

Grades—do they  
express how smart  
we are?

Business



“ Four score and seven years ago...” the kids’ eyes begin to glaze over. After two minutes, few students are still listening, and those who are look like they’re about to fall asleep as they rest their chins upon their palms, eyelids flickering shut. How did these once-eager, happy-go-lucky, information-absorbing children suddenly, one by one, drop off like flies and begin to genuinely lose interest in the evolution of their education throughout the years? With dates, times-tables, and facts nailed daily into their maturing brains, when do they have time to learn about concepts they care about—the things that they are truly passionate about? Each day, drilled into their little minds from a young age is: must get into a prestigious college, must keep my top grades, must complete and turn in all of my homework assignments on time...With schools diminishing their untainted lust for information that they actually take interest in, kids start to detest the very thought of gaining new knowledge, and they cease to invent bright, creative, innovative ideas to share with others in a non-academic atmosphere.

After a lengthy and rigorous day at school, the typical child goes back to his house for several tiresome hours of homework, preceded or followed by intense sports practices or advanced music lessons. If he chooses to take an hour out to eat dinner with his family, or catch up with his siblings, the day’s almost ended, and it’s about time to possibly shower and then prepare to say goodnight. Most teenagers—and even younger students as well, want to spend their last few minutes on the computer or playing video games—they’re simply looking for something that they can just completely zone out on after a seemingly endless day. With such busy schedules, including possible religious classes, club meetings, and community service projects on

the weekends, kids growing up these days don't have enough hours in the day to spend the desired amount of time focusing on their interests outside of their schoolwork. If a student goes home after a semester at school, and shows his report card to his parents, what do they look at? After a quick glance at the teacher's generically developed note, " Billy is an exceptional student.

He listens and works well with others..." and a speedy skim through the various A's and B's listed on the fresh white paper, they smile, pat their child on the back, and give them a cheery ' Good job!'. Parents often push their kids to strive for their best in school, though that's not actually the original point of attending. When looking at grades, parents glance at an " A" and assume, " Wow, my kid must be learning a lot, since he's been doing so well in class." Most students merely try to get high grades because it's an expectation of their parents, or since they need them for a competitive college to accept them, so they don't bother going above and beyond to receive a better education. Since reading through chapter two of *The Game of School* four times, I've spent a considerable amount of time think about the points the author, Robert Fried, is trying to prove. Kids try to get by in school doing the very least amount of work possible—What Fried calls " The Game".

While going through his writing, I couldn't help but agree with him on multiple accounts. For example, in the section " Learning for Its Own Sake? Get Real!", the author discusses how students can do the bare minimum of work, and still pass school with flying colors. Flipping through workbooks, digging through text searching just for the answers to the assigned

<https://assignbuster.com/gradesdo-they-express-how-smart-we-are/>

problems, it has become so easy to turn in schoolwork and instantly be given the title of a student that knows the material. If kids have to read through certain chapters, they find ways to avoid anything that first appears long and tedious and simply eye the headings or bolded words. Fried notes that whenever a teacher passes back a corrected assignment, you always seem to hear, “‘ Whadja get?’ Never ‘ Whadja learn?’ Always ‘ Whadja get’.

” When I read this, I immediately connected, remembering the many, many times I had been asked the same exact question—and seconds later, blushing when I realized how often I had asked this to my friends that also... As I carefully scanned the next few paragraphs, however, I began to feel a tad bit better as I disagreed with Patricia Cadet, a graduate student of Fried. As she described how she was teetering on the brink of deciding whether she sincerely enjoyed learning or not, I quickly and firmly knew that I loved to gain more and more knowledge, particularly in science or math. When I understand a new idea, something clicks in my brain, and I always feel accomplished. Biology has been fascinating since I was a small kindergartener, toddling around the classroom, whispering and giggling with my friends. I recall standing awe-struck as an itty-bitty five-year-old poking at the cocoons the silk worms had created.

As my teacher would carefully explain to us how the worms would spin their cocoons to later transform into moths, I listened attentively with wide eyes. When caterpillars were brought into the classroom and kept in clear, glass jars, I pranced inside each afternoon, checking to see if they were preparing to begin the process of metamorphism. Once the caterpillars climbed the twigs and stayed as if frozen, I knew the day was coming that they would

<https://assignbuster.com/gradesdo-they-express-how-smart-we-are/>

form their own cocoons. After they formed their cocoons and stayed inside for what seemed like forever, the day I was anticipating came—they had turned into majestic Monarch butterflies. I remember rushing outside with my classmates, watching as my teacher unscrewed the lid that kept the butterflies trapped and staring starry-eyed at the insects long after they had disappeared up through the tree branches and clouds.

Every time I heard that we were doing another scientific experiment, I got excited—from incubating chicken eggs to learning about the human eye. As I had continued to read Fried's writing, I noticed a point where he stated that students get grades and don't always care if they gained any academic benefit from them. The first or second Friday of my freshmen year, I had turned in my history timeline of my own personal life, in which we were instructed to include a goal we had for the future. I read through chapter two of "The Came of School up through the Grades" that Saturday and thought of what I wrote on my timeline—"My goal for this year: Get a "B" in Chemistry Honors." Not "learn more about chemistry and how it can be applied to the outside world," but simply to receive a high grade in the honors class. It seemed exactly like the message Robert Fried was trying to send, and I suddenly felt a growing sensation of guilt in the pit of my stomach.

Relating to my personal life, I really connected to the work of Robert Fried, and generally agreed with the idea of how young people are rapidly losing the true treasure of learning. Recently, I was reading about the effect of paying students who get good grades. Kids in grade school as well as college students were tested to see how influenced they were by school districts, programs such as Ultrinsic, and their parents when they were paid for <https://assignbuster.com/gradesdo-they-express-how-smart-we-are/>

receiving higher grades or test scores. In a study conducted by Edward Deci, a psychology professor at the University of Rochester, two groups of college students were given brain-teasers to work on. Half of these students were paid to work on the puzzles, while the others were not. After this experiment ended, as well as the payments, the individuals who had not been paid continued to work on the brain-teasers while the students who were paid stopped the practice.

Deci claims that “ the idea that [being motivated by money] is going to magically turn into intrinsic motivation is really a pipe dream.” The author of “ Compensation” and a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Barry Gerhart believes that incentives would definitely influence behavior, however minor. Del Jones states in his article “ CEOs Split on Paying for Good Grades”, published in USA Today, “ The question, Gerhart says, is would the extrinsic motivation erode the intrinsic motivation, the joy of learning.” With monetary motivation on top of the incentive just to get these good grades, students these days barely feel the need to actually learn anything at all. Though the basis of public education was for kids to develop their skills so that they might be able to grow up and get a job with a reasonable income, over the years, the standards of learning have definitely gone down. As a retired professor of English depicted of teaching in the 1960s, “ Forty years ago...when I first started teaching in '63, if I had one word to tell what I wanted my classroom to be like, I would say ‘ exciting.

‘ If you ask me now I would say ‘ safe’.” Somehow, in the more recent generations, students have lost interest in discussing deep philosophical questions of life without prompting from a persistent teacher. Kids don't

<https://assignbuster.com/gradesdo-they-express-how-smart-we-are/>

come to class with bright, sparkling eyes that seem to radiate eagerness. As time goes on, we've had to balance our natural greed for knowledge with the competition of grades and college. And now, what have we accomplished but getting sucked into the nail biting Game of School— and if we choose not to play, well, that's not an option, is it?