

Noel Ball

CSE 13S

Kerry Veenstra

15 January 2023

Just Scoring Points

Just Scoring Points, by Walter Tshinkel, is an article about a professor's observations of the university educational system in America. He sets up two major metaphors around college students' learning, both of which I believe to be fairly accurate although a little too black and white. He talks about the major impact on students' retention of knowledge when they focus too much on points. Yet on the other hand, he blames the foundations of the university education system for this impact on its students. He also goes on to elaborate on the attempts he's made with his own students to further incentivize learning and benefit students that don't exactly fit into the limited "cookie-cutter" testing system.

The first metaphor Tschinkel sets up compares the content students learn to bricks in a building, that when fully constructed, represents the complete understanding of the topic. He emphasizes that it's the students job to keep the bricks in place after they've learned and practiced the material. However with the testing system universities currently use, it's in the student's best interest to constantly keep juggling new content without practicing and establishing the foundations of their building. Inevitably, by the time the knowledge is no longer needed to be used, the building crumbles into a messy pile of bricks. The second metaphor compares earning points to playing a sports game. It describes students' retention of the material as temporary until the match is over and the score is changed, where they can reset by the next

round in order to succeed in the next match. I certainly agree with both metaphors, and especially so with the points he goes on to make about how the testing system practically forces students to follow these methods of learning. However I feel that his presentation of the argument is too exaggerated of how college students actually treat studying. When he illustrates how “most of [his] students did not know, and did not really want to learn, the meaning of important concepts...”, it feels like a very detached perspective from the real efforts students take for their learning. As a college student myself, and peers included, it’s clear to all of us that the goal for our education is to learn from the content we study, in order to be able to apply it in the real working world; not simply to succeed temporarily in a class we are spending our own money and effort to get into. I feel that students tend to fall back on the idea of just scoring points in order to make ends meet in a short period of time or to cram an intense workload and keep their grade afloat when it’s down to the wire. Of course this does happen, it’s smart and efficient to prioritize your short term success when needed in order to keep your long term success a realistic goal. Although Tschinkel believes that “even though most students remember individual factoids, they can hardly ever give a coherent account of anything broader”, I don’t believe it’s consistent or intentional from most students.

Towards the end of the article, Tschinkel offers a few improvements to the education system that he feels will benefit students and their interest to retain the content they learn. First he talks about the need to engage more students, because he says “the lecture format evolved to serve students who are highly motivated to learn ... but the average student gets little out of lectures”. I really agree with this point, although I learn from lectures decently well I know a lot of people that despise school because its format never gave them an opportunity to learn. Next he mentions replacing multiple choice exams with essays, which I also believe to be a valid

argument. There is much more freedom in expressing and illustrating what has been learned, practiced, and retained throughout the term compared to a large test. The last thing he mentions is increasing the integration of the curriculum as a whole. Such as reinforcing older ideas as they are going to be built upon, or demonstrating how the material from the previous course will be applicable and expanded on in the current course. I feel that this can certainly be improved upon in our educational system, although in my experience this has been done to a substantial degree.

Overall, I like Tschinkel's approaches to bending the "cookie cutter" education system, and the amount of effort he has spent analyzing his students' learning in order to further benefit them.