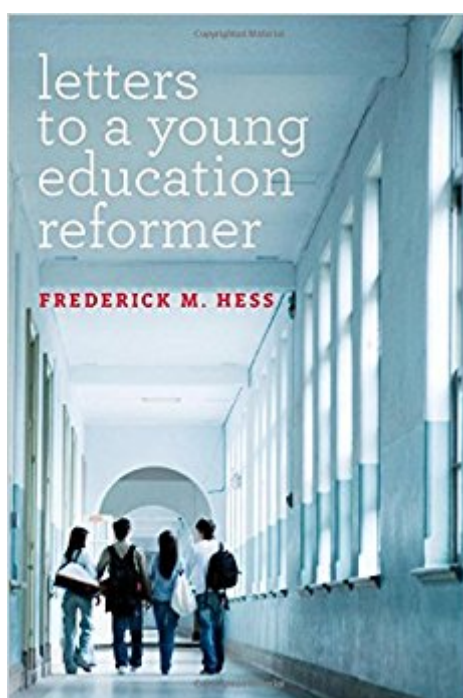


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# Letters To A Young Education Reformer (Educational Innovations Series)



## Synopsis

In *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*, Frederick M. Hess distills knowledge from twenty-five years of working in and around school reform. Inspired by his conversations with young, would-be reformers who are passionate about transforming education, the book offers a window into Hess's thinking about what education reform is and should be. Hess writes that "reform is more a matter of how one thinks about school improvement than a recital of programs and policy proposals." Through his essays, he explores a range of topics, including: Talkers and Doers -The Temptations of Bureaucracy -The Value in Talking with Those Who Disagree -Why You Shouldn't Put Too Much Faith in Experts -Philanthropy and Its Discontents -The Problem with Passion Hess offers personal impressions as well as lessons from notable mistakes he's observed with the hope that readers will benefit from his frustrations and realizations. As the policy landscape continues to shift, *Letters to a Young Education Reformer* offers valuable, timely insights to any young person passionate about transforming education and to not-so-young reformers who are inclined to reflect on their successes and failures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*, Frederick M. Hess distills knowledge from twenty-five years of working in and around school reform. Inspired by his conversations with young, would-be

reformers who are passionate about transforming education, the book offers a window into Hess's thinking about what education reform is and should be. "Every prospective teacher, education advocate, and education journalist ought to read *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*, the latest wise and evenhanded book by Rick Hess, one of the few true iconoclasts in education reform. I always learn something from his work, and this book is informed by his decades of experience as an educator, policy expert, and also as a parent is no exception." Dana Goldstein, author, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* "Regardless of their political views and commitments, readers will learn much about reform in this important book. It stimulates deep thinking and will surely ignite productive conversations with others who are concerned about a range of school improvement imperatives." Shaun R. Harper, Clifford and Betty Allen Professor, University of Southern California Rossier School of Education "Whether his missives usually leave you cheering or fuming, *Letters to a Young Education Reformer* is timely and worth the read, especially his chapter on talking with those who disagree." Stacey Childress, CEO, NewSchools Venture Fund "In this politically polarized climate, Hess's analysis forces readers to consider a range of evidence and opinions as they seek to make a difference in schools today." Pedro A. Noguera, distinguished professor of education, Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles "I can always count on Rick Hess to make me think, and this book is no exception. It will be an important source of insight and motivation for the next generation of scholar-activists in education." Sara Goldrick-Rab, author of *Paying the Price*, and professor of higher education policy, Temple University "Frederick M. Hess is the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. *Letters to a Young Education Reformer* is a volume in the Educational Innovations series."

Frederick M. Hess is the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute

This book has so much great information and thought leadership, that one recommendation/review cannot do it justice, but I'll try. From the beginning of the book, Dr. Hess teaches us that passion can distort our perception of reality. We are taught in the book to draw wisdom from our own experiences and failures and the experiences and bad judgement of others. Furthermore, this book eloquently argues we need to learn from both those whom we agree and those we don't. We do not want our passion to close the door to a fruitful discussion. This book also drives home the fact that

reform is not about having good ideas, but about how to make ideas actually work. For this, Dr. Hess teaches us that the how of education reform is more important than the what. We are reminded that we all want the same end (what is best for children), but we many times disagree on the means. We are reminded in the book that American schooling was never designed to do what we are asking it to do today. While this book is specifically about education reform, anyone involved in the reform of anything in business or society today would be well served to read this book. As reformers, the author holds us accountable by positing that those making decisions need to be held responsible for making them work.

Every new teacher begins a career filled with passion and enthusiasm to work with students and bring them the joy of learning. New teachers can become overwhelmed with the demands of the new job: learning new curricula, assessment practices, a host of other tasks that are a part of the daily job. Then, they learn about the reforms the district is putting in place. Not knowing if they should just be good soldiers and march with the new reforms or bring critical thinking to them, the new teacher is placed between a rock and a hard place of good employee or rabble rouser. In this book, Hess gives the new teacher some guidance: learn, evaluate, and employ these new reforms with caution and thought that makes sense for your environment, for your classroom. He is saying it is the work done in the classroom that counts and your work of thoughtful implementation of myriad reforms will make a difference. Great advice for a new teacher. As a veteran teacher and educator, I'd recommend this book to new teachers.

This is a very honest look at the issues teachers are facing today. While the author is mostly in favor of school choice, he's very open about the pitfalls and drawbacks that would arise from massive implementation of such a system. I received this book on a Friday afternoon and completely finished it well before bedtime. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is in the education profession.

Frederick Hess's *Letters to a Young Education Reformer* provides a thoughtful reflection on the education debate that permeates throughout the United States. Hess interweaves personal experience and anecdotes to paint a larger picture of the flaws that exist in the debate over educational reforms. His observations are both unique and humble as Hess is able to admit to the reader the mistakes he has made during his career as an educational policy wonk. This book should appeal to anyone interested in the debate surrounding educational reforms no matter

one's experience or depth of knowledge. It is not a policy or political book rather it forces the reader to question and reflect on how they engage in the educational reform field. Ultimately Hess produces an insightful work on how educational reformers, no matter their political or policy leanings, can elevate the debate on educational reforms in today's fractured society.

This book is excellent. Frederick Hess writes with lucid, clear prose that simplifies complex topics (without losing nuance) and challenges the reader to see questions of education reform outside of the usual boxes. Hess' masterful ability to move from pop culture references to dense court decisions within a matter of pages is remarkable, and keeps every page as interesting as the last. The book is structured as a series of short letters, each tackling a hot topic--such as school choice, technology in the classroom, and Common Core--or topics that often fly under the radar, such as bureaucracy, or the dangers of putting too much faith in experts. In both cases, Hess refuses to be an ideologue, driving to core principles, history, and incentive structures, rather than to politics or banal talking points. Throughout, Hess resists categorization and provides meaningful insights, such as in his discussion about the difference between "Big-R" and "Little-r" reformers. I could go on at length, but I will close by saying that I would absolutely recommend this book to individuals--on the left or right--who are interested in education reform. It's a quick, engaging read, and challenges you to think differently, challenging assumptions and providing thought-provoking arguments along the way.

This is a book about education reform •an excellent book, at that •but it is bigger than just this topic. It is, of course, well-written and digestible, but it shines in emphasizing, first, how to put good ideas into practice, and second, how to overcome partisanship and political division and have a conversation with the other side of an issue. In the deeply polarized politics of today, these are incredibly valuable lessons that apply far beyond the sphere of education policy, and Hess articulates them well. This book is a big picture look at how to produce lasting reform in slow-moving systems. Though Hess's expertise is in education, his strategies for breaking down barriers and effecting change in the face of bureaucratic inertia and in concert with a wide variety of stakeholders are of value to anyone seeking to become a leader in their field •whether it is business, education, health care, or government. We all want to make a difference; this book can tell you, at least in part, how to do just that. Great read, highly recommend. Five stars from me.

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