

**Review of Jakubowski, C. T. (2021).  
*A Cog in the Machine: Creating YOUR Own Story!* (EduMatch)**

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**Abstract:** Jakubowski presents teachers, especially preservice teachers, with a narrative of just about everything that can go wrong when initiating a teaching career. However, that narrative of stress and struggle backgrounds a message of resourcefulness and resilience. The book urges teachers to take charge of their positionality as cogs in the schooling machine to work towards systemic improvement in schools. Inspirational in its intent, the book could be bolstered by more detailed discussion of strategies useful in realizing the systemic changes it recommends.

Part journal, part narrative, part analysis, *A Cog in the Machine: Creating YOUR Own Story!* traces Casey T. Jakubowski's personal story while offering in-text questions for guidance and reflection for others entering the teaching profession. Jakubowski prompts the future teachers reading the book to interrogate their place as a cog in the modern schooling machine. Three steps are outlined for them to do so: 1) Open a new document or buy a journal; 2) Engage in the thought exercises (i.e., allow opening questions to guide, answer ending questions to reflect); and 3) Write why you (the reader) are reading the book. Ultimately, *A Cog in the Machine* connects identity, place, and professional pursuit of teaching to provide a way for future teachers to circumvent burnout and thrive on their why.

The book's structure follows Jakubowski's narrative journey. The first third sketches the history of New York, the Jakubowski family history, and Jakubowski's early childhood and adolescence, and ends with a poignant reflection on four types of bullies (unaware, unwise, outlasting, and outcast). The second third of the book surveys Jakubowski's formative years as a college student at Fredonia College, the perils and excitement of student teaching, landing his first teaching job, and the pressing burnout of the early years of teaching. Post-divorce and mental health struggles, Jakubowski joined the 50% of teachers who burn out and leave the profession. Jakubowski, however, did not leave Education. Instead, he refocused and reengaged in his own schooling and earned a master's degree. Working as an adjunct at three different schools teaching courses in Social Studies Education and Teacher Education, Jakubowski assisted preservice teachers as they honed their craft. The final third of the book details Jakubowski's career as a New York State Education official, describes his pernicious battle with Imposter Syndrome, and traces his turn to (and completion of) PhD research with a specific focus on rural education and school improvement. The book, then, ends with a reflection on how crafting a narrative journey helped him. Equipped with a clear sense of why one is a teacher, with care for students, and with a dedication to the profession, Jakubowski encourages future teachers who read the book to write their own narrative journey so they too can reflect on their experiences as a teacher and strengthen connections among their identity, place, and vocation. Doing so, Jakubowski argues, will help them maintain balance if and when they face the fiery pit of teacher burnout.

For future teachers especially, the book stands out for three reasons. First, the emphasis on identity and place as one prepares to become a teacher is vitally important. The profession of teaching is intimately personal. Before a teacher teaches, they should take time to ground

themselves by reflecting on where they come from and who they are. The guiding and reflecting questions throughout the book provide the future teacher an excellent roadmap with many examples of good turns to take and dead-end avenues to avoid. Second, the book itself morphs into a pedagogical tool. If used in a teacher preparation course, enlightening class discussions will emerge as students and teachers interrogate the questions posed by the book and compare their own narrative journeys with Jakubowski's. Third, writing a narrative journey opens the possibility for future and present teachers to see the waters they swim in. Understanding the waters in which they swim helps teachers not only set realistic expectations for their professional lives but also helps them brace for future hurricanes.

Two things, however, would improve the book. First, the use of capital letters is overwhelming. Jakubowski's energy can be felt in the words, sentence structure, and stories he tells. As a result, the use of all capital letters comes off as jarringly unnecessary. Second, it is imperative that future teachers recognize their place as a cog in the schooling machine. But it is equally important for future teachers to understand *how* to buck the machine from the positionality of a cog. In covert and overt ways, teachers can disrupt, challenge, and organize to change the modern schooling machine. For example, they can practice fugitive pedagogy, they can teach books that highlight collective action over biographical admiration, and they can invite (reasonable) controversy and (non-violent) conflict into their classrooms to challenge the status quo. While Jakubowski nails the why, the book critically misses the how. A cog is not deterministically bound to uncritically work within the machine. Rather cogs can (and should) use their function to challenge and attempt to dismantle the machine in which they work.

Despite these two limitations, *A Cog in the Machine* stands as an excellent addition to any syllabus for teacher preparation courses.