

Our Failure

We tried a totally new approach to grading students in the high school classroom. We attempted to create a learning experience which would incorporate three of the most important educational psychology constructs – intrinsic motivation, raise individual self-efficacy and a mastery orientation. Therefore, we devised a grading system, which sought to do the following:

1. Increase collaboration/cooperation and decrease competition
2. Increase student choice
3. Reduce opportunities or incentives to plagiarize or cheat
4. Improve internal locus of control

We attempted to accomplish this by imitating the system James Lang devised in his *Cheating Lessons*, in which one of the professors he discusses has hundreds of students, and the professor wants to figure out the best way to ensure the students are learning without cheating, so the professor devised a gaming approach. We studied the approach and then made it accessible for our students.

In Jewish philosophy, our grading approach was instead of viewing any assignment as an assignment per se, **to view them as opportunities**. The goal was to reach a certain amount of points and each assignment would be worth a different amount of points. However, the student him or herself would choose their own assignment and also choose to revise them. We referred to each opportunity as "Currency."

For example, a final project would be worth 300 points, a reflection, 75 points each (2+ pages), read and response to article we post would be 100 points, etc.

(See attached syllabi for more information)

By allowing the students to *choose* their assignments, *choose* how they get graded, and revise their work, the students would take full ownership of their learning experience and also their grading experience. **To put it simply, their grades were entirely on them.**

Yet, this approach failed. It was all based on sound educational theory and ought to be how classrooms work, but it failed.

We think it failed for **five** specific reasons, namely:

1. We did not adequately prepare the students for this switch in mentality.
2. We were not sufficiently organized in keeping up with the point system.
3. We did not give hard deadlines throughout the semester, which would have helped the students self-regulate better.
4. This learning approach was an outlier experience for students existing in only two courses. As such, most of the student's time and energy was devoted to conventional norms of meeting high school academic expectations.
5. We found that despite our best efforts, because our approach to learning existed outside of the institutional norms and expectations of other stakeholders, too many

students spent much of their time and energy calculating points, forecasting their final grades and valuing what they perceived to be the most “cost effective” (i.e. the maximum number of points in the least amount of time) and we, the instructors, did not do a sufficient re-directing them.

We still think this approach can be a game changer for Jewish day schools, and certainly for Judaic studies classes. We tried in our classrooms and it failed. Yet, we will try again!