



MUGAMORE

*Succeeding without Labels —
Lessons for Educators*

Dr. Jonathan T. Jefferson

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This book was developed to compare the real life educational experiences of an average child during the last generation in which the United States led the world in education to a real child's experiences today (when the United States is no longer in the top 20). The practice of labeling students with a disability has reached the status of a dangerous standard practice. Increasing demands for educational accountability will lead to more students being labeled and left behind. Written from a unique in-depth child's point-of-view, this book is designed to trigger a paradigm shift from automatically labeling children to patiently allowing them to grow into themselves. The author compares common disabilities chapter-by-chapter in sync with the child's intentions (or lack thereof). This sharing of the educational lives of two children, coupled with peer reviewed literature and research, provides powerful motivation for change.

Mugamore Details

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From Reader Review Mugamore for online ebook

Garrett Zecker says

In Mugamore, Dr. Jefferson has lifted the curtain on the incredibly complicated failings, misadventures, misdiagnoses, and terribly directed business oversight of the new quantitative educational system for both educators and the general public. Unlike a great deal of obfuscation and acronym that cripples many of the industry texts, Jefferson presents information in an unbiased and direct way, while using peer-reviewed sources presenting educational data that seems to me to have been largely ignored by policymakers and educational leadership in the United States, further adding to a system that is crippling students and educators under the guise of making everything better.

One of my favorite parts of the book was interestingly also one of my biggest gripes with it.

Jefferson presents a lot of information in a allegorical and anecdotal manner throughout the text, presenting several characters who tell a story beside the data being presented. This presents real world applications that seem to walk through the last forty years of events and educational decision making leading us to where we are today. It presents some of the ways education was failing in 70s and 80s, but then counterbalances it with the variety of surprisingly different failures that are happening today. The book does this with an engaging narrative that is touching, shocking, and real, and then these chapters are followed or preceded with the topics about educational policy most directly related to the thematic elements of the narrative.

As much as I liked the narrative portions, I also didn't like it because it was clear throughout the book that the author had some specific investment in the characters of Mugamore, Taylor, and Dr. Bixby. It turns out that we learn he does have direct investment, but that personal investment may have affected the structure of the narrative in terms of the creative writing aspect of the story in several moments when I was confused about who I was reading about. Furthermore, in my opinion there were some poor transitions between the two stories and the academic portions as well. Both of these things may have been a little easier to understand if there was clarity on the pseudonymous characters from the beginning. One final thing is that the weight of the anecdotal aspects might be the only thing keeping this book from being an industry tool that it could easily have become - and I wonder if it could with a little more balance and tweaking of the research portions (although, I am sure that the accessibility of this work to the general public might also be an important selling point to the author and the publishers - and should be commended as well!)

In brief, Mugamore is an excellent book about educational policy and the effects of a world constantly at odds with wanting students to succeed by focusing on the wrong things. While Jefferson doesn't entirely provide any answers, his study on the topics over the generations and the various effects on three distinct people is an inspirational approach to an industry oversaturated with ineffective literature that can be enjoyed in one sitting by a parent, administrator, education professor, and everyone in between.

Michelle Lofton says

My initial reaction to the cover of this book was of immediate dislike. It features a Black boy with ADD/ADHD, LD/OCD labels across his face. I thought, "Here we go again..." and did not feel compelled to want to read this book, but then I read the entire title of the book, Mugamore: Learning without Labels—Lessons for Educators, and I was intrigued.

As a homeschooling parent most educational theory books draw my attention. I want to know what is going on in and around education today. I have read extensively and I am usually underwhelmed by new books because I find that they are just the same old information with a new cover and a slightly different voice. Skimming through the chapter titles, I wasn't expecting to be wowed or to gain much new insight from Dr. Jefferson's book. However, Dr. Jefferson draws attention to the problems facing today's educational system by juxtaposing American schools in the 21st century to their late 19th century counterparts. It is clear that Dr. Jefferson believes that today's schools have declined since the 80s and have lost their focus on educating the whole child in lieu of preparing them for standardized tests. He is quick to surmise that today's educational model is to slap labels on children, especially boys, and place them in special education classes.

The first half of this nonfiction book follows Mugamore, highlighting his experiences within the American education system in the mid-70s and early 80s. Mugamore was a child living in the inner-city who ran away from school in second grade, was retained in third grade but overcame these obstacles to become student body vice president in sixth grade. Although not wealthy, Mugamore is a product of a nuclear family with both a father and mother in the home and siblings. His summers are spent on a family farm in the country where Mugamore and his siblings are given the freedom to explore and to just "be kids."

In the second half of the book, Dr. Jefferson introduces us to Taylor, a young man born to a cocaine-addicted mother. Taylor was adopted twice, first by a foster mother who eventually terminates her parental rights, and again at the age of 14 by a school administrator. Taylor spends his childhood bouncing around between residential treatment facilities and group homes. His childhood is vastly different than Mugamore's. Therefore, it is difficult for readers to draw accurate comparisons between the educational experiences of the two boys as they are not on an equal playing field. While the first half of the book, Mugamore's story, was compelling, Taylor's story was a more difficult read. There were pages of therapy notes from his stay in a facility in Jamaica, many of which did nothing to move the story along. I found myself wanting to skip over the notes.

I also found some of the transitions confusing. Thrown in at the end of the chapter on Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Grades, (Mugamore) Dr. Jefferson adds a section on same-sex schooling in which he concludes that the findings on the benefits of same-sex schooling are inconsistent. This five-paragraph section does not add any substantial information to the overall book, and, in my opinion, could have been omitted.

Dr. Jefferson ends each chapter with a "wrap-up," which summarizes the chapter's key points and provides a few resource links. I found the wrap-up sections useful, but wish they had been expanded to really delve more deeply into the issues. I was hoping for suggestions, and more theoretical or empirical evidence on how to improve a failing educational system to make this a truly useful book for teachers and others in the education industry.

Julie says

As a parent of a child diagnosed with ADD at 7 years old, I could definitely relate to this book. The examples used at the beginning of the book with Mugamore to describe typical childhood behavior in the 70's and 80's, is now behavior that could lead to a diagnosis of ADHD. This was a typical child who needed extra help and patience as he was learning and instead of being labeled and given a medical diagnosis to excuse his behavior, he was given extra help and individual attention until he was able to catch up to his peers. Mugamore did not have a perfect childhood, but he didn't have a terrible one either. There were mistakes made by the adults in his life, but nothing that he couldn't overcome.

Taylor on the other hand, who was used in the second half of the book and to illustrate the changes in the school system in the last couple of decades, had a horrible childhood. I really felt for Taylor. I felt his adoptive mother took the easy way out and sent him away. I'm sure he was an energetic child, but instead of using patience and parenting skills he was sent away and labeled with a variety of disorders. I think if his adoptive mother had handled things differently in Taylor's childhood, his adolescent life and adult life could have turned out differently, but by the time he was a teenager he was an emotionally scarred individual. I commend Dr. Bixby for trying to help the boy and I couldn't see anything he could have done differently. The sad fact was that Taylor was already damaged and was either not willing or able to make the changes he needed to lead a successful life.

The only thing I would have changed in the book is that I would have liked to have seen a child of the same demeanor as Mugamore used to describe today's school system instead of Taylor, who's family support could not compare to Mugamore's.

The author did a great job on researching the changes that have engulfed our school system in the last few decades and his research shows that it has not improved. This is a great book for anyone struggling with a child who has been diagnosed with any of the many diagnoses available today.
