

Roisin Lafferty

Oxford Scholars

Mr. Rutherford

April 2016

Oxford Scholars

Education as a privilege and how I have always viewed it as such. Attending three different schools in two continents in eighteen years has provided many insights into starkly contrasting educational systems. I am fortunate for the opportunities afforded to me in every educational establishment where I have been a student. Valuable experiences both inside and outside the classroom in all of these environments have fueled my interest in looking further and more closely examining the many techniques and their effectiveness when used in schools both in Ireland and the USA.

When I was nine years old my family relocated from Galway Ireland to California. This was such a huge change in life and in that, very little emphasis was put on studying and more time was devoted to assimilating into our new environment. At the end of fourth grade, my teacher handed me a piece of paper that said Honor Roll across the top. I remember smiling and saying thank you before sitting down at my desk and staring cluelessly at the piece of paper until one of my classmates explained what it meant. It came as a surprise to me that every assignment, quiz, and grade were handed in and graded. In Ireland we were graded on a Ni, G, VG scale and I had very few memories of receiving grades on tests. It also came as a surprise to me that these types of awards were being handed out at such an early age creating a subconscious divide between those who got handed a blue slip of paper and those who didn't.

As a senior in high school, I have lost track of the number of times that I have been asked by both classmates and parents of classmates in regards to how well I did on either a standardized test or a regular chapter test. It is very interesting to me to closely examine the need for competition in society in order to want to succeed. In a sense I feel that at certain points of high school, myself included, we may have lost sight of the idea of self motivation and turned toward making things competitive to hold our attention. Even in the fourth grade, the list of honor roll was posted outside the door of every classroom. As if this was not enough, that list was also split into categories of those who received highest honors as opposed to honors. I came from a very different cultural background yet two years later I was finding myself devastated when I missed highest honors by .3 of percent. The motivation to get on that list is what initially propelled my academic career and may have contributed to the fact I was lucky enough to be selected as an Oxford Scholar. so there is certainly some merit to the system.

I strongly feel that as I have progressed in my more strenuous classes, oftentimes there has been emphasis on testing over teaching. There have been multiple times in which a class will consist of exponentially more testing than teaching within a classroom. Teachers have so much information to cover within a school year in order to secure our future academic success so they cannot be faulted. Oftentimes, the threat of a test is the only way to ensure that students will study which leads us to question when and why we lost the desire to learn for the enjoyment of furthering ourselves intellectually. It also leads us to question if information is no longer being presented in an exciting enough manner to intrigue the students and inspire a desire to learn. Too much testing and not enough teaching may serve as a form of explanation for PISA's ranking of the United States's as 30th out of 65 developed countries in math, 23rd position in all around educational systems, and 20th ranking in reading. Shanghai scores on the math assessment show

that their students are, on average, 2 years of schooling ahead of students in the US. Such rankings must be sign of a greater problem and it is my belief that testing time in the classroom could be a good place to start searching for a solution

In both Ireland and the US, I have experienced situations in which students have pushed and pulled strings in order to get accepted into their 'ideal school.' So often, these same students end up not enjoying the experience and may opt to drop out. It is a serious concern that as a society we may be so fueled to increase graduation percentages or to add more colleges to the list of places where our students have graduated on to that we lose sight of what is truly within the capabilities of the student and also what is in this same students best interest in the long run. Pushing to graduate before they are ready or to get accepted into top colleges and universities that they are not necessarily prepared for has proved ineffective. According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 80 percent of students are graduating high school yet less than 40 percent of graduating seniors have mastered reading and math.

I am so grateful for the opportunities I recieved within all the the various schools that I have attended. The people that I have met and been mentored and taught by within these schools have shaped me into the person I am today, They have fueled my desire for knowledge and have inspired a confidence in my abilities assuring me that i can be successful in whatever i decide to endeavor into. I have learned the value of hard work in order to reach the goals that I set for myself. I am appreciative for the chance to open up the conversation about our educational system, as i feel that those of us finishing up our high school years have first hand knowledge about the various attributes and areas in need of improvement- knowledge that could prove to be invaluable for improving the experience of generations to come.