

KIRKUS REVIEWS

LOVING LEARNING

How Progressive Education Can Save America's Schools

Author: Tom Little

Author: Katherine Ellison

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One of the leaders of the progressive education movement reflects on ways to improve more than just standardized test scores. The urgency of this book comes from two directions. The first, most obvious direction is the need for change in our American education system; every semester brings more news of disinterested students and harried teachers struggling to make a difference while guarding their backs against the threat of termination if the test scores don't add up. The second direction is Little's personal fight; diagnosed with bone cancer in the summer of 2013, he felt a new urgency to finish writing what he'd learned. The author died earlier this year, leaving behind his legacy of work at Park Day School in California and in this book, which examines successes and challenges at that school and many others like it. Little traveled around the country, visiting "progressive schools," a loose moniker for schools that structure lessons and the direction of learning based on where the interests of the students take them. Emphasizing critical thinking, open communication and collaboration, and hands-on learning, the model works to prepare students to leave school capable of self-directed learning. With the assistance of Pulitzer Prize winner Ellison, Little explores the different movements forming to protest the government-driven "testing mania," noting that corporate interests have lobbied furiously to convince legislators that using standardized tests to measure student achievement and teacher efficacy has in fact hampered both. Little also writes about the accountability and rigor that critics claim progressive schools lack. When we talk about the ways children learn, it is accepted wisdom that different people learn in different ways, but with standardized testing, we're looking at one small piece of their educations and extrapolating too far. Little's enthusiasm and passion for the potential of progressive schools burn on every page and offers hope for a better way forward.