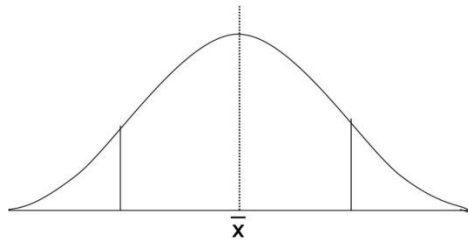


WE DON'T NEED NO EDUCATION

In the future, education during this era will be defined by the Self-Esteem Movement. Self-esteem has been funneled down the throats of children from the time they walk into their first classroom. Predictably, any sort of factual data continues to show that education has been significantly damaged by the onslaught of self-esteem. When reported individually, many of these numbers seem like very positive things. Taken as a whole however, it's easy to recognize some disturbing trends and identify some of the more insidious effects of the Self-Esteem Movement.

Once upon a time, there was this thing called a bell curve. It looked something like this:



The bell curve represents a distribution of scores across people. A few people fail, a few people do exceedingly well, and the majority of the people fall somewhere in between. This held true for standardized tests as well

as grades. Education has changed in the past twenty years in such a way that the bell curve no longer applies to grades. Studies have found that significantly more A's and B's are being assigned with fewer F's and D's. The result is a negatively skewed curve in which the average is actually well above average.

According to the Department of Education, grade point average (GPA) has increased nationally by an average of .32 from 1990-2009. This statistic looks great when observed in a vacuum. An overall increase in our national GPA suggests that the American education system is a well-oiled machine, and our children are becoming more intelligent, which would be wonderful, if only it were true.

While subjective measures of performance like GPA have increased, standardized measures of intelligence and achievement have remained relatively stable. Average IQ continues to be around 100. SAT scores have hovered around 500 for reading and 510 for math. ACT scores consistently average 21. These scores have been stable for decades, and will likely remain stable for decades to come. Additionally, they all (more or less) arrange themselves nicely into a bell curve. So, no, the children of America are not getting smarter. They are staying pretty much the same, but being told they are smarter by grade inflation.

What is grade inflation? Why, I'm so glad you've asked. Grade inflation is exactly what it sounds like, it's an enormous problem. Quality of work remains stable, while grades increase. It is the product of adults that

are afraid to damage the self-esteem of children, so they lie to them. Students (and parents) are being pandered to by school systems across the country.

Vanguard High School, in Florida recently had a graduating class with twenty-five valedictorians, all of whom had 5.0 GPAs. Twenty-five students who got straight A's throughout high school, including college and honors courses. Vanguard chooses to calculate class rank based entirely on GPA, which probably accounts for at least a dozen of their valedictorians, but it cannot explain the entirety of the situation.

The Self-Esteem Movement permeated the values of Vanguard High School. Instead of calculating rank based on numeric grades to determine which student had actually achieved the highest overall grades, they chose to have a twenty-five way tie. The only motivating factor behind this decision had to be self-esteem. The other students worked so hard, they might feel badly about themselves if they aren't valedictorian as well. I assume the rest of the graduates tied for salutatorian. Self-esteem aside, the fact that twenty-five students finished high school without ever making a B is reason enough to discuss this issue. Either Ocala, Florida is a breeding ground for geniuses (it's not), or this is easily documented evidence of grade inflation.

I suppose this was an inevitable outcome. If everybody gets a trophy during basketball season, then giving everyone A's and B's during report card season only seems fair. The result of this is intelligent students having their learning experience sullied. I think that

this is even worse than handing out trophies during sports. At least in sports, the athletic kids can observe and measure ways in which they are better at sports than their peers. Intelligent kids can do the same, but it's a much more ambiguous scenario for them – it's hard to measure achievement if everyone just gets an A.

Handing out academic praise semi-arbitrarily to all students decreases motivation to achieve. If doing *anything* warrants praise from the teachers and administrators, then there is little motivation to actually make an effort. I am atrociously guilty of this. I was a horrendously lazy student. I once wrote a lengthy analysis of the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Norse mythology for my senior English class. To this day I have never read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and couldn't be bothered to read them all just for one paper. I cobbled the whole thing together using research and bullshit, and got an A. My most sincere apologies to Mrs. Abadia. School seemed laughably easy, and they were handing out A's by the time I was high school. There was simply no motivation for me to study or exert myself when I could coast by with A's and B's.

The culture of education in America at the time did me a tremendous disservice. Had there been some motivation to apply myself throughout high school, I might have achieved something great or impressive. Instead, I put in minimal effort because that was all that was reinforced. Many of my peers did the same. We are a generation of wasted potential because we were never consistently encouraged to apply ourselves as

students. For me, this resulted in a relatively lax work ethic in college, where I chose to pursue a fascinating and somewhat easy degree path with few viable career options associated with it.

Students feel entitled to high grades, as if their very tangible specialness is deserving of A's without effort. There has been a fundamental shift in the way that most students respond to grades. They receive high marks with little evidence of pride. They react to low grades with frustration, just as they always have. The difference is that students are no longer frustrated with themselves when they earn a low grade, that frustration is directed toward teachers when they are given a low grade, the operative words here being 'earn' and 'given.'

Entitlement has perpetuated a culture in which students are allowed to have an external locus of control. Meaning that students are allowed to take credit for the positive aspects of their existence, and blame external factors for the negative aspects. Grade inflation creates students that demand high grades as a validation of their feelings of specialness. They are certain of their intelligence and will not let low grades tell them otherwise, no matter how accurate they may be.

I have been questioned by numerous students on numerous occasions about low grades. These are usually demanding emails that say something to the effect of 'why did you take so many points off my assignment.' That would be the entirety of the email in many cases, no subject, no salutation, no regard for grammar, and no identifying information other than an email address.

Many of these students had gotten a B. I have explained to a relatively disheartening number of students that a college course should not be easy, will not be graded softly, and that a B is by no means a bad grade.

Students have been conditioned to believe that they deserve nothing less than high grades regardless of their effort, or the difficulty level of the course. Failing a course is out of the question, as it invalidates their feelings of intelligence and specialness. Failing represents an unacceptable outcome, since we no longer do things unless they result in success.

A staggering number of students have been suing universities for ‘useless degrees.’ Having spent four years of my life working toward a bachelor’s degree in psychology, I admit that I am not entirely against this idea. However, students pursuing degrees of certain types have some knowledge that a bachelor’s degree is no longer sufficient in their field. My entire psychology program was reminded of this more than once, and we were frequently encouraged to consider graduate school and/or PhD programs. The students who choose to sue universities seem to be doing so not because their degree is particularly useless, but because it isn’t particularly lucrative. Another example of young people having an obstinately external locus of control – the university is (financially) responsible for their choice of major and their unwillingness to consider further education.

A specific (and personally abhorrent) example of a student suing a university is the case of Megan Thode, formerly of Lehigh University. Ms. Thode was enrolled

in her second and final year of a Masters of Counseling and Human Development program at Lehigh University in 2009. She received a C+ in her fieldwork (internship) course, which did not meet the B grade requirement for her to be promoted to the next level of courses. Her professors state that she was enrolled in a supplemental internship course midway through the semester to help her further develop her counseling skills, so the unfavorable outcome of the course should not have been a surprise. Ultimately, they felt that she was not ready to move on, and assigned a grade C+, meaning she would have to retake the course before being eligible to finish the program.

Instead of working with her professors to reflect on areas of growth and developing the necessary skills to become a competent and successful therapist, Thode transferred to a human development master's program, which she ultimately completed. She then sued the university for “denying her a career” and sought \$1.3 million in damages, representing her estimation of lifetime loss in earning potential due to her inability to complete her original program and become a therapist.

I assume that Thode would have also demanded reimbursement for tuition had she not attended Lehigh free of charge because her father was a professor at the university. Looking a gift horse in the mouth, indeed. Instead of taking ownership of her shortcomings, she went on the assault and blamed the program and her professors for her failure. Poor form from an aspiring therapist, a profession that trades on self-awareness.

Whole language was another concept popularized in the nineties. It was not a direct product of the Self-Esteem Movement, but was certainly in line with its values, which only encouraged it to exist far longer than it rightfully should have. Whole language encouraged phonetics by allowing children to sound out and spell words in whatever way they saw fit. As long as it made sense to the student, then it was correct.

I am the product of a school that adopted the whole language approach. I suppose that somewhere along the line, a teacher in a higher grade was supposed to teach us things like spelling and grammar, but that never really happened. Because of whole language I am, and will always be, horrible at spelling. When combined with growing up in the rural South, it's nothing short of amazing that I can write a coherent sentence at all. Advocates for whole language (perhaps unintentionally) chose the emotions and self-esteem of children over accurately teaching fundamental skills that they will need for the rest of their lives.

Since making self-esteem the primary focus of parenting and education, there have been vocal opponents of retention. Their concern is that the potential emotional damage done to students who are required to repeat a grade outweighs any academic implications of promoting them to the next grade. They do not bother with discussion of the potential decrease in self-esteem brought on by promoting a student into an environment where they are not capable of mastering the material at

the same rate as their peers. Emotion trumps knowledge yet again.

A study conducted on 6th grade students in 2001 found that students ranked failing a grade as the most stressful event that could happen to them. The death of a parent and going blind were ranked second and third, respectively. Despite the fact that middle school children lack the same understanding of death that adults have, this is absurd. Few people would expect failing a grade to rank higher than the death of a parent.

The cultural mindset apparent in these results is that failing a grade is worse because it is something that does not happen to everyone. Everyone has parents, and everyone's parents will die. It is a universal experience. Failing a grade is more idiosyncratic and contradicts every other message the children of the Self-Esteem Movement have been given. Very suddenly, everything true could potentially be false. Failing a grade means you might not be special. You might not even be *average*, and that is completely impossible.

Dropout rates are worth mentioning, but not in detail. The National Center for Education Statistics show national dropout rates decreased from 12.1% in 1990 to 7.4% in 2010. Any number of factors may have contributed to this decrease. Perhaps increased focus on self-esteem has created students that are confident and motivated to complete school. The more likely scenario probably has more to do with grade inflation. Successful students are less likely to drop out, and the education system has started arbitrarily handing out success.

Inflated levels of achievement and self-esteem have apparently encouraged students to stay in school, which is an objectively good thing. The ends almost justify the means, but the implications of this spoon fed success are the more concerning factor. Students given achievement believe that they are achieving, creating adults who enter the work force without understanding that achievement usually requires some degree of effort.

Since 1966, the American Freshman Survey has polled rising college freshman to rate themselves against their peers on a variety of areas. Areas of inquiry include drive to achieve, leadership ability, intellectual self-confidence, social self-confidence, writing ability, mathematics, understanding others, and cooperation. Tracking the results of the surveys over the past four decades shows that an increasing number of students are ranking themselves as 'above average' on categories related to individual achievement. Categories that are less individual (cooperation, spirituality, understanding others, etc.) have either remained stable or slightly decreased. The Self-Esteem Movement has resulted in measurably increased confidence that is not justified by anything factual. Conversely, a similar study in Asia has found stability in rankings despite increasing achievement in students. This is why my daughter will probably be learning Mandarin as a preemptive measure.

Fugazi success generates confidence that is very real. Generation Y and the Millennials have had self-esteem sewn into every fiber of their being. We have

been told with conviction that we are special creatures. A large portion of this came from the people responsible for our education. The education system has allowed us to believe that we are much more intelligent than we actually are, creating an entire generation of people who are extremely confident and extremely ignorant.

Americans are at the peak of their obnoxiousness and self-esteem's infiltration of the education system is one of the major culprits. Factor in the number of people who consider browsing Wikipedia a sufficient method of gaining expertise on a subject, and the number of truly intelligent people will continue to decline as the number of people who believe they are intelligent will continue to rise. Overly confident people operating with limited knowledge will generally react aggressively when their worldview is challenged by things like fact or reason.