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As is the case for many countries, the education system is built with the objective of increasing human capital, and seen as a source for increasing the productivity of an individual a part of society. As noted by Alan Slavin, a physics professor at Trent University, and writer for the Canadian magazine *University Affairs*, Ontario's newest curriculum introduced between 1997 and 1999, may be diminishing a student's critical thinking skills (2007). Slavin addresses the issue in his article, "Has Ontario taught its high-school students not to think?". While I am inclined to agree with him, I must remark that Slavin puts the majority of his focus on the smaller, more noticeable consequences of the newest curriculum, and neglects to broaden his focus to the outside factors that may have attributed to a student's lack of a learning ability. In his article, Slavin compares his own continuous low-class average at Trent University, with other professors at both Brock and Guelph University, noticing the same pattern. When inquiring into the averages of schools outside of province, Slavin was unable to find any similar data.

The reoccurring observation that Slavin notes, is a student's reliance on their ability to memorize and regurgitate. Slavin blames this shift in a student's learning method on the new emphasis being put on standardized testing, as well as the "content-intensive curriculum" (2007), which is "beyond the mental development of students at that level" (2007). Meaning that, with there being so much content to learn and understand in a limited amount of time, students are forced to rely on their memory, and unable to fully develop their analytical skills needed for future schooling. Slavin brings attention to the existence of grade inflation, and how the averages of

graduating students with over 80 percent in the 1960's, has increased by nearly 45% (2007).

A person may assume that this is the cause of society putting a greater emphasis on a student's education, rather than their athletic ability, as was the case nearly 60 years ago, though Slavin notes that bell curving has become increasingly popular with professors in order to maintain an "acceptable distribution" (2007). By giving student's grades that are higher than what they have earned in order to maintain a school's academic reputation, it is no surprise that Slavin has recognized a decrease in student work ethic; primarily with students failing to hand in or pick up graded assignments. Students have no reason to put any extra effort towards their education, since as Slavin explains, they are getting higher grades by simply memorizing material over understanding it (2007). While criticizing what he believes to be a "content-laden curriculum" (2007), Slavin remains small-minded in his analysis, neglecting to look at a child's entire education experience, instead of just what is being taught to them since the new curriculum has been put in place. There has been a lack of responsibility being taught to children as of late, with the "no-zero policy" contributing to this. The no-zero policy was first implemented in 2010, by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but has recently been revoked due to the negative effect it had on the children.

The policy allowed for students to hand in late or incomplete work, and still receive a mark for it. The reasoning behind this policy was to give students as many opportunities as possible, and allow them to further their education

(Smusiak, 2014). Currently, the no-zero policy has been terminated, but that does not mean that the concept behind it has been forgotten. The Ontario Ministry of Education states, that teachers are expected to hand out zeros to children only as a “ last resort” (Ontario, 2010). With this in mind, teachers are highly unlikely to fail a student, since not only does it reflect poorly on them as an educator and the school itself, but it is also considered to be a step that is frowned upon by the ministry. By a teacher being lenient towards a student, that student is then not expected to take responsibility for his/her education, and does not become accustomed to the idea of failing.

Failing is an inescapable part of reality, that children must learn is unavoidable and a part of life. Children are being taught to fear the idea of failing though, as Slavin notes that much of what is being taught by teachers, is with the sole purpose of passing the standardized province-wide tests being given out by the Ontario government (2007). By pairing the advanced curriculum with the need to pass tests that are required in order for a student to graduate, a student is then pressured into using memorization as a study tool.

Society is always changing, and everyone in it is forced to learn to adapt and change along with it. Years ago, it was expected in a two-parent household for the woman to stay at home with the children, and for the husband to go to work. During the 1960's, this attitude was followed by the majority of families, but in recent years there has been a major shift in the role of the mother. In fact, according to USA Today, in 2012 the percentage of mother's who chose to stay at home with the children instead of work has decreased

to only 29% (n. d, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that parental involvement was much greater during the 1960's then it is today, and that it may be a contributing factor to a student's low academic performance.

There have been recent studies including an article a part of the Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing, that have shown that parental involvement, such as checking their child's homework, has had a greater influence on a child's academic performance then the actual teachers (Ali, 2016). Children spend less than 15% of their time at school (2016), the rest they are at home with their parents. The more a child hears knowledge being passed through conversation at home by their parents, the better off they will be.

This concept has become much harder to achieve though, with both mother and father now working full-time jobs, and leaving their child without the opportunity to listen and try to understand any of their conversations regarding academics. Another point to be considered, is that with parents working an average of eight hours a day, when they do have time to sit down and talk, their conversation topics are reflections of how their day was, not academic related subjects such as spatial properties. As noted by Ali, parents are most often clueless about how to teach their children, and encourage "rote learning" (2016). Slavin puts emphasis on the concept of memorization throughout his article, which goes hand in hand with rote learning, which is a memorization technique that is based on repetition. As observed by Slavin, memorization in all its form, has become the easiest and fastest way of learning for a child-but not the most beneficial. It can be concluded that Slavin was correct in his belief that a student's learning capability has

suffered in lieu of the new curriculum, that continues to pressure children into learning by memorization. What Slavin failed to consider though, were the less obvious, yet just as important factors that have made a contribution.

The no-zero policy has had a lasting effect on the mindset of both students and teachers, that when paired with the changes of a two-parent household and a student's fear to fail, has created a problem of great magnitude. It took nearly 10 years for the effects of the newest curriculum to be noticeable, so perhaps any new changes to be made in the near future will have predictors that can be caught before any lasting effects can occur.

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