



Unfettered: A Philosophy of Education

James B. Barlow, Anil B. Naik

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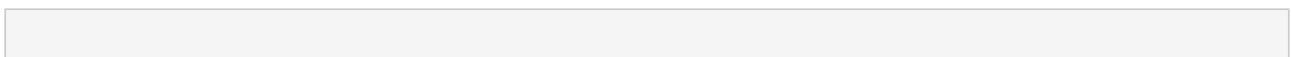
Just because there are problems today in education doesn't mean that we're stuck. There is so much potential. We foresee a place where students not only acquire academic knowledge, but also learn how to be in the world. It can be a positive fear-free environment in which young people can learn to thrive in changing times—where students are given the ability to seek out new challenges and create new experiences and be encouraged to do so. In this school, educators teach creativity and critical thinking, while cultivating self-discipline, self-knowledge, and freedom. Young people can leave this American institution open-minded and knowing the joys of cooperation, with a love of curiosity and learning, and aware of the world and their place in it. They can be unintimidated, unfettered and flexible in the years ahead. Our educational philosophy is that all students want to learn and can be taught.

This book is not an operational manual, full of research and detailed step-by-step guides. This is a philosophical look at what our schools are about, what they should be about, and the practical steps we can take to move it along. What drives our beliefs and structures our ideas about schools are our own experiences in them. We thought about many of those big questions: What is an ideal society? What is possible? What can be taught? What is innate? What is the ultimate goal of an individual? Of a society? We found inspiration in the philosophies of many great minds before us and we tried to place our understanding of their ideas within the context of the modern American school. We believe that to do fundamental change educators must examine their own motivations, ideals, and philosophy, as well as those of their school. Improving education will take more than finding little tricks for getting through the daily grind a little easier—it will require looking at what educators and students are grinding toward and why.

We do not believe that our book is anything more than a voice. Although suggestions for school reform should certainly come from many sources including educational researchers, parents, community members, administrators, teachers, and all students, both successful and struggling, there should be more emphasis on ideas coming from our teachers and students. They are the ones in the trenches. They know most clearly what goes on in the classroom and how school affects the lives of our young people.

We are not academics or researchers, just two friends, a retired educator with over forty years of teaching experience and his former student. We are over fifty years apart in age and come from different family backgrounds yet we both care deeply about education. Over the years, as we sat in restaurants over breakfast or in cafés over coffee, an inspired exchange occurred. We challenged each other on almost every aspect of our educational philosophy. We shared our own personal experiences as a teacher and a student and we reflected on what we liked and what could have been better. We inquired and listened, gave and took. We found so much to agree on. We found so much to be hopeful about.

As teachers talk to each other and to their students about what is going on in our schools, we would love more students to take it upon themselves to share their beliefs about what makes a good education and a positive educational environment. By interacting and sharing, we can learn together. We hope that in reading about our values and beliefs, you will think more about your own and take action where your heart leads you.



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Kari Annis:

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