

Book Review

A Reflection on Changes in Education from a Veteran Teacher's Perspective

Sarah Douglas
Texas Tech University

Getting Schooled: The Reeducation of an American Teacher by Garret Keizer offers a unique, personal perspective of a teacher reluctantly returning to education as a high school English teacher. His reason for returning was not for the love of education; it was simply necessary for health insurance and family matters. Keizer finds himself working for a principal who was a prior student, and with a new generation of learners different, yet disturbingly similar, to his last teaching stint fourteen years ago. The experiences are described in a raw, unfiltered manner worthy of contemplation.

As the journey depicts experiences of a single academic school year, the chapters are broken down into months, each providing the reader with descriptive and reflective details of the author's mind. The differences observed from his past school environment to the current are disconcerting to the author; even being married to another teacher is not a substitute for knowing what it is to be integrated in the heart of a school. When discussing the vagaries that are encountered in his new situation, Keizer (2014) states that, "it takes courage to reconfigure your view of the world" (p. 143). Reading his thoughts on technology promises to show a true and humorous representation of what must be felt by any who are attempting to catch up with the rapidly changing digital world after being absent for a period. "Technology is no longer just a fast way to transport information," but rather it "has become a participatory medium" in schools (Thomas & Brown, 2011, p. 42). Technology is not a new idea to the current generation of students: "They are comfortable

with technology, and are often more proficient with it than their teachers are” (Jones, Jo, & Martin, 2007, p. 12).

Although not explicitly stated, Keizer’s passion and knowledge of literature directly affects the impact he has on his students throughout the year. His methodology, while at times antiquated, is applicable to the core of effective and quality teaching, because he is a reflective thinker and willing to change or adapt when necessary. According to Dewey, a reflective thinker constantly seeks to find solutions and strives to develop a sense of reflection in their students (Simpson, 2006). Most sections of the book discuss times when the author sought to keep the student interested and engaged in learning. Keizer (2014) describes the paradox of teaching by asserting

that you must reach out to every student with the belief that no student is beyond your reach and that you must, at the same time, hold to the conviction that having served one student is worth the effort of having tried to serve them all. (p. 85)

Regardless of his cynicism when approaching his position as a teacher, Keizer’s dedication is remarkable. From searching for methods that reach students to attending and showing support at school meetings in the district he lives, it cannot be said that he is anything but supportive and caring. Keizer (2014) is even quoted as saying, “I need to be as ready to learn as I am to teach” (p. 124). “Many highly intelligent people have passed through the whole of their education” without discovering their creative abilities (Robinson, 2011, p. 66). Similar to Robinson, Keizer (2014) believes in the need to help “students to discern and develop their talents” (p. 94). Educators should guide and direct students “to develop reflective habits” through examining “student impulses, curiosities, and interests and assist them as they grow into independent thinkers and productive individuals” (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycok, 2005, p. 64). Educators cannot hope to accomplish these goals without adequate preparation. Simpson (2006) stresses, “what the student learns is largely dependent on the teacher’s preparation, alertness, reflection, and dispositions” (p. 71). Keizer (2014) considers “preparedness a matter of social responsibility” (p. 251).

Getting Schooled: The Reeducation of the American Teacher (Keizer, 2014) does not give direct guidance or a list of details on how an educator should teach; however readers are provided with commendable examples, allegories, and metaphors of superb teaching techniques. One such example described shows that students are able to earn credit for their thoughts about a subject being studied, even if it was not part of the original assignment. Keizer (2014) tells his students, “If I can find

something accurate—or, better still, something insightful—in your notes, I'll see that you get credit for that too" (p. 113). Being more concerned with the progress and quality of work and not the manner in which it was gained is an effective approach used in standards based grading models (Marzano & Kendall, 1998). Other thoughts Keizer (2014) has on homework include accepting late work and being available to assist students before, during, or after school.

Standardized testing is the approach being taken nationwide to discern what students know. Eliot Eisner (2002) contends that, "We live at [sic] time that puts a premium on the measurement of outcomes, on the ability to predict them, and on the need to be absolutely clear about what we want to accomplish" (p. 4). Concerns over standardized testing are mentioned throughout Keizer's text, many dealing with the amount of time preparing for them takes from actual learning. Additionally, he (2014) asserts that exams should be used to "instill the hope that mastery is possible" instead of "as if mastery could be ascertained so soon after imparting the material" (Keizer, 2014, p. 159). Keizer's thoughts coincide with Eisner's (2002) view that "Achievement has triumphed over inquiry" (p. 4).

Even though the use of unedited thoughts provides a deep and genuine perspective, there seems to be an almost defeatist view of teaching throughout the book. Contrarily, the experiences described show effective strategies which worked well with the students being taught. Keizer (2014) repeatedly brings attention to being prepared and making studies meaningful as he states, "The problem is not that these kids lack a work ethic; the problem is that some of them see no connection between a work ethic and school" (p. 239). Dewey would agree that the school system "needs to understand the connections between school and community environments" (Simpson, 2006, p. 62). These connections are essential, as "Learning does not happen when the subject is disconnected from the learner's life" (Palmer, 1999, p. 2).

Getting Schooled: The Reeducation of the American Teacher depicts the unvarnished views of education without abashment to self-criticism or faults. "Teaching is taxing, emotionally and physically" (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycock, 2005, p. 30). Many times educators are thought to be perfect, virtuous beings. The perspectives provided by the book allow for an authentic insight into the thoughts of a veteran teacher.

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