

Why Not To Trust Your School

“Rulers have always taken care to control the education of the people. They know their power is based almost entirely on the school and they insist on retaining their monopoly. The school is an instrument for domination in the hands of the ruling class.”

Francisco Ferrer, Anarchist proponent of the “Free School Movement”

Free public education is an important aspect of society which has the potential to both empower or enslave us depending upon the intentions and ways in which education is offered or in our case compulsory. In countries like Spain, religious education was the only way to learn until the early 20th Century and it was unlawful for poor people or women to be educated. This is the case in many fundamentalist religious societies today. In Europe and the United States, attacks on public education are a cornerstone to reactionary political agendas. In a capitalistic society where so much emphasis is placed on making rich people richer and protecting their “private property” we should consider why people in power have vested interest in a system of public education.

When we go to school we are taught that school will teach us what we need to survive in society by giving us the necessary skills to get a job and “take care” of ourselves, but the system is not interested in our well-being. It is only interested in what we could do for them. The process of public education is a combination of rudimentary knowledge which we need to be able to serve the rich and powerful plus “norming” behavioral indoctrination intended to keep us from questioning the status quo when we become servants to the capitalists or the government by persuading us that the system which exploits us somehow exists solely for our benefit (a blatant contradiction and a lie).

1. **The first task of public education in a capitalistic society is to teach students to “respect authority.”** This is done by placing a teacher or school

bureaucrat in the role of the students' parent or guardian, the authoritarian figure they are familiar with at home. Authority is imposed through a system of punishment for those who do not do what they are told and rewards for conformity. Strict adherence to stupid and trivial rules like always walking on the right side of the hallway teaches us to *obey* no matter how stupid the order is. We are taught that people should be able to tell us what to do. We are thereby prepared for the world of bosses, cops, politicians, and military officers ordering us around and treating us like we are stupid and inferior.

2. **The second task of public education in a capitalist society is to rob us of our individuality** so that we will submit to what we are told to do and not pursue our own ideas, desires or talents. It does this by placing us in an environment with thousands of people our own age and using authority figures to label anyone who does not go along as worthy of scorn. This is the basis of what we know of as "peer pressure" which is essentially a system for teaching innocent children to value mediocrity and obedience and encourage them to harass anyone who doesn't obey. Any deviation from society's norm is immediately condemned, individuality becomes deviance. This makes us used to doing what everyone else does and blindly "going with the flow" for fear of stepping out of line and being persecuted. This forms the basis for the system of social control in the workplace where people submit to exploitation rather than being labeled a 'troublemaker" and are encouraged to betray their fellow workers to the boss even if they work at a minimum wage job and can't possibly benefit.
3. **The third task of public education in a capitalist society is regimentation.** The Capitalist System looks at people as nothing more than a piece of meat: A resource whose whole purpose is to make money for them, buy their products and die in their wars. Modern industrial society is organized into work shifts which can run 24-hours per day making money for the rich. Industrial society is based on three ideas created by Fredrick Taylor, Henry Ford and Max Weber. Taylor had the idea of reducing the workers motions to that of a machine so that capitalists could maximize their profit in any given time period. Ford is credited with the assembly line so that all the workers would limit their robotic motion into a single meaningless task. Weber helped construct the modern bureaucracy in Nazi Germany to control large numbers of people with a militaristic organization. His ideas were adopted by capitalists around the world after World War II. For thousands of people to be able to work in this kind of work environment, they must be conditioned from a young age to live "by the clock." Even in the service industry or other areas

of work outside the factory these same principals of organization apply to varying degrees. The public school system conditions students to conform their desires to a strict schedule by imposing punishments for those who don't show up at school on time, go to class on time or complete assigned tasks on time. This prepares us for a life in the factory or office where "time is money." To maximize the degree to which students can be exploited when they enter the work force, they must be conditioned to be nervous or guilty about not showing up on time and subject to the time schedule created by those in authority.

4. **The fourth task of public education under capitalism is to discourage dissent.** This begins with the system by which our performance in school is evaluated. We are repeatedly graded based on our ability to repeat facts, figures and phrases regardless of where we understand their meaning. Rote memorization robs us of our ability to reason out problems and to question the things we are told. It conveys the illusion that there is one "correct" answer to every question and you are only acceptable if you know that answer. It tells people that common sense means trusting the person with authority to have the right answer rather than believing your experiences in life which contradict what authority tries to tell us. This is intended to encourage us to put our faith in "leaders" who have the "correct" answers rather than reasoning out problems and questioning what we are told. By discouraging creative, investigative, inquisitive or critical thought, students are prepared for adulthood where they will be told that all the answers to life's problems come from television, the government or organized religion. This makes people more receptive to propaganda from the government or capitalist advertisers and less skeptical when there are obvious contradictions, distortions or lies in what they are told. It also makes students perceive learning as boring so they will be discouraged from learning later in life.
5. **The fifth task of public education in a capitalist society is to encourage selfishness.** This is done by forcing students to compete with each other. In academics, students are punished for cooperating with each other or asking for help by receiving a lower score. In athletics, students compete against each other physically. They are taught that those who lose or perform less well are inferior and that, consequently, persons in society whom are less well off, deserve to be because they are lazy and don't work hard enough. They are taught that it is OK for the strong to dominate the weak and those who try to help less well off people are "sissies" and should think only about themselves. School also teaches the idea of being a 'team player' which means

that our ability to benefit personally is tied to our willingness to sacrifice our personal desires and do what we are told by leaders. We are told that, by doing this, we benefit because we are sacrificing for the “team.” This is intended to prepare us for the working world where the “team” is a capitalist corporation and being a “team player” means being a good slave and not thinking about the moral or personal consequences of what our bosses tell us to do.

6. **The sixth task of public education in a capitalist society is to divide us by gender and social class.** Early on, some kids are labeled as “smart” based on test scores or some other arbitrary means. These are often the children of more well off parents who are eager to prove themselves superior by taking credit for everything their kids do in life. For the rest of their school years these kids will be given the best teachers and facilities. They will be told to go to college so they can get a job in the future middle class. The rest of the students will receive minimal attention in academics and be tracked into vocational education classes to become the working class of tomorrow. Those who are kicked out or drop out are labeled as inferior and told they will never get anywhere in life. Unfortunately these are all too often self-fulfilling prophecies. Upper class kids just aren’t around because they’re all in private schools where they wear suits to class and learn to feel nothing but contempt for the less privileged. Girls are more regimented from a young age and are told they are not supposed to perform as well as boys in subjects like math. They are discouraged from studying subjects like industrial arts and given less access to activities like athletics which are considered “unfemine.” Cliques in school often form based on income, social group and gender. Students whose income and gender enables them to reflect values which the capitalist society claims are important consider themselves superior and are more likely to associate with each other and act aloof. Those who are not considered “popular” (part of the elitist cliques) are told that they should admire them. This is intended to prepare them for the working world where they are told by tabloid newspapers, magazines and television shows like “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” “America’s Castles” and “Empires of Industry” to admire the rich instead of asking how they got away with stealing all their wealth from everyone else!
7. **The seventh task of public education in a capitalist society is to persuade us to defend the system which exploits us.** Modern public education was first introduced to indoctrinate the children of immigrants into the “American Way of Life,” “American Culture” and the “American Political System.”

It was intended to eliminate immigrant people's feelings of cultural distinctiveness and homogenize them into loyal and obedient citizens. Students are told that we live in the so-called "greatest country on Earth," and that in comparison, the rest of the world is full of backwards peasants or evil "terrorists" with inferior values and cultures. They are taught that capitalism is the system that works, that everyone can get rich if they work hard enough, and that poverty is the fault of individuals who are inferior and don't work hard enough rather than capitalists who destroy the livelihoods of thousands of people to make a profit. They are told that they live in a "free country" worth dying for where everyone is treated equally under the law, but students who endure the daily humiliation of police harassment because of the color of their skin or the fact that people under 18 years of age have few rights under the law know better! We are taught that the system imposed on us is democratic and that "checks and balances" keep it from becoming corrupt when in reality, the system is controlled by cliques of rich business owners who choose politicians to represent *their* interests and use political machines to stay in office. We are also increasingly indoctrinated into the social values of those in authority. This includes everything from taboos and attitudes about sex and drugs, to encouraging drivers education, to telling you to rat out your friends and family to the cops. A huge portion of what is now taught in high school is either social control or political indoctrination and of no use to living an enjoyable or free life.

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