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## **Liberate Us from the Educators**

**by Scott McPherson**

The state's monopoly on education is perhaps the worst thing that has ever happened to children in America.

From the earliest days of the republic, education was provided by parents, churches, and local communities. The first proposals for state-supported schools were merely calls to address an absence of schools in isolated pockets of rural poverty.

No one suggested that parents could not or would not be responsible for their own children's learning — in fact, throughout the discussions of school funding it was always understood that the group targeted by such funds was only a minority of the poorest children.

Over time, the education bureaucracy — particularly teacher-training institutions — and affiliated interest groups began to lobby for a greater role for the state in education. (See [\*Education and the State\*, by E.G. West.](#))

Despite claims that public schools were established to serve the children of the poor and working class, it was not uncommon for people within those groups to resist such measures, for they feared the effects of allowing “elitist” interests to control their children's learning. These elites were often very explicit about their desire to use the schooling establishment to mold children like “pieces of clay” to serve the interests of the state. (See [\*The Twelve-Year Sentence\*, William Rickenbacker, editor.](#))

John Holt, a radical proponent of school reform and children's rights, writes in his excellent book, [\*Freedom and Beyond\*](#), that “universal compulsory schools are not and *never were meant to be* humane institutions, and most of their fundamental purposes, tasks, missions, are not humane.... There is one prime, legitimate, humane mission or function of the schools,” he continues, and that is “to promote the growth of the children in them.”

Holt spent years teaching in both public and private schools in Colorado, Massachusetts, and California, and found that most people's definition of “education” is far from this ideal. Schools are seen essentially as giant cookie cutters — and children are the dough. We've locked our children in a giant bureaucracy where they and their parents have very little, sometimes absolutely no, say over their own development and learning.

Another function of the schools, as Holt sees it, is “custodial.” “Call our schools day corrals for children,” he writes. “Society demands of schools, among other things, that they be a place where for many hours of the day, many days of the year, children or young people can be shut up and so got out of everyone else’s way. Mom doesn’t want them hanging around the house, the citizens do not want them out in the streets, and workers do not want them in the labor force.”

“What then do we do with them?” Holt asks. “We put them in schools. That is an important part of what schools are for. They are a kind of day jail for kids.”

Today, we can see the effects of a century and a half of government-controlled education.

Carlisle Moody, Ph.D., a professor of economics at William & Mary College, [wrote in April 2003](#) that “in Virginia, the average per pupil expenditure in the public school system is approximately \$7450, of which the taxpayers of the Commonwealth pay 86 percent. So, it costs Virginia taxpayers roughly \$6400 (.86 x \$7450) to educate one child for one year, not counting the capital costs of the buildings.”

And that does not even include hidden costs. For example, if all of those who currently homeschool or privately educate their children were to instead send their children to a public school, and those who have no children were to have children and send them to public schools, the public school system would have to raise taxes radically to maintain this per-pupil expenditure. In short, education officials depend on taxes extracted from those *who do not even use their system* — and even with this windfall they cannot seem to make ends meet. They are hiding the true cost of their system from taxpayers.

Bond packages are also regularly approved by voters so that local governments can spend greater and greater sums on schools and leave the bill for later generations, but still it never seems to be enough. Schools are drab and boring institutions that look more like prisons than places of learning and are often in a state of complete disrepair.

Most important, there’s the cost that cannot be measured in dollars. Students face a one-size-fits-all approach to learning that they must endure whether they like it or not, whether it is good for them or not. The grades he receives from this system will haunt the student throughout his academic life.

Many children are miserable in the schooling environment they must currently endure, and through constant adult control and dominance, quizzing and testing, bullying and discouragement of their individual interests, they have come to see the school as a place to be feared, rather than a place where real learning and personal, individual development; fulfillment; and betterment take place. They will carry a resentment of education and learning through their entire lives.

If many children have nothing better to look forward to in life, as Holt feared, than “pointless, stupid, stupefying work,” then the public schools are an excellent preparation for this eventuality. For 12 years, children are force-fed a diet of subjects they often neither understand nor care anything about, but must digest in order to avoid the wrath of their teachers. Schools are typically unresponsive to the most basic needs of students (except perhaps to label the child a problem and administer the appropriate behavior-modifying drugs), and, despite claims that they foster individuality, they instead demand rigid uniformity.

Holt describes “the business of the schools” as being “to make Robert MacNamaras at one end and Lt. William Calleys at the other. They are, each in his own way, perfect products of schooling: the one unshakably convinced that his cleverness and secret knowledge give him a right to exercise unlimited and godlike powers over other men; the other, ready at an instant to do without question or qualm everything, *anything* anyone in a position of authority tells him to do.” Doesn’t this sound a little bit like the typical teacher-student relationship?

And parents *must* pay for this. Teachers complain of poor pay, but most do not want to grant even a basic level of educational choice to the students and parents who “employ” them.

It is time to liberate parents and children from this system. Government officials and large segments of the population are often quick to denounce so-called monopoly business practices, yet somehow tolerate a government that has monopolized the most precious of spheres — the growth and development of the individual child. Let’s get government out of the education business and let parents and children chart their own course in the learning process.

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