

The 7 Worst Contributors to Teen Failure

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- **Education system** – It is too easy to generalize and place blame on schools, and it is not my intention since I do believe that most of those inside of that system do not readily see it for what it is. Having worked in and around education for 15 years, including teaching graduate students who were going into the field of school counseling, I can readily say that in this field I have met some of the most wonderful, passionate, positive people I've ever known in my life, people I'd hope my daughter could one day have as role models... I've also met some of the most burned out, cynical people I've ever known, people who make a strong argument to do away with tenure.

Unfortunately many of the great people share a common experience of feeling like they are having a great season individually, but are playing on a losing team. Perhaps the most outspoken and provocative voice is that of John Taylor Gatto, the former New York State Teacher of the Year whose book Dumbing Us Down: the Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling revealed the real inner workings of what drives our education system and what it is doing to the squash the best in many of our youth. Once you've read this book your perceptions about education and what you advocate for will likely change forever.

Perhaps the system's greatest shortcoming is that there is no place for all those kids who fall in the 'middle' category of youth who are neither going to IVY League schools nor destined to drop-out. Instead they come to school each day and experience a sense of not being quite as good as others struggling not to lose the competition for academic success, constantly hearing what they've done wrong and struggling to find a way to keep up and fit in. That they turn eventually to their social life or withdraw into their computers and music is an understandable option. At least it doesn't feel bad and create stress.

One of the greatest challenges I face in my work is that the experience of learning for so many teens is so painful and inhibitory (mostly boring) for most teens, that the moment they hear they can 'learn' something from my workshops they become cynical and resistant rather than curious and excited. How we got to a point of allowing our kids to spend hours a day immersed in a system that makes exploring and learning something to stress about and fear, and allowing the adults in that system to in essence raise our kids (they spend far more time there than with us) and haven't done more to reform and reshape this is beyond me. The reason the Netherlands is #1 and we are #20 is because they have reshaped this. It is worth reading about.

- **Absent parents (especially substance abusers)** Statistically 40% of kids in America are growing up in homes without fathers. Even for those kids with two parents, a 2000 survey, the average family in America spent 15 quality minutes together a day. An ongoing UCLA research of 'wired homes' (homes where everyone has internet and computers) that number drops down to 4 minutes a day. Kids spend on average 3 hours a day watching TV and even more when internet gaming and chatting is included. They spend 6+ hours in school. The fact is that most

American kids are spending far greater volumes of time engaged with people and things other than parents than they are with parents. It is no doubt that when these kids become teens, their expectations to be independent and treated as such rises to the level it does.

- **Overly critical adults** – Some of the most fascinating research being done in the world today is being led by a University of Wisconsin MD and cellular biologist named Bruce Lipton. His innovative work is bringing proof to the fact that nurture has much more to do with who we become than nature. He in fact offers a compelling argument that our DNA is the potential of who we can become, not the blueprint of who we are destined to become. This being said, it makes perfect sense that children who are raised with adults who are overly critical of them, endlessly pointing out their shortcomings or comparing them to some absurd standard of excellence that no child can sustain constantly, grow up feeling and being inhibited in their confidence and development. We can often see it in their posture as they carry themselves with tension, guardedness and sometimes even shrinking themselves down to appear smaller than they are.
- **“Self-Esteem” centered parenting** - The Duke of Windsor noted "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children." Parents of the 90s had no idea the damage they were doing when they succumbed to the self-help, self-esteem craze. Now their children think they can do no wrong, think their needs should come first and that their feelings should matter enough to influence what we all do and in being this way that are ill-prepared for the realities of the challenges they will face when they are on their own. Their first round of anger comes when the world doesn't respond to giving them what they feel entitled to and when and how this leads them to have to realize they are not nearly as powerful as they thought they were.. The next round (which will be the big one), is the anger they'll express when they discover they've been raised by a generation of adults who lived in a submissive role to their children and rather than tending to the larger world were more concerned with being their child's friend than in playing a vital role taking care of the world around them. They are in the works of becoming what Dr. Joseph Riggio of Princeton, New Jersey calls, The Angry Generation™... a generation of young adults who will awaken to a world so damaged that could have been avoided had our generation been doing what it should have been doing rather than gratifying ourselves and glorifying our children.
- **Parents who push that success equates to high-achievement Money, grades, high profile career, IVY League schools, etc)** These kids start off one down in that they are not 'good enough' until they have achieved and then when they do achieve they must continue to achieve in order to be good enough. They become fixated on grades, appearances and measuring up and ultimately depend on the approval or appearance of looking good in the eyes of the world in order to be settled and at ease in themselves. By their late teen years they have either succumbed to the system and 'sold their soul to the man' or they sling shot to the other extreme succumbing either to addiction, self-loathing or despair, needing lots of professional help often to get to a life in which they can feel at ease in their own skin. * Recent Newsweek cover story "The IVY's Are Dead" & recent US News and World Report "Is College Worth The Cost?" – Provocative and very informative reading!

• **Media – Technology (see attached article on technology and the brain development).** In short we are hard wiring our kids to have short attention spans and to feel more bonded with impersonal electronic devices that rarely disappoint them (well at least for Mac users) than they are towards humans. Just think, when is the last time you had a meal with your kids where they didn't receive and send a text message... of course when is the last time they had a meal with you when you didn't do so either?

• **Problem Solving Orientation** – This is so ubiquitous that rarely do people hear me speak about it without rushing to defend it. As my teacher often says, “Where you put your attention is where you'll get your results”. We are a nation of problem solving junkies who as soon as one is solved, go and seek others. The long term impact of this is that we indeed have more problems than we know what to do with and are endlessly self-absorbed in our labors to solve them. Perhaps the greatest expose I've read on this is James Hillman's provocative work, We've Had A Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World Is Getting Worse. For more on the pervasiveness of this orientation and the perpetually inhibiting impact it has, listen to my audio introduction to the Edge – available for free as a download on my website if it is not attached with this article.

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