



去學校化論者再探： 重讀伊利區的「學校無用論」

溫滢雅*

*國立虎尾科技大學應用外語系講師
台北市立教育大學教育系博士生

【摘 要】

本文分兩大主要部份探討「學校無用論」。第一部份旨在闡明「學校無用論」的論點。第二部份則從三方面來重新閱讀伊利區的論點：首先，從現代化的觀點審視當時的社會經濟背景；其次，從社會角色的觀點探討伊利區的學校無用論；再次，以社會資本觀點重新檢視。在第二部份和第一部份之間，將先從伊利區當時理論的時代背景及其對後來社會學家的影響、檢視伊利區承先啓後的歷史定位，並借重其他社會學家對「學校教育」和「社會問題」的定義，再次思考伊利區對教育的定義和他所論述的教育問題。末了以後設思考反省本文論述的觀點。

關鍵字： 艾文·伊利區、去學校化論者、社會角色、社會資本

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at “The Futility of Schooling” by Ivan Illich

Yvonne Ying-Ya Wen*

*Lecturer in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, National Formosa University
Ph.D. Student in the Department of Education, Taipei Municipal University of Education

【Abstract】

“The Futility of Schooling” is to be interpreted in two parts of this paper. In the first part, the article is rephrased. In the second part, the same article will be examined once again in three ways: firstly, from the perspective of modernization in the social-economic contexts; secondly, from the perspective of social roles; and thirdly, from that of social capital. Prior to the second reading, Illich’s thoughts will be seen in terms of his time and influences in sociology. Right before the beginning of the second part, definitions of “schooling” and “social problems” will be borrowed from other sociologists for discussion. A final word will give a meta-analytical reflection on what is discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Ivan Illich, deschooler, social roles, social capital



As any educational system cannot be isolated from the historical development and ongoing changes of its society, the writing of any writer cannot be completely free from his or her personal experiences and encounters. It is from these social as well as economic backgrounds, along with historical ones, that a writer's unique perspectives are voiced. There are contexts in which an article is created and within which it is to be read.

Of course, Ivan Illich is not an exception to this. Throughout his writings, analogies are drawn between the church and the school more often than not (for example, see Illich, 1971a), and we can find their origins in the writer's own personal experiences serving the Lord as a Catholic priest, whether successful or not, in the Third World. In his article "The Futility of Schooling," Ivan Illich focused on the futility of schooling in the Third World where he spent much of his time ministering. Latin America is the social background that the second reading of this article is to begin with after the first look.

A First Look

In the beginning of this article, Illich gave foolproof statistics as evidence for the agricultural economy of Latin American countries. Then he went on to argue that, education, as an instrument to produce the bourgeois as was the case in most highly industrialized countries, is hardly of foolproof help to such poverty-stricken nations in Central and South Americas.

He had it that the gap between the two classes brought forth by the old feudal society, the marginal majority and the schooled minority, had been furthered widened instead of being shortened by education. In modern society where everyone is supposed to be equal, the have and have-nots have now been separated even further apart by schooling. Illich found this prevailing phenomenon in Latin American unequal.

Everywhere schooling has been "the prerequisite for membership in a managerial middle class (p. 361);" that is to say, in his opinion, schooling is the admission fee paid

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

for a ticket to get into the management, to become a member of the executive among the middle class. However, Illich dismissed the "liberal myth (p. 360)" that assumed schooling as a means for social integration. Rather, he regarded it a new means to discriminate the growing urban mass from the new elite.

As a minister preaching the Lord's gospel himself, Illich did not believe the school-gospel while playing his role as an educator in Latin America. Despite the private investment and national budget allocations in education, the bridge built across the social gap was quite narrow under his scrutiny. Schooling, which is expected to allow passage into the middle class for the socially deprived, has persistently been made a device to put the blame on the marginal underachievers when they fail.

In his opinion, the free schooling that is supposed to ensure equality among all citizens did not measure fully up to their expectations in enhancing the social participation and economic status of the citizens, although it had played a part in performing such a role some hundred years ago. He took the United States of America for instance. Around 1850s, a few years of schooling seemed to have brought extremes of both the unschooled and the educated together. There was a certain kind of balance between those who just made it without going to school and the educated who did not get rich.

Illich contrasted such a picture with that of Latin America in his time. Years of schooling were tripled, and money up to twenty times as much was spent on grammar schools. Yet, these efforts no longer produced the same result as they had done in the United States one hundred and fifty years earlier. In Illich's time, sixth-grade dropouts could hardly find a job.

Then Illich pointed out that the problems lie in the fact that the social structures of Latin America were then out of date. Neither school systems nor railways could make up for the distance between Latin American countries and industrialized countries, because the former remained a largely agricultural society of the primitive mode.



For Illich, the definition of schooling could be interpreted in terms of its two features. One was its custody over undesirable excess population from the street, the family, or the labor force. In this respect, schools have been a place built to accommodate such persons who are not welcomed anywhere else and, otherwise, would have been fooling around when not taken into their care.

The other feature in Illich's definition was that schooling marked those educated as capable and sent them on their way to success. Then schools became an accepted ritual of certification and qualifications, because success was acquired through years of formal education rather than ability procured on one's own. What matters became the length of schooling no matter how capable a person was.

In the industrial age, categories were set up by affiliating products with a certain institutions. This made it hard for people to challenge the school as a system, since it had been taken for granted for so long that nobody ever doubted it. What Illich argued is that education may not necessarily be the product of schooling. To him, mass schooling as education, just like the car as a vehicle for family transportation, was impractical and inappropriate for the general public in Latin America. He regarded them both as favoring the rich. He thought the government budget spent on superhighways actually biased against the largest number of people, the poor. So were the two-fifths of government budget on schools.

Schools, which were affordable only by such rich countries as the United States of America, were beyond the means of the developing countries in Latin America from Illich's angle. He refuted the three proposed solutions to the problems of twelve years of schooling for all. First of all, he regarded radical population control unfeasible for it takes time for population control to be influential. Secondly, he deemed maximum reallocations of government budgets impracticable, for the investment in schooling could not be raised beyond certain levels. Thirdly, a government expecting foreign aid up to

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

an increase of 30 per cent should not rely on so unreliable and unforeseeable a help for its education.

Besides, he considered the benefits of educational investments to have been neutralized by the rise in per capita cost of schooling. He argued that, unlike mass production, mass schooling does not reduce the average cost of each student's educational expenses. These are the reasons why Illich thought the universal schooling was a creative utopia to such poor countries as in Latin America.

Schools, in the definition of Illich, worked as a means to maintain the status quo for the advantaged. The majority of Latin Americans were not rich enough to pursue unlimited years of schooling; what made it worse was that they were schooled not only into compliance but also into submission: Only very few of them would be able to be admitted into institutes of higher education, and most of them would always stay undereducated and remain in the lower class accordingly.

Illich found the political ideal copied from the United States of America, "equal scholastic opportunities for all (p. 364)," impossible. From his view, more money for education meant more privilege for just a few people at more expenses of the larger number of population; he thought the educational system favored only the relatively few. The majority of the population were schooled into the bottom of the pyramid.

Illich also blamed the education for its hypocrisy: Education, which promised to allow generous opportunities for all, put the blame back on the undereducated when they failed to make use of such remedial institutions as trade school or night school. Schools, the cause of the frustrations of the undereducated, made the undereducated feel that they themselves were responsible for their own frustrations while others were taking advantage of a head start as their own achievement.

School-centered formal education went unchallenged, because it did increase the



national income. Some other phenomena also went unchecked for the same reason: Schools were inefficient in educating the majority; furthermore, schools were limiting the access to the elite and were freely allocating benefits to members of this elite. In the economy of developing countries, schools were part of a society that packaged the minority of school graduates into production and the majority into disciplined consumption. Illich went on to single out the fact that the gap between the two groups was further enlarged by the rates of their annual raises.

Illich thought that, when educational reforms failed because of the social framework, people often forgot the presuppositions that radical innovation in formal education involved radical changes in political situations, production organization, and human needs for schools. Trade school, which was seen as a remedy for mass schooling, was taken for illustration. Although it cost several times as much as standard schools to run trade schools, their graduates were not likely to win out in an ever changing job market, for trade schools fell behind the times easily.

Instead of the trade school, Illich presented a subsidized transformation of the industrial plant as a more feasible substitute. His idea was that the role of training centers could be played by factories during off-hours, planned and supervised by managers. With part of the educational expenditures allocated to sponsor this kind of educational exploitation of existing resources, the economic as well as educational results might be incomparably greater.

He thought that such subsidized apprenticeship, if offered without age limit, would make industry a replacement for school. Then schooling and employment could take place at the same time to qualify manpower. The medieval tradition in which men were shut in a segregated institution away from the secular world, preparing themselves for it, was not a must any longer.

Another remedy for the failure of school that Illich proposed was fundamental

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

education, or adult education, that had been proven by Paulo Freire to be more efficient and effective than the best of all schooling: Adults who could be interested in political issues of their community were made literate within six weeks of evening classes in Brazil.

Unfortunately, adult education in his time was reduced to a palliative for the "underprivileged" rather than a real cure or treatment. To reverse this situation, Illich even suggested a radical arrangement of obligatory school sessions of only two months each year that lasted for the first twenty or thirty years of a person's life. Within that two months, math and language teaching would take up a large proportion of the instruction. For him, it sufficed for what the Greek word *scholē* meant as formal education.

In his subsequent discussion, Illich confessed that it was difficult to predict the political consequences of such changes within and without a country. When a society was reared with formal education of schooling but others were not, whose schooling might be the core principle for standards? He also pointed out that schooling outside the universal school might bring some side effects such as the lack for the common language and the criteria. Then the world might be split into two worlds like China and the United States who shutting each other out of door.

Illich thought that the schooled mind favored neither of the two worlds' educational devices. It was difficult for the educated to acknowledge the Communist Party of Mao as an educational institution which might prove more effective in citizenship education than the schools at their best. Guerrilla warfare was another misused educational device in Latin America. The transistor radio also had educational functions that worked for dissidents in Brazil or in Colombia. For example, Castro made use of the transistor radio as an instrument for teaching his people "lessons".

The theme of Illich's proposition was echoed once again near the end of the article: Schools indoctrinated the child into the acceptance of the political system his teachers



represented. He said that, when education was legitimated through schools only, non-school education would remain something out of track, if not a misdemeanor. While evading the political indoctrination by Latin American political leaders, the schooled mind fell into the identical trap paradoxically.

Before he concluded the article with another call for relieving Latin American countries of their schooling burden, Illich warned against the potential danger of violence inherent in the cult of schooling, for it might give rise to insurgency. The governments might have to increase their military forces in order to suppress such insurgencies. Maintaining present school systems might become a step toward Latin American fascism.

Finally, Illich suggested the reallocation of educational functions among industry, politics, and short scholastic retreats. He also suggested intensive preparation of parents for providing early childhood education. And he pointed out that the cost of schools must be measured in political terms as well as economic, social, and educational terms. Current system of schools, for Illich, emphasized and rationalized the acceptance of two societies: one a colony and the other colonizers.

Before Another Look

“The Futility of Schooling” is to be read once again in the following discussion with its social and economic backgrounds. Prior to the second reading, I would like to view Illich’s thoughts from his time and his influences in sociology. I would also borrow from some other sociologists’ definitions of “schooling” and “social problem” for discussion.

Then I would proceed to the second look viewing this article of Illich’s from three perspectives: Firstly from the angle of modernization in its socio-economic contexts; secondly from the viewpoint of social roles; and thirdly, also lastly, from the perspective of social capital.

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

In this article of his, Illich paid most of his attention to Latin America only. He never said that his discussions could be applied everywhere. Countries like the United States were often taken by Illich as better-off counterparts to the impoverished Third World in his focus. However, some research already done in the United States and the Great Britain will be taken into consideration, despite this fact, in my discussion of his article.

Ivan Illich: His Time & Influences

In Illich's time, the thoughts of critical theory pervaded. The reproach that the Frankfurt School held against instrumental rationality (Chen, 1987) happened to have taken place at the same time when Illich's thoughts were bred and brewed in the 1960s and 1970s. The Frankfurt School also attacked technocracy in which the technocrats or those in the know presided over the general public or the unknowing (Arato and Gebhardt, 1982; Liao, Trans. 1984).

This pattern parallels Illich's criticisms against the society dominated by the privileged over the deprived. Both were blaming the advantaged for the sake of the less advantaged. This can be said to be an influence from which Illich was inspired or a mere coincidence.

The origins of Illich's thoughts from Marx can be traced in his writings here and there. Obviously, his thoughts appeared to be Left-Winged. For example, he did *his* homage to the Communist Party of Mao by honoring it as an "educational institution" (1971b, p. 366) more effective than the schools at their best.

However, the Cultural Revolution, from the insiders' view, is no more than a cultural disaster which deprived many of their learning opportunities. Many illiterates of that generation have remained to this day bitter toward that Movement even though Mao's Communist Party successfully took over the political reign of China by persuading the working class into revolts.



Had he been there as a member among the deprived generation, Illich might have attacked Mao's party as vehemently as he did toward the Catholic religious system in which he had been an insider before he quit. It is the distance that blurred his vision and that added to it an esthetic value which might have never been existent in the stakeholders' view. Disasters become tolerable when it comes to somebody else's matters.

Another source of influences from the Left-Winged could possibly come from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who had been Ivan Illich's friend. They both worked in the Third World and, therefore, some kind of relationship as an ally might have naturally developed between them. This can be traced in the article when Illich quoted his friend as a successful example of effective non-school adult education in Brazil (1971b, p. 366).

Together with his friend Freire, Illich was labeled one of the leaders of "the radical and libertarian movement in education (Whitty, 1985, p. 12)." The movement was active not only in the United States of America, it became known subsequently in Britain by the early 1970s, too.

With the publication of his book *Deschooling Society* (Wu, Trans., 2004), Illich is often referred to as one of the deschoolers. Theoretically, these deschoolers were not without academic followers. Geoff Whitty had admitted that he and Michael Young had at least "flirted outrageously" (Whitty, 1985, p. 83) with a policy of deschooling, quoting the description of him by Demaine (1980; quoted in Whitty, 1985) and Reynolds and Sullaivan (1980; quoted in Whitty, 1985).

What is interesting about these deschoolers is that they were all working outside the mainstream arena of census politics where educational policies were formulated and most of the leading British sociologists of education were located (CCCS, 1981; quoted in Whitty, 1985).

Hence one can have reasonable doubts as to whether these deschoolers have ever had practical influences or concrete involvements in any educational reforms imposed by the governments. Another question that one might ask is that how many countries in the world have actually adopted the educational systems they proposed?

Defining “Schooling”

Education in its broadest sense includes “experiences that stimulate thought and interpretation or that train, discipline, and develop the mental and physical potentials of the maturing person (Ferrante, 1995, p. 479).” This definition of education encompasses the widest range of experiences that we accept as learning.

From this perspective, human beings are constantly learning ever since the day they were born till the day they cease to breathe. Then education becomes a lifelong process instead of schooling experience. Lifelong education matches part of Illich’s picture of education in his sketch for learners to keep going to school for twenty or thirty years—but only two months a year—early in their life.

Yet sociologists make a distinction between formal and informal education with the former representing a purposeful, planned effort intended to impart specific skills and modes of thought while the latter referring to educational experiences that occur in a spontaneous, unplanned way. Ferrante (1995) is the one who holds such a view, and he categorizes “schooling” under formal education.

In his definition, schooling is “a program of formal and systematic instruction that takes place primarily in classrooms but also includes extracurricular activities and out-of-classroom assignments (p. 480).” Or, more realistically, schooling can be “the means by which those who design and implement programs of instruction see to pass on the values, knowledge, and skills they define as important for success in the world (Ibid.).”



The latter definition implied that what is taught in schools is just a part of the knowledge accumulated and stored throughout human history. The schooling that Ivan Illich proposed falls under a non-existent category that lies somewhere between formal and informal education with a thoroughly different approach to what is traditionally known as schools.

What Illich tried to do was to restructure education outside of the framework of schools. He suggested that learners go to school on the job only two months a year for the first twenty or thirty years of their lives (1971b, p. 366). This certainly is a very creative idea. I agree with him on that a very efficient use of time is essential to learning. How the time is spent is much more important than how long the time has spanned. For those who never really want to go to school, his plan can be another form of gospel.

Some students go to school just to meet the requirements of the politics with neither sufficient motivation nor interests. Forcing such students to go to school can be a waste of the social resources (Chiang, 1998). In my opinion, it can be a waste of the student's own time and the government's educational investments as well. To such students, the organizations proposed by Illich can be an alternative for them to take into consideration.

However, Illich's idea of 2-month-a-year schooling has never been put into practice up to the present moment by any government or formal educational system anywhere in the world and, therefore, has never had the chance to be tested of its feasibility. Yet we still can find its variation.

An educational system beside formal ones that allows students to go to school two days a week during the weekend or two nights a week in the evenings is now available to learners worldwide in the in-service or supplementary institutes affiliated with formal institutes of higher education. In a sense, we can say that this vision of Illich has been fulfilled in a way beyond his scope or horizon.

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

Another prophecy of his that has come true in a way that he had never dreamed of is the “network” (1971a, p. 484): People are now learning online via the Internet, matching themselves into communities. At the time Illich presented the idea of network learning, the Internet was not so accessible as it is today. The way Illich proposed for matching peer learners has also now become a pervasive way of online friends matching. Though the current practice is not directly related to education, it can be further applied to learning someday somehow.

One of the educational devices proposed by Ivan Illich that is embodied in modern day society is the industrial plant serving as training centers. Parents who cannot afford formal education to their children send them to factories where they receive training. Some of these parents expect their children to learn a certain kind of expertise or skills therein to make a living with.

A modern variation of this design of Illich is an arrangement that has students go to school during the day and then work in the evenings in a company or vice versa. This can be regarded as a further development of Illich’s original scheme. No matter when these students go to school, what they learn is closely related to their work in their workplace.

Besides, it is also of interest to note that one of the learning devices Illich mentioned has indeed been carried out in the exact form as he had envisaged. That is the “educational passport (1971a, p. 481).” This creative idea is no longer just a concept but has now become a common practice in schools of all levels with different names.

Educational Problems as “Social Problems”

Social problems in some sociologists’ interpretations are “the discrepancy between society’s ideals (of freedom, justice, etc.) and its actualities (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1998, p. 112).” That means, they are considered to be the failure of the social institutions to meet public expectations. This definition happens to coincide with Illich’s



descriptions of the educational systems.

According to Illich, the realities of schools did not measure up to the expectations of the general public: Schooling fails to shorten the distance between the marginal majority and the schooled minority. It does not succeed in being a means for social integration but serves as a new means to discriminate the growing urban mass from the new elite. Then, schooling, which is expected to allow passage for the socially deprived into the middle class, has now become a device to blame the marginal for their own under-achievements. Schooling did not meet the expectations of the general public in enhancing their social participation and economic status, either.

All that Illich scolded as what was wrong with education involved social realities that did not meet the ideal of the public. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to categorize educational problems as social problems, for schooling fails to operate in accordance with social justice. I agree with Illich when he said that such problems are to be seen in their political and economic contexts beside educational ones. This is why I am now moving on to take another look at Illich's essay in its political and economic contexts in the following sections.

Another Look

The Socio-Economic Contexts of Modernization

Latin America in Illich's time of writing was going through a process of modernization. It is still much the same so even today. Long years of political warfare make it unstable for any country to have good economy, not to mention education.

Modernization in integration theories was taken to be "the developmental process as breaking through tradition-based obstacles and replacing them by the more modern, differentiated institutions found in the developed countries (Smelser, 1994, p. 26)." What modernization theory was attacked for has been its drawing on the actual social

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

conditions of the richer Western European countries and the United States to construct a model of modernity which renders it a process moving in one predetermined direction (Calhoun, et al, 2007).

Illich himself had also recognized that the social structures of Latin America were out of date because their societies were still striving a way out of their primitive mode of agriculture (1971b, p. 361). This social framework is also what he held accountable to the failure of schooling. The problem was aggravated by the fact that, when these newly developing countries were trying to become industrialized and urbanized, they still had to compete with those advanced countries (Calhoun, et al., 2007). Then the pressures become two-fold from both inside and outside.

No wonder why Illich considered education to be beyond the means of Latin American countries. He took the schools as a burden in the developing countries and he considered them to be affordable only to such rich countries as the United States of America, because, for poor countries in Latin America, mass schooling is not a necessity but a luxury in his view.

While economic problem of a country is “*a*” real problem, what I am arguing here is that it is not “*the*” real problem for education. The proof can be found in a huge study conducted by James Coleman and his associates (1966, quoted from Stark, 1994) in the United States of America. The research shattered the myth that African Americans suffered from poorer-quality education at schools.

The first of Coleman’s startling findings was that there was hardly any difference in the qualities of schools that African-Americans and whites attended in terms of expenditures per student, age, class size, quality of the buildings, libraries, class size, and even teacher training. The second finding was that these aspects of school quality had no detectable impact on student achievement scores.



That is to say, lavish expenditures during the 1950s and early 1960s to upgrade schools had accomplished not too much to improve the quality of the schools. Coleman concluded his study by saying that school was simply a place where student learned in proportion to the educational qualities of their homes, neighborhoods, and peer environment.

Recent research has also proven that the typical dropouts share similar family attitudes toward education (Barrington and Hendricks, 1989; quoted in Landis, 1989). It is not their genders, ethnic races, or age that matters. Instead, it is their parents' attitudes that matter. When the children are absent from school, their parents either know it or give their tacit consent.

These parents are not interested in either their children's attendance in elementary schools or their achievements. They are not only likely to convey these values to the children but also ready to agree when their children decide to leave high school later. Here we can see that money is not what matters. It is the parents' attitudes that make the difference.

From these two studies, one point can be sorted out for it was repeated in both: Family attitudes are what matters to the children's learning, not the money spent. No matter how much or little money a country spends on its education, it is the parents' attitudes that decide how well the children learn. Therefore, money is not *the* problem.

This point is further supported by data collected from the "High School and Beyond" data base by Stark (1994) to explore the debate on whether it is the inadequate funding that causes school problems. Data collected shows that students in public schools are far more likely to drop out than students in Catholic and church-related schools.

However, Catholic schools and other church-related schools spend far less money per student than the public ones. It is not difficult to see that, although money is "*a*" real

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

problem for developing countries, or emerging countries in Illich's term, it is not *"the"* real problem for education. What the Third World countries need to do is to change the attitudes of family and parents.

Let's take another country for instance: Parents' attitudes are what make Finnish education the best among the world. Nearly every parent in Finland, heedless of his or her occupation, is a reader (Tseng, 2008). Going to the public library makes up an important part of the family outings. Children learn to read first from their parents, not from the schools.

Illich was right when he suggested that parents should be prepared for providing their children early childhood education. It is in accordance with what Barrington and Hendricks (1989; quoted in Landis) and Coleman (1966, quoted in Stark, 1994) found. Parents themselves need to learn so as to become competent parents. They had better be readers themselves, for children look up to their parents for examples.

What parents do matters more than what they say or what they ask their children to do. Sometimes, what is passed on from one generation to another is something left unsaid in between them. Children observe while parents are doing something. They learn not only from what their parents say but also from what they do.

As for the social inequality, education is neither its creator nor its terminator. Education is not supposed to be a panacea that eases all pains or a one-size-fits-all cure. This world is one of imperfections, and education is not the only one to blame. If we keep looking outwardly for solutions or answers, we will constantly be frustrated and disappointed. It is not the job of anybody to make everything right because it is simply beyond the limits of any of us.

Social Roles and Social Capital

In this part of the second reading of Illich's "The Futility of Schooling," I would like to



take a look at education from the perspectives of social roles and social capital. While playing their social roles, the individuals can get their self-worth from inside. Schools can be made a place where they get this intrinsic value. Social capital is what a child from a poor family can make it to the upper class with.

Social Roles

Parsons (1959) in “The School Class as a Social System” had mentioned the “role-performance” (p. 33) of citizens. Individuals go to school in their development of social functions. This is essential to their commitments to the society and also a prerequisite of their role performance.

In their commitment to the performance of specific roles within the structure of society, individuals may be in relatively humble positions and yet be solid citizens so long as they remain faithful to their occupations and work honestly. Although they may not be exerting a larger influence on others in the society as those in higher positions are, these people still make up a positive force conducive to the operation of the society.

Those taking up higher places in the government *of the people* are entrusted *by the people* with duty to make the most of their administration *for the people*; however, they may not be doing so for the society but, rather, *for themselves*. Compared to such corrupt bureaucrats who voraciously take as much as they can into their own pockets, these “small fries” are really “big fries.”

Winners and losers are not to be taken at their face values. The values of the individual persons do not come by competing with other people as to how much money they make or how high their social status is. One can have everything and still be a loser. A loser in the world’s definition can still be a winner.

Why is it that a winner in the world’s definition may not necessarily be a winner? In Luke 9: 23-24, Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"

This is the reason why I would rather say here that the value of one's self-worth does not come by comparing with others while trying to get over as many people as possible. Instead, to be a contributing factor to the society, one ought to give, not to take. The true meanings of our life on earth lie in self-sacrifice, and that is what "the cross" means.

It does not matter in which position that one stands so long as he or she has a sense like this. With such an intrinsic value, one finds it comfortable to get along with one's own self. Being such a self-confident person, one does not have to compete with others to get his or her own value.

Most of the social conflicts will not be existent when people have positive self-worth, some kind of recognition from inside rather than outside. No more competition is required. The society will no longer be an arena for wrestling but a playground where everyone is trying to give something more and expecting nothing in return.

Associated with every status is a role set or an array of roles (Ferrante, 1995). Role expectations are socially prescribed and include both rights and obligations. When people refuse to or are unable to take up the accompanying rights and obligations affixed to their social roles, they assume sick roles. When more people in the society take up their social roles and function properly accordingly, the society can be a more harmonious one although there can always be room for improvisation and personal style in the way they carry out their rights and obligations.

If education can be of any help at all, it is here where its battlefields lie: teaching students to find their self-worth and their values so that they can do their best, play their roles well, and try to surpass their own older selves rather than those of others'. They



have to be reassured of their self-worth so that they can take heart doing this.

However, the education in our time and at all times is driving toward the other end, telling students to beat others to be the champion. It is a pity for the human race that we turn ourselves back to the level of animals in such a dog-eat-dog world where only the stronger survive. Once we recognize what distinguishes humans from the beasts, we should not be doing this.

Personally I am not really sure how much education or schooling can do to help accomplish such an ideal. Individual behavior is always unpredictable and there can be too many variables and factors in the making of each individual that are beyond control. On this point, I believe, to a certain degree, in the futility of schooling just as Illich did.

Being a Christian, I find it to be the job of God rather than of a man to change people's attitudes and self-images. And it is revealed to me by means of personal experience that it is true: God changes people. I have gone through a process of transformation since I was reborn spiritually in 1997. It has been more than 10 years now. I am still going through such a change day by day. Despite the fact that it goes against the academic tradition to do such a confession in a journal article, the truth has to be revealed for reference nevertheless.

How Social Capital can Work for Education

When students are learning to play their social roles with positive self-worth, students are also allowed a chance to become better than themselves. To conflict theorists, the social function of the hidden curriculum reproduces the social class of students (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; quoted in Ballantine, 2001); for example, working-class children will eventually go to the same walk of life as their parents do.

However, recent research gives evidence to the opposite: Even children raised in a poor family could develop well when they seek social capital to help them adapt to their

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich
environment (Werner, 2000; quoted in Lee, Chang, Yen, & Wu, 2006).

Social capital, according to Putnam (2000; quoted in Lin & Erickson, 2008, p. 1) is the "connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Yet Putnam is not the first person who talked about social capital. It is Bourdieu (1986) who first analyzed "social capital" systematically.

In the definition of Bourdieu, social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to a credit, the various sense of the word (p. 88)."

In these definitions, we find relationships, connections, and network(s) as key words. These connections and relationships can be useful resources to resort to especially when the educational system or the family fails to provide their due support. What the students lack at home or at school can be somewhat compensated by social capital. Social mobility is not a dream for students that know how to use social capital. They do not have to copy the social status of their parents; there are possibilities that they change their fates with their own hands, if ever they know how to use social capital.

This is certainly something not foreseen in Illich's "The Futility of Schooling." Of course he was viewing the same thing in a broader picture. And those cases successfully utilizing social capital constitute only part of it. They are certainly not the majority for whom Illich was speaking. Yet I still wonder whether those students for whom Illich spoke ever really needed his help. As mentioned earlier in this paper, some students just do not want to go to school, it may be a relief or release for them not to have to. It can also be a waste of resources for the government and their parents if such students do go to



school.

Students taking advantages of social capital may be said to be the exceptions for sure. What I am trying to say here is that, where education and family fail to work for students, social capital does. Students are not doomed to take up their parents' roles, and they can make a difference in their own life, outperforming their social roles, if they know how to use social capital.

A Final Word

In this article, I re-examine Illich's discussion on the futility of schooling by arguing that, although economic problems are currently existent in the modernizing process of Latin American, money is not the real problem with education but, rather, parents' attitudes in the family. That is why I agree with him when he said that parents should be prepared to begin early childhood education at home.

From another perspective, I borrow one minor point, social roles, from the functionalist Parsons' "grand" theory and apply it into the discussion of social members, the individuals. I believe that the value of a person in society is not decided by the status of his or her position but by how well he or she plays his or her role. And individuals should not seek their values outwardly from competing with others but should seek inwardly by becoming better than their own older selves, by giving rather than taking, and by self-sacrifice rather than by getting more into one's own pocket.

Establishing self-worth by performing positive functions in the society, anyone can be given a chance of social mobility heedless of where he or she comes from. This is where the social capital of the conflict theorist Bourdieu can work for the individual. Of course, Bourdieu is here used against his will in rendering proof to his enemies. And my discussion of social roles had crossed the border to my own personal religious experience.

While revisiting Illich, I found my belief in education deconstructed and that I myself

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

am not a believer in education, either. I found its futility in the struggles, which I have not yet engaged, over resources in the department where I get stuck. Both parties engaged are highly-educated. Yet avarice and ferocity are displayed rather than the bright side of human race. If education can actually be of any help at all, I pray to the Lord that it work here for me.



References

- Arato, A. and Gebhardt, E. (Eds.). (1982). *The Frankfurt School readers*. N.Y.: Continuum.
- Ballantine, J. H. (2001). The informal system and the “hidden curriculum” – What really happened in school? In *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* 5. 223-245. Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In S. Ball (Ed.), *Sociology of education: A critical reader* . 83-95. London: Routledge.
- Calhoun, C., Gerteis, J., Moody, J., Pfaff, S., & Virk, I. (2007). General introduction. In Calhoun, C., Gerteis, J., Moody, J., Pfaff, S., & Virk, I (Eds.). *Contemporary sociological theory* 2 .1-22. Ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Chen (陳伯璋), P.-C. (1987). An Analysis of Illich’s “Deschooling Society (伊利希「反學校化教育」評析).” In *Educational thoughts and research (教育思想與教育研究)* . 155-178. Taipei: Shtabook (師大書苑).
- Chiang (姜得勝), T-S. (1998). The study of implementing possibility of the equity of educational opportunity during the processes of social change (社會變遷中「教育機會均等」實踐可能性之研究). In China Education Society (中國教育學會) & Chinese Comparative Education Society-Taipei (中華民國比教教育學會) (Eds.), *Equality of educational opportunity during the process of social change (社會變遷中的教育機會均等)*. Taipei: Yang-Chih Book Co., Ltd.
- Cuff, E. G., Sharrock, W. W. & Francis, D. W. (1998). Consensus and conflict. In *Perspectives in sociology* 4 . 87-114. Ed. NY: Routledge.
- Ferrante, W. (1995). *Sociology: A global perspective*. 2nd Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Illich, I. (1971a). Deschooling society. In J. H. Ballantine S. and J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education* . 479-486. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Illich, I. (1971b). The futility of schooling. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *Childhood: Critical concepts in sociology*. 359-367. NY: Routledge.

The Deschooler Revisited: Another Look at "The Futility of Schooling" by Ivan Illich

- Landis, J. R. (1998). Institutions: Education. In *Sociology: Concepts and characteristics* (pp.304-326). 9th Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lee (李思賢), T. S.-H., Chang (張弘潔), H.-C., Yen (李蘭), L.-L., & Wu (吳文琪), W.-C. (2006). Social capital of family and school—Its relationship with elementary school children's internalizing behavior problems (家庭及學校的社會資本與國小學童內化行為問題之關係). *Journal of Mental Health –Taiwan (中華心理衛生學刊)* 19 (3): 231-254.
- Liao (廖仁義譯), R.-Y. Trans. (1984). By T. Bottomore. *The Frankfurt School*(法蘭克福學派). Taipei: Laureate Books (桂冠).
- Lin, N. & Erickson, B. (2008). Theory, measurement, and the research enterprise on social capital. In N. Lin & B. Erickson (Eds.), *Social capital: An international research program* . 1-25. NY: Oxford UP.
- Parsons, T. (1959). The school class as a social system. In J. H. Ballantine & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Schools and society: A sociological approach*. 33-40. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Smelser, N. J. (1994). Sociological theories. In *Sociology* . 21-38. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Stark, R. (1994). The interplay between education and occupation. In *Sociology*. 5. 471-498. Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Tseng (曾志朗), C.-L. (2008). *Reading is the life of the Finnish* (閱讀就是生活的芬蘭人). In Hsiao, F.-Y. et al. (蕭富元等著), *The secret that made Finnish education the best of the world* (芬蘭教育世界第一的秘密). 3-5. Taipei: Commonwealth Publishing (天下文化).
- Whitty, G. (1985). *Sociology and school knowledge: Curriculum theory, research, and politics*. London: Methuen.
- Wu (吳康寧譯), K.-N. Trans. (2004). By I. Illich. *Deschooling society* (非學校化社會). Taipei: Laureate (桂冠).