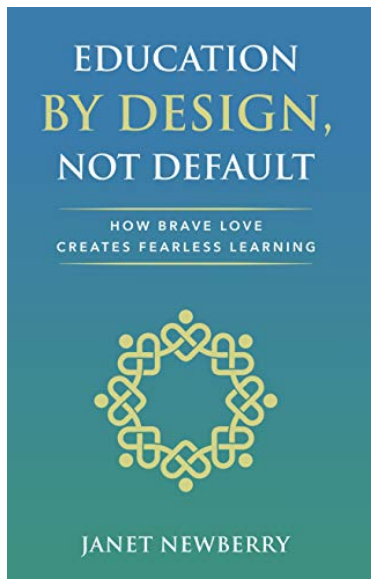


Saplings Parenting & Home Schooling

Book Review

Education by Design Not Default

Janet Newberry



Few can deny that there is a crisis in our schools and among our young people. Schools have all too often become mills of competition, stress, and meaninglessness. Greater emphasis is put on test scores and meeting national standards than on nurturing children to learn, grow, and mature. The result is often children defined by entitlement, mental health problems, and even suicide. None of us wants this, but what is the solution?

My friend, [Janet Newberry](#), offers a solution in her new book [Education by Design, Not Default: How Brave Love Creates Fearless Learning](#). She suggests that we need education by design, not by default. In other words, we can't keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. If we want our children to mature well and learn well, we need to be deliberate in doing education differently.

This book is rich in ideas. Too many to mention here. But here are some of my favorites.

Transformational vs. transactional relationships

She stresses *transformational* rather than *transactional* relationships. Transactional interactions are business as usual today. If you do well, you will get... a good grade, a reward, a privilege. If you do poorly you will be shamed. And by the way, you need to do this on your own. Don't look at another child's paper. Don't ask for help. Don't help someone else. The result is competition, shame, and fear. Transformational relationships see the individual value of the child, liberally applying love. Learning is more important than test scores. Developing confidence is more important than what we call achievement. Working cooperatively with adults or other students is more important than test scores. Newberry says, "Children don't have an inherent need to perform. We teach them that."

She identifies cortisol as a hormone. Living in toxic stress, children experience learning problems and anxiety disorders, addictions and depression—and eventually physical illnesses. And when fear is the key ingredient in our daily fuel, maturity stalls—by design. Cortisol hijacks maturity.

Struggle

She encourages allowing children to *struggle* well. At school, we behave as if struggle is unexpected, a cause for alarm, and a sign of a disorder instead of a sign of growth. We label children as being "ahead" or "behind" when the reality is they are where they are. They mature as they experience struggle, protected from fear and shame. This is the design for childhood.

Struggle has become synonymous as offensive, torturous, to-be-avoided-at-all-costs. If struggle is viewed as an enemy of learning, we have missed the point entirely. If we see struggle as one of life's great negatives, we'll call off marriages, pacify ourselves with activities, and self-medicate our pain. We'll let the fear of struggle push us to distractions that neither solve the struggle or equip us to face it. We'll let toxic relationships fester and hamstring our efforts to grow. Perhaps that's why we believe "adulthood" is bad. We believe growing up is something to be avoided, if at all possible.

Adolescence

Thus we have *adolescence*, which is characterized by immaturity. It's the fruit of a childhood lived in the lies of default. "Prior to the 20th century, there is no record of the word 'adolescence.' Puberty and adolescence are not synonyms. Puberty is a physical stage of development—designed to be experienced with the maturity of a young adult, not an adolescent. Adolescence is a delay in natural development. Stagnation attracts lies. Historically, we began to believe the lies—about ourselves, about our children, about childhood, and about struggle. We forgot that childhood is a season of natural struggle—because it is a season of learning and growing."

There is so much more in this book. For parents, teachers, grandparents. If each of us were to apply the "education by design" principles in this book to the children in our lives, what would our nation look like? Could we have a nation of well-educated adults, secure in their identity? Let's try.

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