

Some Refreshing Honesty about the Purpose of Mass Schooling

In case there was any ambiguity over the idea that mass schooling values and rewards conformity and compliance, an elementary school in Florida has made it very clear.



At Deer Park Elementary School in Pasco County, signs appeared this week showing a hierarchy of behaviors from good to bad. “Democracy” was at the top, “Anarchy” was at the bottom. While there are many issues with these posters, beginning with the fact that public schooling is far from democratic, the one causing the most outrage among parents is the desire for children to exhibit “Cooperation/Conformity.”

“Conform! How Orwellian,” one parent wrote on Facebook.

The posters, tied to the school’s “behavior and classroom culture” project modeled after author Marvin Marshall’s Raise Responsibility System of discipline, suggest that a young person who “complies” and “conforms” is a model student. Under relentless pressure from parents and student advocacy organizations, the school indicated they would temporarily remove the posters until they could better communicate their initiative to parents and the public.

These school posters explicitly reveal the troubling reality that mass schooling retains its 19th-century roots as a system of social control. Originally designed to bring order to an

increasingly diverse population, the industrial model of mass schooling continues to impose order by encouraging compliance, rewarding conformity and eliminating individuality.

As author and academic, Noam Chomsky, says “the education system is supposed to train people to be obedient, conformist, not think too much, do what you’re told, stay passive...”

[embedded content]

In educator John Holt’s bestselling book, *How Children Learn*, republished this month in honor of its 50th anniversary, Holt writes about the systematic ways schooling destroys children’s natural curiosity and originality:

We like to say that we send children to school to teach them to think. What we do, all too often, is to teach them to think badly, to give up a natural and powerful way of thinking in favor of a method that does not work well for them and that we rarely use ourselves. Worse than that, we convince most of them that, at least in a school setting, or any situation where words or symbols or abstract thought are concerned, they can’t think at all.”

The elementary school posters in Florida are an overt reminder that schooling and learning are strikingly different. Children, especially those young elementary schoolers, have an incredible capacity for creativity, an inherent zest for exploration and discovery, and an insatiable appetite for learning about the world around them. Then they go to school where tactics that encourage conformity and compliance crush their natural learning instincts. At least these posters tell the truth.