Clarion Review

Education

It Simply Must Be Said: A View of American Public Education from the Trenches of Teaching

Hank Warren
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Despite the “No Child Left Behind” Act, American students continue to falter, according to many educators, administrators, and politicians. At its heart, the problem is generally viewed as one that must involve educational reform—but the big question seems to be: Exactly what should reform entail?

Hank Warren, who has been a teacher for more than three decades, has some pretty firm views on educational reform—and for the most part, he thinks it must start by listening to what teachers have to say.

In this engaging work, Warren conveys a sense of outrage over the basic fact that teachers have “absolutely no control over the abundance of outside forces that so powerfully influence all that occurs in the classroom.” He is talking about such things as legislation that affects teachers and administrative policies that have little to do with teaching students. In fact, a good portion of this book consists of Warren’s rants against silly rules, woeful classroom conditions, and inept principals.

Warren says, however, that his real goal in writing this book is “to initiate thoughtful dialogue which hopefully will result in truly meaningful improvements to the educational process.” But the author isn’t afraid to assail conventional wisdom, either.

The author rails against what he perceives to be ineptitude and injustices, but he also makes some very specific and, some might say, radical recommendations for improving our educational system—among them: reduce class sizes to a maximum of ten students; do away with grade leveling and allow each child to move at his or her own pace; develop a "comprehensive, broad-based" standard of evaluation that eliminates letter grades and substitutes evaluative tools in combination with standardized and aptitude testing.

Warren also addresses the subject of parenting, which he calls "the most important job in the world," and the way it influences a child's learning in school. He points out that, for parents, "there is no training or certification. Therefore, wouldn't it be in the best interest of their children for parents to work cooperatively and respectfully with highly trained teachers?" Too often this is simply not the case, writes Warren. On the contrary, he often sees parents assailing teachers for their children's inability to learn, while administrators stand silently by, tacitly supporting the parents.

Mixed with the serious messages in Warren's book is, thankfully, an acerbic wit that serves him well as he relates his experiences and observations. In fact, parts of the book are laugh-out-loud funny.

Clearly, Warren is a dedicated professional who has given a lot of thought to the problems of the modern-day American classroom. His is a voice that has value in the national debate on the quality and progress of education. Warren is a teacher who deserves to be heard.

Barry Silverstein