

The educational system is bogus

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As teenagers, it isn't uncommon for us to lose faith in the institutions we find ourselves entangled in.

Disappointments, failures, inconsistencies, and innumerable amounts of other flaws often characterize the educational system. Luckily for many considering the issue, it's easy enough to sweep dissent under the rug and chalk it up to teenage angst or immaturity, but one would be surprised just how much more delicate the situation truly is, how much more prison like our schools really are. It's difficult to argue the case that students are in a prison of sorts experiencing an agonizing and lengthy torture when the general opinion of education is that it improves the mind and the student. This is an issue that needs to be handled immediately. Consider the structure of our educational system for a moment.

As it stands now, the only thing that any students would have in common upon entering a classroom is usually their age, sometimes not even that. Isn't that a little odd? The people organizing this parade of education are, presumably, educated. They're intelligent and qualified on paper, and yet the only possible way they could figure out how to handle students is by their age? Never mind a student's interests or capacities! The entire system revolves around an attribute that shows almost nothing about the character it is attached to. Isn't this a little maddening? Imagine if the army had operated this way, imagine if our government worked this way. Picture that the kind of job you were allowed to have depended entirely on your age, not your skills and interests. Why is it that this is the format of things? Well, we'll get to that, but there are a few more points that need some attention, continuing with how we're teaching in the first place.

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I understand that it is difficult to build a curriculum around a class' needs, but if you're going to obligate children to spend somewhere near 12 years of their life in a program, it might as well try to accomplish what it has set out to do. Sadly, this isn't often the case. What should be interactive learning and intelligent discussion is often replaced with mindless busywork and nonsensical proceedings. Take for example a book discussion. Ideally, the children would read a novel, extract a few lessons, discuss them and be done with it, allowing them to continue their intellectual escapades. For some reason however, the dissection of a book often takes place over the course of several months, accompanied by packets of bookwork and projects that benefit no one.

At a highschool senior level class, I found myself having to make collages and colorful posters that talked of nothing with any real substance. When will we be honest enough to simply tackle a difficult subject, digest it, and proceed? Anyone with any experience in intellectual debate can tell you that you cannot force someone to think a certain way or learn a certain thing, if student's aren't grasping a lesson from a novel, vocabulary sheets and collages are the worst tools for the job. It's the general way of things because it's easier to give worksheets and leave it at that. If they don't get the lesson, oh well, we'll put them in a fundamentals class and set them on easy street to a local diploma. Now let's focus on how we gauge progress in the current educational system. The grading system is a horribly regimented, standardized, inhuman mess of garbage and nonsense.

Essentially what it attempts to do is illustrate what your child understands and can regurgitate via a percentage. Portraying the entirety of your

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intelligence must require a significant degree of sophistication and technique, right? Of course not. It's more an average of what you got right and what you got wrong, never mind opinions. At first glance this might do well enough, but if we delve into the belly of the beast, it doesn't quite hold up to scrutiny. It should be obvious that the purpose of the educational system is to educate, so why is it that the gauge of intelligence is taken over time and averaged? Say you complete two work sheets, one at the beginning of a unit and one at the end.

Logic dictates that you'd likely score higher on the second work sheet, because you've endured the entire unit, and yet the two scores are averaged. What does this mean? Well, it means that even if you have improved and learned, your grade will include the first sheet of paper regardless. This is absurd. To put it in the form of an analogy, it would be like averaging the swim times of olympic swimmers, taking their best swim of their career and their first swim, and using that to gauge how well they swim. If they were lousy the first time and improved, it doesn't matter, they were lousy the first time, there's no way they can achieve the times they rightfully deserve. It would be like averaging the distance you ran in a race, taking the full distance you covered and averaging it with the distance you covered in the first two seconds, thus producing the result of you only running half the distance you really ran.

I suppose now is the time to say it again; This is absurd! On top of this obvious flaw, the simple act of losing a sheet of paper will be recorded in the books as you knowing zero percent of the material, regardless of how intelligent you really are. If you misunderstood a question, or answered it in

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a way that you could argue was correct but wasn't specifically outlined as correct in the teacher's book, that too will earn you a zero. To put that into perspective, potatoes know zero percent of the material. Disagreeing with a teacher means that on paper you will be equated to a dirty vegetable. It's obvious that grades often fail to accurately represent a child's true knowledge and intelligence, so then, what are grades for exactly? Grades, from what I understand, are supposed to be an indication of where you are as a learner.

It's supposed to be data that teachers, parents, and students can use to determine how they will proceed with their education. In practice, as the general theme of this piece has shown, this institution also falls short. In a perfect world, you would receive a report card and respond to your grades accordingly. The grades would accurately portray what you know and what you don't know, and teachers would work with students to fill the gaps in their knowledge. In our world, grades are really only used to gauge whether or not you're going to get to leave at the end of the year.

It's not about the information anymore, it's not about your intelligence, it's about the number. That silly, broken, misplaced number decides your entire future when you get right down to it. Taking a sick day or misplacing some homework could mean that you can't get the scholarships you wanted, can't go to the colleges you wanted, maybe can't even graduate at the time you wanted. With such hefty consequences for low grades, one would think that instructors would take it upon themselves to ensure that all students had decent grades and an acceptable understanding of the material, and yet it has been my experience that instructors would often use bad grades as a

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punishment for unrelated offenses, a punishment the student likely wouldn't understand until it's a little too late. A system that was designed to help students is now used as punishment. Negative reinforcement isn't all too successful at changing behavior, so it's little wonder that grades as a punishment fail to actually improve character.

So let's look at the children that actually do succeed and thrive in school, the ones that readily soak up information and study what they find interesting on their own time. What incentive do they have to work hard? What is the reward for paying attention and doing the work? More work of course! The poor students that display a modicum of civility and intelligence are quickly herded into advanced classes. Advanced meaning, they learn the exact same material as the other classes, but they have to do more work in the process. I can't even begin to describe to you how frustrating and ridiculous this is. The only justification for bookwork you could squeeze out of a teacher is that it reinforces a lesson, but when students show that they readily grasp lessons, they need more reinforcement? We can't simply have a class where we discuss and issue, absorb it, and continue can we? We can't treat our students like human beings, we have to treat them like animals, herding them into pens and working them as far as they're willing to work, and whipping them with bad grades and diminished social opportunity if they fail to meet our ever changing and always nonsensical standards. As it is, there are people taking steps to improve education, though the definition of "improve" leaves a lot to be desired.

It can be observed that, yes, classes are now receiving more computers and smartboards, electronic devices and tailored movies, but for some

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mysterious reason the material itself never changes. I've made a habit of arguing via analogy, so I suppose I'll make one more. If you purchased someone a five dollar gift and spent two thousand on the packaging, you'd be crazy. Why is it that we consider what we teach less important than how we teach it? While both are indeed important, it's more than a little humerous to watch a fifty minute long video that had a budget of several hundred thousand dollars just to teach us a collection of relatively forgettable facts. I have yet to come across a class that has had more than a few worthwhile days of study.

It's funny in a way, as standards are improving, the quality of education is declining. Classes aren't required to have substance, they're required to have bookwork and grades. Instead of improving the system, reform just seeks to raise the expected grade level of students, without ever considering the numerous other flaws of education, and certainly never considering just why students aren't meeting standards in the first place. Currently, highschoools often offer very few economics courses, no ethical courses, very few courses if any that revolve around intelligent debate, and with shrinking budgets, afterschool activities often fail to pick up the slack. At the end of the day, kids go to school for the diploma, not the information. To summarize my lengthy, poorly written, unorganized rant, which I could have continued for another forty paragraphs if I had the drive, the educational system is bogus.

It claims do to one thing and accomplishes another. It fixes a problem by throwing glitter on it, it measures it's success by it's failures, and never once considers students as people. It's a rigid one size fits none system that

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practically forces genius and delinquate alike into desperate searches for entertainment, guidance, and information from any other place than school. It stamps out any and all intelligence, hope, and confidence, allowing for no argument, giving it's judgements with a grading system even teachers despise. No sense of community exists any more, and getting out of bed in the morning requires an immense amount of effort for everyone involved.

Unless there can be a complete restructuring of the system, it simply isn't worth it's mandates.