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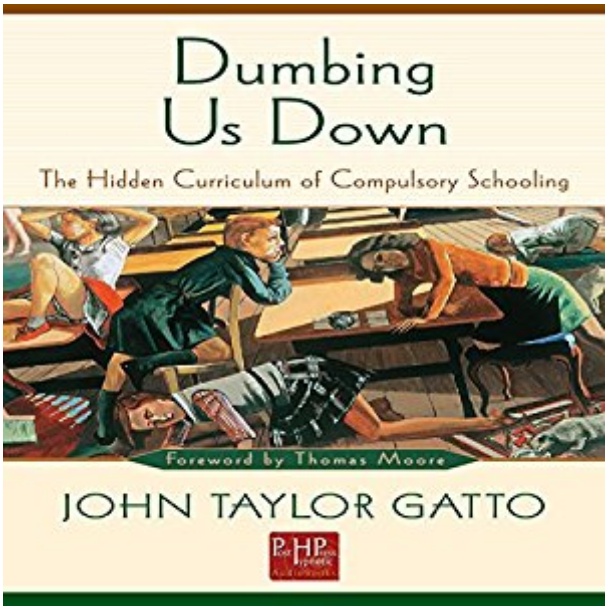
Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum Of Compulsory Schooling



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Synopsis

Thirty years in New York City’s public schools led John Gatto to the sad conclusion that compulsory schooling does little but teach young people to follow orders like cogs in an industrial machine. With over 100,000 copies in print since its original publication in 2002, this book is collection of essays and speeches and contains a description of the wide-spread impact of the book and Gatto’s "guerrilla teaching". About the author: John Gatto was a teacher in New York City’s public schools for over 30 years and is a recipient of the New York State Teacher of the Year award. A much sought after speaker on education throughout North America, his other books include Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher’s Journey through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling, A Different Kind of Teacher, and The Underground History of American Education.

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Customer Reviews

After 26 years of teaching in the New York public schools, John Taylor Gatto has seen a lot. His book,Dumbing Us Down, is a treatise against what he believes to be the destructive nature of schooling. The book opens with a chapter called "The Seven-Lesson Schoolteacher," in which he outlines sevenharmful lessons he must convey as a public schoolteacher: 1.) confusion 2.) class position 3.) indifference 4.) emotional dependency 5.) intellectual dependency 6.) provisional self-esteem 7.) constant surveillance and the denial of privacy. How ironic it is that Gatto’s first two chapters contain the text of his acceptance speeches for NewYork State and City Teacher of the Year Awards. How ironic indeed, that he uses his own award presentation as a forum to attack the

very same educational system that is honoring him! Gatto describes schooling, as opposed to learning, as a "twelve-year jail sentence where bad habits are the onlycurriculum truly learned. I teach school and win awards doing it," taunts the author.While trapped in this debilitative system along with his students, Gatto, observed in them anoverwhelming dependence. He believes that school teaches this dependence by purposely inhibitingindependent thinking, and reinforcing indifference to adult thinking. He describes his students as"having almost no curiosity, a poor sense of the future, are a historical, cruel, uneasy with intimacy, and materialistic." Gatto suggests that the remedy to this crisis in education is less time spent in school, and more timespent with family and "in meaningful pursuits in their communities." He advocates apprenticeships andhome schooling as a way for children to learn.

I picked up this book with some skepticism after another teacher told me that I ought to read it. After the the first essay, The Seven-Lesson Teacher, I was hooked. John Taylor Gatto eloquently says much of what I had been thinking after teaching high school science for 8 years. I had told my husband when I left teaching high school that I felt that high school could not be reformed but must be completely re-imagined. I had complained about the assembly-line approach to education in American high schools. I never felt I knew my students or understood what they hoped to accomplish in school and in my class.This is a must read for anyone involved in the education of children and especially those who have an inchoate sense that something is wrong with the way we are teaching our children. In the essays in this book, John Taylor Gatto discusses the hidden national curriculum (The Seven-Lesson Teacher) and its inevitable result. In his essay The Psychopathic School, he discusses the link between the way we teach our children and the problems they manifest (no sense of past or future, lack of ability to pay attention, no sense that anything is important, and more). The essay, The Green Monogahela, shows the reader John’s background and the informal, learn-from-life way that he learned the most important lessons of his life. Finally, in We Need Less School, Not More, John discusses the difference between family and community, and pseudo-community (he calls it networks) that pervade our national institutions, as well as the importance of a real community to real education. Finally, in the Congregation Principle, John discusses the importance of difference and variety as a corrective to social mistakes and social injustice.

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