

School Inc.

A Personal Journey
with Andrew Coulson



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School Inc. – A Personal Journey with Andrew Coulson **Explores the Challenge to Replicate Educational Excellence** **Airing on PBS in April**

*THIRTEEN's three-part series explores search for
innovation, excellence, and profit*

Why doesn't education use innovation to grow like a successful business? ***School Inc. – A Personal Journey with Andrew Coulson***, follows the late Andrew Coulson, series creator/writer/host and senior fellow of education policy at Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, as he sets out on a worldwide personal quest for an answer to this question.

Throughout the three-part, three-hour series, Coulson examines the role of innovation, the universal search for educational excellence and – for better or worse – the application of the profit motive. ***School Inc.*** will be available to PBS stations starting April 4. (Check local listings.)

In episode one, ***The Price of Excellence***, Coulson explores the educational establishment, its history and the politics that sometimes impede the growth of good schools, effective teachers, as well as the involvement of entrepreneur educators.

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He begins his journey in a one-room 19th century schoolhouse in Easton, Maryland. During the industrial revolution in the 19th century, inventions like New England's automated textile mills give rise to innovations that are quickly replicated, but not so in the education field, notes Coulson.

Horace Mann (1796-1859), the lawyer and legislator who became America's first head of a state board of education recognized this lack as a significant problem in education. As Mann put it, "...if any improvement in principles or modes of teaching is discovered in one school, instead of being published to the world, it dies with the discoverer... Now if a manufacturer discovers a new mode of applying steam power, the information flies over the country at once, the old machinery is discarded, the new is substituted."

Through Mann's efforts to put education into the hands of state-appointed experts and state-trained teachers, universal public education was born.

From New England, Coulson travels to East Los Angeles, CA, to tell the story of Jaime Escalante, a math teacher at Garfield High, and the educational excellence he created in the classroom, a story which would become the subject of the Hollywood film *Stand and Deliver*.

Episode one concludes in Seoul, South Korea, where students eagerly enroll in afterschool tutoring programs called "Hagwons," and we meet teachers who are considered rock stars in education, one professor disclosing his annual salary is more than a million dollars.

In episode two, ***Push or Pull***, Coulson investigates why excellent private schools in America such as Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield, MI, have not "scaled up" to replicate their excellence on a larger scale, and ultimately, serve more students.

But is there some place where scaling up excellence is happening? To answer the question, ***School Inc.*** looks at America's charter schools like the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Academy in Austin, TX, part of the highly successful KIPP network of schools; the Sabis School in Springfield, MA; and the American Indian Charter School in Oakland, CA.

Even though some charter schools are highly successful, when they are seen to compete with public schools, some public school districts have voted to shut down the charter school. But not every charter and public school encounter has a negative outcome. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the city's charter schools provided the facilities and services the other schools needed.

Coulson ends this episode in South America with a comparison of how the success of Chile's wine industry set the scene for the growth of the country's successful school networks.

In episode three, ***Forces and Choices***, Coulson examines the success of for-profit education traveling to private schools in Sweden, India, and London, where the resistance to education as a business has lessened.

In Sweden, where all private schools are fully tax supported and parents can choose between these “free” schools and the local public schools, Coulson pays a visit to two different private schools. At the International English School, strict rules on student behavior are extolled and there is a high degree of student-teacher interaction. At Kunskapsskolan he learns about the profit motive and the school’s expansion not only in Sweden but also in London. Peje Emilsson, administrator at Kunskapsskolan says, “...all entrepreneurs who succeed are being driven by the goal to change something. Profit is a receipt to show that you’ve done it in a successful way, but the primary goal is not to make a lot of money.”

In India there are private schools that serve poor students and parents at little more than a dollar a week. Internationally acclaimed educator James Tooley, who has spent 10 years in India studying both the private and free public (or government) schools, comments on the abuses in the government school system contrasted with the achievements of these private schools. The series comes full circle back to the English countryside where the Industrial Revolution began and reiterates the premise that education is the only field in which successful entrepreneurship is not celebrated.

“What if we allowed all education entrepreneurs to put their own money on the line in an effort to better serve us, gaining or losing just as entrepreneurs do in other fields,” says Coulson “And what if we made sure that everyone had access to that wide-open market place? Would we then see excellence scale-up in education?” Coulson, an education policy analyst, was passionate about his work and prior to his death in February 2016 made arrangements to ensure ***School Inc.*** would be completed.

Andrew Coulson, who died shortly after completing initial production on this series, was trained in mathematics and computer science at Canada’s McGill University. He began his first career as a Microsoft software engineer in 1989. But in January 1994, troubled by the fact that teaching and learning were being left behind by the relentless progress in other fields, he left the computer industry to pursue his love of education. He was the author of *Market Education: The*

Unknown History, the only book to address contemporary education policy questions by drawing on case studies of recorded human history. His 2009 paper for the peer-reviewed *Journal of School Choice* was the most comprehensive review of the worldwide scientific literature comparing alternative education systems. In 2011 he conducted a statistical study titled “The Other Lottery: Are Philanthropists Backing the Best Charter Schools?” He had testified before the United States House and Senate on the state of American education and co-authored amicus briefs for the United States Supreme Court.

School Inc. is a production of Free To Choose Media in association with THIRTEEN Productions, LLC for WNET. Andrew Coulson is creator/writer/director. Kay Krewson is associate producer. Leigh Anne Sides is producer and supervising editor. Thomas Skinner and Bob Chitester are executive producers.

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