

Why Do Schools Shut Parents Out of the Classroom?

When I was younger, I heard that a sign of a good music teacher was an instructor who welcomed parents to sit in on a child's lesson. Recognizing the value of this advice, I incorporated it into my own private studio when I began teaching several years later. Sure, it was a bit awkward at times, but in general, it paid off for all involved – particularly in the instance where I laid down the law, student threw tantrum on floor, and observing parent took my part with a vengeance. Good times.

Unfortunately, not all educational venues view parental observation as a good thing. Jay Matthews wonders why in today's [Washington Post](#):

“When I am about to go I want to tell my kids and grandkids how much I enjoyed watching them in action – talking, writing, building, playing. It helped me understand the essence and individuality of their lives.

*But I have relatively few memories of them in school. **Our education system does little to encourage parent observations.** The few times I was allowed to watch my children in class taught me things and left vivid recollections. I wonder why schools don't try harder to make that happen.*

Many educators have the view that parents can be nuisances and their school contacts should be limited. Usually there is just one back-to-school night a year. Parents sitting and watching in the back of a classroom doesn't fit ordinary school culture.”

Matthews goes on to explain that some schools even behave as

though an observing parent is a violation of the privacy of others in the classroom.

Unfortunately, the attempt to use the school system to separate the child from the parent is not a new one. And as former teacher John Taylor Gatto explains in [*Dumbing Us Down*](#), such a policy may be one of the biggest hindrances to a better education system:

“But no large-scale reform is ever going to work to repair our damaged children and our damaged society until we force open the idea of ‘school’ to include family as the main engine of education. If we use schooling to break children away from parents – and make no mistake, that has been the central function of schools since John Cotton announced it as the purpose of the Bay Colony schools in 1650 and Horace Mann announced it as the purpose of Massachusetts schools in 1850 – we’re going to continue to have the horror show we have right now.

The ‘Curriculum of Family’ is at the heart of any good life. We’ve gotten away from that curriculum – it’s time to return to it. The way to sanity in education is for our schools to take the lead in releasing the stranglehold of institutions on family life, to promote during schooltime confluences of parent and child that will strengthen family bonds.”

Is Gatto on to something? If the education system really has the child’s best interests at heart, then why wouldn’t it welcome the observation of those who gave him life and want to see him succeed and flourish in life more than anyone else?

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