Grades: The Friend of Learning

Last year, students in Jiangsu province first experienced the new college entrance exam. Since more subjects are added to calculate the total score in the new exam system, parents and students are asking the same old question: What are grades for? Will grades help learning? Some claim that grading is a good measurement of how well students are learning, and encourages them, while others argue that grading does more harm than good, discouraging lots of students from learning what they really love and are good at. Anyway, as a firm supporter of the grading system, I have to show you how grading serves as a friend of learning.

Grades provide guidance for the distribution of learning resources. Specialists have designed the appropriate range and amount of each subject for students to learn, and the weight of the grade of each subject is also designed accordingly. This way, the weight of grades informs students how much time they should spend on each subject. In college, where grades are summed up according to credit weight, it’s the same. “The full credit system is an active exploration to improve the quality of undergraduate education.” Guo Lihong, the president of Northwest University once noted. By saying this, he views grades as powerful tools of education.

Grades are direct and intuitive feedback on learning, based on which students improve their learning method. There have been cases where students never do exercises. They suppose they learn well, for they can understand everything in the textbooks. However, with a simple exam we can tell how many of them really figure out what they should learn. After exams, students have a better understanding of how well they are learning, and thus they are better able to find their own way of learning. Again, grades help.

But, yes, I do hear opponents disagreeing: Pressure, vicious competition, and other harmful results all will discourage students form learning. They also point out that if the grades are viewed as final purpose, the learning process makes no sense at all. That’s right. Grading is a double-edged sword. Whether it’s a friend or an enemy depends on how we view it. And that’s also why we should see it positively. Anyway, grading is the irreplaceable method in China to evaluate a student, and for now it’s also the fairest. So, before a better system comes out, we have to convey the idea that the grade is and only is a learning helper. We shall oppose doing paper and exercise all day long, but figure out ways to seek real wisdom through exams.

The grading system is imperfect, and may not ever be perfect in the future. But for now, it gives students direction and show students where to improve. It’s undoubtedly a nice friend of learning.