some of the most accurate rifles around. They are also light and very durable. This would make the semi-automatic gun an excellent rifle for hunters. I have hunted deer for 12 years, and my father for many more. We have used semi-automatic rifles for a number of years and are extremely pleased. The reason you have never known anyone to hunt with an automatic is that it's illegal as hell to hunt with one.

You say that people kill people. I agree totally. But doing away with guns will not stop the killing. The only purpose of automatic weapons is not to kill people. They are good investments and fun to shoot at targets.

One more question. How many people do you know have a tank parked at their house for protection?

Chuck Klein

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