

But That's Not How I Learned To Do It!

A small insight for parents on Common Core math from a former California public school teacher... and why you DON'T need to stress about it!

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I know you've been there. Your child brings home math homework and you give yourself the pep talk. "I can surely do this elementary math homework... been there and done that." But after a few moments of gazing at the worksheet, trying to help your child solve the problems while looking at the examples provided, you're being met with the frustrating response of, "No, that's not how we're supposed to do it", and you're stumped. You proceed to ask yourself why it has to be so complicated, and why can't they just teach basic math. You turned out just fine, right?

RIGHT! You did turn out just fine! And it is okay to be a little flustered with the state of education right now. What we should all ultimately want is for children to learn math (well, any subject actually) in a way that makes sense to them. The adoption of Common Core is not the end all be all for education as we know it, but rather a way to try and outline what is *thought* to be most important for children to learn in their schooling years. On a sidenote, it is common to see "standards based grades" in the elementary years, where instead of your child just receiving one grade for each subject, grades are given for individual standards within each subject, and they are given on a scale of proficiency (Is this child understanding this concept with ease or not?). While the simplicity of just receiving one grade per subject might be missed, let's try to not get hung up on standards-based grades and try to appreciate them for the insight they give us into each child's learning journey.

Okay, now back on topic! From my "former teacher" perspective, my role was to be there to truly facilitate learning and not necessarily push one right method to solve a problem. It was about presenting students with a problem and allowing them to make sense of it on their own. A lot of times, that involved working with a partner or small group, using manipulatives, and being encouraged to show their work with various models. This idea of the teacher at the front of the room dictating the one right way to solve the problem is a thing of the past. It's now key to ENCOURAGE

multiple strategies and afford students the opportunity to essentially be the teacher and share their strategies and thinking with their peers. Now this can be both a blessing and a burden. You have those students who truly benefit from this and have those lightbulb moments of seeing problems solved in new ways and learning new approaches. But then you also have the students who experience so much overwhelm and are likely more confused than when you started the lesson. So of course, those students are going to bring their homework home feeling absolutely stumped. They are hoping you will help them make sense of it all.

Then you are left in the ultimate conundrum... 1. Do we email the teacher and ask for additional help or an extension on time to complete the homework? 2. Do you teach them the old fashioned way? 3. Do you both cry in frustration? (Ok, please know I am kidding with number 3!) Please know that most teachers (and I say most because I don't feel that I have the authority to speak on behalf of all teachers, and I will continue this perspective throughout the rest of this article) do not have the desire to give homework out as some sort of way to confuse children and ruin their afternoons or evenings. I know many teachers who don't even assign homework at all! Ultimately we just want homework to be an opportunity to extend and practice what was learned in class, and also to give parents an insight into what their child is learning. Of course, we want children to learn responsibility and the importance of completing tasks and assignments, but the ultimate goal here is **learning**. So please, the next time you sit down with your child to tackle some math homework, take a deep breath and remember- they're just kids and this is just elementary school math!

Ultimately, teachers and parents should be able to agree on one common goal- that children are learning. It may sound cliché, but there truly is no "one size fits all" for learning, and when teachers and parents can be united in that idea, things are bound to be more successful. From the parent perspective, your ultimate goals for your child at school are to learn, be successful, have a good group of friends, and be surrounded by teachers and staff that support them. You want them to be in an environment where they thrive. From the teacher perspective, they want all of that, too, but are also there to do a job, and that job involves being held accountable for the learning of their students. That is why when you attend a parent-teacher conference, you will most likely be presented with data and test scores. There is no reason to be concerned, you just have to understand that data points, scores and standardized testing are just par for the course in the public education world. Don't be afraid to advocate for your child and ask questions. Ask what this data they are showing you **actually** means. Ask the teacher how your child is genuinely doing in class by finding out if they participate in classroom discussions, if they contribute to

group work, and if they seem to be grasping concepts outside of the “testing” environment. There is SO MUCH MORE to learning than just how your child performs on a test. That is one piece of the puzzle in their learning journey! Please remember that your child is more than just a data point. While sometimes it may seem that all a teacher is discussing with you is related to academic performance and what the data shows, the ultimate reality is that being able to problem solve is what we want to see from students. We want them making sense of the world around them and using their incredible little brains to figure out solutions to the issues they are being presented with..

I guess in a way, I am just trying to say that as a former elementary school teacher and now a mom, I know that it can be easy to get caught up in feeling like maybe your child isn't progressing at the right pace, or maybe you can't help but compare them to other kids their age. I think at the end of the day, all we need to pour our hearts into is making sure children feel capable, supported, and encouraged to be a problem solver, and to make mistakes while doing so. It's not about getting hung up on every little data point, report card, or test score. It's about coming alongside them in a way that reassures them that learning is going to come with all kinds of ups and downs, and that's okay! Grades don't define them.