

# 3 Back to School Thoughts from G.K. Chesterton

Every year, the approach of fall signals to children and parents that it's time to gear up and begin the cycle of packing lunches, picking out clothes, racing to the bus stop, and coming home at night with armloads of books and homework once again.

But while parents and children across America know this drill well, there are several things about school that they may have never realized. These things are delineated by the famous author G.K. Chesterton in his book, [\*What's Wrong with the World\*](#), and include the following:

## 1. The Classroom is Ineffective for Learning

As Chesterton explains, the public generally believes that the best way to get kids learning is to get them in school under the influence of a good teacher and good books. Nothing could be further from the truth, explains Chesterton, for the quickest way to learn and understand comes through experience:

*Without going to school at all, the gutter-boy would be educated. Without going to school at all, he would be over-educated. The real object of our schools should be not so much to suggest complexity as solely to restore simplicity. ... The truant is being taught all day. If the children do not look at the large letters in the spelling-book, they need only walk outside and look at the large letters on the poster. If they do not care for the colored maps provided by the school, they can gape at the colored maps provided by the Daily Mail. ... If they cannot learn enough about law and citizenship to please the teacher, they learn enough about them to avoid the policeman. If they will not learn history forwards from the right end in the history books, they will*

*learn it backwards from the wrong end in the party newspapers.*

## **2. Parents Have No Place in a Classroom**

A good parent is often defined by the measure in which he is involved in his child's life. The parent who wants to be involved in his child's schooling may be externally tolerated, but internally, his thoughts and input will be neatly sidestepped:

*There is one thing at least of which there is never so much as a whisper inside the popular schools; and that is the opinion of the people. The only persons who seem to have nothing to do with the education of the children are the parents... In the lower classes the school master does not work for the parent, but against the parent. Modern education means handing down the customs of the minority, and rooting out the customs of the majority.*

## **3. True Education is not Valueless**

Modern day America has come to value anything and everything that is relative in nature. As such, the idea that educators be careful not to impose their values on the children in their classroom has become of utmost importance.

According to Chesterton, however, such an ideal is utterly impossible:

*It is quaint that people talk of separating dogma from education. Dogma is actually the only thing that cannot be separated from education. It is education. A teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching.*

Given this, any parent who sends his child to a school or teacher which does not share his values must be prepared for

the likelihood that he will eventually be at odds with his child's values as well.

Chesterton's words certainly don't mix well with current popular opinion... but do they have a ring of truth? Are today's schools, as organized, set up to exclude parents and teach dogmatic principles rather than the 3 Rs?

[Image Credit: U.S. Air Force [photo](#) by Senior Airman Rose Gudex]