

**Review: John Taylor Gatto, *Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey Through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC, 2010 (2024 edn.)**

Pages: 214

**Explosive Education Exposé**

This condenses a life of torment of a wide-eyed and hopeful teacher, who, despite recognising problems in the education system, tried reforms from the inside, all to no avail. His logical conclusion was the system is unredeemable, which makes perfect sense given his investigations that *that is exactly how it was designed in the first place* (from 1905 to 1915)!

The reader will be made to feel uncomfortable at his schooling and 'higher' educational experiences; when looked at objectively have largely been a waste of valuable time and perhaps cost them a life of happiness. Decisions are not taken, rather influenced by societal and family pressure to simply 'get a good job'.

The positive side is knowing this diabolical system exists may help avoid future mistakes, or at least be able to give advice to younger people.

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**Contents (pp. vii-)**

"Forced schooling seduces the trapped into believing that inert knowledge, memorized fact bits and sequences I the gold standard of intellectual achievement." [pvii]

Kant's questions: what can I know?; what may I hope?; what ought I to do?; what is man?

"The saddest people on earth are the ones who go back to college reunions —35 percent of all college graduates regret the waste of time and money,

and wish they hadn't attended; 50 percent say they didn't learn anything useful there." [pix]

## **A Dedication for the Family Builders (pp. xi-xii)**

### **Prologue: Against School (pp. xiii-xxiii)**

"Teachers were every bit as bored as they were."

"The obligation to amuse and instruct myself was entirely my own, and people who didn't know that were childish ... to be avoided if possible."  
[pxiv]

Compulsory mass schooling arose 1905 to 1915 to make: good people; good citizens; and each person his best.

H.L. Mencken, *The American Mercury*, April 1924: "The aim ... is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality."  
[pxvi]

The six functions of Prussian schooling:

1. Adaptive.
2. Integrating.
3. Diagnostic (student's proper role).
4. Differentiating.
5. Selective (Darwin's theory).
6. Propaedeutic (selection of a small fraction to be taught how to control the masses).

Mass production required mass consumption; addicts and children can always be convinced to consume more.

Compulsory schooling managed to extend childhood by two to six years.

“Maturity by now has been banished from nearly every aspect of our lives.”

### **I) Everything You Know About Schools Is Wrong (pp. 1-26)**

Horace Manns believed all society’s levels would mix in the classroom and create social harmony.

In the late 1960s, classrooms descended into chaos when teachers’ hands were tied to discipline.

The Roman *pedagogue* was a specialised slave doing the master’s will.

“The ultimate goal implanted in student minds, which replaced the earlier goal of independent livelihoods, was getting a good job.” [p25]

### **II) Walkabout: London (pp. 27-60)**

“Teaching is a function, not a profession.”

7,000 students drop out of school each day in the U.S.

“Like all sane people, so-called kids wanted to grow up as soon as possible.”

Andrew Carnegie wished to exchange merit for social stability and capital protection.

The U.S. military exists to employ the underclass and suppress the domestic people.

### **III) Fat Stanley and the Lancaster Amish (pp. 61-69)**

“Education must be largely self-initiated.”

Standardised test scores would allow the lower class to come to terms with their inherent inferiority.

### **IV) David Sarnoff’s Classroom (pp. 70-82)**

Gatto's criteria of an educated person:

- Ability to ask hard questions of data.
- Avoid slavish dependence on official definitions.
- Ability to scan mass of information and extract the useful.
- Ability to conceptualise.
- Ability to reorganise information.
- Rhetoric skill.

The average teacher's tenor is 16 years; turnover is 22%.

Administrators have created a caste system for themselves.

Half of teacher time is wasted on admin and front-office politics.

Classroom disruption is now seen as a problem of bad teaching.

#### **V) Hector Isn't the Problem (pp. 83-89)**

#### **VI) The Camino de Santiago (pp. 90-98)**

"Kids who drove me crazy were always big TV watchers .. TV-addicted kids were irresponsible, childish, malicious .. above all .. they seemed to lack any sustaining purpose of their own ... Hitching the body and mind to screen reduces the attention span ... it creates a craving for constant stimulation." [pp91,97]

#### **VII) Weapon of Mass Instruction (pp. 99-144)**

"School weakens family and ... all relationships."

"We rarely hear anyone attributing their success to school time." [p101]

"From the first month of my teaching career of 30 years, I realised that intellectual power, creative insight, and good character were being

diminished in my classroom and that indeed I had been hired for precisely that purpose. I was a clerk in a vast penitentiary; the rules and procedures were the guards.” [p101]

“If you’re ugly ... chances of admission at Yale or Stanford drop to almost zero.”

“Educated people ... or people with principles ... At any moment they may announce, ‘This is wrong. I won’t do it’ ”.

“Don’t buy into the calculated illusion of extended childhood.”

“The destruction of uninterrupted time is a major weapon of mass instruction.”

### **VIII) What Is Education? (pp. 145-156)**

The educated are: seldom at a loss what to do with time; can form healthy attachments anywhere; are aware and accept their own mortality; and actively seek variety.

### **IX) A Letter to My Granddaughter About Dartmouth (pp. 157-173)**

Gatto’s Real Learning Index:

1. Self-knowledge
2. Observation
3. Feedback
4. Analysis
5. Mirroring
6. Expression
7. Judgement
8. Adding Value

**X) Incident at Highland High (pp. 174-191)**

**Afterword (pp. 192-206)**