

## Weapons of Mass Instruction Book Review

*Weapons of Mass Instruction* is a book authored by John T. Gatto, which addresses the compulsory schooling system in the United States and other nations across the world. The author draws his evidence and information from his vast experiences as a high school teacher for thirty years in the US. He has also read extensively on the American education system history as he was a history teacher, and thus he has a full understanding of the current state of the school system. Apart from his vast knowledge, Gatto also has excellent narration and perfect writing skills which he has profoundly employed in his books. This paper will perform a review of the book *Weapons of Mass Instruction* by Gatto. It will specifically highlight the main issues, give questions and general thoughts, and lastly provide opinions about the book and how the writer excelled in his writing skills.

### Highlights of the Book

Gatto, the author of the book, addresses the compulsory schooling system that all American enrol at during their early age. He divides the book into ten short sections arranged in a chronological manner to help the readers understand the main arguments presented. In the first chapter, the author directly jumps into the main idea of the book explaining “why everything about schooling is wrong” (Gatto 1). After the section, the author proceeds with five other chapters that give real-life examples and explanations to support the initial argument in chapter one.

In section seven, the author introduces his main chapter “Weapons of Mass Instruction”, which forms the title of the book (Gatto 99). Three other sections are then used to give deeper details on the real meaning of education as compared to schooling. Apart from well-organized chapters, the book is written with a simple English, which makes it be

perfectly clear for people with any backgrounds. The entire book makes up only 241 pages, and the author also includes footnotes indicating the source of data used.

### **Questions and General Thoughts about the Book**

The theme used by the writer raises several issues in the readers' mind which form the cornerstone of understanding the central message from the author. Some of the questions that arise in the book include: Is eliminating the schooling system important? Is the current system variable to the society? Should another system be introduced? How can another system appear? Is Gatto reasoning persuasive? And what are merits and demerits of his arguments? These questions give the general thought about the books as answered below.

First, Gatto presents his idea of 'doing away' with the compulsory school system. The author adequately demonstrates by using famous examples from the US history that it is not the system which makes people better but the education they possess. In one example, Gatto narrates that "Bud, who was uneducated in the school system, became a manager at Rockwell Manufacturing Empire, where he was in charge of ten Harvard graduates due to his knowledge" (Gatto 27). The example serves as to prove that people in the society do not need a compulsory schooling system for them to succeed.

The author also addresses how the current system is less variable to the people compared to the prior system. According to Gatto, the current system does not give more knowledge to the society due to the increased illiteracy rate. During the military intake in Second World War, "only 4% of all those who applied were considered to be illiterate for the task, however, that figure increased by 19% in 1952 during the Korean war, and further to 27% in 1960s Vietnam war" (Gatto 10). The above statistics is a clear indication that the society is not in any way benefiting from the schooling system as statistics agrees with the authors on this issue.

The book also focuses on how the political class and business owners use the school system for their benefit. The author shows how the government uses schooling for their policy agenda to ensure that they attain the human rights requirement. The system thereby helps to "ensure that most people in the country are within the safer level of manageability by the government" (Gatto 15). When all of them pass through the schooling system, they are programmed how to seek employment for the rest of their lives. Thus, the government just worries about how to find new jobs in the industrial market for the workers.

On the other hand, industrialists have used the system to ensure that they get the best products for employment. Once individual passes through the schooling system, then the manufacturers can use assessment test to determine who can withstand the task of being a servant in the industry. "They always want what is best for them, and they want the continued production of labor that shall always beg for salary for the least of their lives" (Gatto 14). The schooling system perfectly provides them with these candidates at unlimited levels.

### **Opinions about the Book**

Overall, the author's argument is well constructed, and he has excelled in representing the real issues that influence the schooling system in the United States as well as other nations. Institution and students across the world now focus on how to excel in exams rather than on how to acquire more knowledge. Past research on the US education system has indicated that students graduating from high school usually have very high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), but they cannot even solve a small analytical problem on the real life situation (Ravitch 30). It thus appears that the argument of the author is in line with other findings on the schooling system; hence, this paper supports the way of his reasoning.

Further, the author has suggested that for the current system to be eliminated, all the students have to refuse to take the tests simultaneously. The above suggestion means that students will oppose the current schooling system, that aims only at programming them to be

one product. However, according to this review, it does not appear logical to suggest that students would avoid the exams, as the pressure to succeed in such tests comes from the societies and not the government itself. Most parents are the products of the current schooling system, and, thus, they always force their children to excel in the same system too (Spring 32). All things considered, students can do little to change the situation.

It is the view of this paper that parents should be the source of change in the compulsory schooling system. Most of the students in high school are too naïve and still immature to take this action, and, thus, parents should step in to save them from schooling imprisonment. Parents can step in by withdrawing their children from participating in the SAT, thereby terminating the ultimate goal of the school system (Ravitch 51). The above solution is feasible for both parents and students, bearing in mind that most students participate in these tests due to parents' pressure only. Gatto states that "7000 students drop out of the schooling system every school day translating to over one and a half million per year" (Gatto 37). Such a high dropout rate means that most students are not satisfied with the school activities, and all they need is parents backing to eliminate the inferior and failed compulsory schooling system.

The author's argument that reducing the mandatory education would help people be more innovate and adventurous in their careers seems to be quite expedient as well. The current regime does not show students how to gain more knowledge; what it shows them instead is that they have to pass various exams to survive in the current society (Ravitch 24). The argument made by the author is, therefore, very realistic; eliminating the system will move students from being exam robots to becoming curious people who seek to acquire more knowledge in the relevant fields.

Apart from the uniquely selected arguments by the author, he has also excelled in the manner in which he presents his writing to the audience. First, the author uses real life

narrations and examples which serve a significant role in convincing the readers how weak the schooling system is. Meanwhile, real-life stories are the best way to write an argumentative topic as they help users to connect to the actuality directly and to follow the reasoning of the writer (Smith 16). The author also uses a lot of rhetorical questions to hook the readers into his arguments, which perfectly brings out his theme out in a unique way. The book has also utilized varieties of other writing skills that encourage readers to read and understand.

The book is a true representation of the current American schooling system, and, therefore, I would recommend it to other readers across the country. Specifically, it would be advisable for the students who are within the school system to read the book as it will open them to the new reality of life. Students mostly think that life is all about passing SAT and getting the perfect score, but they fail to understand the basic knowledge needed in that life (Spring 61). Thus, they end up being employees for the rest of their lives. If they read this book, then they could obtain a different perspective about their future. Teachers and other education officers who make policy in the sector should also get familiar with the book. It addresses the weakness in their area, and, consequently, they should be concerned about how to improve its efficiency, too. Reading this book can help them to develop new ways of evaluating students and enhancing knowledge acquisition rather than teaching how to pass exams.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the above documentation conducted a review on the book *Weapons of Mass Instruction* by Gatto. In precision, it has summarized the book based on all chapters, presented questions and general thoughts of the book, and lastly, it has given opinions about the book and how the writer excelled in his writing skills. According to the review, the author's main argument is that American schooling system is not helpful for the society, as it

programs students on how to pass the exams rather than provides them with knowledge. The review has agreed with the author and has concluded that parents need to support their students in eliminating the compulsory schooling system.