

2d. The prisoners cannot neglect their task, nor do it remissly, as all must work equally, in proportion to their weight.

3d. It can be used for every kind of manufactory, to which water, steam, wind or animal power is usually applied, and especially to the grinding of grain, for which every prison is at a great expense.

4th. As the mechanism of a Tread-Mill is not of a complicated nature, the regular employment, which it affords, is not likely to be often suspended, for want of repairs in the machinery, and should the supply of grain, at anytime, fail, it is not necessary, that the labour of the prisoners should be suspended j nor can they be aware of the circumstance; the supply of labour may, therefore be considered as unailing.

5th. It is constant and sufficiently severe; but it is its monotonous steadiness and not its severity, which constitutes its terror, and frequently, breaks down the obstinate spirit.

These juxtapositions are unfair; they're gotchas. They're also relevant. Our tools and services increasingly do things *to us*, not *for* us. And they *certainly* aren't about helping us to do things *with* them. There are few places this is clearer than our children—or more precisely, our students.

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How Children What?

by Alec Resnick

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In 1967, John Holt published *How Children Learn*. In 2013, Paul Tough published *How Children Succeed*.

Holt was following up on the publication of his 1964 book, *How Children Fail*. Beginning in 1952, Holt taught elementary and middle school—first in Colorado, then Boston. For eleven years, Holt kept a journal of his experiences. This journal grew into his first books, *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*. The first explored how children, "used their minds badly." The second explored what it looked like for children to "act as bold, effective learners." Both were grounded in Holt's own, concrete stories and experiences. The fundamental thesis of both is that learners' *motivation* is essential and that because this cannot be forced, we must trust learners, working *with* them and their interests if they are to grow into empowered adults. Semiotically, Holt now parses

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Tough is a journalist who has covered education, child development, and poverty for the past decade. Tough has never taught. After writing about Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone in *Whatever It Takes*, he felt dissatisfied with his understanding of why only some children go on from such programs to succeed. Tough sought out researchers, economists, neuroscientists, psychologists, doctors, and the occasional teacher or administrator to find his answer. The fundamental thesis of *How Children Succeed* is that kids will be more successful in school and more secure in life if we focus on developing their 'non-cognitive skills,' like the ability to persevere or maintain healthy emotional hygiene. Semiotically, Tough parses as a pragmatic journalist uncovering heroic possibilities for education reform.

As snapshots of the 'conversation around education reform,' this juxtaposition highlights two transitions: (1) in focus, a move from "learning" to "success," and (2) in disposition, a move from "craftsmanship" to "scientism." Taken together, these transitions mean *How Children Succeed* emerges as complicit in our society's social and economic stratification.

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information, hey education! [...] Well the PC, I mean Steve Jobs famously, originally, thought that the personal computer was going to be a treadmill for the brain.

And so in the twenty-three years since the creation of the World Wide Web, "a bicycle for the mind" became "a treadmill for the brain."

One helps you get where you want under your own power. Another's used to simulate the natural world and is typically about self-discipline, self-regulation, and self-improvement. One is empowering; one is slimming. One you use with friends because it's fun; the other you use with friends because it *isn't*. One does things *to* you; one does things *for* you.

A mind is something human. A brain is an organ, something biological. We care about brains because they are the seat of our minds. You fall in love with someone's mind. You gamify someone's brain. Minds meet. Brains collide. You do things *with* one. You do things *to* another.

In 1824, when James Hardie wrote about the mechanism underlying the treadmill's efficacy as a punishment, he commented not just on its monotony, but its simplicity and economy and versatility, too:

1st. No skill or time is requisite to learn the working of it.

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In 1990, Steve Jobs said,

I think one of the things that really separates us from the high primates is that we're tool-builders. I read a study that measured the efficiency of locomotion for various species on the planet. The condor used the least energy to move a kilometer. And humans came in with a rather unimpressive showing about a third of the way down the list; it was not too proud of a showing for the crown of creation. So, that didn't look so good. But then somebody at Scientific American had the insight to test the efficiency of locomotion for a man on a bicycle. And a man on a bicycle—or a human on a bicycle—blew the condor away, completely off the top of the charts. And that's what a computer is to me. What a computer is to me is, it's the most remarkable tool that we've ever come up with. And it's the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds.

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From craft to scientism

Holt tells stories. Tough cites studies. Holt talks about the skills and dispositions of individual teachers and students, about tactics and anecdotes and the nitty gritty of a day-to-day schoolteacher. Tough talks about the hippocampus and cognitive behavioral therapy and "the research" which tells us about the correlates of lifetime material security.

How Children Succeed begins by calling out "the cognitive hypothesis"—*i.e.* the notion that it is IQ and the activities associated with high-IQ which matter most. Having set up "the consensus" Tough proceeds, TED style, to promise he will "[overturn] conventional wisdom with something new and mysterious." And with continued TED-flair, Tough tells us about Heckman, a Nobel laureate economist so disconnected from reality that he was floored to learn that a GED is not functionally equivalent to a high school diploma. In the year of our Lord two-thousand-and-ten. Tough goes on to suggest that perhaps culture—or no, something intrinsic to learners, an ineffable go-get-'em-and-stick-with-it-ness—has something to do with it.

This setup is recapitulated at every scale in *How Children Succeed*:

1. Set up a straw man argument about what people "believe" about education

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2. Introduce an expert authority (a Nobel laureate or recent MacArthur grantee) who can slam the brakes on our conventional wisdom
3. Locate hope in the manufactured whiplash between this contrarian result and our intuitions & institutions.
4. Close by swaddling the contrarian pressure in a traditional authority: science. "It's not warm and fuzzy, it's cold, hard science."

Policy rhetoric must be simple—no, that's not right—it must be concise. This constraint of concision is what creates the sense of increasingly superficial acceleration in venues like TED. But this requirement for concision is not simply a matter of medium. Reform efforts of all stripes—and education reform in particular—often fall prey to the implicit demand they *scale*. Either they must work for everyone, or roll out in the next five years, or work regardless of the population involved, or...

Because reform efforts target big problems, because policymaking is the primary logic with which big problems are confronted, and because the knobs and levers that policymaking offers are coarse, the rhetoric surrounding policy cannot admit nuance, because nuance acknowledges and accommodates difference, militating against the *scale* at which your idea can apply.

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creative explorations as a positive development? Not to mention their children probably won't be labeled as 'needing' them. Given that, isn't it possible—likely, even—that the excitement of Tough et al unintentionally accelerates a progression toward an apartheid educational system where everyone goes to "school" but for some, that "school" looks more and more like a re-education camp?

Fundamentally, none of this is Paul Tough's fault—these issues go to the very foundation of the frame of school as a mechanism for righting inequality. Which sounds great. And may even work. But because we think of school as something that happens to an individual, this frame makes it very easy for "School will fix X" to turn into "Those who suffer from X need treatment Y to overcome it." Which can too easily turn into a thinly veiled form of blaming the victim. *How Children Succeed* unwittingly plays accompaniment to this tune, proposing policies and a frame for education which—if taken seriously—will accelerate the already central role school plays in cultivating an underclass in America. And that impulse is understandable—school is *everywhere* and has access to enormous, formative time and experiences [not to mention resources].

But increasingly, we overload our omnipresent social institutions with the responsibility to synthesize an emotionally, intellectually healthy world within the institution. Whether it's wraparound services in school or social medicine in our hospitals, many of our

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- Congressional Budget Office's "Change in Share of Income by Income Percentile"
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Now, consider what a book like *How Children Succeed* does when introduced to this mix. Worry, for a moment, about the various ways that the purest, most generous frame of "non cognitive skills training" might be perverted in this context. Is it possible that we'll end up with rows upon rows of struggling students, preparing for a standardized state test on their Android tablets, overseen by a classroom manager with job security and training two steps above temp labor's, hired in by Amplify, tracked by inBloom, and lining the coffers of a company like News Corp? After every couple hours of Khan Academy and test prep (sorry, those are the same now), they take a break during which the classroom manager and a character coach work together to run programs focusing on emotional control and perseverance whose implicit message is now nothing more than a psychological treadmill.

And in this dystopia—which doesn't feel too far off for districts struggling to simultaneously chase buzzwords and save money—consider what the parallel experience at Exeter or even in just the 85th household income percentile suburb will look and feel like. Do you honestly think folks in those contexts are going to see "character development classes" standing in for academic and

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Tough needs jargon and science to justify the age old common sense, "Get someone to slow down and think about what they are doing." And this common sense is construed as "cognitive behavioral therapy" *retrospectively*—sure, Spiegel is an expert *who's actually done the work sans cognitive behavioral therapy*, but Paul Tough has got a theory about her chess teams' reflective process and he is on it! To be clear, I've nothing against reflection or science or even cognitive behavioral therapy. What I want to highlight is the need to bring every successful, cultural phenomenon under the tent of "Science" (really, scientism) in order to bolster the relevance of those apparently scientific modes and ideas to the design and management of education. So rather than ask how school can become more like Spiegel's award-winning chess team, Tough observes that there are some resonances between cognitive behavioral therapy and the successful chess team *and* between cognitive behavioral therapy and the grit-peddlers.

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Most who sink in the time and energy to research and articulate opinions about education reform—much less design and implement interventions and alternatives—have the best of intentions. Understandably, this means that claims about the potentially oppressive consequences of various policies, rhetoric, and trends get stuck in the craw pretty easily. We respect teachers and care about our schools and are easily shamed by the achievement gaps that mock the very American brand of egalitarianism whose pursuit is so central to our love of public schools.

Despite this, whether it's the Great Society or New Math or charter schools as originally championed by the American Federation of Teachers, there's a long list of reforms which in one way or another, many feel have not only fallen short but been corrupted. Pundits injecting fresh rhetoric into the conversation can and should be attentive to how robust their intended message is to the ebb and flow of pressures and incentives in education.

With that in mind, let's turn to four artifacts. For each, imagine what the world would look and feel like with each of these taken to their extreme:

- Presidio Middle School's "An Algebra Class Uses the iPad"
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Hardie was talking about the treadmill. Down the street from where I work, people pay for that same privilege at Boston Sports Club. The difference is not in the machine, but in the context. It may be worth differentiating the 'grit' necessary to overcome Kafkaesque demands on your attention and the 'grit' necessary to overcome natural adversity or obstacles attendant to goals of your own selection.

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help to answer certain kinds of questions. If you are thinking about a small change — Is it better to paint the walls of the classroom green or white? — you can do a little experiment. You can leave everything else the same and just change the color of the wall and see what happens. Even if you are asking whether it is better to reward success or punish failure, you can do a little experiment. But we cannot decide by such measurements whether we want an open society or a totalitarian one. You cannot do a scientific experiment to decide whether you would like empowered citizens or instructed, disciplined automata. This is not a matter of science; it is something much deeper than that.

Which brings us back to a/the basic question, "What's the point of school?"

From learning to success

Holt focuses on learning as instrumental to self-actualization. Tough focuses on school as instrumental to social and financial security. This distinction is emblematic. Learning is an activity of an individual. School is an institution of mandatory treatment. Holt cares about learning because he sees it as a basic part of any reasonable definition of the good life. Tough cares about school because he sees it as a far-reaching set of levers with which to redress fundamental social and political inequities, mitigating the

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depends on two things and two things alone: the existence of shared narratives and the capacity of such narratives to provide an inspired reason for schooling.

Engineering an underclass

Over the past five years since the 2008 crash, the 'recovery' has been a recovery for corporations first and the wealthy second. Worse, over the past twenty years, there has been steady growth in very low skill (*i.e.* low pay) and very high skill (*i.e.* high pay) jobs (*cf.* Autor et al). Not only has the middle class household been cut out of productivity gains, but structurally, the very possibility of a middle class *job* has become rarer. And these trends are accelerating. And *How Children Succeed* is complicit in the small and emblematic in the large.

Now may be a good time for me to step back and observe that I agree deeply with the one line summary of *How Children Succeed* most might toss off, "Success in life depends more on your personality and your ability to persevere than whether you aced conic sections." Most curricula are aggressively irrelevant and disconnected from anything of interest or use to students. The curricula are useful to the extent they are prerequisites for other curricula whose associated institutions (*i.e.*, college) are highly [socially] capitalized and act as the gatekeeper to many of life's finer stations. The capacity to be curious, to persevere, to bring

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your children, students, or employees, the more likely you [as parent, teacher, manager] are to emphasize creativity, curiosity, and responsibility. The classist undertones of "character development" seem germane to Tough's work—after all, he is advocating that we de-emphasize academics in favor of grit for exactly those who have struggled with traditional education environments. But somehow, he does not imagine this relevant.

And that dearth of moral and intellectual imagination goes to the heart of Tough's vision of school as a managed institution, which by virtue of its size and scope can be used to mitigate the social and economic ills of an inequitable society by making it slightly more profitable or less painful to start life as poor, black, or brown. This cuts directly against the grain of the inspiring notion that public education should not *serve* the public, but *create* a public. And here, it is Postman that said it best,

The question is not, "Does or doesn't public schooling create a public?" The question is, "What kind of public does it create?" A conglomerate of self-indulgent consumers? Angry, soulless, directionless masses? Indifferent, confused citizens? Or a public imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, a respect for learning, and tolerance? The answer to this question has nothing whatever to do with computers, with testing, with teacher accountability, with class size, and with the other details of managing schools. The right answer

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effects of poverty, violence, malnourishment, the Drug War, and so on.

At the very outset of *How Children Succeed*, Tough sets up "the cognitive hypothesis"—again, the notion that it is IQ and the activities associated with high-IQ which matter—and knocks it down. But there is a total absence of discussion of how actual learning and teaching happen throughout his book. In its stead, there is a focus on the personality traits and disposition of character which best serve the poor and dispossessed and what types of institutions can inculcate them.

This represents a tremendous narrowing of scope and ambition when it comes to the historical mandate of a public—much less liberal—education. But school is no stranger to that narrowing. In 1841, Homer Bartlett wrote in response to a query from Horace Mann ("father of the U.S. public school system"),

I have never considered mere knowledge, valuable as it is in itself to the laborer, as the only advantage derived from a good Common School education. I have uniformly found the better educated as a class possessing a higher and better state of morals, more orderly and respectful in their deportment, and more ready to comply with the wholesome and necessary regulations of an establishment. And in times of agitation, on account of some changes in regulations or wages, I have always looked to the most intelligent, best educated and the

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most moral for support, and have seldom been disappointed...But the ignorant and uneducated I have generally found the most turbulent and troublesome, acting under the impulse of excited passion and jealousy.

The former appear to have an interest in sustaining good order, while the latter seem roe reckless of consequences. And, to my mind, all this is perfectly natural. The better educated have more and stronger attachments binding them to the place where they are. They are generally neater, as I have before said, in their persons, dress, and houses; surrounded with more comforts, with fewer of "the ills which flesh is heir to." In short, I have found the educated, as a class, more cheerful and contented,— devoting a portion of their leisure time to reading and intellectual pursuits, more with their families, and less in scenes of dissipation.

The good effect of all this is seen in the more orderly and comfortable appearance of the whole household, but nowhere more strikingly than in the children. A mother who has had a good common-school education will rarely suffer her children to grow up in ignorance.

As I have said, this class of persons is more quiet, more orderly, and, I may add, more regular in their attendance upon public worship, and more punctual in the performance of all their duties.

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Even at the birth of public education, school was to be primarily concerned with the formation of social and emotional habits. Incredibly, Tough not only freely acknowledges this, but goes on to cite one of the classics establishing that historical consensus: Bowles & Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*. When I saw that, I thought, "Oh thank goodness! Now we'll get a mature handling of at least the counterpoint: that maybe our schools shouldn't be preoccupied with creating a gritty underclass."

Tough then spends all of one page summarizing the argument, acknowledges that this social engineering function of school is, "a resounding demonstration of the importance of character to school success," and then proceeds to elide any acknowledgement of political or moral dimensions to the situation. There's no sign Tough understands Bowles & Gintis to represent a profound obstacle to his framing and thesis or to the roll-out of 'character education' and its ilk. Without exaggeration, the entire issue is laid to rest with, "And when it comes to self-control, Marxist economists are not the only people who are skeptical of its value." From there, Tough proceeds to talk about academics who worry that "self control" can descend into "compulsive restraint."

The near-miss is breathtaking. Consider just one facet of the sociological line of inquiry Bowles & Gintis have come to represent: the poorer you are, the more likely you are to emphasize "good manners, neatness, honesty, and obedience." The wealthier

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