

We Don't Need The State To Educate!

Do we really need the State to educate? Most people believe this to be the case, especially for the poorest among us. But E.G. West and James Tooley – and several others – have looked at the actual history of education, and found something startling: mass education existed before heavy state involvement.

I highly recommend the book *Government Failure: E. G. West on Education*.

The main points asserted by the book include these:

- *Before government compulsion and widespread government provision of education, private provision was widespread, even among the poor.*
- *Only a very small minority of parents cannot be trusted to choose their education for their children. Compulsory, uniform provision is not an appropriate way to deal with that problem.*
- *The portrayal in English literature of nineteenth-century private education in Britain has no basis in fact.*
- *Proponents of compulsory state-provided education at the time of its origin generally believed that state provision was important to help form the thinking of the young and to prevent them from entering a criminal lifestyle. The first of these objectives is suspect in principle; there is no evidence to suggest that the second has been achieved in practice.*
- *If the objective of state involvement in education is to ensure that the less well-off have access to education, this should be achieved by government schemes to fund parents, not by making universal, compulsory provision.*

I would add a few things, based on my observations and those of a number of others in the field: education as we know it is badly specified, over-specified, and largely an exercise in

special interests benefiting at the expense of taxpayers, parents, and children. It does not provide the best learning experience for our children, and in fact crowds out better alternatives.

But that's another story. The work of E.G. West stands as a condemnation of the widespread theory that government involvement in education is necessary or advisable. His research showed that the only thing wrong with that theory was the facts.