

I disagree. I believe that children have an innate love of learning. Actually, I think adults also love learning. If I have been successful at school, that has been because a set of circumstances have allowed me to keep hold of my youthful love of learning in spite of my many years of schooling.

Can you imagine how you would feel if your individuality were not respected, your personality counted for nothing, if what you wanted or didn't want was completely irrelevant? If you can then you may be a garments factory worker (or other wage slave), a prisoner in a jail, a military recruit or a school child. Almost all of us know the experience of feeling forced by others to do things we didn't want to do. On occasions, we've thanked them later, but by and large, I venture to suggest, we wish they'd just let us get on with our lives, especially if it was someone with whom we had no personal connection and who felt that they themselves were in a system which gave them no other choice.

*"How can I get some time to myself, to do what I want to do?"* In many schools, such thoughts are high on young children's minds. I say young children because older children have often given up the idea that such a thing is even possible within the confines of school classes, and have replaced it with the question *"How long until break time?"*

I know a school in which children are given time to themselves if they've done their work properly. Unsurprisingly, they learn to 'do their work properly' in a quick and efficient fashion, so they can have time to themselves. The trouble is, it's not *their* work – it's what the teacher has given them. How can the teacher measure what is 'proper'? Well, with 99% of the work given out in this school, there is only one set of right answers – so that becomes the definition of what is 'proper'. But hang on, we're mixing up two very different things here – work and answers. The aim of the exercises is *not* for the children to get the right answers. (We already know them). The aim of the exercises is surely for the children to *learn* how (or even, dare I even suggest it, why?) to get the right answers.

So, in school, both children and their teachers tend to confuse two very different things – learning is reduced to the task of getting the right answers (often by blind copying, either from one another or from the teacher). After a couple of years of this, most children come to believe as their teachers do that learning in school is very different from learning at home – good results cannot be expected without a great struggle from both teacher and child. In such circumstances, children are understandably dispossessed, so mindless copying becomes the rule, not the exception. Did you ever try explaining something to someone who is not listening? Interest, like love is just not something that one person can reasonably demand from another – or that one person can give another if they've not got a mind to. The cycle of bored learners and bored teachers gives a revealing perspective on the claim that children don't want to learn.

Let us consider the pre-school child for a minute. By the time they start school, haven't most kids already learnt to walk, to talk, to understand a first language and to start to make sense of the world around them? The fact that these complex skills are learned but not taught should give us food for thought. Experience tells us that whilst there may be a general pattern, nature has decreed that all children learn these things at their own pace and in their own way.

A place in which learning was allowed to occur naturally would not be a school we would recognize, it would be a return to the word's roots (the word derives from *skhole* the Greek for 'leisure'). Few people in the school business could feel at home there. Could a place, devoid of routines, extrinsic motivational trickery and pointless rules that must be obeyed really be preparation for mainstream society?

It would be foolish to offer a single prescription for how to amend the modern conception of schools and schooling. Indeed, to frame the discussion in these terms is already to make some key assumptions. A schooling is not an education. I don't believe that any one-size-fits-all advice is of great value here any more than I think that one sort of institution is the best for everyone. To overturn the school monster is to tackle habits of thought ingrained into our society over many generations.

Personally, I am not prepared to endorse a social system of soulless mass production and mass consumption. It deserves our support no more than do leaders who send the young generation off to fight and die for their greater good. How are we to respond to a society which would hold the next generation hostage, and demands that 'for their own good' children had better be dumbed down, taught to hate learning and to mindlessly obey orders, to compete with one another and generally do what the boss says whether in pursuit of high marks or high salaries? The wide road is not always the right one, and to smooth the passage of the young into such a society is to do no one any favours.

There was life before schooling, and God willing, there will be life after it. The first step towards truly helping the next generation is to think clearly – something the modern school system was designed to prevent. If we break children out of the school trap, it will not be by repeating myths and half truths we learnt to repeat within its four walls. I say, let us help the next generation be all it can be, let them fulfill their talents as latent potentials – let us do what we can to give them not a schooling but a real education. If we are to break the cycle of alienated teaching and learning, then let us start here and now. If society can't tolerate this, then let it face the consequences.