

Toxic Schooling:

How Schools Became Worse

Unease with schooling is not new: "We are faced by the paradoxical fact that education has become one of the chief obstacles to intelligence and freedom of thought".

(Bertrand Russell 1926, from **On Education** P:28)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a variety of those concerned with education – Edmond Holmes, A.S.Neill, Rudolf Steiner, Margaret McMillan, Charlotte Mason, Susan Isaacs and Bertrand Russell were critical of schooling and went on to suggest more personalised, democratic and humane forms of education as alternatives. However, in the 1960's and 1970's, a period of social and cultural upheaval in the West and political change caused by decolonisation in many developing countries, a number of writers again began to question and critique the relevance and benevolence of schooling. This book examines the main ideas in a dozen or so key texts on schooling produced roughly during the period 1960 to 1980. For reasons of space, a selection had to be but there were other important books produced during the period that are not considered here. No doubt my own history and preferences have played a role in this selection as I was a pupil, student teacher, teacher and teacher educator during this period and read most of the texts at the time. The writers selected are *Edward Blishen, Paulo Freire, Paul Goodman, James Hemming, John Holt, Ivan Illich, Philip Jackson, George Leonard, Soren Hansen and Jasper Jensen, Julius Nyerere, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Everett Reimer, and Carl Rogers.*

This book then examines the evidence of the extent, if any, these critiques had on changing and improving the nature of schooling provided today, or whether in many ways **the situation is now actually worse.**

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Became Worse

by Clive
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Contents

Introduction

- Chapter 1 The School That I'd Like**
Edward Blishen
- Chapter 2 Pedagogy of the Oppressed**
Paulo Friere
- Chapter 3 Compulsory Mis-Education**
Paul Goodman
- Chapter 4 The Betrayal of Youth**
James Hemming
- Chapter 5 How Children Fail**
John Holt
- Chapter 6 Deschooling Society**
Ivan Illich
- Chapter 7 Life in Classrooms**
Philip Jackson
- Chapter 8 Education and Ecstasy**
George Leonard
- Chapter 9 The Little Red Schoolbook**
**Soren Hansen and
Jasper Jensen**
- Chapter 10 Education for Self-Reliance**
Julius Nyerere
- Chapter 11 Teaching as a Subversive Activity**
Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner
- Chapter 12 School is Dead**
Everett Reimer
- Chapter 13 Freedom to Learn**
Carl Rogers
- Chapter 14 Key Critiques**
- Chapter 15 Schooling Today – Much the Same?**
- Chapter 16 Schooling Today - Making Matters Worse**
- Chapter 17 What Is To Be Done?**
- References**
- Further Reading**

Democracy is not genetic, it is learned behaviour. There is nothing in our genes to programme us as democrats or dictators at birth. Therefore education must have clear idea of the sort of democratic person it hopes to cultivate. What are the characteristics of such a person? Somebody described as democratic would, for example, celebrate social and political diversity, work for and practice mutual respect between individuals and groups, regard all people as having equal social and political rights as human beings, respect evidence in forming their own opinions and respect the opinions of others based on evidence, be open to changing one's mind in the light of new evidence and possess a critical and analytical stance towards information. The democratic citizen would possess a proclivity to reason, open-mindedness and fairness and the practice of cooperation, bargaining, compromise and accommodation' (Harber,2004:137).

If education, whether in something called a school or not, is to be consistent with this then there is a need to move away from the dominant, negative characteristics of formal schooling identified in the critiques of the selected educational writers from the 1960's and 70's.

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