

When your child is average

By Victoria Birch



Taylor Swift is often quoted as being “intimidated by the fear of being average”. It’s a sentiment shared by many parents of school age children. So much so an Australian board of studies recently made a point of reassuring parents about any C grades awarded to their child. Apparently a C, “...does not mean that your child is ‘just adequate’”. It indicates your child has met the state-wide standard expected for students in their age group.

It doesn't take a statistician to understand that out of five possible gradings (from A to E) C falls plump in the middle. It's not brilliant or terrible but, well, ‘adequate’ probably sums it up about right. My son's report card was full of C's. He's only a young primary school student so that may change, but what if it doesn't? Is it all right if he continues to achieve solid but unremarkable results throughout his academic life?

I'd like to think that what matters is that my son tries his best and loves to learn, but in a society where the metrics of success are measured in A grades I wonder whether I will be quite so philosophical in the long term. Will I push him to try and achieve a result he's not capable of? Will my ambitions for excellence lead me to pursue extra schooling at the expense of other things he really enjoys?

If the statistics are anything to go by there's every chance he will remain an average student.

According to Australia's 2012 Naplan (National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy) results, only a small percentage of primary school children achieved results at the highest level. The vast majority (approximately 70%) achieved a perfectly acceptable but unremarkable outcome.

With parents now more educated than any generation before them, there is a sense that acceptable isn't good enough. The push for exceptional performance means we're currently ensconced in the era of hothousing, where the demand for extra curricular tuition has increased exponentially over the last decade. So why do we increasingly see 'acceptable' as a euphemism for failure?

Shifts in the global economy have changed our perceptions of success. With the advent of the digital age and a decline in manufacturing across the developed world, greater emphasis is placed on the acquisition of knowledge that can be traded across global borders. Competition for jobs is fierce and with more careers requiring tertiary level qualifications, it's no surprise that academic excellence during the school years is considered essential.

It's true that academic intelligence can lead to opportunity, but it's not the only path. Many great people have achieved the remarkable with little or no education. Richard Branson, Winston Churchill, Rachel Ray and John D Roosevelt are just some of those who attained success even though they dropped out of school or failed to complete any tertiary study. Although these high profile figures lacked qualifications they are all united by a determination to achieve, perseverance in the face of adversity and confidence in their ability to succeed.

Interestingly, these qualities reflect the attributes most valued by employers. A 2012 worldwide survey conducted by Swedish employer branding firm Universum, found the top three personality traits most sought by employers were professionalism, high-energy and confidence. Yet, there is little in our current school structure that specifically looks to nurture or assess these traits in our children.

While there's nothing wrong in encouraging ambition in children, it's clear a one-size grade cannot fit all. Pushing children to perform can be productive but if parents' expectations outstrip their child's academic ability it may be problematic. It's hard to see how a child's self-esteem can remain intact when confronted by the frustration and disappointment of his or her parents.

Ensuring children are successful and happy does not start and end with an A grade. Enthusiasm, application, passion and determination along with key social skills such as resilience and empathy are arguably more important in helping children become fulfilled adults. Critically, these are fields of learning where every child has the potential to excel, regardless of where they sit on the academic grading scale.

Source: <http://blog.3plearning.com/category/the-3p-learning-education-discussion-covering-innovating-ideas-for-parents-teachers-and-the-global-education-community/>