

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Massey University Library  
New Zealand & Pacific Collection

A Critique of Deschooling

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts  
In Education at  
Massey University

Juris Robert Gerve  
1977

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is 'deschooling', a concept and a movement which has grown partly out of the crisis in education of the last twenty or so years. Unlike reformers in education, deschoolers demand a paradigmatic shift in the way we view the world. The thrust of their argument is that compulsory schooling, as we know it, is anti-educational and evil in its effects. Schools, even reformed ones, have a hidden curriculum which creates a mental set of dependence on institutions and a propensity for consumption of what the institutions produce. All manipulative institutions must eventually be abolished if mankind is not to squander its finite resources and if man is not to be reduced to a state of psychological impotence through becoming dependent on institutions from birth to death. The school is the key institution in all societies, irrespective of ideology, because it fashions our imagination through the hidden curriculum and because it controls entry to all other institutions. Schools create and perpetuate poverty and inequality, and determine our life chances on irrelevant grounds. Hence the school is the prime target. Without abolishing the schools, there can be no true revolution. The deschoolers propose the creation of convivial institutions. Learning webs where people would be in complete control of what and when and with whom they learn, would replace the compulsory, age-specific, and teacher manipulated structures we have today.

The intention of this thesis is to outline the deschoolers' case and to explore the philosophical and theoretical assumptions underlying the concept of deschooling. The manner in which the deschoolers present their case for the abolition of schools, disguises a spectrum of issues which apparently unbeknown to them, philosophers of education have agonized over centuries before the concept of deschooling was coined. Deschoolers raise many arguments against aspects of schooling as if they are breaking new ground. What really is new, is that a number of key philosophical issues (in different terminology) have been marshalled and organised into

a cohesive theory about man's nature, the nature and function of mass schooling, and their relationship with a new vision of society. What is also new in a sense, is the solution - the abolition of an institution men have long regarded as unquestionably essential to the survival and growth of present-day civilisation. Certainly anarchists have proposed the liquidation of all institutions, unlike deschoolers who do subscribe to convivial ones, but their respective motivations and views of social reality differ markedly.

Beneath the iconoclastic imagery and emotive expressions, the rhetoric and the many seemingly extravagant claims, there is a vision of man and society that deserves to be seriously considered. There are a number of insights which, even if one ultimately rejects deschooling, can be illuminating and which in a sense do fundamentally alter how we view schools.

A further aim then of this thesis is to disentangle the empirical issues from the philosophical, so that attention can properly be rivetted on the latter. As mentioned earlier, the issues are certainly not new - they range over the notions of freedom and authority in education, the relationship between teaching and learning, democracy and equality of opportunity, the concept of education, the nature of man, children's rights, the nature of institutions and of schools, the relationship between schools and society, and the nature and limitations of reform as opposed to revolution.

The deschoolers' case cannot be justified or invalidated on philosophical grounds alone, for the simple reason that they draw upon a wide base of interwoven sociological, historical, psychological, political and economic arguments to present their conclusions. To dismiss or accept their case according to a strict philosophical analysis would be grossly unfair, for they do not pretend to be writing philosophical works. Consequently no attempt is made to explore all facets of the traditional philosophical concerns deschooling touches upon, but rather to indicate their presence and delineate the philosophical boundaries of the theory.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Idea for this thesis was suggested by Dr. Graeme Bassett. An initial examination revealed that two New Zealand reports on education acknowledged they considered deschooling but rather summarily dismissed the theory.

Very little has been written on the subject in New Zealand although some educational texts make brief reference to it. Consequently it was felt there was need to consider the theory in greater depth and to provide a cohesive critique of it, for it addresses itself to a considerable number of seminal issues in education. The theory has much wider ramifications however, in that the analysis of and solutions for education are set in the wider perspective of the deschoolers' concern for the state of modern technological societies and the assumptions about man's nature on which they are based.

It became apparent in the course of examining the theory, that within the scope of a thesis, complete justice could not be done to any one particular issue in the all encompassing spread of the deschoolers' canvas. Of necessity, and at the expense of perhaps greater depth it was decided to sketch in all the main areas and issues from a philosophical perspective, in order to provide an equally necessary guide to any subsequent studies, empirical or otherwise.

Appreciation is expressed to Mr. Alan Cooper for his invaluable comments in the writing of this work. I wish especially to acknowledge the help of my wife, Jan, who has provided the encouragement which enabled me to persevere with this demanding task.

J.R. Gerve  
June, 1977.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

v.

	<u>Page</u>
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	ii
<u>PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	iv
<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	v
<u>CHAPTER ONE.</u>	<u>INTRODUCTION</u>
	1
	3
	7
	8
	19
	21
	25
	30
<u>CHAPTER TWO</u>	<u>EDUCATION AND FREEDOM</u>
	38
	38
	39
	42
	45
	51
	52
	63
<u>CHAPTER THREE</u>	<u>INSTITUTIONS</u>
	69
	69
	71
	75
	77
	80
	83
<u>CHAPTER FOUR</u>	<u>SCHOOLS</u>
	86
	87
	89
	91
	92
	97
	100
	103
	109
	109
	114
	116
<u>CHAPTER FIVE</u>	<u>TEACHING AND AUTHORITY</u>
	123
	123
	127
	130
	136
	141

TABLE OF CONTENTS Contd..

<u>CHAPTER SIX</u>	<u>SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY</u>	144
	Schooling as an Instrument of Society	145
	A Case for the Partial Independence of Schools	149
	The Learning Networks	154
	Conclusions	162
	References	170
<u>GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>		175