

Weapons of Mass Instruction

A Schoolteacher's Journey through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling

by John Taylor Gatto

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Review on 18 June by Donald N. Anderson. A version of this review is on Amazon.com under the title “Vitaly important considerations for educated citizens.”

John Taylor Gatto has written another thought provoking book about the critical problem of allowing children to become educated. This one approaches the defects of current schooling from a number of directions that should leave no doubt about his reasons for objecting to compulsory schooling.

I was a public school teacher for only a couple of years in the early 60's teaching science and math in a small rural high school. I did not experience the vicious corruption of purpose in the way that John Taylor Gatto did in New York. Never the less, I formed the firm opinion that schools supported by government were a serious mistake in a free society and were dangerous to that society's long-term health. It is small wonder that many of our citizens value freedom so lightly that they appear willing to give it up for an illusion of security. After all, most have been bored and conditioned by 13 years of government schooling to accept authority even without reasons.

We need a full range of competing schools that offer the variety we find in fields such as food growing and delivery. We might also find that such schools carefully look for ways to deliver desired information more rapidly at lower cost. School costs have gone up at the same time quality has gone down. This is the picture of a

failing institution, only government life support enables it to continue to mis-educate.

Gatto has done us all a huge service by providing a history of educational thought in America and identified its roots and personalities. You would be correct if you thought my education school classes failed to mention this part of history. After reading his earlier books, I went back and read more thoroughly the musings of John Dewey and others. It was a revelation and something I felt was not compatible with the American ideals of freedom.

I had always wondered why the classes in the education school were the worst classes in the entire college. After all, they should have learned something to become a professor of education. As teachers we always joked about how irrelevant those classes were to the actual work of a teacher. After reading Gatto, I suspect that those professors were selected because they were incapable of inspiring instruction and would fit well in the “dumbing down” process.

Even in my own public school education in the mid 40’s, I was taught reading without phonics. They failed to suppress my interest in reading, but did delay my competence in spelling. The “dumbing down” process was evident at that time although it was just getting well started. I shudder to think of the many of our fellow citizens who have been unable to break free and perform their own critical evaluations. And they vote!

Private schools often mistakenly take leads from the public schools since the latter define the test content that all use to evaluate their standing. Mr. Gatto correctly identifies standardized testing as the first tool that needs to be destroyed to permit children to pursue an education rather than be schooled as obedient robots.

I can’t completely agree with Gatto’s recommendation that folks omit most schooling in favor of education. I personally converted from an avid history major to a chemistry major after I found as a college freshman that history instructors added only trivia to the faster knowledge acquisition skills I had already acquired through reading. However in chemistry, my skills were inferior and I definitely benefited from an instructor’s guidance. This was not true of all classes, but there was enough of the challenging to keep me interested for many years.

I believe Mr. Gatto is entirely correct when he recommends homeschooling. The homeschooled students I have met were much better prepared and articulate than

most of their contemporaries. They also fit well in the company of educated adults rather than participate in the resentments and conformity of perpetual childhood.

Every parent and taxpayer needs to read this book and develop his own position on schooling and education after incorporating the information that Gatto so vividly describes!