In Praise of American Educators: And How They Can Become Even Better

Richard DuFour
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This impassioned, authoritative work offers practical solutions for improving American schools and teachers.

Former teacher, principal, and school superintendent Richard DuFour, who works as an educational consultant, is uniquely qualified to write about American education. Claiming that “teaching has become America’s most embattled profession,” DuFour demonstrates that educators have come under unfair attack. In his book, In Praise of American Educators, he exposes what he considers to be “the phony crisis” in American schools.

The book cites record-setting high school graduation rates, steadily improving test scores, and high parent satisfaction in service of the argument that teachers have been unfairly criticized. At the same time, it acknowledges that public schools must be improved, and much of the book imparts ideas for how improvement can occur.

DuFour employs the intriguing technique of directly comparing two of the highest-performing countries in education, Singapore and Finland, to the United States. This comparison yields several compelling observations, not the least of which is that teachers in these other countries are far more respected than those in the United States. The text also presents the pay scale for teachers in the United States as problematic: “It is unlikely that we will attract the top high school graduates to teaching if they have to assume a $29,000 debt for a position that pays 68 percent of the average salary of college graduates in America.”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book is its advocacy of the “Professional Learning Community” (PLC) process, which it presents as the future of American education. In convincing fashion, DuFour lays out numerous reasons why a learning-focused culture is imperative and discusses how, exactly, to build a PLC school system. This discussion, which constitutes a major portion of the book, is fascinating because it demonstrates how engaging teachers in both curriculum formulation and educational assessment can create a beneficial collaborative environment. DuFour’s compelling support of the PLC process is a high point of the work.

In Praise of American Educators has an authoritative tone that befits its author’s impressive credentials. So, too, does it indicate a passion for educational excellence and express keen admiration for teachers. Still, DuFour is realistic in his expectations; while he strongly encourages teachers to change their methods, he fully admits that it will take fundamental modifications to the current educational system, as well as bold initiatives in individual schools, to make change happen.

This is a tightly organized and well written text. Its design includes numerous sidebars and subheads to facilitate reading. The cover of the book is simple and attractive.

Source: https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/in-praise-of-american-educators/
Throughout *In Praise of American Educators*, DuFour exudes optimism, yet he recognizes that his PLC-oriented approach will require substantial change across school systems. Still, the author’s argument is compelling. Not only is his enthusiasm for change infectious, his bold recommendations are backed up by research and facts. This is a success-oriented book that educational professionals and policymakers alike should take to heart.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (February 18, 2016)

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