

# WHAT'S THE HIGHEST GRADE YOU CAN RECEIVE IN MONTESSORI?

Grades?

Really?

No, what?

Is this a trick question?

**The highest grade in Montessori is obviously missing from traditional education.**

When we went to school there was an A, a B, a C, a D, and an F. So, what is missing? The highest grade you can receive in Montessori – is an E. Shall we unravel the mystery?

Let's look at our experience in school. If you receive an A, the teacher perceives you as being bright (and treats you accordingly.) When you receive an A, you look at yourself in three ways. "Hey, I'm smart (and maybe smarter than the rest of my friends.) Or, I really had to work hard, and I went through all the pressure and anxiety to achieve." Or "I didn't even have to break a sweat (and therefore have no real respect for the challenge.)"

B's and C's tell you that you may not be as smart as your other classmates (and may have lesser value, but I tried.") Or they may be placeholder grades that say I did just enough to get by.

F's are tricky in how they are received and how they are viewed. They may be viewed as, "You're dumb, not very bright, ignorant, or lazy." They may be received as, "I do not have value, I am dumb, I don't understand," or they may be the rebel's fight against the establishment.

The F brings nothing good neither in giving or receiving. It helps no one. It may also be said the same for A's, B's, and C's where students are basically judged on the capacity of their memories and not the power of their mind or spirit.

The challenge with grades is that it actually stops learning. There is an old saying, "People who think they have arrived, have, because they are not going any further." An A is not the end of learning but probably the beginning. In the traditional system you do not move on to mastery from

a B or a C, and heaven help us with an F. You have arrived at a mediocre place, and you stay there because no one has challenged you to get an E.

Dr. Montessori writes in "Spontaneous Activity in Education,"

**"The popular expression 'quick' is synonymous with intelligent."**

**"On the other hand, one who learns the same things, but who takes a longer time ... is slow."**

**"All this makes us realize that our civilization is not based upon 'respect for life' and 'respect for the soul,' but rather it is based upon 'respect for time.'"**

What makes Montessori unique is the letter E. In Montessori, it is E that is celebrated, sought after, and acknowledged. But the celebration of E has many dimensions.

The first dimension to be celebrated is Effort. The road of learning is long and requires much effort along the path of learning. And there is no quitting point. The next E is for Energy. Mental energy is not just reserved for the "quick" but is needed at every level of learning and it constantly needs to be replenished.

The third E is Encouragement. Encouragement is the "coin" of heaven. It is what God gives us to spend on each other. The more we give it away the more we are all blessed by it. It is one of the amazing attributes of God. And it is in Encouragement we become most like Him. Encouragement is like oil to soothe, power to animate and love to motivate.

**Proverbs 25:11 "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in frames of silver."**

Encouragement is probably our most important ministry to each other. All of these E's lead us to Excellence which is both our Christian and Montessori goal. For our students we are looking for excellence – not perfection. Perfection belongs to God while excellence is our mandate. Getting to the very best we can accomplish, in whatever time frame is needed, is our shared goal. Traditional education establishes time as the constant and learning as the variable (grades.) In Montessori time is the variable and learning is the constant (and the excellence.) But this journey of excellence only comes about with untold amounts of encouragement. So, we become not only guides and coaches but cheerleaders, counselors, pastors and at times we appear as drill sergeants (without the yelling.) The reality of life is that we can go much farther than we think, learn more than we

imagine and accomplish the amazing because God sends us encouragers. Another wise old saying, “To go fast go alone, to go far, go together.”

It just might be the scarlet E of Encouragement that we embrace that gives great pleasure to our heavenly Father.