

I Won't Learn from You: And Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment

By Herbert R. Kohl

"I Won't Learn from You," Herb Kohl's classic essay on "not learning," or refusing to learn, is now available in book form, together with four new essays. Drawing on an idea of Martin Luther King Jr.'s, Kohl talks about the need for "creative maladjustment" in the classroom and indeed anywhere else that students' intelligence, dignity, or integrity are compromised by a teacher, an institution, or a larger social mindset. This volume also includes "The Tattooed Man," Kohl's autobiographical essay about "hopemongering," which Kohl finds essential for all effective teaching in these difficult times.

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I Won't Learn from You: And Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment by By Herbert R. Kohl ebook read online.

pdetail:

- Sales Rank: #946328 in Books
- Brand: Brand: New Press
- Published on: 1994-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .90" h x 5.78" w x 8.57" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 153 pages

editorial:

From Publishers Weekly

Despite the social and economic despair that pervades many U.S. public schools, meaningful learning and teaching are nevertheless possible, declares famed educator Kohl. To overcome the "massive rejection of schooling by students from poor and oppressed communities," Kohl (36 Chil dren), in these five inspirational, optimistic essays, outlines teaching strategies designed to unlock students' energy, intelligence and drive by encouraging them to envision ways to improve their world. He believes that both teachers and students should cultivate "creative maladjustment," channeling personal discontent into moral or political action. Kohl defends multiculturalist curricula as central to the struggle for fairness. Turning to higher education, he argues that issues of academic freedom and "political correctness" are used by neoconservatives to mask their desire to control ideas in the university and to push out ethnic and women's studies.

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From Kirkus Reviews

The five essays in this book are powerful reminders that currently popular ideas of school choice may be only another trendy veneer disguising the deeply rooted problems of public education. Teacher Kohl (From Archetype to Zeitgeist, 1992, etc.) is an ardent spokesman on behalf of students, the people most neglected in debates about failures in the classrooms. The title essay explores the provocative idea that "not-learning" is a conscious choice made by children who observe, sometimes very early, that the school system is trying to impose on them values and behavior that are foreign and sometimes repugnant to them. Diagnosed as learning-disabled, stupid, or disciplinary problems, children who appear not to be able to learn to read or do math may simply have opted out of the system, choosing instead to put their intelligence and creativity to work outside school. In "The Tattooed Man," he asserts that, before anything else can be accomplished, teachers must challenge the hopelessness felt by students. The "norming of excellence" and political correctness are the subjects of two other essays, accompanied by a devastating critique of E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Cultural Literacy and Core Knowledge series. Kohl attacks Hirsch's material as not only racist and sexist, but "pernicious, stupid, and dangerous." Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to be "maladjusted" to injustice and inequity is the theme of the last essay. "Creative maladjustment" consists of "learning to survive with

minimal moral and personal compromise in a thoroughly compromised world," says Kohl. In such a world, he argues, the failure of schools and teachers is often pinned on children--by diagnosing them with Attention Deficit Disorder, for example. He challenges teachers to take action by, for instance, refusing to turn such children over to special education classes. Some anecdotes and examples are repeated from earlier works, but this is must reading for Kohl fanciers and anyone looking for the humanity buried in the long debate about why Johnny can't read. -- *Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

Brilliant. -- *San Francisco Chronicle*

Must reading for. . . anyone looking for the humanity buried in the long debate about why Johnny can't read.
-- *Kirkus Reviews*

There is more insight in these pages than in many longer works. -- *The Progressive*

This is one of the most important books on teaching published in many years. For teachers, of course, the book will be invaluable. For people who know Herb Kohl and his writing, however, it has another dividend. It brings out all the sweetness and the passion and the zest for life and mischief-making humor of an infinitely vulnerable and honest human being who has made it his vocation to peddle hope in the face of despair, a task more essential today, I think, than at any time in twenty years. All in all, a wise and tender book, written with the deepest love for children. I will go back to it again and again for strength in future years. -- *Jonathan Kozol*

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