



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on August 27, 2012

## On Teaching and Tutoring

There is a world of difference between classroom teaching and one-on-one tutoring. I've experienced both and know the difference. Classroom teaching is more a job of mob management, endless record keeping, mandated testing, and following government instructions rather than actual teaching. A room full of rambunctious children out to defy you can turn teaching into a game with winners and losers. Frustration is the main emotion experienced by classroom teachers. Besides, most of today's teachers have been badly prepared by their colleges of education. Which is why they are so poor at teaching the basics and why test scores continue to reflect the lack of genuine learning that takes place in too many of today's public schools.



One-on-one tutoring is an entirely different kind of experience in which the minds of both the tutor and the student are engaged in a wonderfully intense brain-to-brain exchange called teaching and learning. The tutor has been engaged by the student's parents for a reason: to teach what the student has to know, to expand that student's mind with mental skills that are necessary for survival in our high-tech civilization.

Much of tutoring is involved in helping a student get rid of bad habits and inculcating good ones. The public schools have created functional illiterates by the millions, but few of them ever engage a tutor to undo what the government school has done to them. I have several principles which I apply to the complex job of teaching: Never teach anything that later has to be untaught, and never let a student develop a bad habit. Our public schools do both. The students I've tutored have had to unlearn what they were taught, and I have attempted with great difficulty to help a student get rid of a bad habit, which his public school teachers permitted him to develop.

Few teachers write about the glories of classroom teaching. But I recently came across a book, *What Teachers Make: In Praise of the Greatest Job in the World*, by Taylor Mali. I wonder how many public school teachers would actually agree with him. The jacket copy reads:

Teacher turned teacher's advocate, Taylor Mali inspired millions with his original poem "What Teachers Make," a passionate and unforgettable response to a rich man at a dinner party who sneeringly asked him what teachers make. Mali's sharp, funny, perceptive look at life in the classroom pays tribute to the joys of teaching and explains why teachers are so vital to our society.

Taylor Mali spent nine years in the classroom teaching everything from English and history to math and SAT test preparation. A vocal advocate for teachers and the nobility of teaching, he speaks around the world about teaching. He has a goal of creating a thousand new teachers with his New Teacher Project through the power of "poetry, persuasion, and perseverance."



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And so, Taylor Mali is not your typical public school teacher. In fact, he's something of a teacher-rock star. His YouTube poem-reading performance has been seen by over four million viewers.

A 10th-generation native of New York City, Taylor graduated in 1983 from Manhattan's elitist [Collegiate School](#), a private school for boys. He got a B.A. in English from [Bowdoin College](#) in 1987 and an M.A. in English and Creative Writing from [Kansas State University](#) in 1993. He also studied drama with the Royal Shakespeare Academy at Oxford. His mother was a children's book author, his father vice president of Henry W.T. Mali & Co., manufacturers of pool table coverings. He is the great-great-grandson of [John Taylor Johnston](#), founding president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

By the way, the Collegiate School has an endowment of \$61.7 million and a yearly tuition fee of \$39,400. And what do parents get for their money?

Collegiate School bundles its fees into one, all-inclusive tuition charge. With the exception of athletic clothing and Advanced Placement examinations, all books, supplies, and class overnight trips are included in this single billing. Also included are lunch, musical instrument rental, student-accident insurance, and tuition-refund insurance for early withdrawal or dismissal.

While Mali has had some experience teaching in the public schools, he prefers the private school. He writes in a poem:

I always said I liked teaching in a private school  
Because I could talk about God  
And not be breaking the law.  
And I sure talk about God a lot.  
Yes, in history, of course, that's easy:  
Even the Egyptian Pyramid Project  
Is essentially a spiritual exercise.  
But how can you teach math and not believe in God?

What law says you can't talk about God in a public school? I've never heard of such a law. I've only heard of atheists getting judges to ban talk about God in the public schools. But that is not a law; that's a politically-correct judgment without any constitutional merit whatsoever. Teachers don't talk about God in public schools not because there is a law against it but because the school is put under the gun by a gang of atheists who are totalitarians at heart. If the atheists are correct, then you can't read the Declaration of Independence in the public schools. You can't read the prayers our presidents have uttered at their inaugural ceremonies. You can't talk about America's great religious heritage. In other words, you cannot really teach history.

What Taylor Mali's book lacks is any sense of moral indignation concerning the censorship of speech and ideas that the atheists impose on American teachers. But private school teachers tend to be silent about the faults of the public schools. The National Association of Independent Schools makes it a point not to criticize the public schools. They are none of the NAIS's business. But what that does is force Taylor Mali to look at American education with rose-colored glasses.

In 2011 there were approximately 3.3 million full-time teachers in the public schools and 0.4 million in



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the private schools. Mali is obviously writing for all teachers, but he must know in his heart that the teachers in the public schools must deal with shootings, massacres, condom distribution, reading failure, student depression, teen suicide, drug addiction, and more. As he was learning to teach, he made the following astute observation:

I started substitute teaching because I wanted to teach younger students. I wanted to see if I could make more of an impact in students' lives if I got them into my class earlier, before they had learned bad habits. But the younger the students I taught — eventually worked my way down to sixth grade — the more I realized that the most important work to be done in education is with the youngest possible kids, the ones in primary school and pre-primary.

From what I understand, the evidence is overwhelming: when children have access to quality pre-primary education, the advantage they get is so great that their peers who were not as fortunate will never catch up. Never. Even if I had been the greatest teacher in the history of the world, by the time a student reached my sixth-grade class, the extent to which he or she could progress intellectually had been almost entirely determined nearly ten years earlier. No wonder teachers will never be able to make up for the work that parents have failed to do.

That's where Taylor Mali reveals his total ignorance. Parents naïvely put their children in public pre-school and primary school because they expect the educators to teach their kids to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. But when the educators, with their perverse programs, actually dumb-down the kids, it's not the parents' fault. It's the fault of a perverse system calculated to deliberately injure a child's developing brain. That in itself is a criminal act.

I doubt that Mali has read any books critical of Progressive education. He certainly has not read mine. Thus he writes from ignorance. His private school education gave him no real idea of what goes on in today's public school classrooms. It provided him with a benign and stimulating experience that colored his view of the teaching profession.

He cites the various teachers he had at the Collegiate school and at Kansas State University who had a positive influence on his life. Even I, as a public schooler, had such teachers back in the 1930s and '40s. My first grade teacher, Miss Sullivan, taught me to read with phonics. Thus, I became a highly proficient reader. My third grade teacher, Miss Bender, introduced us to the beauties of classical music in her Music Appreciation class. My French teacher in junior high school, Mrs. Strongin, inculcated a love of the French language and culture that expanded my cultural horizons. And my Architectural Drawing teacher at Stuyvesant High School, Dr. Greene, encouraged me to become a writer.

They are now all gone, but I remember them with great fondness and gratitude. They were dedicated to their students, and my immigrant parents could not have given me what they did. But my immigrant parents also gave me what the schools could not give: a religious legacy of 5,000 years. Of course, all of that took place before teachers were unionized and politicized and misled by leaders and administrators driven by an obsession with power. That was before the Progressives took over the schools and set them on a course of dumbing them down. No doubt, there are still some good teachers in these schools who manage to provide some of their students with positive values. But the school system itself has been so infected with the curses of atheistic hatred of God, that much of that hatred must rub off on the students.

It is almost impossible to become a good, innovative teacher in today's public schools. The system is controlled by unionized atheist totalitarians who violate both a teacher's and a student's freedom of



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speech and freedom of religion. The schools are ruled by politically correct edicts dedicated to the Progressive program of dumbing down the nation. So far, no federally funded program has been able to change anything. In fact, federal funds simply give the atheist totalitarians more money with which to continue their perverse programs and, as usual, with federal money comes federal control.

(To be continued.)



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