

Why grades shouldn't exist

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Grades. The sheer mention of the word can induce cold sweats, shaky fingers and stuttering voices. They have been, and will most likely always be the sole measure of a child's success, and one of the only things parents care about, it's pedestal placed almost as high as health and survival, sometimes even higher than wellbeing. They will determine your future, people say.

Or will they? Do good grades mean a successful future? Or do they do more harm than good? What do we go to school for? To learn, of course. And grades help map our learning. They provide us with an idea of how good we are, compared to how good we should be, and how much we need to improve, thus helping us with the process of learning. But society has changed. The bar of 'how good we should be' is getting higher and higher, favoring only the elite amongst students, leaving the 'laggers' in the wake of their dust.

Higher standards mean better results. But is this always the case? The system of grading places the elite on top everyone else, transforming the grading system into a system not meant for measuring how much a student learns, or improves, but rather what they are compared to the best of the best. The reality is, only a few of us will fit into that category. Majority of the students in the classroom will be amongst average or below average. The grading system will tell them repeatedly that they have failed, that they are mediocre or unsatisfactory, that they will not succeed later in life just because they are bad compared to the best.

It leaves them defeated, and in the long run results in less motivation, because they think they will never be able to reach those standards, so why try? This defeats the purpose of school entirely, as students will lose interest in learning itself. If school is a place for learning, why are we comparing students to each other, when we should be comparing students to themselves? Learning should not be able how well you start off, or how talented you are, but rather how much you are willing to try, how much time you spend, and how well you improve. Just because a student is average compared to other students, it does not mean that they are worse at learning. And not only will students be comparing themselves with peers in their class, but also with people outside their class, or even outside their school. In a society where grades are so valued, where everyone wants to be better than everyone else, the grading system is a completely unreliable source for that measure. Grading is done by one teacher, a teacher that is bound to be biased, a teacher with individual points of view, a teacher that may be swayed by their own opinions.

An A* from one teacher may only be a B from another, but the student with the A* will think that they are better than the student with the B. Teachers are people, not robots, and people have personalities and points of view. One teacher may care a lot about handwriting, another may not; one may value factual arguments, while another may like emotional rebuttals. A teacher's judgement of a particular student can also be swayed by their impression of the student- a troublemaker may get a lower grade than a 'good student', even if the standard of their work is the same. There is no accounting for a fair standard when the grading system is so subjective.

Even if the teachers marked off a fixed criteria, the criteria may also be subjective.

The criteria is created by, again, a teacher, who may be interested in seeing certain things in a student's work. The student will have failed if they do not meet those exact criterias, even when those sole criterias do not determine success. The students will then try to achieve those criterias, instead of doing what they believe will make a successful piece of work, essentially fitting them in a box, limiting their creativity and personality. Grades exist to help us better prepare for the future, but at the same time, they compromise our abilities to self motivate when there is a lack of them. Many students will only try their best when a piece of work is 'graded', because there will be consequences, they will be commended if they do well and punished if they don't.

However, in life, there won't always be a person telling you when you need to try and when you don't- you won't necessarily be praised when you do well and punished when you don't. Grades remove intrinsic motivation for students, as they will end up only trying when they think it's worth it, and slacking off if they don't. This can be harmful in the long run, especially in the workplace, where everything you do matters. Should the grading system exist? Do we really want our children to suffer in an oppressive system that is subjective and biased, a system that not only fails in fulfilling its own purpose, but at the same time, defy it? After all, learning should never be a destination, but a journey, a journey that cannot, and should not ever be measured by numbers, letters, and percentages.