

Rhetorical analysis of "the dangerous myth of grade inflation" essay sample



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There is proof in the pudding. This cliché has been used an immeasurable amount of times to express that evidence to the claim leads to its legitimacy. It has been speculated for many years that grades are being inflated, and students are receiving A's for mediocre work. In fact, the introduction of Alfie Kohn's " The Dangerous Myth of Grade Inflation" shows reports of the matter made by Harvard Professor Harvey Mansfield and Harvard's Committee on Raising the Standard, respectively, with a gap of over a century (pg. 1). Kohn expresses his take on the matter of grade inflation and asserts that these accusations are false and ill-supported. Using arguments and logic to give his assertions a backbone, Kohn is successful in illuminating that grading as a whole, not grade inflation, is the overlooked problem by educators and students in colleges everywhere. So you be the judge. Is there proof in the pudding? Alfie Kohn is addressing the topic of grading inflation to educators and students, and his widely respected lecturing status attests to his knowledge on the matter.

The author of 13 books, Kohn has been speculated to be " perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades and test scores" (www. alfiekohn. org). In " The Dangerous Myth of Grade Inflation," he is debating the existence of grade inflation and pointing out factual evidence to prove his assertions. As I stated above, he begins his piece with quotes from the prestigious Harvard University. To show that some really do consider grade inflation a serious problem, Kohn states that The Boston Globe " in a tone normally reserved for the discovery of entrenched

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corruption in state government" posted articles on a surplus of Harvard students receiving A's and graduating with honors (pg. 1). He then goes on to notify the reader, when it comes to investigating this issue, the usual requirements of gathering data and reasoning are nonexistent, and actual critics should be relied on to demonstrate proof of grades inflating. Kohn then transitions to the fact that many of the claims are self-reports and unreliable. The efforts of proving grade inflations are then discussed with "Evaluation and the Academy: Are We Doing the Right Thing," released by American Academy of Arts and Sciences (pg. 3). Kohn addresses the problem with this belief of declining SAT scores should match declining success of students in college. Afterwards, Kohn addresses several misguided concepts of the grading system as we know it now. In his conclusion, he reveals that grades are the real threat to academic greatness, not grade inflation.

The arguments displayed by Kohn give a considerable amount of perspective to the idea of inflated grades being a myth. "The bottom line: No one has ever demonstrated that students today get A's for the same work that used to receive B's or C's" (pg. 3). This statement is very effective on Kohn's audience simply because of the evidence provided behind it. A research analyst named Clifford Adelman analyzed over 3,000 student transcripts and found that grades have actually declined slightly in the past twenty years. This argument provides a connection, especially to the educators, by effectively demonstrating that grade inflation is simply a belief by those who fail to analyze and investigate properly. Kohn also directs attention towards the assumption that lower SAT scores should point to lower success in students' grades. He attacks this assumption, stating that an analysis by the

president's office of the University of California on almost 78, 000 UC students revealed these standardized tests only predicted around 13. 3 percent of freshman grades (pg. 4). And even with that small percentage of accuracy, the reader must also consider that it is difficult to say that the standardized test's course work and collegiate course work are identical.

To conclude the argument on SAT scores, Kohn states that all evidence he found concerning the scores showed that there were improvements on both the math and verbal portions of the test. Thus, success should be expected more from students rather than assuming that grades are inflating. Kohn then makes a very avid point when he says " It is surely revealing when someone reserves time and energy to complain bitterly about how many students are getting A's - as opposed to expressing concern about, say, how many students have been trained to think that the point of going to school is to get A's" (pg. 6). This is the point in Kohn's work where he assumes the connection of grade inflation being a myth has been established to his audience and begins to focus on the logical aspect of what is wrong with grading as a whole. Using a logical approach, Kohn suggests to his audience that students are now accustomed to only attending school to receive A's (pg. 6). He expresses that grading in its current form has caused the student to only want good grades on course work, instead of actually absorbing the information and retaining it.

This suggestion is very effective on the student aspect of his audience because most students, including myself, can relate and have experienced a point in their life where they only wanted to make a good grade, and little information about the assignment was actually retained. Kohn also logically

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illuminates on false assumptions that underlie the myth of grade inflation. For example, he states that “ The professor’s job is to sort students for employers or graduate schools” (pg. 6). Here, Kohn takes a blender analogy, given by a professor, and states that students should not be advertised to recruiters as a “ student-as-appliance” approach. In fact, research shows that grades do not predict the future career success of students. So why do professors sort students simply based on GPA when there is a variety of effective skills in each individual? Another assumption is “ Students should be set against one another in a race for artificially scarce rewards” (pg. 7).

Kohn is straightforward in his approach of this misguided concept, stating that this method is only effective “ to ensure that there will always be losers” (pg. 7). Why does a door of failure have to be opened when there is a better way? Instead of “ Who’s beating whom” one should be evaluated on “ How well are they learning” (pg. 7). Kohn’s successful address on the underlying assumptions of grade inflations demonstrates to his audience an amount of logic and reasoning that makes it easy to understand what the true problems of the grading system are as a whole. In conclusion through the connection of he and his audience, the successful arguments and logical reasoning used by Alfie Kohn to address the actual existence of a true grading inflation has most definitely proven that the actual problem lies within grading as a whole. Kohn leaves us saying “ The real threat to excellence isn’t grade inflation at all; it’s grades” (pg. 11), leaving his audience with no choice but to at least strongly consider this statement as the truth. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but when someone mentions grade inflation do you believe there is proof in the pudding?

Work Cited

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