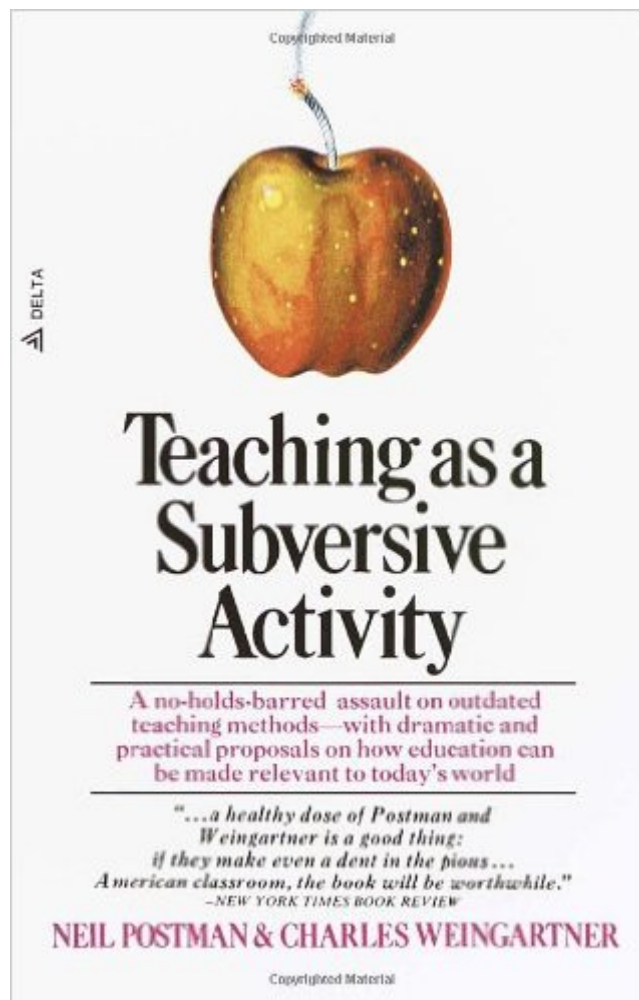


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Teaching As A Subversive Activity: A No-Holds-Barred Assault On Outdated Teaching Methods-with Dramatic And Practical Proposals On How Education Can Be Made Relevant To Today's World





Synopsis

A no-holds-barred assault on outdated teaching methods--with dramatic and practical proposals on how education can be made relevant to today's world.

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Customer Reviews

Most reviewers seem to like Teaching as a Subversive Activity. I am not among the book's fans. The book's authors, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, score a number of points. They manage to "nail" educators for relying too much on the lecture method in which students copy, then memorize, the teacher's opinions. This is a very valid criticism; teachers do little to teach students how to think; we settle for teaching them what to think. The authors make another good point about the tyranny of testing, which has become far worse since the early 1970s. Beyond these points, I found the book to be lacking. I think that the authors meander too far from their original point - that teaching needs to be reformed. They discuss an incredible array of topics in just over 200 pages, but the discussions are superficial due to the book's excessive breadth. And their digressions are not engaging and are often only tangentially related to teaching. For instance, the long list of quotations at the end of Chapter 7 is mind numbing. The authors' arguments remind me of the old saw that it is easier to tear down a system than it is to build a new one. Many of their suggestions are quixotic, or just laughable. Consider what the authors suggest administrators do if students write graffiti about their teachers in school bathrooms; in this case, Postman and Weingartner state that the administrators should chisel the students' words on the front of their schools. Are they joking? Did the authors ever

actually attend high school? Some of the other ideas have the sound of bad 60s hangovers. For instance, Yale University adopted the authors' idea about eliminating grades in the early 1970s - with disastrous results.

This book has some pleasant surprises, but leaves the reader with an overall sense of frustration. The book's appeal today is not what it would have been in 1969. At publication, the book was probably radical for its experimental approach to education that suggests that stimulating creativity and questioning is more important than the transference of raw data to students. Today it is fascinating because it makes you wonder, Did people really think like this? Were the 1950's as mindless and autocratic as this book seems to suggest? Has no one since Socrates suggested this kind of provocative education? The book becomes frustrating if you attempt to seriously apply their conclusions today. In suggesting that education cater primarily to the felt needs of students instead of communicated what is decidedly essential curriculum, the authors have committed intellectual suicide. If you let high school students shape their studies around their interests, there would be classes in fashion and video games and blogging. The classes would be less likely to have reading lists, and instead only movies to watch. Sadly, the book begins by quoting Hemingway's suggestion that we need a "[...] detector" (p. 5). The next four chapters are then pretty much some of that. It suggests that education should gravitate in the direction of questioning, relevance, and addressing only what the students feel is worth knowing. This is like telling children that they should only take the medicine that tastes good. Then, surprisingly, the book improves (I'm wondering if one of the authors picked up here). It enters into a layman's take on perspectivalism (C. 6).

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