

Education Revolution

THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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Inspiring educational stories from the far corners of the earth



INSIDE:

Revolutionary ideas from Nepal, Japan, Canada, England, Norway, and Milwaukee!

PLUS Education in the News and upcoming conference announcements



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THE MAGAZINE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)

AERO, which produces this magazine quarterly, is firmly established as a leader in the field of educational alternatives. Founded in 1989 in an effort to promote learner-centered education and influence change in the education system, AERO is an arm of the School of Living, a non-profit organization. AERO provides information, resources and guidance to students, parents, schools and organizations regarding their educational choices.

The Mission of Education Revolution Magazine is based on that of the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO):

"Building the critical mass for the education revolution by providing resources which support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone."

Towards this end, this magazine includes the latest news and communications regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public alternatives, independent and private alternatives, home education, international alternatives, and more. The common feature in all these educational options is that they are learner-centered, focused on the interest of the child rather than on an arbitrary curriculum.

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Exploring My Own Time in School

BY CARLO RICCI

The definition for learning that inspires me most comes from John Holt, who wrote that “Living is learning. It is impossible to be alive and conscious (and some would say unconscious) without constantly learning things”¹ In this sense, I did learn while I was in school, but regrettably I now recognize, and always intuited, that my schooling was clearly miseducation. When I think about my schooling, sadness and strength overcome me. It is too late for me, but not for others. We must all do our part to inform others of the alternatives and to act in a way that the alternatives are a reality—because they are.

Unfortunately, my formal schooling did not allow me the dignity to unfold, but my living did. The problem, of course, is that throughout my living I had to contend with the time taken away from me by formal schooling.

Time is the most precious gift that we have and as I look back I am angry by all the time that was taken away from me by formal schooling. The best I can do now is to make sure that others are better informed and that others have the opportunities that I did not have. This is the basis of my work and my hope. Young people are among the last acceptably oppressed groups and we have an ethical obligation to advocate on their behalf.

I would characterize my own schooling as abusive, stifling, limiting and frustrating. My grades out of high school were so low that I did not immediately get into university. I did not know what I know now. I had options but was unaware of them, just as so many young people remain unaware today. Ultimately, for all intents and purposes, I completed my Masters in one year and my PhD in one year while working full time as a high school teacher. I was able to do this largely because of what I was doing on my own before I got there. I share this not to be a braggart but to highlight the point that none of us can know a person’s future attainment. Sadly, a large part of contemporary schooling falsely pretends that a person’s future potential can be determined.

Even as a graduate student at one of the most respected universities in Canada, my experience remained abusive, stifling, limiting and frustrating. Even at the graduate level, in general, I was limited by the courses that were on offer and by those that were compulsory. While in the courses I had to read the material that the professors expected me to read and answer questions that they found to be important. Many of my students now believe that I have a degree in alternative schooling, because they feel that I know so much about it. The truth is that everything that I know I learned on my own. I did not take any courses in my schooling that focused on this topic—even if I wanted to, none were available. I tell my students that I received my

certificate from a post-secondary institution, but that I educated myself—schools were obstacles. I cannot stress this enough.

Some ask if I would be able to read or write without schooling. Again, my response is that I did learn to do these things without schooling. I believe that we learn to read and write on our own. Schooling was an obstacle in my way toward self-education.

I owe a lot to my parents in all of this. As the schools devalued me as a human being and as a schooler, my parents always supported and encouraged my decisions. I made mistakes and they were very good at not pointing them out to me. They did not judge and evaluate my every move, but they were there as pillars and collaborators to help me in any way that I needed.

Holistically, schools are not the problem, but they are a symptom of a much larger problem. Creating learner centered democratic schools will not improve the lives of children much, but creating a learner centered democratic world will. Ageism is too often arbitrary, senseless, and punitive. In his book, *Escape from Childhood*, Holt asks, what if children had the right to equal treatment under the law (for example, to work for money, travel, live away from home and so on)? He says that most who believe in the institution of childhood see it as a walled garden. He goes on to write “What I want to do is put a gate, or gates, into the wall of the garden, so that those who find it no longer protective or helpful, but instead confining and humiliating, can move out of it and for a while try living in a larger space.”² I agree with Holt and believe that putting up gates could be a laudable aspiration for an educational revolution.

References

1. John Holt, *Learning all the time: How small children begin to read, write, count, and investigate the world, without being taught*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1989, p. 157.
2. John Holt, *Escape from childhood: The needs and rights of children*. Cambridge, MA: Holt Associates Inc., 1995, p. 9.

About the author: I currently teach in the faculty of education’s graduate program at Nipissing University and I founded and edit the online Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning (JUAL) at www.nipissingu.ca/jual/index.asp. Everything of value that I have learned, I have learned outside of formal schooling. I have never taken a course in school connected to what I now teach and write about. I have two daughters ages 2 and 4 that I hope will decide to be unschooled. ●