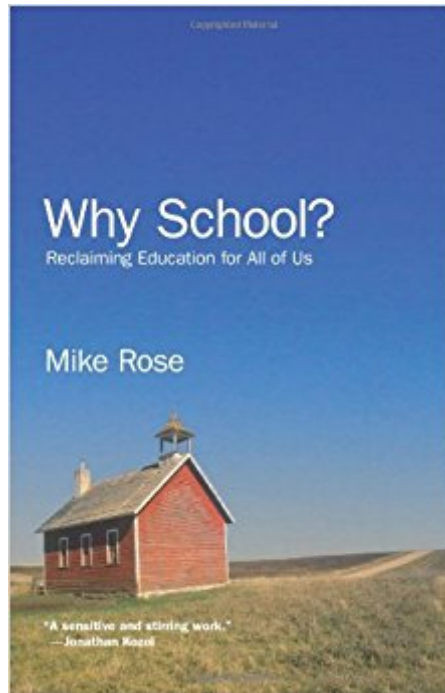




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# Why School? Reclaiming Education For All Of Us



## Synopsis

In the tradition of Jonathan Kozol, this little book is driven by big questions. What does it mean to be educated? What is intelligence? How should we think about intelligence, education, and opportunity in an open society? Why is a commitment to the public sphere central to the way we answer these questions? Drawing on forty years of teaching and research, from primary school to adult education and workplace training, award-winning author Mike Rose reflects on these and other questions related to public schooling in America. He answers them in beautifully written chapters that are both rich in detail—•a first-grader conducting a science experiment, a carpenter solving a problem on the fly, a college student—•s encounter with a story by James Joyce—•and informed by a deep and powerful understanding of history, the psychology of learning, and the politics of education. Rose decries the narrow focus of educational policy in our time: the drumbeat of test scores and economic competition. *Why School?* will be embraced by parents and teachers alike, and readers everywhere will be captivated by Rose—•s eloquent call for a bountiful democratic vision of the purpose of schooling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A beautifully written work . . . [a] moving call for a humane approach to education that accounts for the needs of every child."&#151;Christian Science Monitor

A powerful and timely exploration of this country's public education goals, and how they are put into

practice, by the award-winning author and educator

The reduction of educational aims to the dictates of the national economy is a main theme in Mike Rose's new book *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*. Rose laments economic motives and the standardized testing has overwhelmed all the other aims of public education (p. 166). Rose fully accepts American schooling should prepare (young) people for making a living. But "our national discussion of education" and pedagogical practice "has been dominated by" the aims of economic competitiveness and test scores (p. 4). Besides, parents send their children to school for many other reasons than for merely making a living. There are intellectual, social, civic, ethical, and aesthetic educational aims which have been historically more important than economic outcomes. "Not today" (p. 4). Economic motives and standardized testing dominate the thinking of pedagogy and educational practices. Although the book is specific to the pedagogical and political battles in the U.S., the lessons go far beyond culturally specific circumstances. This rather short book is concerned with the process of learning, the activity of good teaching, and provocatively scrutinizes the social goals and pedagogical aims of education. Rose repeatedly emphasizes historically American children have been sent to school for a variety of reasons (pp. 4-5, 23-4, 34-7, 95, 110-5, 159). There is a long tradition in American public education to promote (Jeffersonian) good citizenship and facilitate the realization of civic duty (pp. 166-7). American public schools have historically supported a moral education (p. 4, p. 165) and a learning process to assist and support personal development (p. 115). Rose argues today we need to think in "comprehensive ways about what we want from our schools and how we judge" and evaluate schools' pedagogical accomplishments and what they contribute to society (p. 148). The "narrow focus on test scores" and economic competitiveness distracts from the proper comprehensive assessment of national public educational aims and needs. What we want from schools and how we judge them is "profoundly affected by [...] our beliefs about intelligence, and by the way we conceive of public responsibility" (p. 7). Rose maintains our educational policy makers "operate with a fairly restricted notion" of intelligence; "one identified with the verbal and quantitative measures of the schoolhouse and the IQ test" (p. 73). This is a mistake, especially in a democratic society. Major philosophical, educational, and cognitive thinkers have long (and recently) argued intelligence is a remarkably dynamic potential (pp. 86, 73). The potential of intelligence is often revealed when we are young, but just as often not fully revealed until adulthood. Quantitative measures and IQ tests are overly static and fail to accurately measure the dynamic potential of intelligence. "Instead of these static measures of attainment, our focus should shift to the dynamics of development" (p. 104). In a

democratic society there is an implicit assumption that intelligence is a dynamic potential. After all the possibility of a democracy necessarily must presume "the capacity of the common person to learn, to think independently, to decide thoughtfully" (p. 85), otherwise a democracy is not obtainable. It is in this context of cognition and intelligence Rose wants to defend the pedagogy of remediation as a highly important mission of higher education (chapters 9, 10 and 11). Nearly every human being has the potential to "catch up with the right intervention" (p. 134), and "[r]emedial programs are necessary if we want to educate a wide sweep of our citizenry" (p. 124) for civic responsibility and sustaining a healthy democracy. Especially illuminating is Rose's chapter on the Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans (re)entering American educational institutions. Many of them are grossly underprepared and/or require psychological, social, and financial programs to adequately address and support their educational needs (p. 141). Unfortunately, educational programs for veteran populations "tend toward single-shot solutions: a few basic skills course, or tutoring, or counseling" (p. 143). Thankfully Congress has recently made a serious commitment to the educational supports and needs of these veterans (p. 140). Programs employing multiple levels of support and integrating "a number of interventions," with intensive psychological, social and financial supports, have been the most successful for American veterans (p. 143). By logical extension, we can imagine analogous intensive supports and multiple interventions which may be quite effective for non-veteran populations. When students lack the proper educational and social supports to help them succeed academically they too often become personally hopeless, academically dismissive, and politically cynical (p. 146). Rose wants to rethink the aims of education and regenerate an environment of personal hope, academic engagement, and political action. Rose has written a passionate defense of public education, without denying the "inadequacies of curriculum and instruction, the rigidity of school structure, or the 'savage inequalities' of funding" of these institutions (p. 150). In concert with the Jeffersonian and Deweyan traditions, Rose believes in spite of the shortcomings, public educational institutions are necessary and essential institutions for a democratic society. Just as important is personal development of each individual (pp. 139-44). The love of learning and fulfillment of self-awareness can occur at anytime in a person's life. Rose offers personal testimony to illustrate the point. From elementary school through high school Rose "accumulated a spotty academic record," enduring many "years of hazy disaffection" toward his schooling and education (p. 34). In college the study of literature broadened his knowledge and interest in the world. His study of literature "fanned out to and fostered a knowledge of history - intellectual and social history particularly - philosophy, and art. [...] History then led to politics and economics [... which in turn led to] a study of psychology [...] to understand human behavior" (pp.

34-5). Rose's study of literature would lead to a deeper self-awareness and love of learning, a deeper understanding of the (social) world and confidence in his personal self-efficacy to engage and impact social reality. Learning to read and write well "gave [Rose] skills to create with and to act on the world" (p. 36). For Rose this personal transformation didn't occur until young adulthood. It was because of the existence of a wide access to higher education he was able to develop his love of learning and achieve a deeper self-awareness from his formal education. Rose's point is there are millions of people who could experience similar personal transformations, but only if we protect public education and extend its access. Rose's book is an elegant and accessible defense of the ideals of public education while at times highly critical of established institutional practices. Undeniably American "schools are bedeviled by a host of ongoing problems, from funding to curricular faddism" (p. 148). Rose calls for "capacious critique" of public education "that encourages both dissent and invention, anger and hope [...], adequate to both the daily joy and daily sorrow of our public schools. And we are in desperate need of rich, detailed images of possibility" (p. 152). Rose's aim to defend and offer hope and promise for public education is a success. Professional educators, parents, and students will find the book engaging, accessible, and realistic. The book will find a multi-partisan audience and promote serious dialogue for understanding just how schools function as "a great theater in which we play out conflicts of the culture" (p. 149). Most importantly the book demonstrates the inadequacy of overwhelming educational aims with economic motives. The book will contribute to reclaiming educational aims from mere economic outcomes and reprioritize the historical roots of public education toward purposes of intellectual, social, civic, ethical, and aesthetic achievement, geared toward personal development, self-awareness, and emotional and spiritual well-being.

Why School is the work of a lifetime. Mike Rose has been an educator for many, many years, and he has researched and written about the state of education for most of them. This text is the product of those years. If you loved *Lives on the Boundary*, this is not that book. It is far more wide-ranging and it is far more political, but Rose's passion for his subject comes off the page. With this book he is starting a conversation that we--as a nation, as individuals, as parents, as educators--need to have in order to overhaul public education. His main concern is the narrowing of the intent of education for exclusively economic ends. Further, he points out that the broad hatred of public education many people have is unfounded and, worse yet, doesn't seem open to argument. Some highlights from the book: his discussion of broad based knowledge as important to every day life as it is for economic gain; valuing the teacher as a professional on par with other professionals (like

doctors and CEOs). Some people might think that a book about the state of public education would be about the least relevant thing they could read, but Rose would say, that's the whole problem. Everyone should care about education. *Why School?* is an inspirational book that will raise points you might not be ready to deal with, but the conversations Rose wants to start could change the road education is on.

Rose is realistic but inspired when he discusses literacy in America. He discusses the issues in the schools today and gives some inspiring thoughts about how to make it better. This is a fast, inspirational read for teachers!

While Mike Rose clearly cares about students, his own and in general, he does not present any solutions to the many issues plaguing American education. He does provoke thought, and tries to provide hopeful optimism to educators in particular. *Why School?* addresses concerns such as remediation, economics, and politics using anecdotes from his long teaching career. Unlike Rose's book *Lives on the Boundary*, *Why School?* raises the questions of why we teach, what we teach, and to what standards we hold out students. Rose reminds the reader of the original purpose of education: to provide a setting for students to develop moral values, a sense of civic responsibility, and intellectual growth. Slightly interesting to educators, those not involved in the education world would likely be bored, or feel disconnected to Rose's words.

Great book!

Such a simple view on how to change ed for the better. A must read for parents, teachers and students

I enjoyed reading the book. I just wish I had paced myself better as I read it. Many good insights within. Recommended for educators to learn from.

Very good book everyone should read

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