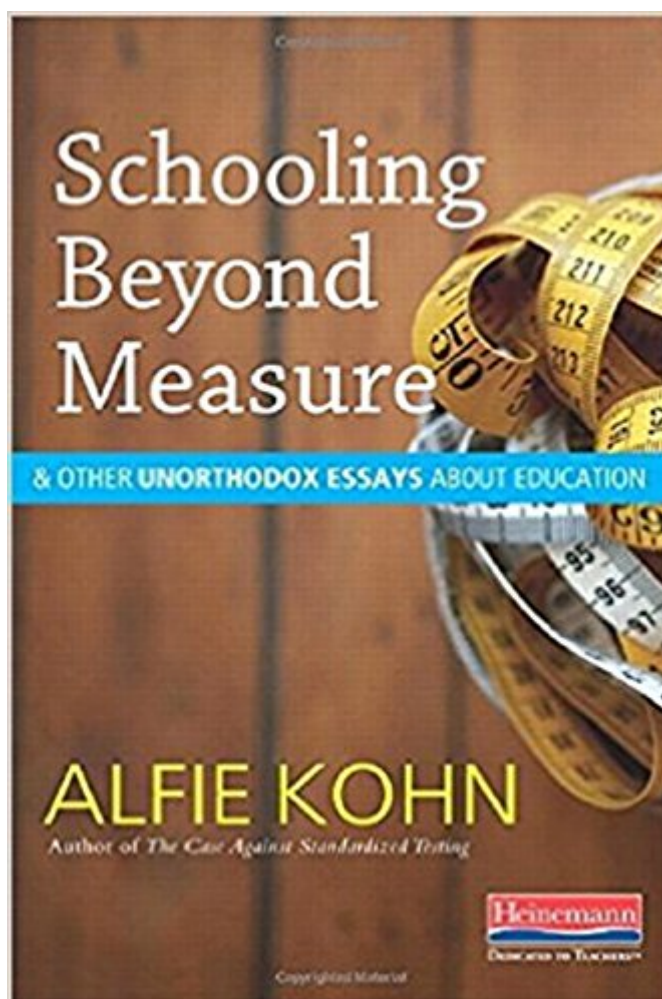


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Schooling Beyond Measure And Other Unorthodox Essays About Education



Synopsis

In this collection of provocative articles and blog posts originally published between 2010 and 2014, Alfie Kohn challenges the conventional wisdom about topics ranging from how low-income children are taught, to whether American schools have really fallen behind those in other countries. Why, he asks, do we assume learning can be reduced to numerical data? What leads us to believe that "standards-based" grading will eliminate the inherent limitations of marks? Or that training students to show more "grit" makes sense if the real trouble is with the tasks they've been given to do? Kohn's analytical style-incisive yet accessible-is brought to bear on big-picture policy issues as well as small-scale classroom interactions. He looks carefully at research about homework, play, the supposed benefits of practice, parent involvement in education, and summer learning loss-discovering in each case that what we've been led to believe doesn't always match what the studies actually say. Kohn challenges us to reconsider the goals that underlie our methods, to explore the often troubling values that inform talk about everything from the disproportionate enthusiasm for STEM subjects to claims made for more "effective" teaching strategies. During these dark days in which teachers are viewed as expendable test-prep technicians, and "global economic competitiveness" eclipses what children need, Kohn calls for us to summon the courage to act on what we already know makes sense. Alfie Kohn writes and speaks widely on human behavior, education, and parenting. The author of thirteen books and scores of articles, he lectures at education conferences and universities as well as to parent groups and corporations. Kohn's criticisms of competition and rewards have been widely discussed and debated, and he has been described in Time magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores."

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Heinemann (May 5, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0325074402

ISBN-13: 978-0325074405

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #185,381 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #95 in Books > Textbooks >

Education > History & Theory #247 inÂ Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Education Theory > History #449 inÂ Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Education Theory > Reform & Policy

Age Range: 5 - 17 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 12

Customer Reviews

Alfie Kohn was recently described by Time magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores." He is the author of 13 books on education and human behavior, including *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, *The Case Against Standardized Testing*, and *The Homework Myth*. A former teacher, Kohn now works with educators across the country and speaks regularly at national conferences. He lives (actually) in Belmont, Mass. and (virtually) at www.alfiekohn.org.

I'm predisposed to like this book because I have read a number of Kohn's essays and blogs online and it's good to have them collected all in one place. Kohn has an easy-to-read and witty writing style. None of these essays is very long, but they all build a cogent argument and pack a punch. I especially appreciate his ability to think beyond sound bites and to question the meaning of the latest education fads. His takedown of the widespread traditional interpretation of the famous "marshmallow test" ("*What Waiting for a Second Marshmallow Doesn't Prove*") is especially incisive. And while there isn't anything particularly new in "*Remember When We Had High Standards? Neither Do I*," there is even less that's new or interesting about the widespread bogus nostalgia for a golden educational era that never was, which he convincingly debunks. As a former classroom teacher himself, Kohn isn't afraid to admit that he's made mistakes (poignantly in "*What We Don't Know About Our Students--and Why*"), and his respectful attitude towards teaching as a profession, and teachers as a group, is refreshing. While his point of view and policy prescriptions may sometimes be viewed as liberal, he is a bipartisan critic of national "school reform" policies, taking both the Obama and Bush administrations to task for an overemphasis on standardized tests and a misunderstanding of what learning is and what good teachers can do. I especially loved the title of the essay called "*Whoever Said There's No Such Thing as a Stupid Question Never Looked Carefully at a Standardized Test*." Unfortunately that memorable title heads one of the weaker essays in the collection. Kohn's analysis of a math question from a Massachusetts state exam is more muddled than the question itself. As far as I can tell, he didn't understand the algorithm in the

problem and got the answer wrong himself. The readers of this essay in "Psychology Today," where it also appeared, make good points about the value of algorithms and mathematical language in the comments section: "Math is abstract, and it is primarily a language. Working fluently with that language, both in communicating and in being communicated to, is one of the primary ends of mathematical education." I am sympathetic to many of the policy suggestions in this book, but sometimes they strike me as just shouting into the wind. One of my favorite of these essays was Chapter 29, "'Ready to Learn' Means Easier to Educate." Its point is that educational institutions, with their endless testing and selective admissions criteria, are effectively excluding those who most need the education they offer. It calls into question the entire purpose of education in our society: is it to improve the performance of students who are struggling--to actually educate people--or merely to select and rubber stamp applicants they think are "ready to succeed"? While I think Kohn's interpretation is correct here, I don't think this essay is going to change much about the admissions industry. A number of essays in this book, from "The Case Against Grades" to "Homework: An Unnecessary Evil," to "Why the Best Teachers Don't Give Tests" share this kind of impractical idealism. And yet. A case against homework is making some small inroads in the culture at large, especially in elementary school. Angela Duckworth, who coined the term "grit," has responded to the critiques with a more nuanced and helpful view of the subject. Prestigious colleges from Reed College to Brown University are implementing unconventional assessment policies similar to those described here. Kohn's last two essays, "Change by Decree" (he is against it) and "Encouraging Courage" (he is for it), are both inspirational and humble. His last sentence of "Change by Decree," while presented in the context of educational policy, could apply to almost any important societal issue: "People don't resist change. They resist being changed." This book provides examples of how education could change for the better, if we choose.

Such a wonderful book. I LOVED it

Wonderful

Excellent!!

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