

Almost the Full Picture

I find the short essay “Just Scoring Points” by Walter R. Tschinkel fascinating and well-informed. The article argues that in today’s learning environment, that learning takes a back seat to the goal of just scoring points. Walter argues that students in college are only interested in scoring points for their classes. Walter makes the comparison of a sports game. Students are, therefore, incentivized only to study the material that is only being quizzed on and not truly learn the material to heart, only learning enough to pass the class with flying colors. My views on Walter’s take are complicated. I agree with his assessment that students are only interested in passing the course. I personally have used strategies to counteract this phenomenon, like not looking at grades throughout the year, teaching others, and taking extra time to learn concepts. However, I disagree that everything is lost when students move on from the section or idea after a test. From my experience, the knowledge is not gone it is just locked away, and the student can access and relearn previously learned material in a fraction of the time. Overall, I agree with Walter and his assessment that the sports form of education is not nearly as effective as it needs to be and that changes need to be made.

Since I cannot change the educational system, I have taken strategies upon myself to avoid the trap that I and many others have fallen into. One of my favorite strategies to avoid falling into “sports mode” education is to not look at my grades. When I tell people I don’t check my grades except maybe once a month, I get the same shocked reaction, “What, I check my grades impulsively.” Not checking my grade was an accidental habit I picked up in high school. I was simply too lazy to check my grades and had only a slight idea of my standing in the class; I would see individual assignment scores but not the overall grade. Though through this accidental habit, I managed to escape the Just Scoring Points of education. As a result of not knowing my

overall score in my classes, I treated every assignment, test, and essay with extreme diligence. School no longer became a game of how I put in the least amount of effort for the maximum gain, but it became more of a job. I learned the material not for the A but for my understanding. I learned Chemistry, Math, and English because I needed to. Since I never really knew my grade, I put a hundred percent effort into learning the material cause otherwise, how would I get my theoretical A? I know this strategy isn't helping me fully escape the mindset of scoring points cause, in the end, I am still hoping for an A, but it makes me work and learn more for my educational benefit.

Though avoiding checking my grades is not the only escape from the trap of just scoring points. My second method is by teaching. It is my personal experience that if you can't explain an idea or subject, you have not mastered it. I have been helping other students with classwork for as long as I can remember. By helping them, I don't mean giving them the answers. Through guiding others to the solution, I learn the material on a higher level. I have learned what other assumptions people make or assumptions I have made that aren't necessarily true. Secondly, it simplifies the concepts when you teach them and solidifies them in one's mind.

The third and final technique is just genuine interest. Interest and hard work are the hardest and least concrete of all the strategies I use to avoid "Just Scoring Points." I like engineering; I joined a robotics club to learn more about coding and mechanical engineering. Through this club learned a lot more than in any other class I was taking at the time. Sometimes just genuine interest in a subject can carry you farther than any other class. For example, this is not my first time learning C before this class; I was teaching myself C through a book cause I knew one day I might need it. This quarter I started taking a Udemy course on Vim cause I knew in the long run, it would save me time and make my life a lot easier. One of the best and hardest

ways for students to get out of Just Scoring Points is to make it fun to explore and learn the concepts they need to. However, I know this form of learning is wishful thinking.

Overall I agree with the assessment of Walter R. Tschinkel, except for one point I don't agree with the idea that advanced students forget basic earlier concepts. I am not sure that entirely holds. I agree that students don't know the material as best as they should but saying they don't remember anything from past courses doesn't seem right either. A quick analogy could clear things up. The human body is a pretty remarkable thing. If you gain a specific amount of muscle mass and lose it, it takes a fraction of the time and energy to regain it. In my personal experience, this applies to education as well. The number of times I have had to relearn a programming language after not touching it for a long time is countless, but each time I relearn the language, it takes me a fraction of the time. I remember that I hadn't programmed with python for two years and relearned everything in a single day. I am willing to bet that this applies to all subjects and most students. If students in the just scoring system wanted to relearn information such as what a protein-carbohydrate is, they could relearn this information in a laughably short amount of time. Knowledge, therefore, becomes more like a need-to-know basis; why does one need to understand evolutionary theory when they are simply studying the genome of bacteria? I know this way of thinking is controversial though I believe it has merit.

I agree that the Just Scoring System is flawed but to say it has no merit doesn't seem fair either; there is a reason that this system has been in place and a reason it turns out a skilled and effective workforce assuming these individuals get hired. Overall I agree with Walter R. Tschinkel that we should move away from the just scoring system, and I have been using strategies to accomplish this on an individual scale. However, to say that students learn nothing

seems laughable to me, and hence why I think that “Just Scoring Points” has almost the full picture.