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## Deschooling Schooled Minds: Speculative Essays

Kelly Graziano

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# DESCHOOLING SCHOOLED MINDS: SPECULATIVE ESSAYS

by

KELLY BURNS-GRAZIANO

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a collection of speculative essays (Schubert, 1991) that explore the "why" of schooling and possible alternative educational arrangements (Illich, 1970/2002; Reimer, 1971; Goodman, 1962; Holt, 1972; Gatto, 1992/2017; Giroux, 2000). As one who has been schooled (in "educational" institutions and those like it, e.g. abusive relationships), I have developed a passion to bring awareness to the destructiveness of schooling and to learning *from* the world rather than what others want us to know and believe *about* it. Incorporated with autobiographical narrative, I trace both the historical and current reasons behind the establishment and maintenance of mass compulsory schooling (Adams, 1995; Montgomery, 2005; Nasaw, 1979; Saltman, 2012; Spring, 1973; Apple, 1995/2012). In short, it is not about authentic learning, which happens quite naturally in a free, accessible, and loving environment. Rather, it is about indoctrination into a way of life and thinking that benefits the powerful few. I push the boundaries of traditional inquiry not only in form (speculative essay) but also in my connection of schooling with abuse and a healing that can only be found in love (Cameron, 2012; Evans, 1992/2010; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994; Schubert, 2009). A theoretical foundation of love is what we can build upon as we embark upon a cultural revolution to disestablish compulsory schooling and come to understand learning as a natural process and children as belonging in society with adults who love and nurture them. There is a better way; there should be many, in fact. As with love itself, it will require courage and faith. Deschooling (Illich, 1970; also, Apple, 2012; Gatto, 1992/2017; Giroux, 2000; Holt, 1972; Jackson, 1958/1994) demands this and more.

It demands no less than the best of who we are as human beings in relation to one another and the best that our society can be. The visions I have of a deschooled society are born out of the meanings I have made out of my inquiry. As I share my stories and visions, six prominent meanings emerge: (1) My university experience has led me beyond school reform to question the very idea of schooling (Illich, 1970; Holt, 1972; Bloom, 1987; Prakash & Esteva, 2008). (2) Deschooling must start in the mind – challenging the ways we view learning, education, and life (Dewey, 1938; Schubert, 2009a; Holt, 1967). (3) Like all abusive relationships, schooling is toxic; therefore, to deschool requires unshackling ourselves from its cultish grasp (Evans, 1992; Cameron, 2012; Spring, 1973b). (4) Schooling cannot be reformed...not by politics, not by religion, and not by force...and it is time we let go of this sacred cow (Gatto, 2008; DiLorenzo, 2016; Giroux, 2000). (5) My primary vision of a deschooled society is to create communities where every child, woman, and man has access to resources for learning anything at any time without compulsion or discrimination (Illich, 1970; Eisner, 1979/1994; Berry, 1990). (6) Composing speculative essays to transgress the traditional dissertation format helps revitalize self-healing and everlasting love--love for oneself, love for others, love for differences, love for unity, love for humanity, love for the universe, and love for peaceful futures in an uncertain and fragile world (Schubert, 1991; hooks, 2001; Fromm, 1956). It is my sincerest hope that this inquiry will bring us a step closer to realizing these visions of a deschooled society.

**INDEX WORDS:** Deschooling, Schooling, Education, Alternative education, Speculative essay

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My children, Brooke, Joseph, Matthew, and Joy

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First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the strength, intelligence, and character to persevere through the many challenges I have faced that have led me to where I am today. He has surrounded me with the love of family, friends, and colleagues whose support and encouragement have been essential throughout my journey. He gave me eternal life through His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ. This freedom that was purchased by His blood is the foundation of not only my faith but the entirety of my life. It shapes who I am, my identity in Him, and how I approach every opportunity and challenge. The desire I have to support freedom for all through deschooling comes solely from God. It is a desire that He has placed within me and that is born out of the love and freedom He first gave to me.

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Last but certainly not least, I could never have completed this dissertation without the support and patience of my family...especially my children who, year after year, had to sacrifice time with me as I buried myself in books, in writing, and spending nights away from home to attend class sessions hours away. They always understood the importance of what I was doing and knew that they were my greatest motivation. Though coming in halfway, I must also express my most heartfelt gratitude to my husband, Michael, who brought the love and stability that had been lacking in our lives. He has been such a tremendous help and support to all of us, and I could not have imagined how blessed our lives would become with him in it. Finally, my parents have always been my biggest fans, cheering me and encouraging me every step of the way. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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## PREFACE

The problem is that while schooling destroys us, it remains a sacred cow. The very idea of deschooling fundamentally threatens schooled minds that value acquisition over conviviality, abuse and power over love and freedom. Although much is known about the harm caused by schooling (Jackson, 1958/1994; Apple, 2012; Illich, 1970; Holt, 1972; Giroux, 2000; Gatto, 1992/2017), there is very little in the literature that makes the connection between this kind of harm and that of the verbally abusive relationship (Evans, 1992/2010; Cameron, 2012; Olson, 2009; Rahimi & Liston, 2012). Yet, both involve a dominating power that silences and diminishes while creating dependency. We just can't seem to let go of the institution of schooling. Like many victims of abuse, we think we can reform our way into a better situation in our schools. *If only we did this better or tried that, things would be better.* But they never are. Instead, the would-be reformer remains "befuddled, not able to attack the problem" (Evans, 1992/2010, p. 24). Why? Because the problem is schooling itself. The only thing the victim really needs is to *get away from* the abuser, and so we need to get away from schooling.

There are also very few scholars that suggest love as a legitimate theoretical framework for exploring this issue, though it has been implied (Schubert, 2009; hooks, 1994; Ayers, 2016; Freire, 1970/2000; Holt, 1972; Illich, 1970). It is love that provides the most compelling argument for deschooling, love defined as valuing and protecting the dignity and freedom of all. It is love that says, "You are more than a test score, more than a cog in the wheel of our institutional power trips, and you should have the freedom to determine what is worth knowing, being, and becoming." Love requires so much more than what we find in school. It requires freedom, nurturing relationships, and self-determination. This is not an either-or requirement but all-encompassing, and something that simply is not possible within the institution of schooling

(Holt, 1972; Reimer, 1971; Illich, 1970). The sooner we as a society can grasp this, the closer we will be to ending our co-dependence and creating a more convivial world available to all.

For a relevant contextual framework, a brief history of schooling in America is necessary to understand our present circumstance (Nasaw, 1979; Adams, 1995; Jackson, 1958/1994; Montgomery, 2005). Exploration of current discussions related to deschooling is, of course, essential, as is the understanding of current victimization of children within the culture of abuse found in schools (Illich, 1970, 1971, 1973; Jensen, 2000/2004). Finally, a dream and a vision are required to bring about a more loving, deschooled society in the future (hooks, 1994; Jenkins, 2011; Schubert, 2009; Berry, 1990/2010).

The theories that guide my understanding and approach to my dissertation topic are as varied as the theorists themselves. However, I do draw heavily from the critical theorists and their focus on hierarchy of power, hegemony, and hidden curriculum (Apple, 2012; Gatto, 2008). Also, my exploration lends itself most readily to speculative essay as my chosen form of inquiry (Schubert, 1991) with such great examples as those from Dewey (1897, 1938), Freire (1970/2000), Illich (1970, 1971, 1973), Reimer (1971), and Fiske (1987/2011).

It [speculative essay] is a kind of meta-analysis or research synthesis that uses the informed and insightful scholar (rather than a set of statistical rules) as the instrument for synthesis and illumination. (Schubert, 1991, p. 64)

It is such speculation that leads not only to greater understanding, but also to further questioning and to imagining, each of which is meaningless without the others.

The purpose of my inquiry is to explore deschooling as a means of escaping from the oppressive institution of compulsory schooling. This will be accomplished through a collection of semi-autobiographical speculative essays that draw upon the work of other curricular theorists

and that explore love as a theoretical framework which compels us to break free from the abusiveness of schooling. In my dissertation, I am asking the following questions: What is deschooling? How is schooling destructive? What's love got to do with it? Why is deschooling needed?

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### What's Wrong with Schooling?

Anywhere in the United States one might travel, lamentations about public education can be heard, some more desperate than others, about how schools are failing to properly educate our children. The irony of such declarations is not lost on me or many others who devote their time and energy to the field of curriculum studies. For we know that schools are, in fact, succeeding greatly in doing what they were designed to do, that is to maintain the status quo for the dominant group and to put people in their places in a hierarchical society. As Holt (1972) notes, “[C]onvincing people that most of our present schools are bad for learning is not going to do much to change them; learning is not principally what they are for” (pp. 2-3), at least not the kind of learning that is advertised to the general public. And if learning is not even what they are for, what exactly are we supposed to improve upon? As Gatto (1992/2017) explains, “Schools teach exactly what they are intended to teach, and they do it well: how to be a good Egyptian and remain in your place in the pyramid” (p. 13). Students learn how to be consumers and producers. They learn how to fit neatly into their roles in order to preserve the status and power of the government and corporate elite.

Schooling has not always been for every child, and this was accepted. Poor children had to work to help keep food on their families' tables, girls only needed to learn how to tend a home, and Blacks were considered far too ignorant (or would be far too dangerous) to become educated. More importantly, children often learned what they needed to know through the course of living in the presence of other adults. As Holt (1972) posits, “[W]e make years of useless schooling a requirement for many jobs that could be done as well or better without it” (p. 178).

However, with the Industrial Revolution came the push for mass schooling. Though touted as “democratic,” there were many reasons for this push that had nothing to do with providing every child with a free and equal education. As Nasaw (1979) explains, “Democracy meant offering every student the opportunity for an education equally adjusted to what school officials assumed would be his or her future vocation” (p. 132). The goal was to fit everyone into their places, not unlike schooling in communist countries that was so feared. In comparing schools in capitalist and communist countries, Reimer (1971) states, “They perform the same functions and share the same defining characteristics. There is not the slightest doubt that communist schools sort their students into jobs, vocational levels, pay differentials, power and privilege strata in just the same way as capitalist schools” (p. 27). Schooling “for every child” has never meant providing a democratic education, only the assurance that every child would be “placed.” Just because schooling became more universally available did not make it more democratic. Rather, it is and has always been a means of social control.

One need only consider the social efficiency method of schooling that has persisted for the past one hundred years to know this is true. As Winfield (2012) notes,

From the 1920s to the present, reformers and policy-makers have sought to apply business practices to education, arguing that the efficiency innovations in industry that allowed the profit margins of giant corporate entities to swell also would deal effectively with the task of educating America’s children most efficiently. (p. 149)

Such a method takes the view of our nation’s children as commodities to be produced like machines on an assembly line and hardly human. If they learn anything, it is to be consumers and producers. This is not a democratic institution. The primary goal of my inquiry is to explore deschooling as a way to ensure freedom for everyone to determine her/his own course.

The unpleasant fact about compulsory schooling (both public and private) is that it is an oppressive institution, a prescriptive program that seeks to overpower students' minds with whatever those in power wish them to learn. Overpowering others is the primary goal of abusers and why it is not a stretch to compare schooling with the abusive relationship. I have experienced both and know all too well the similarities. More about the abusive aspect of schooling will be addressed in the next chapter. For now, let us finally heed Gatto's (1992/2017) advice: "It is time we squarely face the fact that institutional schoolteaching is destructive to children" (p.16). As I typed this, I wrote "teachers" in place of "children." My Freudian slip results from the reality that schooling is destructive to both students and teachers... and everyone else.

#### Who Influences My Work on Deschooling?

A seed was planted in my heart long ago to turn a critical eye towards schooling. During my doctoral studies, I embarked on an intellectual journey which led me to an exploration of a wide array of works on deschooling such as Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1970/2002), *Celebration of Awareness* (1971/2012), and *Tools for Conviviality* (1973/2009); Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) and *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004/2016); and William Schubert's *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility* (1986) and *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians* (2009a). Before long, that seed grew into tree of hope – hope that we could live in a world without the devastating effects of schooling.

I was primed for this journey by some wonderful education professors in my undergraduate program. They introduced me to John Dewey's works (e.g. *Experience and Education*, 1938, and "My Pedagogic Creed," 1897) and the Progressive Education movement and showed me how the needs and desires of the learner should be at the center of any educational program. I went into my first teaching position with stars in my eyes and a thousand

ideas of how to create a learner-centered environment in my classroom. That first year of teaching would mark the beginning of my disillusionment.

Year after year, I became more and more discouraged even as I continued with greater determination, unable to realize a truly learner-centered culture within school. It was not only my experiences as a teacher, but also as a wife in a verbally abusive marriage, a member of an oppressive religious organization, and a single mother of four, that have helped me formulate my ever-evolving educational philosophy. It is a philosophy that advocates for freedom, respect, and dignity of all persons. I have been gifted with an understanding through these experiences of at least some of what is wrong with schooling. You see, my own personal experiences with abuse and oppression help me to see similar abuses within our educational institutions. The lack of freedom, the labeling, the controlling that I have witnessed in school is not unlike what I have personally suffered in other contexts. And yet, there are viable alternatives to schooling just as there are alternatives to abusive relationships and religions. There are ways to set ourselves free. As the work of others has helped me come to this realization, it is my humble hope that my life's work might be part of an awakening for someone else.

My dissertation topic is deschooling, and it begins with me. I am having to unlearn things that schooling has taught me and open myself to more liberatory learning. Put simply, deschooling education is “separating learning from social control” (Illich, 1970/2002, p. 19). It is recognizing learning as a natural process that needs no prescription from outside of the individual learner her/himself, no other person, entity, or institution to dictate its course. As Dewey (1916) stated, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (p. 239). Human beings are born learning and curious, but society has come to believe that, at least by a certain early age, humans need professional help to continue in this way. As Falbel (2008) states,

It is utter nonsense, not to mention deeply insulting, to say that people need to be taught how to learn or how to think. We are born knowing how to do these things. All that is needed is an interesting, accessible, intelligible world, and a chance to play a meaningful part in it. (p. 62)

My position is not meant to be offensive, however. I have known many fine educators within the institution of schooling and am not suggesting the abolition of all schools. Neither do I intend to be defensive. My position is meant, rather, to question the way things are and to explore current alternatives and future possibilities.

I have been influenced by numerous curriculum theories, almost as numerous as the theorists themselves, that have something to contribute to the idea of deschooling. I will give a brief overview of a few of these theorists along with the theoretical framework(s) that form the foundation of their various works. In the brief exploration that follows, it is my hope that we will gain a greater understanding of how my own experiences link up with the experiences and theories of the following representatives to cry out for freedom and justice in education, which is ultimately a call to love.

Ivan Illich

The first theorist that comes to mind when I think of deschooling is Ivan Illich, with works including *Deschooling Society* (1970/2002), *Celebration of Awareness* (1971/2012), and *Tools for Conviviality* (1973/2009). It is his landmark work, *Deschooling Society* (1970/2002), that provided the first glimmer of hope after my disillusionment with schooling. Throughout this work, Illich (1970/2002) makes a clear distinction between what happens in school and true learning. “The pupil is thereby ‘schooled’ to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new”

(p. 1). According to Illich (1970/2002), the modern institution of schooling is a hindrance to authentic education. “Most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction” (p. 12). He goes on to explain that when a person is ready and motivated to learn something, such learning can happen far more efficiently outside of school.

Not only does Illich (1970/2002) claim that school does not enhance individual learning, he explains how it perpetuates social inequities. “Obligatory schooling inevitably polarizes society; it also grades the nations of the world according to an international caste system” (p. 9). We see this even more acutely in today’s testing culture. Gatto (1992/2017) explains how test-score driven he was in the classroom and the reality of social class perpetuation:

In spite of the overall class blueprint that assumes that ninety-nine percent of the kids are in their class to stay, I nevertheless make a public effort to exhort children to higher levels of test success, hinting at eventual transfer from the lower class as a reward... The lesson of numbered classes is that everyone has a proper place in the pyramid and that there is no way out of your class except by number magic. Failing that, you must stay where you are put. (pp. 4-5)

Testing, then, only helps to affirm the polarization Illich speaks of when making the analogy that just as the Church cannot guarantee salvation for all, obligatory schooling cannot guarantee equal educational opportunity for all.

Throughout his work, Illich (1970/2002) uncovers a hidden curriculum in the myriad of assumptions we find in schooling. “Children belong in school. Children learn in school. Children can be taught only in school. I think these unexamined premises deserve serious questioning” (p. 26). Without these assumptions, mass obligatory schooling could not exist, nor

could its hidden curriculum, which Illich likens to that of powerful churches throughout history (i.e. the assumption that salvation can only be found within the Church). To clarify, Illich is not calling for reform. Mere reform will never cure the ills of schooling. Illich (1970/2002) calls for something much more radical as he states, “I believe that the contemporary crisis of education demands that we review the very idea of publicly prescribed learning, rather than the methods used in its enforcement” (p. 65). Reformers, however, cannot seem to let go of “the idea that they have an obligation to the young, especially the poor, an obligation to process them, whether by love or by fear” (p. 67). Illich explains that this processing is to fit them as either producers or consumers in a society where economic growth and power for an elite few are the top priorities.

Thankfully, Illich does not stop at his critique of schooling, leaving us with no alternative. We are not left wondering what the world would look like without compulsory schooling. He says that deschooling would force us to welcome the young back into society from which they have been cast out (and into the schools). “If society were to outgrow its age of childhood, it would have to become livable for the young” (Illich, 1970/2002, p. 28). Many changes would have to occur concurrently, but it is possible. As he further notes, “The alternative to dependence on schools is... the creation of a new style of educational relationship between man and his environment” (p. 72). This new relationship would involve the emergence of networks or “learning webs,” which would involve equal access to educational resources and the matching up of teacher-learners or peers with common interests. Laws would need to be put into place, as well, to prohibit discrimination based on educational degree while still allowing for tests of needed skills within the job market. There is no prescriptive formula, however. There is not one needed. As Gatto (2008) states, “Trust the people, give them choices, and the school nightmare will vanish in a generation” (p. 60). Could it really be that simple? I believe it can. For

all the years that I felt stuck in a verbally abusive relationship, all it took to break free was trust – trust in myself, in people who truly loved me, in Love itself. Trust and Love go together, and the result is freedom.

In both *Celebration of Awareness* (1971/2012) and *Tools for Conviviality* (1973/2009), Illich uses terminology that connects me with my past experiences with oppressive religion and abusive relationships. For example, he predicted violence as a result of compulsory schooling. “Ultimately, the *cult of schooling* will lead to violence, as the establishment of any religion has led to it” (Illich, 1971/2012, p. 119, emphasis mine). I have often referred to the fundamentalist religious group that I was involved with for seven years as a “cult.” As with school, it was easy to get in and very difficult to get out without feeling like a complete failure (and damned). And there is a “violence” inflicted upon the spirit when a human being is controlled, when a person (as in a verbally abusive relationship) or institution (such as a church or school) seeks power over another. It is very real, and it is very damaging. I have seen students becoming more depressed, anxious, withdrawn, even defiant throughout my years in the classroom. These are the very symptoms I experienced after 13 years in a verbally abusive relationship.

In contrast, Illich (1970/2002) first used the term “convivial” in *Deschooling Society* in which he makes the distinction between “manipulative” versus “convivial” institutions. He describes a spectrum where on the manipulative end are found institutions (such as law enforcement, military, jails, schools, and hospitals) in which membership “is achieved in two ways, both coercive: by forced commitment or by selective service” (p. 54). I would only add abusive personal relationships to his list. In contrast, convivial institutions like “[t]elephone link-ups, subway lines, mail routes, public markets and exchanges do not require hard or soft sells to

induce their clients to use them” (p. 54). Neither do any truly loving relationships. Love cannot exist without freedom, without free will, without the sincere desire for mutuality.

In *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich (1973/2009) provides a more in-depth definition of “conviviality:”

Autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. (p. 11)

I believe this definition sums up the root of Illich’s attacks on the institutions of modern society, his passion for freedom and loving relationships, his desire for conviviality. This is a desire that I share in my own work as I explore the human destruction of living in a schooled society and the hope of moving away from it and towards more loving interactions.

Paulo Freire

Another highly influential figure (and oft referenced in Illich’s writing) is Paulo Freire. In works such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) and *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004/2016), we see the same focus on freedom for the individual that we see in Illich’s work towards deschooling. Freire (1970/2000) claims, “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (p. 50). Deschooling is Illich’s (1970/2002) answer to this claim, believing it foundational to the cause of freedom. “Deschooling is, therefore, at the root of any movement for human liberation” (p. 47). As long as we value freedom, we must resist schooling. There was a time in this country when such resistance was strong. As Gatto (1992/2017) informs,

Our form of compulsory schooling is an invention of the State of Massachusetts around 1850. It was resisted – sometimes with guns – by an estimated eighty percent of the Massachusetts population, the last outpost in Barnstable on Cape Cod not surrendering its children until the 1880s, when the area was seized by militia and children marched to school under guard. (p. 21)

Such a fact should cause us to consider long what these resistors may have understood and what they may have seen coming. Llewellyn (2008) supports resistance in stating, “There are lots of good reasons to quit school, but in my idealistic American mind, the pursuit of freedom encompasses most of them and outshines the others” (p. 49). So, if not school, then what? Can we gather together for educational purposes in other ways?

Illich (1970/2002) suggested “learning webs.” These can be likened to Freire’s rejection of the “banking” concept. Such webs might be part of Freire’s (1970/2000) “cultural synthesis [in which] the actors who come from ‘another world’ to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people’s world” (p. 180). Here, again, we see the mutuality that love requires, to see others as equals and having as much or more to bring to the conversation as we ourselves. As Freire (2004/2016) understood,

Children need to grow in the exercise of [the] ability to think, to question and question themselves, to doubt, to experiment with hypotheses for action, and to plan, rather than just following plans that, more than proposed, are *imposed* upon them. (p. 37, emphasis mine)

There is no place here for power over another. Rather, Illich’s and Freire’s convivial society is one in which we are all in this together.

One other fascinating similarity between Freire and Illich is their prediction of violence as a result of oppression. As Freire (1970/2000) puts it, “Chafing under the restrictions of this order [of oppression], they [the oppressed] often manifest a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their own comrades for the pettiest reasons” (p. 62). What a frighteningly accurate portrayal of recent school shootings!

Finally, both Illich and Freire call for a cultural revolution. Illich (1971/2012) contrasts this with political revolution, which “strengthens the demand for schooling by futilely promising...more learning and increased earning...available to all through more schooling” (p. 186). You just have to elect the right politician. The cultural revolutionary must both overcome the false assumptions upon which schooling is based and put forth policies to deschool society. This requires a radical restructuring of society. Similarly, Freire (1970/2000) says, “‘Cultural revolution’ takes the total society to be reconstructed, including all human activities, as the object of its remodeling action” (p. 158). The current culture is the instrument of its own re-creation. It is part of a process and not something that happens overnight.

I didn’t wake up one day and suddenly decide to leave the cult-like religion I was involved in or grab my children and leave our abusive home. No one could come into my world and tell me what was wrong and how to fix it. It was something inside of me, something I believe God put in me, that compelled me to reach out and open my eyes to see what was real and what wasn’t. I needed help, and so do all who are oppressed, but it starts with the individual. As Illich (1970/2002) states, “Each of us is personally responsible for his or her own deschooling, and only we have the power to do it” (pp.47-48). As we acknowledge this for ourselves, we are able to respect this power possessed by others, not power to oppress another but rather to liberate oneself.

John Holt

Soon after my disillusionment with schooling began, I gave birth to my first child. I knew I wanted to stay home with her and, later, her younger siblings. I was also already thinking about homeschooling. Once this adventure began, I discovered “unschooling” in the writing of John Holt, including *Freedom and Beyond* (1972) and *Instead of Education* (1976/2008). Through his writing, I found support for the fact that I did not want to reproduce school at home, that I wanted my children to learn naturally and experientially. Now, over 15 years later, I have discovered wonderful connections between Holt and Illich. Both had the desire to see education and its subjects freed from the institution of schooling. As Holt (1972) informs us,

In sum, a deschooled society would be a society in which everyone shall have the widest and freest possible choice to learn whatever he [sic] wants to learn, whether in school or in some altogether different way... It would be a society in which there were many paths to learning and advancement, instead of one school path as we have now – a path far too narrow for everyone, and one too easily and too often blocked off from the poor. (p. 190)

It is out of love for my own children that I first desired to provide this kind of life for them. It must be love that compels us to provide such freedom for all of society’s children.

Holt (1972) also addresses the issue of reproducing social inequities through schooling’s creation of categories (winners and losers). “The things we do to select a few winners defeat whatever things we do to encourage the growth of all... it is grotesque and outrageous for an institution doing such work... to keep trying to pass itself off as the chief defender of children” (pp. 250-251). And yet it continues to do so, and many parents and students are still being shamed by their refusal to participate in the hypocrisy. Luckily, I found a supportive homeschooling community, but I could not escape the questions when out with my children

during the day. “Shouldn’t your children be in school right now?” There is something very wrong with expecting and accepting the absence of children in society. As Gatto (1992/2017) expounds,

This great crisis that we witness in our schools is interlinked with a greater social crisis in the community. We seem to have lost our identity. Children and old people are penned up and locked away from the business of the world to a degree without precedent: nobody talks to them anymore, and without children and old people mixing in daily life, a community has no future and no past, only a continuous present. (p. 20)

Love does not expel; it embraces. And genuine love for children (and elderly... everyone) is needed to deschool society.

We say we love our children, but how can there be love with force and control? Yet, “education” has come to mean, as Holt (1976/2008) puts it, “something that some people do to others for their own good, molding and shaping them, and trying to make them learn what they think they ought to know” (p. 17). A man beating his wife (verbally and/or physically) has been quoted as saying, “It’s for your own good.” A church guilts a person into behaving in certain ways and not in others in order to “mold and shape her/him.” I have heard these very things throughout my experiences in abusive situations. How can we say we love children when this is the education they are “given” in schools? In my ex-husband’s family of origin, women were viewed as commodities for men, to serve their purposes. I was defined by this assumption daily. How are we defining students in schools?

My school’s mission statement is “To Ensure a Viable 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce.” I have heard similar mission statements from other schools. Is that how we define our children, as merely members of the workforce, as producers and consumers? Are we not being forced to

make the same choice as educators in the past, who “had to choose: would they train their students to be independent, self-directed individuals or dependent wageworkers”? (Nasaw, 1979, p. 130). We educators might say, “No, that is not us!” But the institution of schooling that many of us work for causes us to do this very thing. As Giroux (2000) highlights, “School leaders are now drawn from the ranks of corporate executives, employing a managerial style that describes school systems as ‘major companies,’ students as ‘customers,’ and learning as a measurable outcome” (p. 84). It is exploitative, and it is abusive. Love is the only cure. Love compels us to deschool. This, I believe, is what compelled John Holt and is what compels me in my work towards deschooling.

William H. Schubert

The curricular theorist who has influenced me most toward a theoretical framework of love in my inquiry into deschooling is William H. Schubert, with works such as *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility* (1986), *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians* (2009a), and “Language, Legacy, and Love in Curriculum” (2009b). In *Love, Justice, and Education* (2009a), he explores Dewey’s *New York Times* article on his “visit” to Utopia through dialogue among its citizens. It is a convivial society, indeed, one that is in contrast to our acquisitive one. As Schubert (2009a) explains in his prologue, “[T]he notion of loving acquisitiveness out of existence captivates me, and is a central message of this book” (p. 7). This notion captivates me, as well, because love is the antidote to acquisition, that desire to obtain, possess, and control that we find in schooling, in cult-like religions, and in abusive relationships. Tolstoy (1967/2008) explains how this relates to deschooling in stating, “The difference between education and culture lies only in the compulsion, which education deems

itself in the right to exert. Education is culture under restraint. Culture is free” (p. 5). Love requires freedom.

Closely tied to freedom is the notion of mutuality, previously explored in our discussion of Illich and Freire. Schubert (2009a) contributes much to this idea in quoting one Utopian as saying, “Our encounters in gatherings...might be seen as mutual apprenticeships in which we see ourselves as curricula for one another” (p. 62). Again, there is no need to have power over anyone in such relations. There is no hierarchy of importance, of one (lacking) needing to be taught by another (possessing). As another of Schubert’s (2009a) Utopians states, “Hierarchy is a pillar of the acquisitive society, one which is not needed and has no value once the shackles of acquisition are broken” (p. 42). I remember feeling how I just wanted to walk through life side-by-side with my husband. Instead, he seemed to feel the need to constantly push me down. It is a different reality that the acquisitive person lives in. There is a sense of having to be higher than the other so as not to be lower than. There is no concept of mutuality. There is no real love for another when life is a competition.

Let us compare this experience in a verbally abusive relationship with what Schubert (2009a) suggests we see in schooling in an acquisitive society, as explained by a citizen of Utopia:

Yes, and in schools we nail down desks of wiggly students, straighten out wiggly minds, extract bits of embodied understanding, call it *knowledge*, test it, and assign persons a rating that they are known by, sorted by, devastated by, numbed by, and granted or denied opportunity by... (p. 26)

Is it a harsh comparison? Perhaps. But is it unwarranted? I don’t think so. As Goldman (2008) questions, “Discipline and restraint – are they not back of all the evils of the world?” (p. 44). One

thing is for sure. There is no love in the above scenario. And worse, there is fear, without which one cannot control another. I feared my abusive husband, because love was not present. As we reflect upon our own society and its institutions, let us remain focused on the knowledge that “love repels acquisitive mindsets, and enables progress toward a non-acquisitive society of world-wide social justice” (Schubert, 2009a, p. 217). Just as nothing I did to try and change my marriage (no amount of books read or prayers prayed or gimmicks tried) could stop my husband’s abuse, no amount of reform efforts can change the culture of an institution like schooling that is based not on love, or Illich’s (1970) “conviviality,” but on acquisitiveness.

No matter how hard we fight, we cannot reform our way out of the mess of schooling. Schubert (2009b) describes our current attempts using war as a metaphor. “When we refer to educational practitioners as on the front lines, does this not imply that our ammunition is curriculum and our instruction is shooting the ammunition into students? What do we want to kill in the students?” (p. 3). I remember sitting in my therapist’s office describing the pain I was experiencing, physical pain, deep down into my bones. Doctors could not find a reason for it, because none of their instruments display the soul. My therapist helped me discover that my spirit was being assaulted through the verbal abuse I had endured for many years, and the physical pain was but a signal of its impending death. As the abuser seeks to destroy the spirit, that part of a person that makes her real, unique, and valuable apart from the abuser, I posit schooling does the same. It is much easier to manipulate and control a population if uniqueness is taken away, if students are seen merely as unintelligent children whose spiritedness must be subdued if not denied completely. Those in power through the institution of schooling (and not a person’s own spirit) are the decision makers with regard to the course, direction, and even

character of the next generation. Like Schubert, I wish to convey the message in my work that schooling (including reform efforts) is violent and that it is killing us.

I also hope that one day, like Schubert's (2009a) Utopians, we will speak of a time like this that is in our past, that we became fully aware of and finally rejected. Through both reflection and imagination (which we find in and through speculative essay writing), we can make our way to educational freedom. Reflection and imagination, yes, but above and beyond these, love.

The influence that these theorists have had on my own work towards deschooling is nothing short of profound. Their theorizing not only validates my personal journey of disillusionment with schooling, it affirms my deepest rationale for deschooling, that of moving beyond fear and towards love. We must ask ourselves what we are afraid of. What is it that we fear in our young people and in ourselves that makes us so unwilling to let go of controlled education? Why can't we allow our young to play a meaningful part in society (where they will *learn along the way*) without first *molding* them for 12 or more years? If we ask these questions within the framework of love, I believe we will see that setting them free from compulsory schooling is one of the greatest acts of love we can bestow upon the next generation.

#### Why Speculative Essay?

With love as a framework, my desire to deschool schooled minds is what leads me to the speculative essay form of inquiry. Through speculative writing, I create an invitation... no, a desperate plea... for others to join me as I continue my journey towards freedom from schooling. It is a conversation I want to have with my readers as I converse with other scholars in the field through their own speculative writing. Schubert (1991) likens the speculative essay to persuasive writing in stating, "The curriculum scholar often strives to convert the reader or at least to

persuade; a central mission of much curriculum writing is to convert or persuade” (p. 61). Once I became completely disillusioned with the fantasy of being able to reform our way out of the problems of schooling, I became impassioned and emboldened to share my epiphany with others while continuing a search for ever greater understanding. I do this not out of my own expertise but rather as a “connoisseur” of essayists who have come before me (Schubert, 1991). The growing list of essays that have impacted me on this journey include Dewey’s (1897) *My Pedagogic Creed*, Freire’s (1970/2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Illich’s (1970/2002) *Deschooling Society*, Reimer’s (1971) *School is Dead*, and Holt’s (1972) *Freedom and Beyond*. More than any other form of research, it has been speculative essays like these that have informed and guided my own educational journey.

What these and other speculative writers have done for me is to first complete my disillusionment. I spent many frustrated years in the classroom trying to make schooling something it can never be, an authentic and meaningful life for myself and my students. But something happened to me when I learned about deschooling. As Holt (1972) reasons, “The dream of many school people, that schools can be places where virtue is preserved and passed on in a world otherwise empty of it, now seems to me a sad and dangerous illusion” (p. 5). That was it! It was all an illusion. All my frustrated striving was for something that can never be. Yet rather than losing all hope, much of which was already gone, I was *relieved*. I no longer had the one option of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Why had the thought of ending schooling altogether never entered my mind? How had I and others become so imprisoned by the “cult of schooling” (Illich, 1971/2012)? Suddenly, a passion was ignited within me to continue this conversation with others, and speculative essay writing is the best way for me to do this.

Rather than attempt the formulation of a step-by-step guide to bring about a deschooled society (not the goal of the speculative essay or appropriate, as no one should impose their ideas upon another), my goal is simply to have a conversation, to reason with anyone who is willing to reason with me. The primary goal is understanding, and this is where we must begin. As Reimer (1971) explains, “The basic objective of education must be an understanding of the world we live in and the world we hope for, understanding which can lead to effective action” (pp. 99-100). The decisions about what this action should be must be a product of both public debate and personal conviction. This is why I write. For me, this becomes a semi-autobiographical inquiry to explore how the common thread through all the influential essay-writing related to deschooling is love... love for oneself and love for others. Love frees rather than controls. Love trusts rather than fears. Love unifies while respecting individuality.... all things that schooling does *not*.

Not to give the false impression that I choose speculative essay as my form of inquiry solely for the benefit of humankind, I write also for myself. From a background of abuse that I compare to schooling, this form of inquiry is a healing process for me. bell hooks (1994) understands this well, as she explains,

Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in ‘theorizing,’ in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This ‘lived’ experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, [became] a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away. Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place. (p. 61)

Like hooks, my speculating becomes very personal. But the healing is something I invite everyone to, and the imagining of possibilities without which deschooling will remain mere fantasy. The damage done to us through schooling is something we all must heal from as we imagine together what could be. It is ourselves that must be transformed. I find that the speculative essay does this best.

I am fully aware that in choosing speculative essay as my form of inquiry, I transgress the traditional dissertation format. I do so for good reason, because it is the best fit for my topic of deschooling and my own style. Writing about deschooling, Reimer (1971) says, “We must develop a language in which we can speak with precision about the needs of modern man – a language freed from the one which is shaped by those institutions men have come to accept as the suppliers of their specific demands” (p. 76). I believe the speculative essay as a form of inquiry helps us develop that language. I have been drawn to it ever since deciding upon my topic, and really even before I knew what to call it. It is, in fact, what has led me here. Most of what I have read, studied, and written throughout my curriculum studies has been speculative writing. As the previous exemplars demonstrate, I am in good company.

Of the alternative forms I might choose, however, the speculative essay is perhaps the most difficult to define. Yet, so are the topics of its speculation (knowledge, human beings, life itself). As Schubert (1991) questions, “How is it that educators unwittingly can be so certain about solutions to curriculum problems, when those very problems are embedded within a context of uncertainty amid the most profound questions that beset humankind?” (p. 67). Rather than attempting to objectify the subjective, the essayist takes her/his reader on a journey of thought. This is not aimless wandering, but rather a targeted effort to shed light onto the central curricular questions too often left in the shadows of empirical science...questions like, “What is

worth knowing? Who decides? Who benefits, and who is silenced? What and where are love and justice in education?” The speculative essay for me, then, is not an attempt to propose concrete answers to complex issues but, rather, a concerted effort to bring fuller awareness to the sham of schooling and to what might be, what could be, if we continue the conversation.

Although not prescriptive, Schubert (1991) builds upon Eisner’s (1979/1994) work to give us some characteristics, or “standards,” which all great essays share as a form of curriculum inquiry. These include “*referential adequacy* and *structural corroboration*... [and] the necessity that the writer be a connoisseur of the topic about which he or she is writing” (pp. 65-66). In other words, the author is not speaking on a topic about which he or she knows nothing or about which there is no support in the literature and/or personal experience. In choosing the speculative essay, I follow Schubert’s (1991) advice:

- (1) to write from experience for which one is a connoisseur;
- (2) to write from commitment to ideas to which one is deeply committed;
- (3) to immerse oneself in the general masters of the essay form;
- (4) to immerse oneself in the abundance of essays on curriculum; and
- (5) to write a great deal. (p. 71)

To further expound upon each of these points, I have become a “connoisseur” of the literature surrounding my topic, reading everything I can get my hands on that relates to the topic of deschooling (e.g. Illich, 1970/2002; Reimer, 1971; Holt, 1972) and to the topics of schooling destruction and abuse (e.g. Gatto, 1992/2017; Nasaw, 1979; Olson, 2009). I write from commitment as a disillusioned educator who knows that schooling needs to end and out of the tremendous passion that I have for seeing the oppressed find freedom within the framework of non-manipulative love. I have immersed myself in both the general masters of the essay form

(e.g. Jensen, 2000/2004; Berry, 1990/2010), as well as those essayists who write specifically about curricular matters (e.g. Dewey, 1897; Freire, 1970/2000; Schubert, 2009a). Finally, I write often and everywhere. I jot hand-written memos on anything within reach whenever an idea comes, I write in the margins of the books I read, and I write outlines that become rough drafts that become revisions and so on. This requires much dedication and hard work, but to write with passion about something worthwhile is its own great reward.

Speculative essay writing can be included within the body of qualitative research that has gained acceptance in the field of curriculum studies. It shares the characteristic of reflective writing centered on one's own inquiry and/or the research and philosophical journeys of others. As Schubert (1991) explains, "One must remember that the [speculative] essay is a portrayal of the author's way of reflecting. It is, thus, a form of philosophical inquiry put into writing" (p. 65). There is no set formula for this form of inquiry. It is a work of art created with great intentionality and devotion to its subject matter. As there is no single, formulaic definition for the speculative essay, neither is there one for qualitative research. To the questions surrounding what qualitative research is, Hatch (2002) states, "I don't believe a single correct answer exists" (p. 5). However, as with the speculative essay, there are certain distinguishing characteristics, many of which they share.

*Centrality of meaning* is one such characteristic described by Hatch (2002) that involves taking into consideration "the meanings individuals use to understand social circumstances rather than trying to identify the 'social facts' that comprise a positivist social theory" (p. 8). These meanings are what the speculative essayist seeks through the writing process. Rapley (2007), as cited in Engin (2011), says it best:

Writing is thinking. It is natural to believe that you need to be clear in your mind what you are trying to express first before you can write it down. However, most of the time, the opposite is true. You may think you have a clear idea, but it is only when you write it down that you can be certain that you do. (p. 298)

I have found this to be true time and time again. As I write what I think I understand, I begin to understand something else. It is a journey of meaning-making. As Schubert (1991) notes, “It [speculative essay] is a form of writing quite unlike the research report which summarizes the product of empirical inquiry. In contrast, the essay lets the reader travel the undulating trek of thought and feeling that the essayist travels” (p. 65). It is a kind of reasoning together that includes the reader as participant.

As the curriculum researcher studies the work of others before attempting to contribute something to her/his topic of interest through speculative essay writing, so too do those employing other qualitative methods. Engin (2011) talks about these *expert others* in her qualitative research:

I used other writers and references to distinguish my own work as well. I used their ideas to interact with and then noted how my work is different... Such interaction with expert others through the literature constituted a dialogue about my ideas, and clarified my own concepts. I used the literature as a spring board to discuss my own framework and ideas, which also constituted practice for more public academic discussion about my thesis. (p. 303)

This is precisely what the speculative essayist does, what I intend to do. It is much like an extensive literature review that studies the inquiry and perspective of others in order to illuminate one's own understanding while interjecting something new to the conversation that moves it

forward. As Engin (2011) explains, “[The] expert other can be the writer...[and] can also be the literature with which the writer is interacting and the other interlocutor then becomes the co-creator of knowledge in the dialogue” (p. 298). The ensuing reflection often leads to new questions and sparks the desire for further research.

I transgress, as others have done before me. Without such transgression, the field of curriculum will die as surely as anything dies when it becomes stagnant by not continuing to move out in new directions. While I would like to say it is out of pure boldness and bravery that I transgress the traditional form of dissertation inquiry, it is mostly because I have been given the freedom to do so. For this, I am truly grateful to my professors in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University and to all supporters within the field.

While I am confident in my chosen form of inquiry, it is in keeping with the reflexive characteristic that speculative writing shares with qualitative research that I discuss the associated challenges. As Hatch (2002) explains, “Researchers are part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (p. 10). This must be acknowledged by any honest researcher, and this includes the speculative essayist. We all bring to our research and writing a unique conceptual framework, one that may not be easy to define.

For example, I find myself closely linked to the critical theorist, but I also find kindred spirits with the critical utopianists, like John Fiske (1987/2011). In his foreword, Jenkins (2011) explains, “If the fantasy is a world where all groups are allowed to speak in their own interests, say, then Fiske’s example pushes us to identify what blocks or prevents them from doing so” (p. xix). The problem is, we cannot always fix it, and I must be careful not to become discouraged as I dream of a deschooled society. “The struggle is real,” as they say, and it is also important that I not get so caught up in the dream that my speculative inquiry becomes mere fantasy writing.

Still, there is a thread of hope interwoven through the identification of the obstacles faced. There is a balance to be maintained between understanding the problems to the point of discouragement and thinking the problems can all be magically eradicated. I hear the voices of all the speculative essayists I have addressed here in these words by Fiske (1987/2011) as he discusses the problem of hegemony and the hope that is found in its vulnerability:

Hegemony is a constant struggle against a multitude of resistances to ideological domination, and any balance of forces that it achieves is always precarious, always in need of re-achievement. Hegemony's "victories" are never final, and any society will evidence numerous points where subordinate groups have resisted the total domination that is hegemony's aim, and have withheld their consent to the system. (p. 41)

It is this resistance that results in the conversations we are currently having in the field of curriculum studies. The speculative essays that I have read and the ones I am now beginning to write prevent "total domination" of the mind.

This is a hope that calls for action. The first step involves reflection and imagination. However, the critical utopian and the speculative essayist do not stop here. Rather, we "identif[y] the steps we might take towards achieving our goals, the resources we possess or lack which might impact that struggle, and the success stories which might model future interventions" (Jenkins, 2011, p. xix). It is after the model of such essayists that I hope to continue my own inquiry. Even so, it must be recognized that this form of inquiry does not always bring about any real change. There is no doubt about John Dewey's influence, for example, in the field of curriculum. Also, Freire (1970/2000), Illich (1970/2002), Reimer (1971), Holt (1972), and Schubert (2009a) produced compelling essays, as have many others. However, in practice, our educational system has not reflected their insights well. Riding on the backs of such giants, I

attend carefully to Schubert's (1991) caveat that "the speculative essay as a form of inquiry yields insight only as great as that mustered by its author" (pp. 64-65). I still have much to learn. Then again, isn't that the point? My writing may not change the world, but if all I manage to do is keep the flame alive, that of questioning assumptions that harm, imagining a more just and joyful world, and simply keeping the conversation going, I feel I will have done something worthwhile.

We are not yet where we want to be, but one thing is for certain. We will never get there if we do not imagine it first. This is where the speculative essay takes us. Illich (1970/2002) understood that he was conceiving and believing what was yet to be. He writes, "The educational institutions I will propose, however, are meant to serve a society which does not now exist" (p. 73). But what he imagines, and I with him, is a society that, once it has abolished schooling as a common necessity for living, can find its way quite easily to more convivial arrangements. All that is needed is a commitment to this cause, one that is shared within the pages of the speculative essay. As Apple (2012) proclaims, "One of the many tasks in which committed critical scholars/activists in education must engage is to 'bear witness' to what is happening; to uncover what dominant groups wish to hide" (p. ix). This is what the great essayist does.

Along with the witnessing, however, must come hope as we imagine what can be. Freire (1970/2000) does this especially well. As Giroux (2000) informs,

Hope for Freire is a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination that encourages progressive educators to stand at the edge of society, to think beyond existing configurations of power in order to imagine the unthinkable in terms of how they might live with dignity, justice, and freedom. (p. 146)

The speculative essay, in helping us to “think beyond,” also helps us to continue, challenge, advance, and transgress the traditions of forms of curriculum inquiry. Illich (1970/2002) suggests that we must change the focus of our research from that which uses school as a funnel for instructional packages to that which focuses on an alternative structure, “an educational network or web for the autonomous assembly of resources under the personal control of each learner” (p. 70). He calls for those of us who have been the most “schooled” to lead the way, a notion Freire (1970/2000) would approve of, liberation *with* and not *for* the people. As Illich (1971/2012) explains,

The university itself, if it is to be worthy of its traditions, must be an institution whose purposes are identified with the exercise of liberty, whose autonomy is based on public confidence in the use of that liberty... My friends, it is your task to surprise yourselves, and us, with the education you succeed in inventing for your children. (p. 134)

I know of no other form of curriculum inquiry that can reveal such love and hope, stir up so much passion and commitment, or that can inspire the kind of liberatory work that is needed.

I believe the speculative essay is an excellent choice for exploring and illuminating the issues surrounding the “why” and “how” of deschooling, because the first and most important step in any cultural revolution is awareness among the people. As Reimer (1971) explains, “Specific barriers to information are not as important as mythologies and the institutions through which these are propagated” (p. 94). What the speculative essay aims to do is call upon readers to reflect upon long-held beliefs that may be false, to question, to seek truth and justice. And as Schubert (1991) states, “Clearly, it [speculative essay] can bring the quality of insight and understanding that has been called paradigmatic” (p. 65). This illumination is my primary purpose for inquiry into deschooling.

Once we open ourselves to the possibility of society without schooling, what the speculative essay helps us to envision, we are free to imagine alternatives. Though speaking specifically about the abolition of prisons, I believe Ayers' (2016) statement on imagining alternatives has broader implications as he says, "Alternatives liberate us from our own culturally imposed mental prisons, our dimmed consciousness and constrained imaginations. Without alternative ways of thinking and being we become destined to be confined in a lockup state of mind" (p. 59). And so, imagining comes first.

We can even use new language to explore education in such a world. Pinar (2004/2012), for example, uses the Latin root "currere" for curriculum. I like Morris's (2015) description: "Currere – as the examination of our lived experiences – is a way to explore our inner interiority, our inner lives in the context of education and in the context of our relations with others and the larger society" (p. 103). I would even suggest not separating the contexts of "education" and "our relations," for I believe they are one and the same. Learning, life itself, is meaningless without relationships... relationships with ourselves, our God, other beings, and the world. Speculative writing is a way to explore and envision such a life. As speculative essayists have helped me to imagine the possibilities of a deschooled world, so I seek to do the same for others through my work.

#### Exemplary Speculative Essays

As previously noted, speculative essayists such as Dewey (e.g., "My Pedagogic Creed," 1897/1959), Freire (e.g. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970/2000), Illich (e.g. *Deschooling Society*, 1970/2002), Reimer (e.g. *School is Dead*, 1971), and Holt (e.g. *Freedom and Beyond*, 1972) have helped me develop a language for theorizing my exploration of deschooling schooled minds. First, they helped me understand that the problem is not *within* schooling; the problem is

schooling itself. Next, they showed me how much better our lives and relationships could be without institutional control. Finally, they revealed how a framework of love compels us to deschool. What follows is an illustration of how those essayists have influenced my dissertation inquiry.

John Dewey – *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897/1959)

Perhaps one of the earliest scholars who could be said to successfully employ the speculative essay as a form of curriculum inquiry, and the first to influence me, is John Dewey. His collection is as vast as it is profound, but *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897/1959) is rightly given special honor in Schubert's (1991) list of "the ten most influential articles" that he goes on to define as "essays... [and] persuasive philosophical pieces that use analytic, interpretive, and/or critical literary style rather than rigorous data-based or other highly rule-bound systematic forms of inquiry" (p. 63). In this essay, Dewey (1897/1959) details his beliefs about education, the school, subject matter, methods, and social progress. He also articulates his famous belief about education as experience that formed the foundation of the well-known Progressive movement that continues to make its mark in education today. For Dewey (1897/1959), "all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the [human] race" (p. 19). Such participation stands in opposition to the traditional view of the student as an empty vessel to be filled.

Dewey (1897/1959) believed that there are two sides to the educational process, a psychological side and a sociological one. He says of the psychological side,

Without insight into the psychological structure and activities of the individual, the educative process will, therefore, be haphazard and arbitrary. If it chances to coincide

with the child's activity it will get a leverage; if it does not, it will result in friction, or disintegration, or arrest of the child nature. (p. 20)

Without consideration of what the child brings to the table, education becomes meaningless and even oppositional to the student. Of the sociological side, Dewey believed the child's social situation plays a key role in her/his learning. He explains, "I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he [sic] finds himself" (Dewey, 1897/1959, p. 20). For him, it was important to understand the interplay of the individual with the society within which s/he interacts.

It was Dewey's belief, then, that the school is its own society, but that this society should not be far removed from the child's natural setting. He held that it "should grow gradually out of the home life... [as] the only way of securing continuity in the child's growth, the only way of giving a back-ground of past experience to the new ideas given in school" (Dewey, 1897/1959, p. 23). But how can this possibly be accomplished? As we look at the schoolhouse both then and now, it could not be much more removed from the natural home and community setting. Why remove the child at all? Why attempt to create a society *like* one's natural setting. Rather, we should invite our children back into society and make it "livable" for them (Illich, 1970/2002). Dewey (1897/1959) himself says, "I believe that education... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 22). Yet, preparation is all that schooling is about. I say, deschool and let them live, because to live *is* to learn.

Although Dewey did not question the institution of schooling itself, he brought into light much of what was wrong with it. At the same time, he utilized speculative writing as a legitimate form of inquiry. His writing is not the conclusions of empirical study, but rather the speculations of an expert in the field, fully immersed and well-experienced in curriculum matters. We find

him a leader among the pragmatic philosophers who gave roots to practical inquiry (Schubert, 1986). “[T]he practical paradigm derived from Dewey...serves interests of establishing meaning and direction amid a continuous flow of problems encountered in educational situations” (p. 314). In this framework, curriculum is not viewed as something imposed upon others but, rather, evolves through the interaction of beings and the environment or situation. Not to be boxed in, “inquiry advocated by Dewey does not serve practical interests alone” (Schubert, 1986, p. 314). As a leader in the Progressive education movement, we must also include him among the critical theorists. Those familiar with his work and writings will recognize his efforts to address questions central to critical inquiry, as listed by Schubert (1986):

1. How is knowledge reproduced by schools?
2. What are the sources of knowledge that students acquire in schools?
3. How do students and teachers resist or contest that which is conveyed through lived experience in schools?
4. What do students and teachers realize from their school experiences? In other words, what impact does school have on their outlooks?
5. Whose interests are served by outlooks and skills fostered by schooling?
6. When served, do these interests move more in the direction of emancipation, equity, and social justice, or do they move in the opposite direction?
7. How can students be empowered to attain greater liberation, equity, and social justice through schooling? (p. 315)

These are all profound philosophical questions best handled through philosophical inquiry, such as accomplished through the speculative essay, of which Dewey gave us much. These are the questions that I explore in my inquiry towards deschooling.

Paulo Freire – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000)

As a form of curriculum inquiry, the speculative essay is not prescriptive. Paulo Freire (1970/2000) understood the importance of avoiding prescriptive theorizing, as he reminds us in his landmark work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness” (p. 47). The essayist, on the other hand, merely invites new awareness and new possibilities. Note Freire’s (1970/2000) call to heightened consciousness of both oppressor *and* oppressed while opposing the force of one’s will upon another that we see in more prescriptive methods:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness.

Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (p.51)

We find this “oppressive reality” he speaks of not only in prescriptive theorizing but in the prescriptive curriculum of schooling, as well. “Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 78). In contrast, we see in the speculative essay an invitation to both reflection and action towards liberation. As Freire (1970/2000) expounds, “Authentic liberation – the process of humanization – is not another deposit to be made in men [sic]. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79). It is a dialogue, what Freire

(1970/2000) contends is the “correct method for a revolutionary leadership to employ” (p. 67). Speculative essay writing, like Freire’s, encourages and continues this dialogue.

Everyone is invited to the dialogue of speculative writing. As a form of inquiry, it welcomes questions and challenges while rejecting a “one right way” or step-by-step process. And it is powerful. Freire (1970/2000) speaks of the “essence of dialogue itself: *the word...* [within which] we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 87). This can only happen within the framework of love. As Freire (1970/2000) goes on to explain, “Dialogue cannot exist... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people” (p. 89). His writing, intertwined with love, reinforces this dialogue just as I aim to do.

This is love not of the “sentimental” variety. Freire (1970/2000) explains. Listen, as he does, to the beauty of speculative writing in its ability to both inform and transform:

Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. (pp. 89-90)

In schooling, we find “the situation of oppression,” and so to deschool is to “restore the love.” With this radical love within dialogue, we find radical hope. “As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I am moved by hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of women and men seeking

to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 92). As we love, we dialogue; as we dialogue, we fight; and through it all, we hope.

Ivan Illich – Deschooling Society (1970/2002)

Ivan Illich (1970/2002) invites us into a dialogue about why schooling needs to end and how we can have better educational arrangements. His speculative writing compels us to consider something far more radical than school reform:

Neither ideological criticism nor social action can bring about a new society. Only disenchantment with and detachment from the central social ritual and reform of that ritual can bring about radical change. (Illich, 1970/2002, p. 38)

Such disenchantment with schooling is precisely what his writing completed in me and what I hope to lead others to through my own speculative writing.

Illich (1970/2002) makes a passionate argument for deschooling. He uses the myths of schooling as a springboard for this dialogue. “A second major illusion on which the school system rests is that most learning is the result of teaching” (p. 12). What is the point of schooling if most learning happens elsewhere? Illich (1970/2002) argues that it actually does the opposite of educate. He writes, “‘Instruction’ smothers the horizon of young people’s imaginations” (p. 39). Everything is planned in school. Successful students respond to such instruction with whatever they have learned is expected. I spoke to a student just the other day who wouldn’t write down one word for an assignment that allowed him to make up his own ending to a story. I said, “Think about it! You get to write whatever you want! Use your imagination!” His quick response was, “I don’t have one.” He may be closer to the truth than most. Perhaps it is this lack

of imagination in those of us who have been schooled that hinders our ability to envision a world without obligatory schooling.

Illich (1971/2012) clarifies that he is not criticizing all formal education, only that which is compulsory and has arisen “with the growth of the industrial state” (p. 110). An earlier speculative essay, written by Philip Jackson (1958/1994), similarly criticized obligatory schooling by utilizing one of the essay’s greatest features, that of drawing comparisons. In *The Daily Grind*, he compares schools with prisons and mental hospitals in their forced attendance. The student, like prisoners and patients, “must develop strategies for dealing with the conflict that frequently arises between his [sic] natural desires and interests on the one hand and institutional expectations on the other” (p. 37). It is the institutionalization of education, that which creates this conflict within, that these critical theorists are calling for an end to. Such speculative inquiry is more than critique. It is a call to action. The more fully we examine the problem, the more we are spurred to action towards its solution. If truth and freedom are our goals, society must be deschooled.

Illich shows us how but in a nonprescriptive way. The speculative essay can provide a landscape of possibility as the writer lays out his/her vision. As Illich (1970/2002) describes,

A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. (p. 75)

There are multiple ways to make this happen, especially now in our high-tech age. But do we even need a “system” at all? What might our society look like without one, without what we

currently call “education”? As Illich wrote, he formed a vision. As I write, using the same form as he, the speculative essay, I do the same.

Everett Reimer – *School is Dead* (1971)

Ivan Illich was a Catholic priest. So how did he come to write about deschooling society? He gives us at least the beginning of an answer when he states, “I owe my interest in public education to Everett Reimer... Together, we have come to realize that for most men [sic] the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school” (Illich, 1970/2002, p. vii). As colleagues at the CIDOC (Centro Intercultural de Documentacion) and as friends, Illich and Reimer spent many hours in conversation. In *School is Dead: An Essay on Alternatives in Education* (1971), Reimer begins by stating, “This book is the result of a conversation with Ivan Illich which has continued for fifteen years” (p. 7). In it, he continues the dialogue, speculating on reasons for and possibilities in deschooling as he looks at education from a global perspective.

His is a message of hope. In Freirean style, Reimer (1971) claims, “The positive thesis of this book is that people can become aware of their bad institutional habits and can change them” (p. 10). Awareness is what his speculative writing first brings. About what schooling does, he informs us,

Increasingly, schools in all nations, of all kinds, at all levels, combine four distinct social functions: custodial care, social-role selection, indoctrination, and education as usually defined in terms of the development of skills and knowledge. It is the combination of these functions which makes schooling so expensive. It is conflict among these functions which makes schools educationally inefficient. It is also the combination of these functions which tends to make school a total institution, which has made it an

international institution, and which makes it such an effective instrument of social control. (Reimer, 1971, p. 23)

A total institution cannot be a democratic one but, rather, an oppressive reality for its members. This is true not only for students, but teachers, as well. As Reimer (1971) explains, “Before there were schools there were caretakers of children, gymnastic disciplinarians enforcing practice, masters with disciples. None of these three assumed that learning resulted from teaching, while schools treat learning as if it were the *product* of teaching” (p. 37). At one time, there were other ways of thinking and being. It is a terrible symptom of being institutionalized that we seem to have forgotten this, that we could live in a society (a more democratic society) in which schooling may not, in fact, be *necessary*.

Reimer (1971) not only speculates on the reasons to deschool, but also on possible alternatives. There should be many. As Reimer (1971) explains, “The school system must not be replaced by another dominant system: alternatives must be plural... It [education] should be a self-justified activity designed to help man gain and maintain control of himself, his society and his environment” (p. 89). It is, once again, a message of freedom and hope. It is a message that the speculative essay propagates well. As Reimer (1971) proclaims, “In the name of these ideals [justice and freedom] it is possible to call for free education, realizing that it can be fully achieved only as a greater social justice is also achieved, and that each can and must be instrumental in the achievement of the other” (p. 94). There are alternatives to the total institution and hope for more democratic ones. Or, perhaps, no alternatives are needed at all. Either way, such messages of hope are a critical element of speculative writing. I learn from them and honor them in my work as I share my own.

John Holt – Freedom and Beyond (1972)

John Holt understood this hope. Like Illich (1970/2002) and Reimer (1971), his hope was to see education and its subjects freed from the institution of schooling. He was able to envision such a society, and through his speculative writing share that vision with us. As the well-known Proverb goes, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” We don’t imagine *after* we have found a way to make our vision a reality; the vision must come *first*. The speculative essay is very effective in building a vision for both writer and audience. As Holt (1972) writes about an encounter he had with an African exchange student who had asked him what message about education he should take back to his country, he finally replied that they did not need schools to have education. He then states, “I had a faint vision of people talking and learning under roofs of palm trees, or under trees – anywhere, everywhere” (p. 117). The writing makes the vision more solid, more widespread, and more lasting.

Important though the vision is, Holt (1972) did not write merely from dreams but out of experience and extensive study within the field. He was able then, with great credibility, to explain the problems with schooling that no amount of reform could ever remedy. He addresses, for example, the issue of reproducing social inequities through schooling’s creation of categories (winners and losers). “The things we do to select a few winners defeat whatever things we do to encourage the growth of all...it is grotesque and outrageous for an institution doing such work...to keep trying to pass itself off as the chief defender of children” (pp. 250-251). It does, though, and anyone who refuses to participate in the hypocrisy (whether by homeschooling, unschooling, or dropping out) is shamed by our schooled culture for doing so.

To continue his reasoning for the hope and vision he has of a deschooled society, Holt (1976/2008) expounds upon the oppressive nature of our modern view of education:

It [education] is the deepest foundation of the modern and world-wide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and “fans,” driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy, and fear. My concern is not to improve “education” but to do away with it, to end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves. (p. 18)

This statement eloquently sums up the rationale for the vision as well as the urgency in making it a reality. His well-informed writing leads us to a greater understanding of deschooling as a human rights issue, a social justice issue, and a call for equity. As Holt (1972) further notes, “I think that schools and schooling, by their very nature, purposes, structure, and ways of working are, and are meant to be, an obstacle to poor kids, designed and built not to move them up in the world but to keep them at the bottom of it and *to make them think it is their own fault*” (p. 186). I have worked in numerous schools and witnessed the course of students from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and with few exceptions, I have seen this to be the case.

Simply ending compulsory schooling will never be enough to eradicate such injustice. Much of the means and tools of learning has been monopolized by schools, and anyone who gains any form of education elsewhere is not given any credit for it. This is what needs to change. And much support will be needed. As Holt (1972) explains, “It must be clear that much of this will require large-scale government action and support” (p. 180). Like Illich (1970/2002), Holt (1972) understood the need for laws to end discrimination based on lack of schooling credentials. It is not an easy thing to eliminate or even diminish something that has become a sacred cow in our society, but writing about it from a position of immersion and reflection is what gives the speculative essayist the power to hope and to share that hope with others.

## Why Deschool?

While sharing my hope of a deschooled society, I must look at myself every day in the mirror and ask, “Are you a hypocrite?” I am arguing to end an institution that has served me well. Or has it? If I continue in my current career, it certainly has, at least in some ways. I am about to obtain the highest educational credential, not to mention a nice pay increase. However, if I wanted to do anything besides teach, I must admit the fact that I have no other “marketable” skills. As one professor notes, “People pay me to lecture, write, and think my thoughts. These are virtually my *only* marketable skills. I’m hardly unique. The stereotype of the head-in-the-clouds Ivory Tower academic is funny because it’s true” (Caplan, 2018, p. 9). Still, schooling pays. Employers care about and pay more for higher schooling credentials. Why? Perhaps the answer to this question will help to answer the question, “Why deschool?”

Caplan (2018) calls the reason why schooling pays “signaling.” In our society, schooling credentials are a marker of a good employee. It really has nothing to do with what or even how much you learn. As Caplan (2018) explains,

Despite the chasm between what students learn and what workers do, academic success is a strong *signal* of worker productivity. The labor market doesn’t pay you for the useless subjects you master; it pays you for the preexisting traits you reveal by mastering them.

(p. 13)

The argument here is that if a person can sit through 12 or more (and more is better) years of schooling drudgery, giving teachers what they want in order to make the grades, they will more likely be excellent workers. This is discrimination by educational credentials, and this is what deschoolers are calling for an end to. For surely there are more just, humane, and less painful, time-consuming, life-eating, or expensive ways to “signal” what employers are looking for. And

is this even what education is for? Impressing an employer? Landing a good-paying job? Are there no better reasons for learning in this life? I believe there certainly are. However, I include this discussion because, unfortunately, those who abandon schooling in our current society are demonized and considered unworthy of success (financially, socially, or otherwise).

This alludes to an even worse discriminatory aspect of our schooled society – the damage done to the psyche of any individual who does not play the game. In discussing Ivan Illich, Prakash and Esteva (2008) note how “[he] came to understand how compulsory education creates a structured injustice; teaching people to blame themselves for failing to reach its mirage of equality and success” (pp. 91-92). Our educational systems do more than deny access based on schooling credentials. They abuse their victims through the monopolistic hold they have on people’s knowledge, denying credit for any learning that occurs outside its grip. Schooling traps me, as well, as long as I want to hold on to the security I have in its existence, “since respectable educators, radical or other, keep clear of the danger of belling the cat or biting the hand that feeds” (Prakash & Esteva, 2008, p. 93). But freedom is better than security, and so I press on to achieve it not only for myself but for everyone. I will bite the hand that feeds and proclaim with Holt (1976), “Education – compulsory schooling, compulsory learning – is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind and spirit. Let all those escape it who can, any way they can” (p. 222). As the victim of an abusive relationship can end the abuse and begin to heal only by escaping the perpetrator, so too must we escape compulsory schooling. Only then can we begin to fully heal from the damage already done.

As compelling as the aforementioned reasons to deschool are, my primary rationale for wanting to see an end to (as opposed to another reform of) the institution of schooling is simply this: we don’t need it! Not only is it harmful, it is completely unnecessary, a waste of time,

money, and energy that would be much better spent elsewhere. More and more people are understanding this. As Esteva, Prakash, and Stuchul (2008) proclaim, “People are again acknowledging that to know is a personal experience, and that the only way to know, to widen the competencies for living, is to learn from the world, not about the world” (p. 104). When, I wonder, did we forget? As Prakash & Esteva (2008) remind us, “Learning and teaching preceded education and the educational system by millennia” (p. 16). And not everyone has succumbed to the lure of schooling as a need or human right. Let us remember what two-thirds of the so-called “underdeveloped” world have not forgotten. “Standing on their own soils, they need no experts to teach them how to nurture and be nurtured by their worlds” (Prakash & Esteva, 2008, p. 31). Let us begin, like them, to simply live, both young and old, and strive not for the acquisition of more and more credentials while tucked away in institutions of so-called learning, waiting to earn our right to become productive members of society, but to start at birth to *be* and to *live* without interruption.

#### Outline of Chapters

My dissertation consists of a Preface, five Chapters, and an Afterthought. In the Preface, I discuss the problem of schooling and the roots of my passion for deschooling that is born out of my own suffering in oppressive relationships and institutions.

In Chapter 1, I introduce my audience to my topic of deschooling, including discussions about my rationale, influences, and chosen form of inquiry. Special attention is given to the influence of major theorists on not only my topic of deschooling, but also my choice of the speculative essay form of inquiry which is a transgression of the traditional dissertation format.

In Chapter 2, I explore contexts, particularly the oppressive and destructive elements of our institutions of so-called learning in their creation of the schooled mind. Through reflection of

works such as Goodman's (1962) *Compulsory Mis-education*, Giroux's (2000) *Stealing Innocence*, Gatto's (2008) "The Public School Nightmare," and Cameron's (2012) *Canaries Reflect on the Mine*, along with my own personal experiences with oppressive persons and institutions, I make the case that schooling is an abusive institution that we need to get free of.

In Chapter 3, I focus on deschooling and the major theorists (e.g. Illich, 1970/2002; Holt, 1972; Goodman, 1962; Reimer, 1971; Schubert, 2009). Here, I detail how each theorist's work supports the idea of deschooling and beyond. I pay special attention to the framework of love that is woven throughout their writing and the current relevance of their speculations.

In Chapter 4, I explore more democratic and non-compulsory educational arrangements, such as Free Schools, homeschool, and resources like Illich's (1970/2002) "learning webs." I explore both the positive and negative aspects of each, what we might borrow from them in an effort to deschool and what characteristics (and their underlying assumptions) need to be left behind.

In Chapter 5, I detail my own personal schooling story and share my vision of a deschooled society (hooks, 2001; Eisner, 1979/1994; Berry, 1990/2010). I explore the changing University (Readings, 1996; Donoghue, 2008/2018; Bloom, 1987) and how my University experience has led me to imagine a deschooled landscape. What might it look like? How differently would life be lived without compulsory attendance in schools? What opportunities might open up without the requirement of schooling credentials?

Finally, in an Afterthought, I share my reflections and life choices deriving from this inquiry into deschooling. For my family, it has put into motion a series of events that have freed us in ways I didn't believe possible when I first began this journey.

## CHAPTER 2

### SCHOOLING AND ABUSE

[The memoirs I include in this chapter are of a fictitious character, Anne. She is a compilation of real women I have befriended throughout the years since my own experience in a verbally abusive marriage. (All included names are fictitious.) Her story is their story... and mine.]

#### Introduction

*It was a chipping away of my being, the constant questioning of my thoughts and ideas. And I must have done something wrong to make him so angry, because I know he really loves me. I will learn to cook better. I won't spend so much time with my sister. I will stay home after the baby is born, because that really is where I belong. I will support my husband, because he supports me.*

Anne's first marriage was a verbally abusive relationship that lasted 13 years...unlucky 13. Ben came into her life with all the charm and charisma of a fairy-tale prince. It was a fast courtship leading to marriage at a very young age (she was 20; he was 26). She was living the dream, but the façade began to crack early. One can only keep up appearances for so long. She fought at first with protests such as, "You can't tell me what to do and who I choose to spend my time with... Don't talk to me that way!... Let me leave!" He grabbed and shoved her some in the beginning but was quickly met with the force (and, I believe, secret threats) of her family. No worries. There are other ways to control.

As I write about abuse, I am defining it as any tactic used to control or have power over another. The most obvious and recognizable form of abuse is physical, because the bruises are on the outside of a person and visible. But physical harm is only one of many tactics a person or institution might use to abuse. *"If the words or the attitude disempower, disrespect, or devalue*

*the other, then they are abusive*” (Evans, 1992/2010, p. 35). The hurt is on the inside but is no less damaging, perhaps even more so, than physical battering. Like hegemony, there is no need for physical violence (which is harder to get away with) when the mind and spirit can be assaulted and manipulated. Anne’s verbally abusive husband never struck her with his fist, and there were times, she told me, that she wished he would. Mental abuse is harder to heal, because it so often goes unrecognized, unvalidated. This is very similar to the type of harm we find in the institution of schooling. Esteva, Prakash, & Stuchul (2008) explain, “As victims, we have been seduced into believing that schooling and education are prerequisites for living a good life. We have been deceived by the cult of experts to accept that living, learning, and growing require expert expertise” (p. 107). Seduction and deception do not make for a healthy environment, and it is time we break free of it.

As with the verbally abusive relationship, until we name it, call it what it is (abuse), and learn to recognize it, we cannot be free. This is why I compare schooling with the abuse we find in interpersonal relationships, so that we can begin to recognize schooling for what it is, an assault on the mind and spirit of students, teachers, and knowledge itself. Olson (2009) writes about “wounds of numbness” that sound very similar to what Anne experienced before realizing she was in an abusive relationship. These include “loss of feeling around learning...just going through the motions...losing interest...not much courage or bravery in the face of learning difficulty” (p. 45). This is why we do not see many students being persistent when the going gets tough, lacking in resilience. It is because they are wounded. These are the symptoms of abuse. As Olson (2009) further describes,

The individuals I spoke to felt that school was not just benign or neutral – it had *fractured* them. Their creativity, their humanity, and their capacity to imagine were, at the very

least, unsupported by their educational environments, and in some cases actively hampered by them. Their journey as adults was about, in part, “recovering” what they had lost in school, so that they could express themselves more fully as professionals and in their personal lives. (p. 4, emphasis mine)

Anne’s journey to recover what she had lost in 13 years of an abusive relationship also involved regaining her humanity, allowing herself to think, speak, and feel freely again. Before the healing can begin, however, we must recognize the abuse as abuse. That is the purpose of this chapter.

For clarity of writing, as Patricia Evans (1992/2010) does in her book, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, I will use the male pronoun to refer to the abuser and the female pronoun to refer to the victim when making this comparison. As Evans (1992/2010) explains, “Since I hear primarily from women [about abusive relationships], I will continue to use the feminine pronoun when describing the target of verbal abuse” (p. 14). Again, this is mainly for clarity and not to imply that women cannot be abusive or men cannot be victims of abuse. Both boys and girls suffer in our schools. However, I align my writing with that of my own experience with abuse and with the literature.

#### Shared Characteristics/Effects

*I had already not been seeing my family often when Ben’s work gave him the choice to move either to Atlanta or Chicago. Chicago it is. I think it was a choice I had a say in. I did not know anyone there, but it would be an adventure, a fresh start for us. The marital counseling here did not help very much, anyway. He never wanted to go more than once or twice.*

Isolation is key. The abuser will often attempt to both physically and mentally distance his victim from any ties to her reality outside of the relationship. Similarly, schools are like little worlds unto themselves. And rather than togetherness, no matter all the token phrases about

“cooperative learning” and “teamwork,” they breed competition. As one school drop-out explains her experience, “It was like being in prison, and it’s like a competition to see who’s the better person” (Cameron, 2012, p. 21). This is a theme that is present throughout many of the drop-outs’ stories, and there is no relief in this isolated world. Students’ realities outside of school are rarely, if ever, considered. About another dropout in Cameron’s (2012) research (Hannah), it is said, “If young people could leave their out-of-school lives outside the school house door and if school culture didn’t punish kids whose lives complicate their school experiences, Hannah would have graduated” (p. 18). But what of it? If in order to graduate, students must learn to deny their lived realities while they “play school” in this isolated world, what good is it?

In my verbally abusive marriage, I felt in a constant state of confusion. I didn’t have the words, the language, to describe what was happening to me. Similarly, through many years of interviewing individuals about their school experiences, Olson (2009) “heard stories of lost human capacity, of intense grief, of profound shame, and of a sense of ‘divided self’ because individuals have few words (and we as a culture have few paradigms) for identifying and describing learning reluctance and school wounds” (p. 25). Towards the end my abusive marriage, my sister described how she felt that I had become a “shell” of my former self. I believe that is what many students are feeling throughout the school day. For many, unfortunately, that lost sense of self lingers far beyond those walls.

Recognizing schooling as abusive is not a tremendous leap if we compare the characteristics and effects of both. As previously defined, abuse is an attempt to have power over another, and the theme of power and schooling runs throughout Post-Reconceptualist curriculum theory. Key issues that are addressed through such inquiry include oppression based on social

hierarchies, hegemony (i.e. hidden curriculum), patriarchy, truth as a social construct, sexism, racism, freedom and justice. These issues began to emerge (and some re-emerge) through the work of curriculum theorists in the 1970s reconceptualization of the field (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995/2014). It was during this time that there was a paradigm shift from “*development* of curriculum to a theoretical and practical interest in *understanding* curriculum” (p. 187). It was a time of increasing awareness that there was more going on in the schools than was the result of intentional planning. There were serious issues that needed to be addressed.

Philip Jackson (1958/1994) understood the greater importance of understanding when he wrote, “Teachers, like parents, seldom ponder the significance of the thousands of fleeting events that combine to form the routine of the classroom” (p. 33). He elaborates on power in explaining how the teacher dominates more than just the planned learning activities of the school day. “Typically, in most classrooms students come to know when things are right or wrong, good or bad, pretty or ugly, largely as a result of what the teacher tells them” (Jackson, 1958/1994, p. 44). They are not free then, according to his analysis, to make up their own minds. This is not unlike Evans’ (1992/2010) assessment of how the abuser attempts to define his victim. As she explains, “[One] pattern that the partner may recognize in verbal abuse is that her mate defines her, the relationship, himself, and most often, the upsetting interactions” (p. 71). In a million different ways in my verbally abusive marriage I was told that I was crazy. I was told that the things that hurt me didn’t really hurt, that my relationship was good and loving, even though my experience of it was quite different.

*Why are you shouting at me? This had become an internal question. It no longer made any sense to ask it out loud, because he would always shout, “I am not shouting!” I am hurting so much, and I am pregnant. This cannot be good for the baby. I have to get myself together. I*

*have to figure out why I can't seem to keep him happy. He is so stressed out and unhappy at work, it's the least I can do to make sure he is happy at home. God, I'm tired.*

*I think I am going crazy.*

Students in schools are similarly defined and have experiences of hurt that are also denied. They are told that school is good for them and that if they don't succeed it is their own fault because they are lazy or dumb or bad. This is domination of the mind and spirit. As Holt (1976/2008) proclaims,

Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other persons' experiences, and find and make the meaning of our own lives. Whoever takes that right away from us, as the educators do, attacks the very center of our being and does us a most profound and lasting injury. He [sic] tells us, in effect, that we cannot be trusted even to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value. (p. 18)

We can no longer allow this most insidious form of abuse, allowing any person or entity to define another in these most intimate and damaging ways, which finds fertile ground in compulsory schooling.

Jackson (1958/1994) addressed such domination through hierarchy of power in his emphasis on the student's lack of control under the teacher's supervision. Later critical theorists, such as Elizabeth Vallance (1973) would call this part of the "hidden curriculum." She explains it as follows:

Recently, we have witnessed the discovery – or, rather, we have heard the allegation, for the issue is cast most often as criticism – that schools are teaching more than they claim to teach, that they are doing it systematically, and doing it well. A pervasive hidden curriculum has been discovered in operation. The functions of this hidden curriculum have been variously identified as the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the perpetuation of traditional class structure – functions that may be characterized generally as social control. (p. 5).

Like verbal abuse, this hidden curriculum can be likened to brainwashing. As one of Evans (1992/2010) clients explains, “*He [the abuser] has a secret agenda. He’s trying to control you. If you don’t know his secret, you’re helpless*” (p. 110). Our children in schools are helpless until we help them name it and stop it.

*I don’t feel so good. I am so exhausted. My bones ache. Do I have cancer? My head hurts. Do I have a tumor? My heart is beating funny. I need to see a doctor. I need more tests. “Are you depressed? Are you under a lot of stress?” one doctor asks me. I laugh, “Well, no, I don’t think so.” There is something physically wrong. Why can’t they find it? I think I am dying. I hope I am dying. Something is very wrong.*

Many of the symptoms Anne suffered as a result of verbal abuse are the same symptoms we are seeing more and more in both students and teachers in our schools. As Palmer (2009) tells us, “I have talked with many teachers who are deeply wounded and wearied by the fact that, every day, as they work to build their students up, they watch the system grind them down” (p. xv). As both a teacher and a survivor of an abusive relationship, I understand the anxiety, depression, lack of focus, even unexplainable physical ailments like headaches and fatigue. I

remember my counselor calling these ailments “soul pain.” I believe many in the grip of schooling are suffering the same as their spirits are crushed. And as Dewey (1938) questioned,

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual *loses his [sic] own soul*: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative...  
(p. 49)

It is of no avail... and worse, it is destructive of our very humanness. Yet, it is a very real result of the acquisitive society that is reproduced in schools, that imagined need to possess and control people as objects, as products.

#### Conviviality ~ The Victim’s Reality

Conviviality, in contrast to acquisitiveness, can be compared to Evans (1992/2010) “Reality II” (where the target of abuse lives), as opposed to “Reality I” (where the abuser lives). Reality II includes knowledge of one’s “Personal Power... [which] works by mutuality and co-creation. Personal Power comes from one’s connection to his or her own feelings and increases through cooperation with, and participation in, life” (Evans, 1992/2010, p. 33). It is about being fully alive in a way that allows us to *see* ourselves and others in respectful interconnectedness with the world around us. Compare this description with Illich’s (1973/2009) definition of “conviviality” discussed in Chapter 1, “autonomous and creative intercourse...individual freedom realized in personal interdependence...” (p. 11). It is about mutuality rather than power over another. Schooling does not fit within this reality. It keeps us too busy and controlled to live in this open and free way. Ivan, another of Cameron’s (2012) dropouts, understands his personal power as he states,

[W]hen I really evaluated what was important to me in life, I decided that high school was more of a side project, something to get over with so that I could have the degree, when really I was just studying the things important to me on the side, separate from high school. So high school just kinda got in the way. (p.72)

Ivan reminds me so much of my James, 16, full of creativity and spirit, always “on the go.” Sitting in school for most of every day finally became unbearable for him. Beginning in middle school, he started calling me from the school nurse’s office more frequently, had numerous headaches and stomach aches, and his grades began to suffer. I was able to get him into a counselor’s office (outside of school), but he already knew what the problem was. I regret it took him so long to convince me! Once I finally withdrew him during his 2nd year of high school, his anxiety dropped significantly and he became much happier, more “himself.” He was able to dive more deeply into the things he was really interested in learning about. He ordered and read books on Japanese culture, language, and weaponry (he now has quite a collection of knives and swords); he planted and ate from several small gardens (he is very much into natural eating and working out); spent hours drawing and painting; and formed a band with several friends to experiment with making and recording music, including playing various instruments and creating videos. He also began working, just odd jobs at first. Now, he manages a small Asian grocery store where he had befriended the owners with his frequent visits and skateboarding lessons for their son. He also works occasionally with a friend’s family in their landscaping business, which utilizes his love of plants and nature.

James’s deschooling was not immediate. The idea at first was to do online public school, something that has grown in popularity over the years. Perhaps this takes away *some* of the abusiveness of schooling simply by removing the child from the institution’s physical

environment. But the goals are the same – do the work you are told to do, study what the teachers tell you is important to study, make the grades, or be a failure. James couldn't do it. The world outside of school, *his* world, was finally within reach. Given the space and freedom to simply live his life, his spirit would not allow him to deny it any longer.

The struggle was greater for me, I believe, as I watched his grades slip further and further beyond the point of no return. Still, I could sense his anxiety at my (and society's) disapproval. Finally, learning all that I have learned in my study of deschooling, I realized I could not continue forcing him into a way of life I myself no longer supported. My conversation with him upon this decision to let go was like freeing a bird from his cage. I could almost *see* the burden lift from his shoulders and the sparkle return to his eyes, like watching a dying ember catch oxygen and flare back to life. It was in that moment that all remaining doubts I had about allowing him to deschool vanished, utterly consumed by the fire that is the spirit of my son.

I don't know all of the obstacles James will face not having gone the "traditional" route of schooling. I could call him "homeschooled" and even create a valid diploma for him (thanks to Georgia's relaxed homeschool laws), but I am honestly not sure what he would do with it. He is not interested in college. One thing I am sure of. I would not go back and deny his need to leave school, especially after seeing him becoming the person he was designed to be, full of confidence, still curious and creative. What a waste sitting in school would be for him during these most vibrant years! And what an unforgivable crime had it been allowed to cripple his spirit.

In schools, we move, we breath, but we are like the walking dead. As Freire (1970/2000) notes, "[T]here is almost an unnatural *living death*: life which is denied its fullness" (p. 171). This is not freedom. To exit our own personal prison, even, to walk completely and utterly alone

is like a kind of purgatory. We must come to understand “that human beings in communion liberate each other” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 133). We do not free others, and we cannot free ourselves in isolation. We need community, the convivial society.

After a cultural revolution, or really as part of it, what is needed is a “cultural synthesis” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 180). As Freire (1970/2000) explains, “In this synthesis, leaders and people are somehow reborn in new knowledge and new action” (p. 181). This can happen once we dismantle the institutions of our abusive culture. Once we disrupt the institution of schooling, for example, we can form what Illich (1970/2002) describes as “learning webs,” those partnerships or groups of like-minded individuals to trade skills, apprentice, or simply explore a common curiosity, unforced and uncoerced. Jensen (2000/2004) has a similar notion when he asks, “What if life is a web of immeasurably complex and respectful relationships?” (p. 113). What if we all defined life this way?

This convivial reality, one that values the individual’s right to choose her/his own path in mutual relationship with others, is about freedom, allowing our young people space to grow and learn as their own God-given spirit guides them. This kind of reality is so much more than idle suggestion. The very future of society depends on our willingness to value this freedom enough to deschool. As Illich (1970/2002) warned us over fifty years ago, “School has become the planned process which tools man for a planned world, the principal tool to trap man in man’s trap... Inexorably we cultivate, treat, produce, and school the world out of existence” (p. 110). According to his analysis, then, we may be running out of time. The more we learn to depend on our institutions to direct the course of our lives, the more we forget what living free is about and the sooner we pass a point of no return to even having that option.

A convivial world must be fostered and protected now so that future generations grow up understanding their right to fully and freely live without taking that right away from anyone else. As Illich (1973/2009) suggests, “A postindustrial society must and can be so constructed that no one person’s ability to express himself or herself in work will require as a condition the enforced labor or the enforced learning or the enforced consumption of another” (p. 13). People need tools to help them live more independently and also for the mutual benefit of all. But mostly, they need – and have a fundamental right to – freedom.

This is not a right held only by adults, but by people of all ages. Adolescence is a social construct, and about them Goodman (1962) says,

The American world-view is worse than inadequate; it is irrelevant and uninterested, and adolescents are spiritually abandoned. They are insulated by not being taken seriously.

The social machine does not require or desire its youth to find identity or vocation; it is interested only in aptitude. It does not want new initiative, but conformity. (p. 68)

Schools might try to get around this argument by saying they have special creative programs for students to “think outside the box” and learn to “think critically,” but in my experience these are mostly reserved for the “gifted,” and not as an all-encompassing culture of faith in youth. For most, we simply keep them young (and controlled) throughout as many years of schooling as we can compel or coerce them into. As Spring (1973a) describes, these young adults “are all kept in a state of infantile dependency. Deschooling, therefore provides a means for releasing the creative energies of the poor and the young and thus for increasing the flexibility of society” (p. 146). Instead of holding them back, we need to build a society for people that allows them to live their lives sooner, believing that when someone wants or needs to learn something, s/he will do it. This is the convivial society we must strive for.

### Acquisitiveness ~ The Abuser's Reality

Contrast the convivial society, Reality II, with the acquisitive one, Reality I. Evans (1992/2010) describes Reality I as follows:

Living in Reality I is living in the Power Over model. The abuser knows no Personal Power, nor does he experience the security and self-acceptance of Personal Power.

Consequently, he avoids his feelings of powerlessness by dominating and controlling his partner. (p. 37)

There is no mutuality in Reality I and no freedom. I lost my freedom gradually, like the frog who is placed in lukewarm water and does not notice the change in temperature as heat is slowly applied. In the end, the frog is boiled alive. As Freire (1970/2000) explains (and as quoted in Chapter 1), "One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (p. 51). This oppression can come from a single person or from an entire culture. Freedom, on the other hand, according to Holt (1972), can be defined simply as, "More Choice. Less Fear" (p. 20). Love allows others to choose. Love casts out fear. The abusive person or culture, however, seeks to control (take away personal choice) through fear. Successful students learn to comply. As Olson (2009) expounds,

Wounds of compliance often are rooted in fear: fear of breaking out of the roles we are assigned by the culture, fear of being perceived as different, fear of not being successful, fear of being an outcast. (p. 41)

How long I had nightmares, even after safely away from my abuser, of being or behaving in ways that might upset him! I had nightmares, too, for years after graduating high school, of

forgetting to go to a class or not doing what was expected of me. The danger had passed, but the *fear* was still there. I have listened to many others tell tales of such schooling nightmares.

*I can't leave. Divorce is not an option. That is a sin I will not commit.* This rationale is the result of both verbal and religious abuse, and the motive is control. Schooling is not much different. As Llewellyn (2008) declares, "The most overwhelming reality of school is control. School controls the way you spend your time, how you behave, what you read, and to a large extent what you think. In school you can't control your own life. Outside of school you can, at least to the extent that your parents trust you to" (p. 49). What we are teaching children in school is how to *not* be free! Research participant and school drop-out, Cole, describes school to Cameron (2012) as "a minimum security penitentiary, [because] you're basically there from time to time, you have to follow every rule, you can't dress the way you wanna dress, there's so many codes. It's just that you don't have a lot of freedom over yourself while you're in school" (p.99). If the only way to get people to stay in school is through compulsion and running it like a prison, something is *very* wrong.

Abuse (or oppression) cannot exist without its myths. Freire (1970/2000) tells us that "one of the myths of the oppressor ideology [is] the *absolutizing of ignorance*" (p. 133). The oppressor (person or dominant culture) holds all the "truth" that is forced upon the ignorant oppressed. Schooling holds a monopoly on education, leading us to believe that within those walls (and *only* within those walls) can human beings learn anything of value. The opposite is mutuality, something the abuser does not allow. This would require authentic dialogue. "Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate, does not 'sloganize'" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 168). Unfortunately, we see this imposition throughout history in every cultural invasion and within our schools.

*I don't think I want to stay in this church anymore. I have found a God who is all about grace. I have learned that I am saved through faith in Jesus, not by following all these rules. God calls me to be free.*

*"What you are saying is very dangerous," says my pastor.*

*Our church friends say, "If you leave this church, you will never find another. You will end up divorced and turning to drugs or alcohol." But I must follow the convictions of my heart. It is my first move towards freedom.*

*"When you are saying these things," says Ben, "I am hearing the voice of Satan." Oh, wow, maybe I am wrong. I am always wrong. But no, not this time. Not about this.*

The only way to dispel the myths is by speaking the truth and allowing others to speak theirs. "As opposed to the mythicizing practices of dominant elites, dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled" (Freire, 1970/2000, pp. 168-169). Oppressors know better than to allow it. Abusers needs myths to survive and to silence their victims. *If you divorce, if you quit school, you will not find love or learning anywhere else.* Listen to what you are not hearing. The silence is deafening. It is in our schools. Jensen (2000/2004) "had learned...to keep [his] mouth shut...and had even learned to quiet the inner voice always asking why" (p. 46). I wonder how many students have learned this same lesson.

It seems the primary function of schooling is to mold children into producers and consumers of the myths of our oppressive culture. Likening schools to powerful churches throughout history, Illich (1970/2002) proclaims, "[I]t [the school system] is simultaneously the repository of society's myth, the institutionalization of that myth's contradictions, and the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality" (p. 37). Truth breaks this vicious cycle and, therefore, must be silenced by those who would retain their power

and control. The myth, however, must project ever farther. As Jones, Robinson, and Vaughan (2015) posit, “We spread schooling much like missionaries sharing their Gospel, assuming that schooling is a human right rather than a modern construct. We do not question our sacred cows” (p. 396). Anyone who might dare to question, of course, is in danger of hellfire. Anne was going to hell if she left the church, and students who quit school are “dumb” and “losers” who will “never amount to anything”... in other words, destined for hell on earth.

Coercion is a form of silencing. “Coercion is central to the raising of our children, whether we speak of grades, desks arranged in rows before a central authority, or the wearing out of the belt” (Jensen, 2000/2004, p. 244). As long as we silence the will of others, we can manipulate and control. In so doing, we break their spirits. Illich (1970/2002) says, “By making men [sic] abdicate the responsibility for their own growth, school leads many to a kind of spiritual suicide” (p. 60). Coercion is insidious and dangerous. As the wife of a verbally abusive husband and the member of a fundamentalist religious organization, Anne felt her spirit being chipped away. I believe many of our students feel the same, and it is time we put a stop to it.

Not just within schools, but also in our dominant culture is Reality I, the acquisitive society. As Evans (1992/2010) explains,

Our Western civilization was founded on Power Over. Now as a civilization, we have tremendous Power Over the earth and its peoples and resources. We have the power to wipe out our world. We have the power of total destruction. The Power Over model is, I believe, no longer tenable. Some of the symptoms of living and acting through this paradigm are pollution, potential global annihilation, hunger and homelessness, prejudice and tyranny. (pp. 27-28)

Much of this abuse is covert. Hegemony, for example, is part of our culture, both inside and outside of schools. This is the assumption that the dominating class exercises “political control through its intellectual and moral leadership over allied classes” (Pinar et al., 1995/2014, p. 250). This is the perfect strategy for those in power to benefit themselves in maintaining the status quo without the use of overt force. The verbal abuser does not use his fists. Instead, he manipulates with his words. As in the hidden curriculum of schooling and the verbally abusive relationship, the dominant class maintains its position through covert control of the dominated.

Another key issue in our culture, and a major assumption of Feminist Standpoint Theory, is that we exist in a male-dominated (patriarchal) society. Therefore, women are oppressed, and this carries over into our schools where, according to a study conducted by Rahimi and Liston (2012), sexual harassment is widespread. A second (and perhaps most troubling) finding is that “the culture of school often serves to perpetuate hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality which contribute to a climate of violence” (p. 68). In addition to its pervasiveness, sexual harassment is frequent, occurring daily and throughout the day, with teachers and other students ignoring or brushing it off. It is part of the hidden curriculum, the abusiveness of schooling. This is the same culture that enables domestic abuse. As Evans (1992/2010) notes,

The therapist may help a person see how patriarchy has influenced his or her life.

Discussing beliefs about power, entitlements, having the final say, being the authority in another’s life versus being one’s own authority, being in charge of another person, and so forth can help the abuser see how patriarchy has taught oppression. (p. 200)

Both patriarchy and oppression, which includes violence against women, are taught through schooling. In most cases, I believe this is not intentional, at least not by individual teachers. But a compulsory institution needs its weapons of compulsion, its instruments of control. It is the

slippery slope of an acquisitive society that leaves no room for the mutuality required to recognize and refuse such abuse, only power over.

### Why We Stay

For anyone who has not been in or recognized themselves in an abusive relationship, it is quite natural to wonder why victims of abuse stay. I wondered the same about others before I became the target of abuse. Beyond the reasons many women might face (not wanting to leave their children behind, not being able to afford the proper support, etc.), there are psychological reasons. The main one is that they have been so slowly manipulated and brainwashed that they do not even know they are being abused. As Evans (1992/2010) explains, “In a verbally abusive relationship, the partner learns to tolerate abuse without realizing it and to lose self-esteem without realizing it” (p. 28). Anne remembered quite clearly (at the beginning of her awareness that she was in a verbally abusive marriage) telling her therapist that she was glad to be learning this now, because she did not want to end up like her husband’s mother who was basically a doormat and disrespected continually. He looked her straight in the eyes and said, “Anne, you *were* her.” She eventually understood the truth in this and was able to make her way completely out.

If you accept my premise that schooling is abusive, then we must ask ourselves why we stay? Why does schooling remain a sacred cow? Is it because we really are blind to its abusiveness? Is it because it fits so well in our acquisitive culture that we do not recognize it for what it truly is? As Evans (1992/2004) warns,

It seems that we live in a world that cannot yet accept Reality II while the dangers of remaining in Reality I become more evident. Unable to begin thinking according to the new model, we live under the threat of annihilation, seemingly caught between conflicting realities. (p. 30)

Removing the institution of compulsory schooling from our lives would disrupt the cycle and force us to feel this conflict and look with new awareness at what arrangements we really want for ourselves and our children.

What we call *education* may be anything but. What happens in schools does more to prevent than encourage learning, and as Freire (1970/2000) notes, “Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 85). How many of us remain unaware that this is what schooling does (and has done) to us? I posit, again, that this often happens without the victim’s conscious awareness, slowly over time. We have been led to view school and school leaders as “good” and “necessary.” As Holt (1969/1972) explains, “[M]ost of the harm that is done to children in schools they can’t and don’t resist, because they don’t know what is being done to them or who is doing it, or because if they do know, they think it is being done by kindly people for their own good” (p.39). How many of us are living half-alive having been made to believe that school, as damaging as it is but second perhaps only to the church, is the only way to enlightenment?

Before the abused partner even recognizes the abuse, she becomes aware that *something is wrong*. Anyone who spends any amount of time in our schools with eyes and ears and hearts open will know that *something is wrong*. We can attack various parts of schooling as an attempt to resolve the issue, but as with the verbally abusive relationship, “[T]here is no specific conflict. The issue is the abuse and this issue is *not* resolved” (Evans, 1992/2010, p. 79). Once we recognize this, we are on the road to freedom.

Anne and Ben had just finished an especially insightful counseling session when she made her decision. The pastor had looked at Ben curiously and said, “You realize you are about

to lose your family.” Ben may have mumbled something, but he was mostly like a stone statue. Cold. As soon as they got back into their car in the parking lot, he looked at her and asked a question that flipped the switch. “You’re not so sure about me now are you?” A chill ran down Anne’s spine. She knew in that moment that, not only did Ben know exactly what he had been doing – *controlling her with his abusiveness* – but that *he* knew that *she* finally knew. In response, Anne turned up the radio, rolled down her window, and turned her face into the air, desperate to breathe. She was frightened and couldn’t tell him what she had just understood, but she knew that she and the children would be gone by that time tomorrow. Note the similarity in Ivan’s realization:

It just all came to a head, half way through eleventh grade, and what made it easiest eventually to finally drop out of school was that it became apparent that the school was *not on my side... the school was against me...* I felt like the school was the enemy, and they felt like I was the enemy, and we split in a not-so-good feeling way. (Cameron, 2012, p. 74)

Like Ivan with school, Anne realized that Ben was against her and that he saw her as an enemy, and more and more so as she refused to be silenced. As Ivan refused to be silenced, he too became demonized until his only options were to stay and be controlled or leave and be free. I believe they both chose well.

As many begin to come to this awareness of the abuse propagated by schooling, there is still another roadblock to freedom. Only the therapist recognized Anne’s husband as abusive, because he was quite skilled at maintaining the public persona of a “really nice guy.” While schools are finding it harder and harder to maintain a positive public image, many still believe they can be reformed to some imaginary former glory. The power bloc that benefits from

schooling is hiding from us all but the assumptions they must uphold, assumptions like, “We need schooling, and a lot of it.” But as Gatto (2008) informs, many respectable societies simply don’t buy it (i.e. Sweden & Hong Kong):

Who was it that decided to force your attention onto Japan instead of Sweden? Japan with its long school year and state compulsion, instead of Sweden with its short school year, short school sequence, and free choice where your kid is schooled? Who decided you should know about Japan and not Hong Kong, an Asian neighbor with a short school year that out-performs Japan across the board in math and science? Whose interests are served by hiding that from you? (p. 54)

For one, our large corporations. Notice in Giroux’s (2000) explanation how similar their tactics are to the manipulative abuser: “The marriage of commercialism and education often takes place in schools with too few resources to critically monitor how learning is structured or to recognize the sleight-of-hand that appears to be a generous offer on the part of corporations” (p. 95). So, even if students and teachers know that *something is wrong* and rebel, they have little support from the decision-makers at the top who are being seduced by corporate greed dressed up as a great partner...*a really nice guy*.

### Conclusion

*As I drove across the miles, moving farther away from him and closer to the home of my childhood, the aches I had become so accustomed to left my body. I felt more alert and alive than I ever remembered, the air was sweet, and the world was so big.* Ivan had a similar reaction:

I think it’s been the greatest thing dropping out of high school, greatest thing in my life, you know. I don’t know, I’m not gonna project it onto everyone else, but, you know, the three years that I haven’t been involved in all that feel like two lifetimes. (Cameron, 2012, p. 82)

It's been over a decade for me, and the moment of leaving my abusive husband was only the beginning of a long road to healing. But leaving was significant, and ever since, freedom is my focus. Freedom for me and freedom for others. This is the theme that draws me to the authors and the stories I write about as they relate to my own story, to Anne's story, and to many others'.

There is no one untouched by the abusiveness of schooling. All of society is affected. However, most acutely affected on a day-to-day basis are teachers and students. Interestingly, I believe the ones closest to freedom are the students. The hidden curriculum is not completely hidden to them, and they resist. As Apple (1995/2012) argues, “[S]ocial reproduction is by its very nature a contradictory process...[and] the very contradictions that students live out in their day to day lives may end up supporting the institutions and ideologies that they seem to oppose *yet offer a terrain for action at the same time*” (p. 84, emphasis mine). This means that we do not have to accept that the reproduction of the inequities in society has no rival. Students push back, some might say “rebel.” Apple (1995/2012) explains by saying that “just like in the workplace, any theory of the school's role in economic and cultural reproduction must account for the rejection by many students of the norms that guide school life” (p. 88). They might disrupt the planned flow of class, insert humor, or simply ignore instruction. By itself, however, this is not enough to effect meaningful change.

It is time for a revolution. Instead of refusing to be silent or to silence, however, we adapt. As Jensen (2000/2004) suggests, “Perhaps our marvelous capacity to adapt to even the most atrocious situations is the major reason revolutions fail” (p. 258). Our survival mechanisms are extraordinary. And they are used against us. Forgetting is the most dangerous of all. Must we continue to ignore, to adapt? Evans (1992/2010) offers us hope and some advice:

Our science shows that out of chaos new order arises. Where will the new order come from? It cannot be legislated, nor can it be established through more wars and more Power Over. I believe this new order can arise only out of individual consciousness. For this reason, the recognition of verbal abuse as a means of controlling, dominating, and having Power Over another person is of real concern to us all. (p. 28)

We must recognize and name it in our interpersonal relationships, and we must recognize and name it in our institutions, such as schooling. Many so-called school reformers have been considered revolutionaries, but Illich (1970/2002) has this to say about them... and the rest of us:

Many self-styled revolutionaries are victims of school. They see even “liberation” as the product of an institutional process. Only liberating oneself from school will dispel such illusions. (p. 47)

This is “Personal Power” (Evans, 1992/2010). We must come to the place where we believe in ourselves again, in our own capacity to learn and to change our world instead of remaining dependent upon others to do it for us.

Finally, Schubert (2009a), as discussed in Chapter 1, speaks of “loving acquisitiveness out of existence” (p. 7). Love is the antidote to Power Over and to acquisition in our culture. Love requires freedom. And the want of both freedom and love should compel us to finally abandon the abusive institution of schooling.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMPELLED BY LOVE TO DESCHOOL

#### Introduction

“Love” is a term that conjures up a vast array of images, thoughts, and feelings. I agree with hooks’s (2001) statement, “If our society had a commonly held understanding of the meaning of love, the act of loving would not be so mystifying” (p. 3). Therefore, I find it necessary to provide a working definition for “love” in the context of my work with deschooling. The emphasis is on *working*, because we must be willing to go where the speculation takes us and remain open to its constant redefining. Still, as I state in the Preface, love here should be considered as valuing and promoting the dignity and freedom of others.

While “valuing” might stop at reflection and acknowledgement, “promoting” requires action. We must be careful, however, regarding the motives for this action. Illich (1977/1978) criticizes multiple “helping” professionals (including teachers) in stating, “As crusading helper, he [sic] acts the part of the missionary and hunts down the underprivileged” (p. 28). As a special education teacher, I see this often, and it is sickening. While mental capacities and learning differences certainly do exist, I believe special education in this country has invented a cancerous mass of unnecessary *problems* that require many more unnecessary *solutions* that only certified professionals can deliver. Job security... and hogwash.

Love does not seek out problems in others to be fixed, which requires a certain amount of manipulation and control. It seeks, rather, to work together with others in the cause of freedom to determine one’s own needs and goals. As Fromm (1956/2006) explains, “mature *love is union under the condition of preserving one’s integrity, one’s individuality*” (p. 19). Our natural desire is to connect at the deepest level, with ourselves and with others. When we do so, we want to

*help*. But it is not a truly loving helpfulness if we do not respect the separate uniqueness of the other with her/his own actionability. Freire (1970/2000) understood the need for caution:

Attempting to liberate the oppressed *without their reflective participation in the act of liberation* is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated. (p. 65, emphasis mine)

Love in action must never be a prescription that one person forces upon another... even “for their own good.”

Another working definition that is needed is that of *deschooling* itself. Illich (1977/1978) warns us about this often-misused term as he urges us to look beyond understanding it simply as the disestablishment of school. He specifically cautions that “the end of the ‘age of schooling’ could usher in the epoch of a global schoolhouse that would be distinguishable only in name from a global madhouse or a global prison in which education, correction, and adjustment become synonymous” (p. 69). In other words, schooling could very well be replaced by just as damaging and commodifying alternatives if we do not understand deschooling as a cultural shift away from teaching others *about* the world and toward ensuring universal access to the tools people need to shape their own lives and learn *from* it.

Let us think of deschooling in the way Illich (1977/1978) himself defines it, as “nothing less than a cultural mutation by which a people recovers the effective use of its constitutional freedoms: learning and teaching by men [sic] who know they are born free rather than treated to freedom” (p. 85). This could never mean simply doing away with schools. It has to do with a paradigm shift within our culture in which we come to value freedom for ourselves and others enough to no longer tolerate the freedom-less culture of schooling. I believe a good start would

be to simply do away with compulsory laws that force attendance in some form of schooling. As hooks (2001) posits, “A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well” (p. 87). It is high time we included children in “everyone.” We have no right to take away any person’s constitutional freedoms, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual preferences.... *or age*.

But if not schooling, what? Part of understanding deschooling is knowing that the hidden curriculum must be exposed and understood in order to avoid it in any alternatives we might propose. Hidden curriculum’s main work, according to Illich (1977/1978) is to “translate learning from an activity [verb] into a commodity [noun] for which the school monopolizes the market” (p. 71). In contrast, we must come to understand education not as a commodity but as “the awakening awareness of new levels of human potential and the use of one’s creative powers to foster human life” (Illich, 1977/1978, p. 60). If we love one another, this is the type of learning we must encourage. As Fromm (1956/2006) explains, “[L]ove is an action, the practice of human power, which can be practiced only in freedom and never as the result of a compulsion” (p. 21). It is risky. It involves letting go of control of the outcomes and trusting one another with our own distinct processes. And yet, what is love if it does not involve risk?

A variety of deschooling landscapes will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter. For now, I focus primarily on the theoretical foundation built by some of deschooling’s major theorists (e.g. Illich, 1970/2002; Holt, 1972; Goodman, 1962; Reimer, 1971; Schubert, 2009), one that is infused with love and provides the framework for more practical steps we might take in our current situation.

## Major Theorists

### Ivan Illich ~ Deschooling is Convivial

We started this schooling business for the wrong reasons, none of which had anything to do with love for others, for helping others become the best version of themselves (though most teachers, I believe, enter the profession for this reason). Illich (1977/1978) provides a brief history in the work of John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), one of the founders of modern schooling. He explains how Comenius “described schools as devices to ‘teach everybody everything’ and outlined a blueprint for an assembly-line production of knowledge, which according to his ideas would make education cheaper and better and make growth into full humanity possible for all” (p. 72). This is a cold science, promoting efficiency but lacking in love, viewing humans as unfit for society until properly processed.

In the United States, we can trace the unloving foundation of mass compulsory schooling to some of the very first settlers who used Christianity as a means to justify rulership over the land (with its indigenous people) they felt God had given them. Anti-Christian at best, annihilating at worst, many of these early settlers saw the Natives as a “problem” that needed to be fixed, a roadblock to their desires for a place to practice their beliefs and their business. As one teacher of the Indians explained,

She [the teacher] wants to encourage her pupils to be *civilized* like the white man, to embrace his religion, and follow his example, and yet has to put into his hands a history of broken promises and of a civilization as far from Christianity as the Indian himself is.

(Adams, 1995, p. 147)

There is nothing Christ-like (or in any way loving) about forcing one’s way of life onto another, destroying both body and soul in the process, and then twisting the story to try and make it seem

like an act of salvation. To allow those who first occupied the land to simply be who they were was never an option. The Indian way of life would not fit into the world white man desired.

The history of schooling has been no better for Blacks and women, particularly in the South. As Montgomery (2005) explains,

Slaveholders' need to protect their capital investments in the black labor required that they withhold acknowledgement of women's productive activities. For all practical purposes, physical labor was designated black...[T]he concept of a natural order that justified denying blacks ownership of their labor necessitated divorcing productive contributions from civil and political rights; there could be no connection between productive value and access to power for subordinate members of the household. (p. 6)

Southern capitalism, then, required the marginalization of both Blacks and women in tandem. For education, this meant that if women and Blacks could not be kept out, the schools had to be used as a breeding ground for supporting ideologies. As Montgomery (2005) describes, "They [southern men] sought to distinguish [female education's] purposes from the northern model linked with abolitionism and women's rights, arguing that female education more narrowly defined by its social and cultural value was a necessary genteel counterbalance to the harshly pragmatic intellectuality of men" (p. 24). Women and Blacks needed to be kept in their social and cultural places that benefited the patriarchy of the southern household and community.

Back to the social efficiency method condemned by Illich (1977/1978), a ripe environment was found for it in this country in response to industrialism. As Winfield (2012) notes,

From the 1920s to the present, reformers and policy-makers have sought to apply business practices to education, arguing that the efficiency innovations in industry that

allowed the profit margins of giant corporate entities to swell also would deal effectively with the task of educating America's children most effectively. (p.149)

So, we see in the history of schooling not pure, loving motives, but the effort to turn out citizens that, as consumers and producers, would fuel the capital gain of a privileged few. It is no place for democracy. As Saltman (2012) explains, "The moment the goal of education becomes 'achievement,' the crucial ongoing conversation about the purposes and values of schooling stops, as does the struggle over whose knowledge and values and ways of seeing should be taught and learned" (p. 67). The conversation does not stop for everyone, though. Throughout history up to the present day, there have always been voices crying out in the wilderness.

One such voice is Ivan Illich (1970/2002), who writes, "Only if school is understood as an industry can a revolutionary strategy be planned realistically... Today most human labor is engaged in the production of demands that can be satisfied by industry which makes intensive use of capital. Most of this is done in school" (p. 46). It is a great game of pretend that has us believing that anything else is happening in our schools, and it is a game promoted and funded by both our federal government and the corporations that control it. As Giroux (2000) elaborates, "Couched in the language of business competition and individual success, the current educational reform movement must be recognized as a full-fledged attack on both public education and democracy itself" (p. 99). If this awareness were to spread, schooling as we know it today would no longer be tolerated. This is why it is so important for us to continue questioning and disrupting these attempts to destroy public education as a truly democratic process.

Illich (1970/2002) does this well in helping us to see the most amazing fact about all the schooling we have endured – it is completely unnecessary! As he explains, "We have all learned

most of what we know outside school. Pupils do most of their learning without, and often despite, their teachers” (p. 28). To reiterate, what is being called for here is *not* reform. Mass compulsory schooling can never be democratic; it was not designed to be. As Gatto (1992/2017) notes, “[G]overnment monopoly schools are structurally unreformable” (p. xxii). Still, we need not end schools altogether, only the obligation to attend them, for there are other and better ways to learn. As Illich (1970/2002) states, “[U]ltimately there should be no obstacle for anyone at any time of his life to be able to choose instruction among hundreds of definable skills at public expense” (p. 14). What must happen is more widespread awareness that schooling and education are not the same.

This awareness is what deschooling is all about, and we are compelled to deschool by a love defined by Illich (1970, 1971, 1973) as *convivial*. As previously cited, Illich (1973/2009) defines “conviviality,” in part, as “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence” (p. 11). It involves being free *with* others (persons and environment) whom also must be free. The opposite of conviviality, then, is acquisitiveness, that desire to possess or obtain control over one’s environment, including his/her fellow man. This is what schooling perpetuates as students “have learned to live by the bell and passively tolerate boredom, irrelevance, and absurdity in their educational lives in order to achieve future material rewards accruing from selected occupations” (Karier, 1973, p.24). They suffer the “education” we provide them, not out of love for learning or even for one another, but for personal material gain. And this is what we teach them to do! As Illich (1977/1978) describes our culture both in and around schooling,

People become prisoners to time-consuming acceleration, stupefying education, and sick-making medicine because beyond a certain threshold of intensity, dependence on a bill of industrial and professional goods destroys human potential. (p.37)

We could argue the chicken and the egg about whether culture made schools the way they are or vice versa, but the reality is both to some degree. The acquisitive culture outside of school feeds the culture within, and schooling perpetuates it.

Interestingly, the symbiotic relationship between culture outside of schools and the culture within crosses political boundaries. As Illich (1977/1978) notes, “The legitimacy of industrial society itself comes to depend on the credibility of schools, and it does not matter if the GOP or the Communist Party is in power” (p. 81). The supposed knowledge we gain *about* the world around us takes the place of real *access* to it. As long as we accept this substitution, our political stance is of little use and we remain prisoners.

What is needed is a broader view of deschooling to move towards a freer and more loving (convivial) culture. As Illich (1977/1978) explains, “The deschooling of our world-view demands that we recognize the illegitimate and religious nature of the educational enterprise itself. Its hubris lies in its attempt to make man a social being as the result of his treatment in an engineered process” (p. 81). To be a social being is to be a loving being, and love cannot be engineered.

John Holt ~ Deschooling is Freedom

The opposite of loving others enough to set them free is controlling them. Spring (1973b) discusses the history of schooling as a means of social control. He writes about American sociologist, Edward A. Ross (1886-1951), as he explains, “To replace these deteriorating institutions [family, church, community], Ross suggested new forms of control, such as mass media, propaganda, and education” (p. 31). This ideology went hand in hand with the emergence of testing and sorting that still plays a major role in schooling. Not only does this oppose freedom, it makes students participate in the loss. As Spring (1973b) goes on to describe,

The student learns to place the greatest importance on that quality of intelligence that best meets the needs of society, which generally means the needs of industry and the corporate structure. In the end, the loss of other qualities creates not only incompletely developed individuals, but also a society directed intelligently, but not necessarily humanely. (p. 39)

Schooling is built on the desire for social control. Deschooling is the only way to support freedom and develop a more loving society.

According to John Holt (1972), another key theorist for deschooling, school reform can never be enough. As he proclaimed, “[I]t no longer seems to me that any imaginable sum of school reforms would be enough to provide good education for everyone or even for all children” (p. 4). He suggested the need to look beyond reform to question the very idea of schooling. It is very important to understand that by deschooling, “we don’t mean a society without any arrangements and resources for learning...We don’t even mean a society without any schools” (Holt, 1972, p. 189). Some people may find school the best place to learn certain things and/or need someone to teach them. The big idea is freedom. Holt (1972) explains a deschooled society as one in which “nobody would be compelled to go to school, neither by law nor by the threat of joblessness, poverty, discrimination, and exclusion from society – all of which are in force today” (pp. 189-190). If we can get past the idea that learning can only take place in school, that only school credentials make you worthy to get you what you want and need in society, then we can begin to fear less the freedom afforded by a deschooled society.

When we talk about freedom, we often speak of *rights*. When it has to do with schooling, it is most often about children’s rights specifically. People worry about how deschooling might lead to the exploitation of our children. Holt (1969/1972) himself understood that

Compulsory attendance laws once served a humane and useful purpose. They protected children's rights to some schooling, against those adults who would otherwise have denied it to them in order to exploit their labour, in farm, shop, store, mine, or factory. (p. 42).

Now, however, it is the schools that exploit our children most, treating them and the education they receive as commodities to be marketed and placed according to the needs of corporate capitalism.

Likewise, Illich (1977/1978) spoke of the danger of how so-called "rights" might actually take away freedom. As he explains, "In reality, as society gives professionals the legitimacy to define rights, citizen freedoms evaporate... The loss of one liberty after another to be useful when out of a job or outside professional control is the unnamed but also the most resented experience that comes with modernized poverty" (pp. 44-45). In other words, rights also become commodified, leading to the compulsion to place meaning on human activity only when that activity is part of an "approved" organization or profession. A farmer might grow a sustaining garden for his family and even a few neighbors but is still considered impoverished if he does not sell or otherwise engage in some professional trade. A mother stays at home to care for her children and is considered to be unemployed because what she does is for love, not money.

Holt (1972) also made it a point to distinguish limits from loss of freedom. We are not talking about complete anarchy with deschooling. Attributing his awareness to Illich, Holt (1972) realized that "telling people what they *may not* do, if you are clear and specific, allows them much more freedom of choice and action than telling them what they *must* do" (p. 18). For example, saying, "Play outside only where it is safe," is more vague and prescriptive than saying, "Don't go into the street." The latter provides much more choice of activity and more clarity.

Holt (1972) further explains in stating, “[I]n a free society you can find out where the limits are; in a tyranny you can never be sure” (pp. 18-19). School is very prescriptive with undefined limits (what does being “disrespectful” or “defiant” actually mean?) and therefore stifles freedom.

I find it very strange that while Americans claim to value freedom, it is freedom that our schooled society seems to fear, especially when it comes to children. Holt (1969/1972) cites a common objection to deschooling, “ ‘If kids didn’t have to go to school they’d all be out in the streets,’ ” and responds, “No, they wouldn’t... those children who did not want to go to school could find, particularly if we stirred up our brains and gave them a little help, other things to do – the things many children now do during their summers and holidays” (p. 42). They pursue their own interests, have more leisure time to reflect, dream, and imagine, they work (whether for pay or otherwise), and likely experience more physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth than the more numerous days spent in school. But for these summertime and holiday steps forward, the school year begins again, and they take many more steps backward.

It doesn’t have to be this way if we learn to live with our children again. Understanding the need to learn *from* the world instead of *about* it is a good place to start. Unfortunately, however, we have created a society that is not fit to have our children live with us in it. Holt & Farenga (1981/2003) understand this along with the importance of changing it:

The modern world is dangerous, confusing, not meant for children, not generally kind or welcoming to them. We have much to learn about how to make the world more accessible to them, and how to give them more freedom and competence exploring it. *But this is a very different thing from designing nice little curricula.* (pp. 100-101, emphasis mine)

Maybe the two can only happen simultaneously (creating a better world and having children be part of it), for perhaps the reason why society is unfit is *because* we have expelled our children from it.

We have a decision to make. Are we going to continue to keep children locked up in schools where we pretend worthwhile learning is happening, or are we going to decide to trust them (and ourselves) enough to set them free? Holt (1969/1972) gives us another decision to make:

What this all boils down to is, are we trying to raise sheep – timid, docile, easily driven or led – or free men [sic]? If what we want is sheep, our schools are perfect as they are. If what we want is free men, we'd better start making some big changes. (Holt, 1969/1972, p. 43)

Our young people are certainly learning something in our schools. We better be clear about what that really is. Only then can we make the necessary decision to deschool and free them – and ourselves.

Paul Goodman ~ Deschooling is Responsible

For Paul Goodman (1962; 1968/1972), deschooling is about being responsible with the time and energy of our youth. We want the best for those we love, and we want not a minute of their lives wasted but enriched so as to bring out the very best within them. Unfortunately, schooling deprives us and our loved ones of such enrichment. In fact, as Goodman (1962) explains very plainly, compulsory schooling is both wasteful and harmful for all in its grip:

The scholastically bright are not following their aspirations but are being pressured and bribed; the majority – those who are bright but not scholastic, and those who are not especially bright but have other kinds of vitality – are being subdued. (p. 57)

This is not what we want, but this is what compulsory schooling gets us. In contrast, responsibility is, as Fromm (1956/2006) describes, an essential component of love and “an entirely voluntary act; it is my response to the needs, expressed or unexpressed of another human being” (p. 26). As long as schooling is compulsory, it cannot be responsible, nor can it promote responsibility in our students.

I think about the wastefulness, for example, in trying to *teach* reading. I am convinced, as both a teacher and a mother of four, that students do not learn to read (at least not well) in school. My first-born daughter did not attend school until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and although I “homeschooled” her, I did not teach her to read. I provided books, I read to her, and I helped her when she asked, but she learned on her own within an environment that promoted literacy and a love of reading. The same is true of my other three children (who began school earlier but did not learn to read there). Goodman (1968/1972) has much to say on this topic. He says that when provided the access, “It is impossible for such a child not to pick up the code unless he [sic] is systematically interrupted and discouraged, for instance by trying to *teach* him” (p. 35, emphasis mine). I “teach” a resource reading class at school for children in special education who have suffered this very fate, their reading stunted, not by uncaring or unproviding parents, but by schooling. Not only do they not read well, they view it as an obstacle they are not smart enough to overcome. What should be understood as a naturally learned and enjoyable process has become just one more thing they can’t do.

How much more responsible (and, therefore, loving) it would be to simply provide a democratic community, one in which both children and adults are free to explore and learn *from* the world around them. For, as Goodman (1962) notes, “it is impossible to do creative work of any kind when the goals are pre-determined by outsiders and cannot be criticized and altered by

the minds that have to do the work, even if they are youngsters” (p. 44). Perhaps this is why my school, among others, has developed a “creativity” initiative. Someone in education must understand, then, that this is lacking in our students (rather, has been purged from them). When will we come to the conclusion that this lack of creativity is the school’s doing? Until we do, we will fail to understand the fact that no amount of “Community for Creativity” campaigns within our schools is going to undo the damage.

A discussion about responsibility often leads to talk of money, what one might call good “stewardship.” Goodman (1962) has much to say on this topic, and it helps us clarify the fact that deschooling does not mean de-funding of education, just wiser use of those funds. Goodman (1962) states, “I agree that we ought to spend more public money on education. And where jobs exist and there is need of technical training, the corporations ought to spend more money on apprenticeships” (p. 59). For those corporations that do, what a waste it must seem that one was forced to learn (and quickly forget) unnecessary mathematical operations and useless facts when they will learn all they need to know about a job *on the job* and in a fraction of the time!

Deschooling means money better spent. Reimer (1971) understood this, as well, as he proclaims,

The money which is now so insufficient for schools would be more than enough to support an enormous network of educational objects and to partially support a number of skill models, pedagogues and educational leaders... (p. 135).

Furthermore, as Goodman (1962) notes, “It would probably help to improve the educational aspiration and educability of poor youngsters to give the money to poor families *directly*, rather than to channel it through school systems or other social agencies that drain off most of it for the... middle class” (p.53). No matter what we do through schooling or how much money we

throw at it, we still see the middle- and upper-classes getting the more desirable and better-paying jobs which perpetuates the hierarchy. It goes back to using our resources, including money, not for more reform efforts within the schools, but to provide a more democratic society in which to grow up.

While money could certainly be more responsibly spent for education, perhaps the biggest waste in schooling is time. For the many years spent within school walls, it is “docility to training and boredom that is heavily rewarded with approval, legitimacy, and money; whereas spontaneous initiation is punished by interruption, by being considered irrelevant, by anxiety of failing in the ‘important’ work, and even by humiliation and jail” (Goodman, 1962, p. 87). Not only is this a waste of time, it is time spent in crippling kids’ natural curiosity and ability to truly learn from the world around them even if given the opportunity to do so. It increases in them the very opposite of love, which is fear. It also teaches the perception that work is no fun. As hooks (2001) notes, “Rather than enhancing self-esteem, work is perceived as a drag, a negative necessity” (p. 65). This is taught quite overtly in schools. It is how we get students ready “for the real world.” No wonder we have so many suffering from depression and anxiety in our society!

Schooling (especially in the lower grades) would not be such a waste of time if we utilized it more efficiently in accordance with its main function, custodial. As Goodman (1962) posits, “[B]y and large primary schooling is, and should be, mainly baby-sitting. It has the great mission of democratic socialization – it certainly must not be segregated by race and income; apart from this, it should be happy, interesting, and not damaging” (p. 55). Unfortunately, it is, like secondary schooling, all about cramming in so-called knowledge via *teaching* and raising test scores. If families need its custodial function, let it remain, but only as that. Then we will do less harm.

It is a common notion that “education is never wasted.” However, as previously addressed, education is not what schooling promotes. With all the time devoted, it has become easy to make the “chief mistake,” as described by Goodman (1962),

To pay too much *direct* attention to the ‘education’ of our children and adolescents, rather than providing them a worthwhile adult world in which to grow up. In a curious way, the exaggeration of schooling is both a harsh exploitation of the young, regimenting them for the social machine, and a compassionate coddling of them, since mostly they *are* productively useless and we want them to waste their hours “usefully.” (pp. 148-149)

It would be a much more responsible use of time, for young and old alike, to focus on creating the kind of community that fosters learning without the need for compulsion, but rather in freedom and with love and joy. Instead, the opportunity for true education is wasted along with the time we focus on something that is not. What Goodman (1962) lamented almost 60 years ago is even more true today:

We are witnessing an educational calamity. Every kind of youth is hurt. The bright but unacademic can, as we have seen, perform; but the performance is inauthentic and there is a pitiful loss of what they *could* be doing with intelligence, grace, and force. The average are anxious. The slow are humiliated. But also the authentically scholarly are ruined. Bribed and pampered, they forget the meaning of their gifts. (p. 147)

What a sad outcome for so much wasted time. How much more will we tolerate? Now more than ever, we must re-evaluate this schooling business... and find it wanting. The writing is on the wall, and we have the choice. Deschool on purpose and out of love that is *responsible* or let us self-destruct in a violent collapse, which may then lead to yet another failed “reform movement” or an alternative that leads to the exact same calamitous result.

Everett Reimer ~ Deschooling is Respectful

While most of us might still get on board with the *possible* (for some) socio-economic benefits to schooling in today's society, we do not respect the whole person. If we did, we would not stand for the emotional and psychological damage done in schools. Reimer (1971) understood this lack of respect, as he states, "While children who never go to school are most deprived, economically and politically, they probably suffer the least psychological pain" (p. 17). While I believe we *can* build a society where schooling is not a necessary prerequisite for social and economic success, we *cannot* make schooling less damaging to the mind and soul. In his chapter titled "Love and Its Disintegration in Contemporary Western Society," Fromm (1956/2006) explains how "[m]odern capitalism needs men who cooperate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated" (p. 79). This is what schooling ensures. It is not respectful of anything but the dollar and, therefore, it cannot be loving.

Unfortunately, the way of life for those in power depends on our system of education. As Reimer (1971) goes on to explain, "No single system of education can have any other result [a dominant hierarchy] nor can a dominant hierarchy of privilege be maintained in a technological world by any means except a unified system of education" (p. 29). Schooling is necessary to fit people into their proper social roles for maintenance of the hierarchy. Allowing this to continue is not only disrespectful to our children and youth, schooling teaches them to disrespect *themselves*.

Children have learned so much by the time they get to school, and they did it largely themselves and without any formal "teaching." They would go on happily this way if it were not for what happens in school. Reimer (1971) describes it well in stating that in school, "[t]he what,

when, where and how of learning are decided by others, and children learn that it is good to depend upon others for their learning. They learn that what is worthwhile is what is taught and, conversely, that if something is important someone must teach it to them” (p.30). And, so, they go from respecting themselves and their abilities, *loving* themselves, to *hating* themselves for their perceived dependence on others for becoming an “educated” (but really “schooled”) person.

The resulting lack of love and self-respect is inevitable for rich and poor alike. As Reimer (1971) notes, “The poor are deprived both of motivation and of the resources which the school reserves for the privileged. The privileged, on the other hand, are taught to prefer school’s resources to their own and to give up self-motivated learning for the pleasures of being taught” (p. 33). The point here is that, even if we could make schooling more “equitable,” it’s still no good. It destroys to the core of a person the potential to learn *from* themselves and the world around them, and only a few I fear, with great struggle, ever get it back.

Perhaps one of the most insidious byproducts of our society’s disrespect of children (and also, as previously discussed, a form of abuse), is silencing. Reimer (1971) notes similarities between this treatment of children and the treatment of “slaves and peasants”:

The essentials of the Culture of Silence are reflected in the Culture of Childhood...

Similarities between children, slaves and peasants have often been noted and have served even as the basis for ethnic myths, explaining the supposed inferiority of lower classes and oppressed races in terms of their childlike character, thus justifying the maintenance of domination over them. (pp. 101-102)

This silencing and domination have been normalized by schooling, which extends the age of childhood so that control over them can last even longer. As Freire (1970/2000) explains, “In order to dominate, the dominator has no choice but to deny true praxis to the people, deny them

the right to say their own word and think their own thoughts” (p. 126). It is certainly disrespectful, and not at all the result of love which compels us to choose another way.

Along with Illich (1970/2002) and Goodman (1962), Reimer (1971) questioned whether compulsory schooling is even constitutional:

The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States was a landmark in history.

‘There shall be no establishment of religion.’ Only the terms and the scope of the problem have changed. Our major threat today is a world-wide monopoly in the domination of men’s [sic] minds. (p.20)

This, indeed, is the worst result of schooling...domination of the mind. If we understand the reasons for the first amendment with regard to religion, it is not a stretch to perceive its application to mass compulsory schooling. As we do, let us listen to how Fromm (1956/2006) defines respect as a “component of love”:

Respect is not fear and awe; it denotes, in accordance with the root of the word (*respicere* = to look at), the ability to see a person as he [sic] is, to be aware of his unique individuality,...the absence of exploitation. (p. 26)

And so, in truly *seeing* people *as they are*, we must respect not so much the money and the class of a person, but the parts that make them who they are – the heart, mind, and soul. This is what deschooling requires.

Schubert ~ Deschooling is Loving

While there are many aspects of love as previously discussed (e.g. conviviality, freedom, responsibility, and respect), William H. Schubert (2009a; 2009b) addresses love most specifically and as a whole in relation to curriculum (and to my work in deschooling). He acknowledges that it is a topic “of ironic neglect in curriculum lore” (Schubert, 2009b, p. 2).

Why should this be? Perhaps it is in the way we view curriculum. If it is just a packaged commodity that we deliver, love does not even make sense. This is a problem. However, if we view it in terms of action, of lived experience, we find we cannot do without it. “Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love” (Fromm, 1956/2006, p. 25).

With this definition, love is essential in curriculum as Schubert (2009b) views it:

I resonate with the journey metaphor and its consonance with the etymology of *curriculum* as the course of a chariot learning through life. Even more, I am drawn to the growth metaphor with its obvious nurturing and cultivating messages. (p. 2)

To be actively concerned with this journey in both our own lives and in the lives of others *is* love, and it is a love that compels us to deschool.

We *must* deschool, because such love in action can never persist in school. As Schubert (2009a) questions, “How can even the most well-meaning teachers be lovely – teach with love, when they have so many students to be trained for a sorting machine that benefits a nexus of power and greed?” (pp. 35-36). I maintain that they cannot. Only in the absence of schooling and in freedom can we develop truly loving relationships that nurture real education. Fromm (1956/2006) understood what is missing as he addressed “one very critical factor in our educational system. While we teach knowledge, we are losing that teaching which is the most important one for human development: the teaching which can only be given by the simple presence of a mature, loving person” (p. 108). This cannot be forced or “compulsory.” It can only occur in such “gatherings” described by Schubert (2009a) as “created freely by intimate participants” (p. 31). Too much is happening in our schools (i.e. hidden curriculum) that prevents intimacy and freedom.

The focus in schools is on “knowledge” and “standards” and “tests.” And, there, no one is free. “Love” is not *rigorous* enough, according to the schooled, to be considered in academic and scholarly work. Schubert (2009a) laments this focus on *rigor*, as he states, “Years, centuries rather, have solidified reverence of rigor, or the appearance of rigor. There is more genuine rigor in an ounce of love than in a ton of policy” (p.148). I agree, and this is why love must become our focus if education that promotes authenticity, freedom, and democracy is our goal.

Love *can* be our focus in a deschooled society. This is a society where we will have shed our acquisitive nature. This would make schooling no longer fit within our culture. As Fromm (1956/2006) describes, “In the most general way, the active character of love can be described by stating that love is primarily *giving*, not receiving” (p. 21). In this atmosphere, people in relationship are teacher and learner at the same time. Schubert (2009a) understands this as he writes, “Love opposes acquisitiveness and thrives in generosity” (p. 132). In giving to one another freely and openly, we learn that which is most needed – not knowledge for higher test scores or how to acquire more credentials, but how to love one another better.

Although still hopeful of what I believe to be an impossible dream – “engaged pedagogy” *within* schools – bell hooks (1994) understands the need for mutual relationships in education and a love that cannot be confined to any classroom:

I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together within and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement. (p. 205)

She expresses weariness in her efforts within the school, and I admire her strength and devotion. Hers, like Schubert’s, is a pedagogy better suited for a deschooled society.

Finally, through deschooling, we can come to understand what Dewey's Utopians already know:

Love is a way of knowing – an epistemology that *men* in charge of Earth too often reduce to another form of conquest. In contrast, we are convinced that love is the key to overcoming acquisition. (Schubert, 2009a, pp. 151-152)

Love *is* Education as it should be, and schooling is not only *not* needed but counterproductive. I hope with all my heart that we come to understand this before it is too late, before we complete our self-destruction.

### Conclusion

Although the message of these theorists is one of alarm and urgency, it is also a message of *hope*. It is not too late for us, but we first must be willing to *see* schooling for what it really is, a place designed to perpetuate the dominant hierarchy of modern (corporate) capitalism and one that does it well to the great harm of our children and our future. As Illich (1970/2002) informs, “We cannot begin a reform of education unless we first understand that neither individual learning nor social equality can be enhanced by the ritual of schooling” (p. 38). This understanding, this awareness, can never happen as long as we cling blindly to our sacred cows. That is why we must first allow ourselves to be repulsed at the inequities in our society, our acquisitiveness, and the harm we are doing to our children through schooling before we can seek out a better way for us all.

And if we open our eyes, we must be prepared to see both the evil and the good. We must see it not only in our society, our institutions, in *others*, but within ourselves. This is the hardest part, the most humbling part, to come to understand that many of us entrenched in the business of education have been the most “schooled.” As crushing of a blow as this may be (it cut me to

my core), we are also the ones to spark a cultural revolution, to find the love within us that says, “No more!” Rather than be pushed down by the weight of our epiphany, let us heed the call issued by these and other critical scholars in our past and present. It is a call I hear in all the voices discussed here and expressed well in the words of Paulo Freire (1970/2000):

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (p. 44)

And so we begin, first through awareness born of suffering, then through action founded in love, to deschool ourselves, our children, and our society. Until then, “Work, leisure, politics, city living, and even family life depend on schools for the habits and knowledge they presuppose, instead of becoming themselves the means of education” (Illich, 1970/2002, p. 8). These precious elements of life *are* our education, and they must be freed, *we* must be freed from the oppression of compulsory schooling. Join me as we continue a journey in the remaining two chapters (and beyond) that will help us answer for ourselves today that remaining question, “If not school, what?”

## CHAPTER 4

### ALTERNATIVE “EDUCATIONAL” ARRANGEMENTS

#### Introduction

In the title to this chapter, I put “educational” in quotes, because there is such a wide array of definitions people give to the term. Most of these definitions, unfortunately, are of the commodified type where education is believed to be a certain knowledge set (or pre-packaged curriculum) learned through the process of being taught by certified professionals in a school (public or private). As already discussed, this is not how I nor my deschooling comrades (e.g. Illich, 1970/2002; Holt, 1967/2017; Prakash & Esteva, 2008) view education at all. It is not a process that must be planned or prescribed by anyone. It just *is*... a part of living itself. So, when we talk about alternative arrangements, we must comprehend this view of education that is opposed to schooling or anything that resembles it. We will see in the examples that follow, some alternatives achieve this purpose to some extent; others do not. Still, it is worth the exploration to understand what aspects of each alternative suggestion might be useful as well as those that should be avoided.

Before we begin such an exploration, it is important to understand what Prakash & Esteva (2008) remind us, that deschooling is only for the schooled, and there are many places and peoples in this world that have not been schooled. They are, in fact, the majority of this world. We should look there first to learn what we have lost in our process of becoming schooled. Of “cultures that still flourish outside the monocultural educated world,” Prakash & Esteva (2008) have this to say:

They continually teach us what it means to share personal and collective knowledge in their regenerated commons; to escape the chains of commodified knowledge and skills,

mass manufactured by schools and universities competing for bigger hunks of the world campus. (p. 87)

By looking to this “under-developed” two-thirds of the world, we see people who have no need of a system of education and suffer not from its lack. Here are people truly free to learn of life and their place in this world without the compulsory consumption of schooling that the “developed” world believes it needs.

Illich (1977/1978) wrote of this perceived need (among many) in his *Toward a History of Needs*. In summary, “The satisfaction of self-defined preference is sacrificed to the fulfillment of educational needs” (p. 34). The job of the institution of education is to *create* the need for its services. Again, such crippling needs have been manufactured, and we need to understand that many people and cultures of this world have not accepted nor been disabled by them. As Prakash & Esteva (2008) explain, “To go beyond education and development means learning to abandon the path of progress that creates ‘needs’ where previously none existed” (p. 81). Is it sacrilegious to say that no one *needs* education? Can we get back to seeing our innate ability to determine our own life paths in a culture of acceptance and self-realization in which learning happens all along the way?

If we look to what Prakash & Esteva (2008) define as “grassroots postmodernism,” I believe we can. These are people and culture who, rejecting the idea of scarcity that runs the economic show of the “developed” world,

Are keeping alive their home economics – that nurtures, nourishes, and sustains them.

They are recovering and protecting their own ways of teaching and learning – those that enrich and regenerate their commons and their places of dwelling where they gain their sense of place, their common sense. (p. 83)

It is a struggle for this “two-thirds” social majority to maintain the purity of their cultures while the economically powerful continue closing in, bringing their beloved education with them. But they are doing it.

It will be no less difficult (perhaps even more so) for those of us already entrenched to break away. But as Prakash & Esteva (2008) inform, “In the story of humans on earth, the notion of education as a human right has a clearly identified beginning. Therefore, it can have an end. *The end is being written into the epic of the people at the grassroots*” (p. 29). I believe there is a grassroots right here in the United States. It is made up of the growing number of refuseniks and drop-outs who are boldly rejecting mainstream schooling in search of something better for themselves and their children.

For those among us who are trying to deschool ourselves, current alternatives fall generally under three umbrellas: (1) Democratic (or “Free”) Schools (Neill, 1960/1992; Gray, 2013), (2) Homeschooling and/or Unschooling (Jones, et. al, 2015; Holt & Farenga, 1981/2003), and (3) Community Resources (Illich, 1970/2002; Phillips & Milner, 2017; McChesney, 2013). As each of these areas is explored in order, note the range of characteristics that move along a continuum of some form of schooling (buildings, teachers/students, etc.) to deschooling (no set place, roles, or curriculum). Within this continuum, it is also necessary to address accessibility. Which alternatives are available to whom? No matter how wonderful an alternative may seem, it must be accessible to anyone at any time in a democratic society.

#### Democratic (or “Free”) Schools

Dating at least as far back as the first formal schools in ancient Greece, we find evidence of freedom being valued in the life and learning of children. Says Plato in *The Republic*, “Forced labors performed by the body don’t make the body any worse, but no forced study abides in a

soul” (Plato & Bloom, 1968, p. 216). Authentic and lasting learning can only happen in freedom, or whatever learning might take place is quickly lost. It also can only happen for oneself *by* oneself. The banking method of learning was rejected even then just as Freire (1970/2000) rejects it. As Plato posits, “[E]ducation is not what the professions of certain men [sic] profess it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul knowledge that isn’t in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes” (Plato & Bloom, 1968, p. 197). What children need is already within them. The most that we can do is gently guide them in their own interests and curiosities while providing freedom and access to the world.

Closer to the modern world, but still as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, freedom is emphasized in the learning of a child. As John Locke (1693) posits in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*,

None of the things they [children] are to learn, should ever be made a burthen [burden] to them, or imposed on them as a task. Whatever is so proposed, presently becomes irksome; the mind takes an aversion to it, though before it were a thing of delight or indifferency. (p. 75)

Compulsory schooling is imposition at its finest, and it is filled with tasks given by teachers to students to complete under threat of failure. According to Locke (1693) this is not only counterproductive to learning, it is inhumane.

Another early figure supportive of freedom and democracy in education is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Emile* (1762), he proclaims the importance of playful childhood and applauds Plato’s methods, stating,

You are afraid to see him spending his early years doing nothing. What! is it nothing to be happy, nothing to run and jump all day? He will never be so busy again all his life long. Plato, in his Republic, which is considered so stern, teaches the children only

through festivals, games, songs, and amusements. It seems as if he had accomplished his purpose when he had taught them to be happy. (p. 70)

Why should this no longer be enough? Why have we allowed consumption to rule our children's lives when it ruins our own? How many of us long for the care-free days of childhood (those of us fortunate enough to have experienced them as such)? Let us not take this away from our children through schooling but understand its importance for healthy development. They will lose nothing of so-called knowledge but, rather, attain greater understanding than any school can hope to give. Dewey (1916) understood this well, as he informs us, "Study of mental life has made evident the fundamental worth of native tendencies to explore, manipulate tools and materials, to construct, to give expression to joyous emotion, etc." (p. 111). Let us not interrupt this most important child's play with schooling.

Play and compulsion do not mix, and taking away this freedom from children was not initially tolerated. From its beginnings in Germany, compulsory schooling has met with resistance (Tolstoy, 1904). Whether government or Church, feeling themselves to be more cultured and compelled to educate the masses, Tolstoy (1904) asks the question of his time that has yet to be satisfactorily answered (perhaps because it cannot be): "Where are we to get in our time that strong faith in the indubitableness of our knowledge, which would give us the right of forcibly educating the masses?" (p. 6). In other words, how can any person or group be so confident in their own knowledge as to force it upon someone else as a matter of necessity? And suppose such knowledge could be attained? Wouldn't others *want* to learn it? Why the need for compulsion? These unanswerable questions are why resistance to compulsory education has always existed and why more democratic schools have been sought.

One such school, the oldest surviving Free School, is A. S. Neill's Summerhill, founded in 1921. From its inception, it has been a school governed by the students. Neill (1960/1992) himself describes it as,

Self-government for the pupils and staff, freedom to go to lessons or stay away, freedom to play for days or weeks or years if necessary, freedom from any indoctrination whether religious or moral or political, freedom from character moulding. (p. 3)

This is only tolerated by those who trust children's natural ability to develop their own path, to seek out their own learning in their own time. Former student, Robert Gottlieb (1992), describes Summerhill as "a way of life, living with others in society and expressing oneself through the passion of interest in love, knowledge, and work" (p. x). I don't know of any mainstream compulsory school that has been described as such, and I know many frustrated teachers and students who long for such a place.

It is very difficult for the schooled mind to understand this kind of freedom. I, myself, at one time may have said, "Wait a minute. You mean to tell me that in these Free Schools, class attendance is voluntary and children are allowed to just.... *play*? How can they possibly be learning anything?" In answer, Peter Gray (2013) would tell me the story of another very successful democratic school still in operation today, called the Sudbury Valley School. The school is founded upon the philosophy that,

Students should be free to explore any ideas that engage their interests and should be allowed to come to their own conclusions, in an environment where they can hear all sides of any question. In a democracy, a school should be a setting for exploration and discovery, not indoctrination. (Gray, 2013, p. 88)

This kind of freedom for children will naturally include much play, and its importance, as previously stated, is not to be underestimated. In fact, as Gray (2011) argues, “without play, young people fail to acquire the social and emotional skills necessary for healthy psychological development” (p. 444). This may, in fact, be a significant factor in the rise of mental illness among children and adults.

There are many other alternative schools, and one may wonder why they are excluded from this discussion. Why include a school like Sudbury Valley and not others? As Gray (2013) explains,

Sudbury Valley is not a Montessori school or a Dewey School or a Piagetian constructivist school. Schools of those sorts may use methods more in line with children’s natural ways of learning than do typical traditional schools, but teachers still run the show” (Gray, 2013, p. 88).

Summerhill and Sudbury Valley are the best examples of democratic schools, which give children the freedom to direct their own lives and learning. Other alternatives are not far enough removed from traditional schooling to be considered as truly alternative arrangements.

Even these Free Schools, however, face criticism from the deschoolers (Illich, 1977/1978; Esteva, Prakash, & Stuchul, 2008; Kozol, 1972). For Esteva, Prakash, and Stuchul (2008), schools like these are simply more reform efforts, and reform can never be enough. As they explain, “Whether reformed, free, or world-wide classroom, these reforms represent three stages in the escalation of interventions to increase social control and to subjugate people” (p. 103). They are still “educational” centers with some form of campus (not accessible to everyone), with pedagogues and pedagogies, and when push comes to shove, the adults (the pedagogues) still get the final word. Illich (1977/1978) expounds:

‘Education’ as the designation for an all-embracing category of social justification is an idea for which we cannot find (outside Christian theology) a specific analogue in other cultures. And the production of education through the process of schooling sets schools apart from other institutions for learning that existed in other epochs. This point must be understood if we want to clarify the shortcomings of most free, unstructured, or independent schools...[A]s long as the free school tries to provide ‘general education,’ it cannot move beyond the hidden assumptions of education. (p. 76)

Although lengthy, at least this much of Illich’s discourse must be included here to help us come to the understanding that even in schools like Summerhill and Sudbury Valley, the hidden curriculum that there must be some kind of program to fit people for society is not eliminated. This hidden curriculum must still be fought, even if we take our children out of school entirely.

#### Homeschool or Unschool?

Homeschooling and unschooling are not necessarily the same thing, but the terms have been used interchangeably (Holt & Ferenga, 1981/2003). From my math background, I might use the analogy from geometry about the rectangle and the square. All squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares. Homeschooling might be unschooling for some, but it can take many other forms, as well. As Holt & Farenga (1981/2003) explain to potential homeschoolers, “Most families wind up adapting a position between ‘school at home’ and ‘unschooling;’ in any case, the decision on what homeschooling will be like for you is yours to make, and it is not an unalterable one” (p. 227). The freedom to choose what it will look like and its flexibility to change at any time is what sets homeschooling apart from any type of community school or program, even Free Schools.

Let us begin our discussion with an exploration of the similarities between homeschooling and unschooling. For both, the central location is typically the child's own home and family. Though homeschoolers can be involved in any number of programs outside of the home, it remains the central hub. Often, homeschooling “[p]edagogues create educational opportunities with child-centered or negotiated curricula that utilize a variety of experiences and materials as the curriculum” (Jones, et. al, 2015, p. 392). Even if closely mirroring school curriculum and structure, it is already an improvement to taking children out of their homes and putting them in same-aged classrooms, often over-crowded, and run by someone the child does not know well (and can never know intimately). This can be reason enough to homeschool, but there is more.

As Holt and Farenga (1981/2003) describe, people take their children out of school “mostly for three reasons: they think that raising their children is their business and not the government's; they enjoy being with their children and watching and helping them learn, and don't want to give that up to others; they want to keep them from getting hurt, mentally, physically, and spiritually” (p. 2). Any one of those reasons alone should be enough to want to keep one's children out of school.

There is no way to tell precisely who each of these families are or even how many, because many try to homeschool (or unschool) in secret so as not to rock the boat (Holt & Farenga, 1981/2003). To what extent they fly under the radar may depend on their location and how their particular region or community views schooling and compulsory laws. In the United States, the laws vary by state. From my experiences as a homeschooling parent, I know, for example, that it is very easy to homeschool in Georgia and Alabama. All that is needed is a

declaration form and some record-keeping, usually just for “attendance” purposes in keeping with compulsory schooling laws.

Contrary to popular belief, homeschooling is not inaccessible to the poor. As Holt and Farenga (1981/2003) explain,

Many [homeschooling] families who write us have incomes well below the national average; they have chosen to live in the country or in small towns on very modest incomes, supporting themselves by small-scale farming, crafts, small businesses, etc.

Some homeschooling mothers are on welfare. (p. 2).

If lack of money were the only objection to homeschooling, it would be a weak case. But there are other concerns.

To address all concerns about homeschooling is not possible here given the limitations of time and space, but we can explore a few of the more common ones. Socialization is a frequent concern I hear and many suggest that “[c]hildren in public schools are able to meet, and get to know, many children very different from themselves,” and ask how this will happen if they don’t go (Holt & Farenga, 1981/2003, p. 27). To best summarize Holt and Farenga’s (1981/2003) response,

The idea that schools mix together in happy groups children from widely differing backgrounds is for the most part simply not true...[and] as the numbers of such [homeschooled/unschooled] children grow, there will be more places for them to go and more things for them to do that are not based in school. (p. 29)

Schools, and especially individual classes, are not as heterogenous as many would like to believe, and the atmosphere of competition found there is not supportive of really getting to

know and respect one another. On the other hand, with the growing number of homeschoolers, opportunities for social growth in more authentic contexts abound.

Another worry I have heard more than a few times, usually from fellow educators, is how to “prevent parents with narrow and bigoted ideas from passing these on to their children,” (Holt & Farenga, 1981/2003, p. 31). But who has the right to, first, decide what is narrow and bigoted and then to try and stop it? Furthermore,

Suppose we decided to give the government the power, through compulsory schools, to promote good ideas and put down bad. To whom would we then give the power to decide *which* ideas were good and which bad?...[P]eople have the right not only to believe what they want, but to try to pass their beliefs along to their children. (Holt & Farenga, 1981/2003, p. 30)

This is how it must be in a free country. A similar argument can be made against the criticism that schooling “rescues” children from abusive/neglectful homes. Since when did it become the school’s responsibility to solve family problems or living arrangements, and do they even have the right? I believe these issues are better solved by caring for our neighbors (community) and perhaps, at times, with the help of social workers. Furthermore, if a home is abusive, time spent at school is not the solution. Rather, it involves repairing the family whenever possible and finding a more permanent, healthier environment for the child if not. Neither of these is the job of a school, nor is any school capable of it.

Beyond the social criticisms of homeschooling, one of the biggest concerns for the schooled mind is how children will learn what they “need to know.” While this has been addressed at length throughout these first four chapters, it is important enough to discuss again, even if briefly. What a child “needs to know” is not something the school (or anyone in it) can

determine. Even the child herself doesn't know what is needed until a problem or curiosity arises that warrants new learning. The problems posed in school are all too often unrelated to the child's life outside of school and are, therefore, not authentic. As Holt (1964/1982) explains,

A child who has really learned something can use it, and does use it. It is connected with reality in his [sic] mind, therefore he can make other connections between it and reality when the chance comes. A piece of unreal learning has no hooks on it; it can't be attached to anything, it is of no use to the learner. (p. 169)

Even if we could possibly know everything a child needs to learn, it is mostly "unreal" to the child in school. What one child in a class is ready to learn, another is not ready for nor interested in and may never be. This is something no teacher, having such limited knowledge of her students, can ever predict, much less plan for.

Perhaps the greatest aspect of authentic learning missing from schools is love for the child. I do love my students, and I often think of them and worry about them when I am not at school. But I come home at the end of the school day to my own children, caring for them, listening to their triumphs and disappointments, their hopes and their fears, comforting them, knowing them. No teacher can ever match that. Holt (1967/2017), reflecting upon his vast experience of simply observing children, goes on to describe the significance of love *from* the child, as well:

Gears, twigs, leaves, little children love the world. That is why they are so good at learning about it. For it is love, not tricks and techniques of thought, that lies at the heart of all true learning. Can we bring ourselves to let children learn and grow through that love? (p. 289)

I believe that we can, and it starts by letting them continue their journey in natural settings, not by mass compulsory schooling.

Along with understanding the necessity of love, it takes a change in mindset about learning, about “education,” to move from school to homeschool, and eventually to unschool. It requires an understanding similar to Illich’s (1977/1978) when he states (expanded here from my earlier quote), “I believe education to be: namely, the awakening awareness of new levels of human potential and the use of one’s creative powers to foster human life. Underdevelopment, however, implies the surrender of social consciousness to prepackaged solutions” (p. 60). This education can never occur in school, only its “underdevelopment.” Homeschoolers understand Illich’s (1977/1978) definition to some extent, unschoolers (those that intentionally seek to *not* reproduce school at home) understand it even more. Unschoolers are well on their way to deschooling their schooled minds. All that is left is to provide access and opportunity to whatever they want to learn about at any given time. And this is where our third and most deschooled umbrella of alternative arrangements comes into play.

#### Community Resources

Unless you are truly unschooling, even homeschooled children have some prepackaged curriculum or plan decided upon by others. To be really deschooled requires a society that makes it easy for anyone at any time, to explore whatever may be of interest to her/him. Many resources are already available, such as public libraries, parks, museums, and special projects like Matt Hern’s Purple Thistle Center in Vancouver. Described as “a deschooling project [that] offers children a public space with shared tools,” (Jones, et. al, 2015, p. 397), this and the previously mentioned resources are just a few out of many (too many to list here) that can support a deschooled society.

It is important to note, nothing is a *requirement*, and all resources voluntary. They must never become another commodity to be consumed in competition for economic rewards. As Illich (1973/2009) explains,

Tools foster conviviality to the extent to which they can be easily used, by anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for the accomplishment of a purpose chosen by the user. The use of such tools by one person does not restrain another from using them equally. They do not require previous certification of the user. Their existence does not impose any obligation to use them. (p. 22)

Any resource that fits this description complements the goal of deschooling. The same resource might hinder or support depending on how it is used.

The greatest resource we have is each other with our collective ways of knowing and being. And the internet connects us, along with so many other resources, in a way no previous era could even fathom. Even as it organizes like-minded people, however, it at the same time fractures society (Philips & Milner, 2017). Still, “Even if it represents fracture and contestation, a public multiplicity can empower marginalized identities, facilitate a greater range of public expression, and ultimately strengthen the democratic process” (p. 163). The more it does so, the closer to deschooling we become. We can use the same spaces to build each other up or tear each other down, to find common ground and common democratic pursuits or to divide by focusing on our differences and excessive need to be heard.

Although such ambivalence brings with it a measure of hope, there are plenty of examples of how today’s resources (e.g. media) might hinder attempts to deschool. With our focus still on the internet, Maudlin and Chapman (2015) describe a shift that has taken place “from the interests of users to the interests of corporations...Although there continues to be

space for noncommercial utilization of the World Wide Web, it exists primarily on the margins of all that is profit-driven” (p. 146). Dominated by Google, YouTube, Facebook, and other internet giants, users are exploited for capital gain. What we use as a space for personal expression and communion is polluted by consumerism. As McLuhan (1994) states, “We have leased these places to stand to private corporations” (p. 68). We are targeted for advertising purposes and bombarded by messages not of our choosing. Still, I believe there are ways to use our resources in more convivial ways – ways more suitable for a democratic, deschooled society.

Writing before the internet exploded onto the scene, Illich (1970/2002) proposed “learning webs” (or “networks”) for access to resources such as peer-matching, skill exchanges, and reference services to educational objects and educators. How easily these networks can be (and are being) facilitated today via the internet! The only caution is to remember, as Turkle (2015) states, “The most powerful learning takes place in relationship” (p. 231). It must therefore be understood that this networking facilitated by the internet is meant only as a starting point. Face-to-face interactions are still important, being fully present with one another.

In order to use the internet as a public good, we also must fight against surveillance and manipulation. WikiLeaks is one example of an attempt to do this by turning the watchful eye in the other direction. As Harcourt (2015) explains its purpose, “The intention is to allow citizens to become surveillers of the state and see directly into every crevasse and closet of the central watchtower, while rendering the public opaque and anonymous” (p. 267). We should, in a free society, be able to share information without fear of punishment. Again, it is the use of our resources, not the resources themselves, that promote or inhibit a deschooled society. As Turkle (2015) suggests, “[L]aptops and smartphones are not things to remove. *They are facts of life and part of our creative lives. The goal is to use them with greater intention*” (p. 216). With our

modern (media) resources used as convivial tools, the idea that the institution of schooling as the *only* means to learning is revealed as a false assumption, and this is perhaps its greatest accomplishment in moving us toward alternatives.

One alternative to our public institution of schooling that must be avoided, however, is complete privatization. As McChesney (2008) warns, “[P]ublic libraries and public education...are being primed for privatization and an effective renunciation of the democratic principles upon which they were developed” (p. 245). This is as inappropriate as the government ownership we have now. We need government policy, however. McChesney (2013) explains it well:

The more a good or service has public-good attributes, the more there is a need for the government to play a role in creating policies to encourage production of that good and to share the expense equitably. That does not mean that there is not a role for commercial players and market forces, but the government plays quarterback, or the game never gets moving. It is a matter for policy deliberation and debate. (p. 52)

So, to reiterate what has previously been emphasized, deschooling is *not* an attempt to do away with publicly funded educational resources, *if* these resources provide access to the world without any pre-planned, packaged curriculum. The world *is* curriculum, and we have the resources (especially technology) to grant this access to everyone.

Government protections should apply to our public media spaces, places that support public debate. “[D]emocracies need agreed-upon values...before productive, antagonistic conflict is even possible. Therefore, it’s appropriate, and in fact necessary, to draw a line between those who reject the basic ground rules and those who work within them” (Phillips & Milner, 2017, p. 184). But who gets to make these decisions? This is a question that illuminates

the ambivalence of media (esp. internet). Struggles over its answer, however, should not discourage us from the positive potential of media as a powerful aid to deschooling. As these authors go on to state, “If history has been plagued by lack of voice and lack of representation, maybe the future will be plagued by too many and too much – *and that’s progress*, even if also impossibly ambivalent” (Phillips & Milner, 2017, p. 200, emphasis mine). In other words, more voice is always better than silencing, and it is a struggle worth continuing.

There are places in this world where internet is not needed, such as in grassroots living and learning (Prakash & Esteva, 2008), but these are also places (as previously discussed) where deschooling is not required. Here in the United States, media saturates our lives; it is part of us and we of it. In this sense, both media and ourselves need to be deschooled, freed from the excesses of both government control and corporate take-over. This will require resistance, even cultural revolution. We must disestablish the institutions of our industrial society which hold us prisoner and replace them with more democratic ones. We have been manipulated, but we are not without recourse. We must have the attitude of Fiske (1987/2011), who proclaims, “I do not believe that ‘the people’ are ‘cultural dopes’; they are not a passive, helpless mass incapable of discrimination and thus at the economic, cultural, and political mercy of the barons of the industry” (p. 312). We resist. We break the rules. We rebel. Teachers witness it in the classroom, artists proclaim it, and protesters rally. “The people” *can* make a difference.

Not only *can* we make a difference, we *must*. We have too much power, destructive power. We have the capability of annihilating ourselves, and we come closer to doing so as we annihilate the essence of who we are as human beings. Harcourt’s (2015) discussion of our “digital selves” is not so far from how Illich (1970/2002) described “contemporary man” decades earlier:

He [sic] attempts to create the world in his image, to build a totally man-made environment, and then discovers that he can do so only on the condition of constantly remaking himself to fit it. We now must face the fact that man himself [sic] is at stake. (p. 107)

We could say that media is changing us, but perhaps we are changing ourselves in order to fit within the cyber world we have created. The former belief relinquishes our power, while the latter is a call to responsibility for ourselves. As Turkle (2015) suggests, “The path forward is to learn more about our vulnerabilities. Then, we can design technology and the environments in which we use them with these insights in mind” (p. 216). What we do not need to do is continue plunging forward, constantly distracted, ignoring what is happening in our relationships with one another and our world...in a sense, sticking our heads in the sand. We might take them out one day and not remember where, or *who*, we are.

Our only hope is to free ourselves now from our current institutions, including mass compulsory schooling. We must concurrently resist the institutionalization of any and all media. It is our responsibility, each of us individually. As Harcourt (2015) urges, “In the end, it falls on each and every one of us – as desiring digital subjects, as parents and children, as teachers and students, as conscientious ethical selves – to do everything we can to resist the excesses of our expository society” (p. 281). We must challenge assumptions, like those telling us that schooling is synonymous with education or that corporate take-over of the media doesn’t affect you and me. Once we begin to do this, to question these and other long-held beliefs, our community resources are preserved for the betterment of all, liberation is on the horizon, and our true education has begun.

## Conclusion

What can we take away from these alternatives in our efforts towards deschooling?

Though not at all exhaustive, this exploration has touched upon most of the major benefits and criticisms of the broader categories of alternative arrangements. Looking at Free Schools like Summerhill and Sudbury (Gray, 2013; Neill, 1960/1992), we find the most democratic of what might still be called “schooling.” The students play the larger part in governing the society they create there. Learning is not compulsory or coerced and thus more meaningful, authentic, and lasting. Some might call these places “deschooled schools.” However, critics argue that this is just another reform effort, and that they still support false assumptions about schooling (Illich, 1977/1978; Prakash & Esteva, 2008). Also, these schools are not widely affordable or available to the general public, and particularly not urban society. As Kozol (1972) argues, “I believe we have an obligation to stay here and fight these battles and work out these problems in the cities where there is the greatest need and where, moreover, we cannot so easily be led into a mood of falsified euphoria” (pp. 8-9). In essence, he felt that many Free Schools were places of escape for privileged whites and called for a more collectivist approach.

Homeschooling and/or unschooling, as varied as the approaches to it may be, does make it easier for those who choose to remain connected both as a family and within their communities to do so. For some, of course, it could still be criticized as a means of escape, but there is more flexibility as to how living and learning will take place. Many of the criticisms have been addressed. However, it is still easier in the society we have now for some to more successfully pull this off than it is for others, and many children unfortunately do not have the immediate support needed. Still, it is a growing movement that I feel is more of a support than a hindrance in our move toward deschooling.

Finally, if we are to truly deschool, our society and its learning resources must be made accessible and available to everyone. Once education is no longer viewed as a commodity, educational resources can be more freely shared. Then, we will have to guard against privatization and the creation of a global classroom. As Illich (1977/1978) cautions,

Either we can work for new and fearsome educational devices that teach about a world which progressively becomes more opaque and forbidding for man, or we can set the conditions for a new era in which technology would be used to make society more simple and transparent, so that all men could once again know the facts and use the tools that shape their lives. In short, we can disestablish schools or we can deschool culture. (pp. 69-70)

Clearly, the latter is in our best interest. It does not even matter whether or not we disestablish schools. Some may remain operational, and those that do will be much better. The difference will be in the lack of compulsion, a wider understanding of learning as a natural and lifelong process that needs nothing more than a free and loving environment, and the mass dispelling of false assumptions that have made us prisoners to our institutions and their certification of people as consumers and producers.

## CHAPTER 5

### MY STORIES ~ MY VISIONS

#### Introduction

Early in my doctoral program, Dr. Ming Fang He posed a simple question that got me thinking... “Why school?” I had never heard nor considered such a question. I was intrigued. Not long after this and discerning my interest, Dr. William Schubert suggested I read a little book by Ivan Illich titled *Deschooling Society* (1970). I had never even heard the term “deschooling,” but I ordered it at once. As I read it, I felt enlightened. All the things I had learned and experienced in education until that moment began falling into place. I was hooked. From there, I found that everything I read and every paper I wrote was in some way connected to this idea about deschooling. Also, my past experiences with relational abuse helped me recognize the abusiveness of schooling, and I wanted desperately to expose its destructiveness and find ways to help us all break free of it. And all along the way, even when I didn’t realize it was happening, *I was deschooling myself*.

The visions I have of a deschooled society are born out of the meanings I have made out of my inquiry. As I proceeded along my journey, six prominent meanings emerged: (1) My university experience has led me beyond school reform to question the very idea of schooling (Illich, 1970; Holt, 1972; Bloom, 1987; Prakash & Esteva, 2008). (2) Deschooling must start in the mind – challenging the ways we view learning, education, and life (Dewey, 1938; Schubert, 2009a; Holt, 1967). (3) Like all abusive relationships, schooling is toxic; therefore, to deschool requires unshackling ourselves from its cultish grasp (Evans, 1992; Cameron, 2012; Spring, 1973b). (4) Schooling cannot be reformed...not by politics, not by religion, and not by force...and it is time we let go of this sacred cow (Gatto, 2008; DiLorenzo, 2016; Giroux, 2000).

(5) My primary vision of a deschooled society is to create communities where every child, woman, and man has access to resources for learning anything at any time without compulsion or discrimination (Illich, 1970; Eisner, 1979/1994; Berry, 1990). (6) Composing speculative essays to transgress the traditional dissertation format helps revitalize self-healing and everlasting love--love for oneself, love for others, love for differences, love for unity, love for humanity, love for the universe, and love for peaceful futures in an uncertain and fragile world (Schubert, 1991; hooks, 2001; Fromm, 1956). It is my sincerest hope that this inquiry will bring us a step closer to realizing these visions of a deschooled society.

My inquiry is based primarily on the schooling experience of (mostly) Americans from all walks of life throughout our history. There's one school story, however, that has not been told. And it's mine... I loved school. I remember the smell of new crayons, the crispness of clean paper awaiting my newly sharpened pencils, and the chill in the morning fall air. I enjoyed my summers, too, and was always ready for the freedom that came with them. Still, I remember the eagerness I felt as school days approached. Who would my teachers be? What would my classes be like? And I was always anxious to see the familiar faces of years past along with new ones. These remain fond memories for me, even with all that I now know is wrong with schooling.

I was smart and a rule-follower. I knew how to navigate the institution successfully. This is where I earned points that told me I was a good girl, an exceptional girl, more so than any affirmations I could and did receive elsewhere. One thing I did not have to be was assertive, and this proved to be a detriment to me in later years. As hooks (2001) notes, "The fear of being self-assertive usually surfaces in women who have been trained to be good girls or dutiful daughters" (p. 59). My schooling rewarded and reinforced my submissiveness. Whatever I was asked to do, whatever I was asked to accept as truth, I did without question. In return, I received A's and

praise. It was easy for me. And so I looked forward to each new school year, for every new opportunity to shine (without having to be at all bold or courageous).

I am still proficient as a student, probably even more so than as a teacher. But I settled into what can be called a successful teaching career. It was natural for me to continue as a teacher in the institution that had brought me so much triumph and acknowledgement as a student, and I had a genuine desire to help those who did not seem so successful for whatever reasons. Over the years, I have grown accustomed to the fact that my job is less about real teaching and more about being “preoccupied with learning the ‘how to,’ with what works or with mastering the best way to teach a given body of knowledge” (Giroux, 2012, p. 8). This is part of the deskilling of teachers that has been increasing over the last decades. Still, even with the disillusionment that began at the start of my career, things went along relatively smoothly until my Curriculum Studies doctoral program. Up until then, school worked the same as it always had. I knew how to be successful, and nothing rocked the boat.

Suddenly, in my doctoral program, the emphasis shifted. It was no longer about grades or “success,” but about real issues, current issues that affect us all. I became less concerned with earning the credits and more concerned with asking and answering the tough questions, with genuine inquiry and philosophy. Instead of learning more about “how to be a good teacher,” the questions became more about “why” and “for whose benefit”? And, finally, I was faced with the ultimate question that sparked my dissertation inquiry... “Why school at all?”

#### About the University

It was my university experience, then, that led me beyond questions about school reform to question the very idea of schooling (**meaning 1**). As such, it was suggested to me by Dr. John Weaver towards the end of my journey that I reflect upon my experience with higher education

and how the University relates to my deschooling inquiry. In my undergraduate and even master's program study, I was a consumer. I paid (or borrowed) for classes towards a particular degree. If I did the required work satisfactorily, I earned credits. If I earned enough credits, I obtained a degree with which I was able to get a job and/or salary increase. I am not alone. Readings (1996) calls "[c]onsumerism...the most pressing threat to the traditional subject of university education in North America" (p. 48). The University is no longer about culture or "finding oneself" in the traditional German sense. As Readings (1996) goes on to explain,

The Germans not only founded a University and gave it a mission; they also made the University into the decisive instance of intellectual activity. All of this is in the process of changing: intellectual activity and the culture it revived are being replaced by the pursuit of excellence and performance indicators. (p.55)

Another way to put it is to say that the University is becoming more like the public k-12 schools with their standards-based grading, TKES and LKES, and other performance measures. This is alarming to say the least, but as certain as I am that k-12 public schooling *cannot* be reformed, I'm not sure the same is true of higher education. As Readings (1996) suggests,

The University has become an open and flexible system and we should try to replace the empty idea of excellence with the empty name of Thought... Thought does not function as an answer but as a *question*. Excellence works because no one has to ask what it means. Thought demands that we ask what it means... (pp. 159-160)

Very similar to how Goodman (1962) suggests that primary schools should admit and celebrate their primarily custodial function without trying to forcibly *teach something*, the University should be a place to simply *think* along with others, constantly questioning and not prescribing or *selling* anything (be it credentials, curriculum packages, programs, or ideologies). If a particular

topic of study or line of research is desired, it is always “open to discussion” (Readings, 1996, p. 160). Alongside deschooling, this would require wide-scale denunciation of discrimination based on educational credentials. Then, there is nothing to *buy*, only learn and create. Would students pay for this privilege? If so, how much? What does this mean for the University professor?

I have not the time nor space within this current inquiry to address these questions adequately. I will, however, take a moment to address the fairly recent explosion of for-profit universities (many of them online) and how they have affected the traditional (i.e. humanities) professor. As Donoghue (2008/2018) explains, “The for-profits focus exclusively on the training and job placement of career-minded students. They aim to capitalize on the connection, now dominant in the minds of so many, between a college education and a high-paying job” (p. 92). Such universities are themselves businesses and work *for* businesses. The most devastating part of all this is that,

A great many traditional colleges and universities, in the face of shrinking resources and rising tuition, have adopted many of the for-profits’ innovations in the application of information technology to higher-education instruction... [which] fundamentally alters the professor’s relationship with his or her students and thus changes the role of the professor in the university as well. (Donoghue, 2008/2018, p. 95)

As has happened in k-12 schooling, instructors are becoming highly managed deliverers of product. More alarmingly, this can be done more cheaply by non-traditional, non-tenured professors.

This all seems like an unstoppable wave of destruction for the traditional university and its professors. As hopeless as it may appear, however, I agree with Bloom (1987) in suggesting that,

The most important function of the university in an age of reason is to protect reason from itself, by being the model of true openness... The university must resist the temptation to try to do everything for society. The university is only one interest among many and must always keep its eye on that interest for fear of compromising it in the desire to be more useful, more relevant, more popular. (pp. 253-254)

I believe deschooling, and perhaps *only* deschooling, can help the University maintain this function. When the knowledge and skills necessary for particular jobs are taken up by the industries themselves (more on-the-job training, apprenticeships, etc.), higher education can keep its liberal arts focus. For whom this will be (and who will be left out) and how it will be paid for are, again, important questions that must be taken up outside the limitations of this one dissertation.

#### Paradigm Shift ~ New Perspectives

It has now become clear to me how I could have spent over 6 years in the University as a consumer. The hope I cling to has come only near the end, unfortunately (but at least eventually), in my doctoral studies. Here, I find more focus on humanities and less on climbing the career ladder. Here, I find space to think my own thoughts. Certain books have been mandatory to read but have always been excellent topics of discussion around the University table. These readings and discussions have led to questions and inquiries that have been encouraged through suggestions and resources for further study. What this University life has done for me is to provide the time, place, and community to *think*, something the outside world offers less and less of. As Bloom (1987) posits,

Falling in love with the idea of the university is not a folly, for only by means of it is one able to see what can be. Without it, all these wonderful results of the theoretical life

collapse back into the primal slime from which they cannot re-emerge. The facile economic and psychological debunking of the theoretical life cannot do away with its irreducible beauties. (p. 245)

Indeed, it cannot. Theorizing about schooling within this space has led me to the topic of *de*-schooling, which in turn leads me to reflect upon my own schooling experiences and my ongoing inquiry about the place of education in our society.

Deschooling starts in the mind and requires a paradigm shift in the way we view learning, education, and life (**meaning 2**). Within the university setting, for example, I have been able to step back and look at my experiences through various lenses. One such lens is as a complete foreigner, like one of Schubert's (2009a) Utopians. But even as an alien with no preconceived notions or history with schooling, what would I see? What would I say? I imagine something like this:

*For many days of their existence, the young are taken from their homes (without resistance from their parents) and placed into buildings where they are divided by age into crowded rooms. Most of the day in these buildings is spent in transition, from one room to another and one task to another. A large amount of time is spent in training for obedience to the rules set by the adult members of the institution – “No talking! No running! Single-file line!” are commands heard over and over from these adults.*

*Some classrooms seem happier than others, but it is unclear what exactly the young are supposed to be learning... or why. Sometimes, the children will ask. Answers vary and include responses such as, “You may need to know this for your future job; you have to pass the test/grade if you want to graduate.” More creative adults might say, “You are learning how to think so that you can be a productive member of society.” None of these answers come without*

*some amount of fidgeting on the part of the adult. They seem as uncomfortable with their answers as they are with the children's questions. Strange. If I was a youngling on Earth, I would think I was not an accepted member of society and had nothing to offer until I went through these many years of unsatisfactory answers and lessons on topics I mostly did not understand nor care to learn about. One adult among these Earthlings wrote, "Love is as love does, and it is our responsibility to give children love. When we love children we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights – that we respect and uphold their rights" (hooks, 2001, p. 30). I wonder if she is an alien in disguise, because this is not the sentiment I see in Earth's schools.*

*Maybe they are just confused. I saw a show once on their television where adults competed against school-aged children, 5<sup>th</sup> graders to be exact (children are sometimes nicknamed by the number of years they have been in school). Mostly the 5<sup>th</sup> graders knew all the questions while the adults did not. The audience laughed throughout. I found this to be both comical and odd. Weren't these adults once 5<sup>th</sup> graders? If they do not remember what they learned in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, what was the point of going through it? I wonder if it is the same for all the grades.*

*At the end of my observations, I see many years of vibrant youth wasted and families that hardly know one another. I see a society that shuts out its young while they go about business dealings that would certainly be more honest and kind if the children were around. I see adults becoming successful workers or entrepreneurs, using skills they learned either on their own or through apprenticing in a particular industry. Not one that I have seen so far needed to know what they needed to know on any test I saw administered within the school building... at least*

*nothing they could not find out quickly through the aid of their technology. It seems to me that all the time and money spent on this thing called “education” could be much better spent elsewhere.*

Does it really take an alien to see the ridiculousness of schooling? It has become so normal that we do not even ask the questions anymore. I believe, however, that younger generations are becoming more aware...and more vocal. “School Sucks” is no longer the subject of anonymous graffiti. I saw it written in large print on a student’s binder just the other day. The resistance is growing, among students and parents alike. “My dad says I’ll never use this,” one student boasts. “This is stupid,” says another. It’s no longer under their breath. It is out loud and blatant. Disrespect for teachers abounds. Mostly, I believe these are not personal attacks on teachers but, rather, of what we represent to them. It is really disrespect for the system, disrespect for compulsory schooling. I believe *that* disrespect is well-deserved and merely a reflection of decades of mistreatment and outright abuse wielded towards students who are now beginning to see as the alien sees.

### Schooling is Unreformable

As detailed in Chapter 2, schooling is like any other abusive relationship or institution in that it is toxic and requires unshackling ourselves from its cultish grasp (**meaning 3**). Its history is one of, not enlightening, but dehumanizing and manipulating purposes (Adams, 1995; Montgomery, 2005; Nasaw, 1979). Its present is in shambles, entrenched in the business of manufacturing consumers and producers, winners and losers, in a prison-like setting (Gatto, 1992/2017; Reimer, 1971; Cameron, 2012). The controlling and defining of human beings in this way is no different than, and causes much the same damage as, the victimization of those in abusive relationships (Evans, 1992/2010; Olson, 2009; Rahimi & Liston, 2012). Its future is anything but bright.

So, in answer to the question, “Can schooling be fixed?,” I believe I have presented a strong case in the negative, but it is worth repeating. No movement or political agenda is enough to transform schooling into a truly democratic institution. It is not now, nor has it ever been, salvageable. Within the realm of school reform efforts, I’ve grown so very weary of arguments between the political left and right, both vying for control of our young. The connection, for example, between the type of economy (i.e. capitalism) and societal inequities is made absolute by some theorists (e.g. Darder, 2017; Giroux, 2000) who believe “fixing” this will solve the inequities of both schooling and society. I believe there are serious flaws with this analogy. In freedom, there will always be both good and evil. Morality cannot be legislated, and equality cannot be magically created by any particular economic system. It is not worth giving up our individual freedoms to attempt it.

I have known both generous rich and miserly poor. I have known people and businesses who have acquired great wealth in our capitalist economy and who also give much of it away for the benefit of others. As DiLorenzo (2016) reminds us,

America, from its founding through the nineteenth century, was renowned for its proliferation of voluntary charitable organizations...In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, private philanthropy was increasingly displaced by government programs, which were not only far more bureaucratic but far less effective than private charity had been. (p. 86)

Of course, there are plenty large corporations filled with corruption and greed. Still, it is only in freedom (including free markets) that true, authentic, and lasting generosity can exist. Let no government or political movement seek to bring equality by force. This is the propaganda of socialism, which has proven throughout history to be an epic failure.

Equality under the law is one thing, but economic equality is unrealistic, as people are unique, with varying degrees of creativity and skill. As DiLorenzo (2016) contends, “Socialists are less concerned about equality before the law, or equal rights to liberty, than they are with *material* equality, which, of necessity, has to be forced upon society by the state” (p. 32). One must understand the dangers of socialism to understand the need to deschool, because public schooling is a socialist enterprise, a government-run “virtual monopoly, especially among the poor, who can’t afford a private school” (DiLorenzo, 2016, p. 173). As such, they cannot be reformed (Gatto, 1992/2017). And poorer students are forced to go to public schools that are often far worse than those in affluent communities where there is competition with private schools.

I am in no way suggesting that the American way is utopian or that it is the way for all the world, but people flee to this country for the humanity and refuge that can be found here... in freedom. Certainly, there are always those among us whom we could help more and love better. But this is the work of individuals within local communities and is most successful in freedom. It has never and can never be the result of any political persuasion or dogma. Such rhetoric has no place in our schools or in any institution where the vulnerable (i.e. our young) can be found.

Yet, we are reminded by Freire (1970/2000) and the many theorists he influenced, that teaching is a political act. As Darder (2017), for example, interprets,

Whether we are conscious of it or not, teachers perpetuate values, beliefs, myths, and meanings about the world. Thus, education must be understood as a politicizing (or depoliticizing) institutional process that conditions students to subscribe to the dominant ideological norms and political assumptions of the prevailing social order... Given this reality, a revolutionary pedagogy discards the uncritical acceptance of the prevailing

social order and its structures of capitalist exploitation, and embraces the empowerment of dispossessed populations as the primary purpose of schooling. (pp. 55-56)

I believe this mentality (particularly the latter part about schooling “purpose”) is a dangerous one. If it is true that teachers perpetuate their own beliefs and meanings (and I believe they do), who decides which are okay and which are not? I am a conservative Christian. I believe in love for God and country, and I believe in free-market capitalism. I am against the indoctrination of Marxism and socialism within our educational systems. I believe there are many in this country, many educators included, who agree with me. My point here is not to start a debate over what political or economic leanings are good or bad. *My point is that no agent of the state should have this much control over other people’s children.* If schooling cannot be neutral with regards to politics (or religion... are they not intertwined?), this is perhaps the most fundamental reason to deschool. It is the responsibility of parents to raise and educate their children, not the state, nor any group of conservatives or liberals pushing a particular agenda for how they feel society’s inequities can be resolved. Schooling cannot be reformed...not by politics, not by religion, and not by force...and it is time we let go of this sacred cow (**meaning 4**).

Clinging to schooling as a means to liberate (from any ideologies or “isms”) is a contradiction in terms. Although we find ourselves on opposite ends of the political spectrum, I find much agreement between Bettina Love’s (2019) “abolitionist teaching” and deschooling. As she states, “The ultimate goal of abolitionist teaching is freedom. Freedom to create your reality, where uplifting humanity is at the center of all decisions...[and where] *all* are working to restore humanity with their eyes on abolishing the educational system as we know it” (pp. 89-90). The shared goal of freedom binds us together. For both Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and radicals, and everyone in between... It is time we lost hope in schooling and gained hope in

humanity. Or are we too afraid to allow children to grow up without being schooled in the way we (as radicals, progressives, conservatives, whatever) feel they should be? A government for the people, by the people, and of the people must work together to provide publicly available resources, spaces, freedom and then *Let. Them. Be.* Deschooling is the best option for any and all political persuasions that value freedom. Let us indoctrinate no one. Here's a crazy thought... why don't we just try it? It's the one thing that *hasn't* been tried!

### My Vision

Understanding the need to deschool is but the first (though essential) step and much of what this dissertation has been about up to now. Let us now further envision a deschooled society. What will it look like? Before laying out my (or any) vision, it is important to emphasize that it is just that – a *vision*. As Eisner (1979/1994) posits, “[T]he practice of education is a dynamic one, subject to change over time. This means that educators cannot rest with fixed solutions to educational problems or with ‘break-throughs’ that once and for all define or prescribe how and what should be done” (p. v). And as I have already emphasized, publicly available education should never be about pushing an agenda. It is simply about providing reliable resources, as discussed in Chapter 4, and letting people make up their own minds. My primary vision of a deschooled society involves the creation of communities where every child, woman, and man has access to resources for learning anything at any time without compulsion or discrimination (**meaning 5**). I must add the caveat that I am not a politician nor an economist. What follows are just some ideas of what a deschooled society might look like for us in the United States.

First of all, there is no need to ban schools. If families desire them for their children, let them voluntarily send them (not by compulsory law). Some families may choose private

schooling for their children. If they are able and willing to pay for them, they should have that option. Again, in a free market, the consumer decides demand. Those paying for this privilege also get more influence into what type of schooling their children will receive. This is not an option for everyone, however, and I do not feel it will stand the test of time in a truly deschooled society. For, whether public or private, it is still schooling, and in a deschooled society (one that provides complete freedom with regards to our own learning), its usefulness will dissipate. Therefore, we need our tax dollars better utilized to provide every citizen with free, educational resources.

One possibility would be to expand our public libraries and make them more accessible, including public transit to any such educational/public sites. Internet access should be made available to all. Everyone should have access to primary sources of information, and news outlets need to be held accountable for the accuracy of the information they provide. If it claims to be news, factual reporting of events without bias is what we should expect. There's nothing wrong with opinion "talk" shows, but there should be transparency with regard to the type of information given. For example, a program claiming to be "news" has no business reporting an event and including commentary about the motives, thoughts, or feelings of people involved. Asking the people directly about such things in an interview is news. Assuming is not. If it does that, it's no longer news. And we need news. We need to be informed about local, national, and world events. This is a very tricky topic, especially in today's climate, and I do not pretend to have the answers. I do believe that having choices is important, so the people can decide for themselves and do their own research into various programs (who owns them, where do they get their funding, what groups/ideologies are they affiliated with, etc.). There should be no

monopolies (whether corporate or government), and perhaps we as citizens need to support more local journalism.

At the same time that we hold news broadcasters accountable for presenting factual information, we must resist the kind of censorship we are currently seeing among social media platforms by Big Tech companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and the like. No voices should be silenced in a free society, and let the people decide what they want to listen to or tune out. The point is to differentiate between fact and opinion. This is a blurred line, I know, and one about which I do not pretend to have a final solution for, but I believe we can figure it out. As hooks (2001) posits,

We have power as consumers. We can exercise that power all the time by not choosing to invest time, energy, or funds to support the production and dissemination of mass media images that do not reflect life-enhancing values, that undermine a love ethic. (pp. 97-98)

So, we can determine the course of our media outlets as we decide individually where to focus our attention, as long as we have the freedom to do so. As problematic as this may be in today's climate, there is one thing I am certain of... compulsory schooling won't solve it, and deschooling won't make it worse.

What deschooling might make worse (if we are not careful to make corresponding societal changes) is how we protect and care for our dependent children. For those who now would have no safe place during the traditional school day, childcare should be made available, ideally at a parent's place of work. Perhaps we could provide incentives to businesses for doing so. Such provision should be made for single working parents or two-income families below a certain income. This childcare must not resemble schooling any more than we would allow it to resemble "churching." It would be best if these daycares (along with the other resources

mentioned here) were organized and funded more by local than by federal government.

Community-agreed-upon materials (e.g. books and toys) should be available for free exploration and play without any prescribed curriculum or “teaching.” Finally, tax breaks should be given to stay-at-home-parents of small children, as this is the best possible scenario given that they are well cared for.

One might ask how the public would pay for all of this. In agreement with Reimer (1971), and as addressed in Chapter 4, I suggest that all of the money now wasted on public schooling could *more* than fund the proposals made here. Also, as previously mentioned, these funds could be put to much better use by providing incentives for businesses to teach interested young people the specific skills needed for their line of work and to fund more on-the-job-training. The resources to be made available in a deschooled society, however, are not just about earning a living. As Eisner (1979/1994) reminds us,

To provide children with a decent educational environment requires a reconceptualization of how we think about educational programs, who develops them, and what they are for. They are not primarily, in the view of Reconceptualists, for learning how to earn a living, but for learning how to live. To learn how to live the child must learn how to listen to her own personal drummer in an environment that makes such attention not only possible but desirable. (p. 78)

In a deschooled society, the people support their local governments to fund the resources to be made available within their communities. Parents and local communities take back responsibility for raising their children, and the children educate themselves about the world around them and their contribution to it.

Wendell Berry (1990/2010) contributes much to my vision of a deschooled society, of how people can find their way once again to who they are and what they are for without having anyone (or any institution) “teach” them. His is not an individualistic world, but he shows us how we can have community and interdependence without compulsion or coercion.

“Neighborhood is a given condition, not a contrived one; he [Emerson] is not talking about a ‘planned community’ or a ‘network,’ but about the necessary interdependence of those who are ‘next’ to each other” (Berry, 1990/2010, p. 85). I believe the best way to obtain such community is by deschooling. If we do not, we will see its continued erosion. In a schooled society, as Berry (1990/2010) goes on to note, “The child is not educated to return home and be of use to the place and community; he or she is educated to *leave* home and earn money in a provisional future that has nothing to do with place or community” (p. 163). And why would this *not* be the case when they are shut up away from home and community for so many hours of their waking existence?

Critics might suggest that, while this is all well and good in theory, the reality is that we need to make money to support ourselves and our families (as we should) and that many of the jobs/careers desired require schooling credentials/degrees. Again, here is where a small amount of legislation is needed. I believe it is quite simple but admittedly a tall order for a society that still clings to schooling as a sacred cow. Still, it is essential that we first, of course, end compulsory schooling laws. Second, we must make it against the law to discriminate based upon educational credentials. Beyond this, “We do not need to plan or devise a ‘world of the future’; if we take care of the world of the present, the future will have received full justice from us” (Berry, 1990/2010, p. 188). With these two roadblocks removed, there will be nothing to stop any of the aforementioned suggestions... nothing, that is, but our own ignorance and/or lack of imagination. I have done all I can to demystify our relationship with schooling, to educate and

enlighten based upon an inquiry shared by theorists before me. Will it take hold this time? I do not know. I only know that it has for me and, for now, that is enough.

As I attempt to “wrap up” an inquiry that can never be easily packaged or “finished,” I want to reiterate the fact that my vision for a deschooled society is only the beginning. The only prerequisites for making deschooling a reality here in the United States are a public fully informed about the abusiveness of schooling and a widespread faith in humanity to be free to live, learn, grow, and contribute to their fellow man. This will be a society where people are not judged based upon outward appearance, beliefs, or credentials, but upon the fruits of their lives unencumbered by any prescriptive measures (i.e. schooling). Though it is only a vision, I echo Berry’s (1990/2010) sentiment as he implores, “How can we have something better if we do not imagine it? How can we imagine it if we do not hope for it? How can we hope for it if we do not attempt to realize it?” (p. 81). This imagination and this hope are conveyed most adequately by use of speculative essay writing (Schubert, 1991), as detailed in Chapter 1 (**meaning 6**). Writing in this way with such great examples from the past (e.g. Dewey, 1897; Freire, 1970; Illich, 1970), I feel I have conversed with some of the greatest minds and come away with a theoretical foundation of love (Reimer, 1971; Holt, 1972; Schubert, 2009) and healing (hooks, 1994) that rises above the fear of running against the wind, of imagining different ways of living and being to form a society where people are free... free to live, learn, and love without compulsion or manipulation.

Such freedom requires movement away from hard and fast rules, away from binary thinking (e.g. good vs. bad, objective vs. subjective, American vs. un-American) that we often find in our modern institutions like schooling, including the University. Life and learning are made up of complex issues where the best outcomes are often found along a broader spectrum of

possibilities. My speculative writing is not empirical science, and it is not purely qualitative. It is, rather, a branching out of thought and ideas that is the result of dialogue with “expert others,” as discussed in Chapter 1 (Engin, 2011). And this conversation must remain “open” and always challenging binary assumptions (Readings, 1996). So, yes, speculative writing transgresses the traditional dissertation format even as deschooling transgresses traditionally held views of life and learning. Both transgressions are needed to bring about a more loving society in which our children can grow.

In a “developed” world that is entrenched in the business of schooling, I will not lose hope, I will not lose heart. I will share my understandings and listen to those of others as I continue to live a life supportive of these understandings and stay vigilant for opportunities to support deschooling efforts everywhere or even just in my own backyard. However God widens my circle of influence, I am ready to speak and act in accordance with the vision He has placed within me.

## AFTERTHOUGHT

I am quitting school. Not because I have finally reached the pinnacle as a student, but because of my support of it as an educator. I have resigned my position as public-school teacher effective the end of this school year. With that chapter of my life behind me, I will move with my husband and our dependent children to his hometown in Wisconsin and live the theoretical life I have begun here. My heart is full and my spirit freed. After a few years, with children grown, we plan to settle back south where the air is warm, the ocean beckons, and my roots are firmly planted.

As I have said before, my support of deschooling must start with me. Admittedly, when I began this journey, I had no thought of leaving (institutional) education. It has been my life's work and sustaining career for many years. I love children and have always wanted to help their growth in some small way. Now, knowing the damage done by schooling and the futility of its reform, I want no more part in it. I have witnessed my own children's struggles with and emancipation from schooling.

People are always surprised when I tell them I'm leaving the profession. "You've spent so much time, effort, and money in expanding your educational career! Why would you give it up?" To this, I must simply point to this dissertation and say, "Here. Read this, and then perhaps you will understand." I do also realize that my decision to leave school is dependent upon my current viable choices. If, for example, I was still a single mother, I would not be able to simply leave. What I *would* do is everything in my power to inflict the least possible damage upon my students while looking for some enjoyable and sustaining employment elsewhere, outside of the institution of schooling.

In my current situation, however, I am blessed to be married to a man with a satisfying career (better conditions *and* salary than I have ever enjoyed as a teacher). I no longer have to work for money, a privilege not afforded to many and one for which I am immensely grateful and will never take for granted. And I plan to stay busy. I take my role as wife and mother as seriously as any role a woman might choose... and *not* “for-profit.” I am also becoming more interested in politics (something I thought I would *never* say). The climate being what it is as I finish writing this (another contentious presidential election and the Covid-19 pandemic), my life choices have become more focal than ever before.

Another question I am often asked is, “Why not try to continue your educational career at the college level?” This, unfortunately, holds less appeal to me than it once did based on what I have learned is happening even here (Readings, 1996; Bloom, 1987; Donoghue, 2008/2018). It is not an option, however, that I have entirely shut the door on. As I shared earlier, I have more hope for the University than I do for k-12 schooling. Still, as Bloom (1987) proclaims,

Our thought and our politics have become inextricably bound up with the universities, and they have served us well, human things being what they are. But for all that, and even though they deserve our strenuous efforts, one should never forget that Socrates was not a professor, that he was put to death, and that the love of wisdom survived, partly because of his *individual* example. (p. 382)

And this is where I must begin in moving forward into the next phase of my life, at the individual level, serving the people around me and living by example. What I do plan to take with me and to always cherish is the theoretical life. As Bloom (1987) suggests in referencing Plato’s *Symposium*, “What is essential about that dialogue, or any of the Platonic dialogues, is

reproducible in almost all times and places” (p. 381)... *as long as we remain free*. This I will continue to defend and fight for.

So again I say, I am quitting school, dropping out, ironic as it may seem to have come to this decision only after reaching its highest level. But what I will never quit is my fight for freedom and justice for all. I am, therefore, prepared to join efforts anywhere and everywhere within my reach to make these God-given rights a reality for all through deschooling.

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