

To the Office of Teaching and Learning,

I want to thank you for all that you do for the students at this university. Facilitating learning and educating throughout a community with many different subjects, students, and faculty is not an easy feat. It is impossible to make everyone happy, and I truly appreciate all of your efforts to do the most good for the most amount of people. It is not lost on me. While learning about education, its downfalls and its triumphs, and learning about classical theory I myself have come to realize a few things about my own learning experiences. I believe that some of the systematic educational practices we have set in place over the years have been a hinderance to students learning, and I think we can do better. Through learning about major sociological theorists, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, I have broadened my understanding of these issues, and I would like to hopefully do that for you as well.

Firstly, one of the more well-known classical theorists, Karl Marx. Marx theorized that capitalism created a system that made our work belong to someone else, therefore alienating us from our work and society. Labor is necessary, it is how we are able to survive. He argued that we are always working for someone else, and those elite are always more successful than we are (Marx, 111). While this economic theory doesn't seem like it has much to do with education, it really does. See, when we begin our work in a classroom, we aren't working to learn as we should be. Instead we are working to succeed. We are working to earn a good grade and please this system that will ultimately decide if we are successful or failures. Our writing isn't our own, it is facilitated and judged by others. So, we begin to feel disconnected, alienated, from our work, thus making it feel like a chore rather than our creation. Grading assigns a value to our work

and we then begin to place that value on ourselves, letting it define us. A bad grade isn't simply a letter written on a piece of paper; it turns into a judgment of who we are.

Max Weber believed that we are trapped in an iron cage. We are forced to work in order to gain wealth, and because of that our work loses the meaning it once possessed. By attending a university we are working to gain two kinds of wealth, knowledge and experience. The knowledge helps us to understand the world, and the practices and processes that make it up within our desired field. The experiential wealth helps us to be better prepared for the future, and it prepares us to enter the workforce to obtain monetary wealth. The beauty of college is that you can pick to love and learn whatever you want. Your passion can guide you and can be your biggest motivator. Unfortunately, so many have been conditioned to choose what makes them the most monetarily successful. The wealth of knowledge we are absorbing is overshadowed by being as successful in school as possible so that we can be successful in life. It is alarming how many times I have been told to pursue a different field because the one I am passionate about isn't very high paying.

Emile Durkheim, another major social theorist, focused on human desire and the control it had over nearly every aspect of our lives. He theorized that our desire was a bottomless pit, and we need some kind of regulation to control that desire and lessen its negative affected on our lives. That regulation, he believed, came in the form of society, providing some boundaries for our desire. But, when society cannot regulate the way it needs to, when we face times of extreme crisis, we experience anomie. Durkheim believed anomie was a lack of control that resulted in these unregulated periods, and he believed this brought about increased rates of suicide. In the schooling environment, our bottomless pit of desire is our never-ending need for good grades. Good grades

dictate so much of a student's life, including their desire and appreciation for learning. School has the opportunity to be that regulatory force. It can be a place for us to push ourselves to be the best learners we can, while also setting standards to regulate our behavior.

Unfortunately, school doesn't do a very good job at regulating. Instead, it leads us to be competitive and place all of our self-worth in our grades, because ultimately we have been taught that grades are the sole factor that decides our future. Rather than feeling a state of deregulation during midterms or finals with frequent library visits and all-nighters, we feel a constant state of deregulation. This is because our system has pushed grading beyond its purpose. Grades motivate students in all the wrong ways. They motivate us to compare ourselves to others, to constantly doubt ourselves, and to conform to the system to get what we want rather than actually learn and love what we are learning.

It should be said that these factors don't apply to every student. As we have seen some students seem to have given up on our system completely, not caring about their grades or assignments and simply doing what is necessary to pass and graduate. But, isn't that part of the problem? This system has created a way for students to give up on their grades and their learning. So, it's safe to say that there has been an enormous amount of stress and pressure placed on grades, and I think the only way to improve students learning is to move away from this.

I have had the pleasure of experiencing a class where the professor did not provide us with grades, other than the final grade assignment at the end of the quarter. They allowed us to use self-assessment as a way to discipline ourselves and our learning. We were able to reflect on the areas we needed to work on and praise the areas we felt

we excelled. It kept us accountable for our work and helped us to enjoy what we were learning. This in turn would reduce the amount of alienation and anomie we are feeling. Self-assessment can become the regulation that our current grading system is. However, it would lessen the pressure on students, allow for open and honest communication between professors and students, and can help students learn to appreciate learning again. By opening that line of communication between professors and students, it can also make us feel more connected to our work. Rather than it being a separate entity, something that starts as our but doesn't end that way, we are in a way forced to take ownership of it. Sitting down with a professor and explaining why an assignment deserves a certain grade would be difficult if the student being graded didn't even care about it.

I understand that completely reworking an education system is difficult and at the very least would take years of planning and experimenting before full implementation. But, I am still passionate about this issue full well knowing that it will not help me. It is an institutions responsibility to be the best it can and create passionate, hard-working, successful students. With the proper care and effort, it is possible to change the way we evaluate our learners.

Citations:

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