



## RELEVANCE OF DE-SCHOOLING SOCIETY PROPOSED BY IVAN ILLICH IN THE MODERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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### Abstract

*Ivan Illich's "Deschooling Society" presents a radical critique of traditional education systems, advocating for their dismantling and the adoption of a decentralized, learner-centric model. Illich's arguments against the institutionalization of education, the hidden curriculum, and the monopoly of formal schooling remain relevant in today's educational discourse. The advent of digital technology personalized learning, and alternative education models such as homeschooling and unschooling, echo Illich's vision by promoting self-directed, lifelong learning. Critical pedagogy and community-based learning networks further align with his call for more participatory and egalitarian education. However, challenges such as ensuring equity, scalability, and socialization persist, requiring thoughtful implementation of Illich's ideas. As modern education grapples with issues of accessibility and relevance, Illich's work inspires ongoing critical examination and innovation. His vision challenges us to create educational environments that empower individuals, foster creativity, and address social inequalities, thus contributing to a more just and liberated society.*

**Keywords:** *De-schooling, Philosophy, Credentialism & Contemporary*

### 1. Introduction

Ivan Illich, a visionary philosopher and social critic, profoundly influenced the discourse on education with his seminal work "Deschooling Society," published in 1971. Illich challenged the conventional education system, arguing for its dismantling and replacement with a decentralized, learner-centric model. His critique emerged during a time of significant social upheaval, and his ideas continue to resonate today, as the modern educational landscape grapples with issues of accessibility, equity, and relevance.

#### Historical Context and Core Ideas

Illich's "Deschooling Society" was a radical response to the burgeoning institutionalization of education. He contended that traditional schools, far from being bastions of learning and personal growth, were instruments of societal control that perpetuated inequality and stifled creativity. Illich's critique focused on several key points:

**Institutionalization of Values:** Illich argued that schools indoctrinate students with specific values, creating a conformist mindset rather than fostering independent thought.

**Credentialism:** The emphasis on formal qualifications, he believed, devalues practical knowledge and skills, creating an artificial hierarchy that privileges certain types of learning over others.

**Hidden Curriculum:** Schools, according to Illich, impart not just academic knowledge but also a hidden curriculum that socializes students into accepting existing social norms and power structures.

**Dependency:** Illich asserted that formal education fosters dependency on institutions for knowledge and personal development, undermining individuals' ability to learn autonomously and collaboratively.

**Monopoly on Education:** He criticized the monopoly schools have on education, arguing that learning should be a lifelong, community-based process, not confined to a specific period or institution.

### **De-Schooling in the Modern Context**

In the decades since Illich published his work, the educational landscape has evolved considerably, yet many of his criticisms remain pertinent. The relevance of Illich's ideas can be explored through several contemporary issues:

#### **Technology and Learning**

The advent of digital technology has transformed access to information and learning resources. The internet, online courses, and digital libraries have democratized education to an unprecedented degree. This shift aligns with Illich's vision of a more decentralized, learner-driven approach. Platforms like Khan Academy, Coursera, and edX provide opportunities for self-directed learning, challenging the traditional teacher-student dynamic and institutional control over education. However, this technological democratization also raises questions about digital literacy and access. While some students thrive in online learning environments, others struggle without the structure and support of traditional classrooms. Moreover, the digital divide – the gap between those with easy access to technology and those without – exacerbates existing inequalities, highlighting a critical area where Illich's vision intersects with contemporary challenges.

#### **Personalized Learning**

Modern educational theories increasingly emphasize personalized learning, recognizing that students have diverse needs, interests, and learning styles. This approach resonates with Illich's critique of one-size-fits-all education systems. Personalized learning aims to tailor education to individual students, allowing them to progress at their own pace and explore topics of personal interest, thus fostering a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation. Programs and methodologies such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio Emilia have gained traction, offering alternatives to traditional schooling that align more closely with Illich's ideals. These models focus on experiential learning, creativity, and social-emotional development, rather than rote memorization and standardized testing.

#### **Critical Pedagogy**

Illich's critique of the hidden curriculum and institutionalization finds a contemporary parallel in critical pedagogy. This educational approach, influenced by thinkers like Paulo Freire, aims to empower students to question and challenge dominant ideologies and power structures. Critical pedagogy encourages a more participatory and dialogical form of education, where teachers and students collaboratively construct knowledge. This pedagogical shift challenges the traditional authoritative role of the teacher, promoting a more egalitarian and interactive classroom environment. It seeks to cultivate critical consciousness, enabling students to become active, informed participants in their communities and society at large.

#### **Alternative Education Models**

The rise of homeschooling, unschooling, and other alternative education models reflects a growing dissatisfaction with conventional schooling and a desire for more flexible, individualized approaches to education. Homeschooling, for instance, allows families to tailor education to their children's specific needs and interests, often incorporating experiential and interest-based learning activities. Unschooling, a more radical approach, aligns closely with Illich's vision by rejecting formal curricula and standardized assessments altogether. Unschooling advocates argue that children learn best when they pursue their interests and passions in a supportive, resource-rich environment, without the constraints of traditional schooling.

#### **Equity and Access**

One of the central critiques Illich raised was the perpetuation of social inequalities through the education system. Despite significant advancements in educational policy and practice, issues of equity and access remain pressing concerns. Disparities in funding, resources, and opportunities persist, often correlating with socio-economic status, race, and geography. Efforts to address these inequalities include policy initiatives aimed at equitable funding, affirmative action, and targeted support for underrepresented groups. However, Illich's call for a more fundamental restructuring of



how education is conceptualized and delivered continues to challenge policymakers and educators to think beyond incremental reforms.

### **Implementing Illich's Vision Today**

Translating Illich's radical vision into practical, contemporary educational reforms involves addressing several challenges and opportunities:

#### **Community-Based Learning Networks**

Illich proposed the creation of "learning webs" – decentralized networks where individuals could connect with others to exchange knowledge and skills. Modern technology facilitates the creation of such networks, enabling peer-to-peer learning communities, mentorship programs, and collaborative projects that transcend traditional school boundaries. Initiatives like maker spaces, community education programs, and online learning communities exemplify this approach, fostering environments where learning is collaborative, hands-on, and directly connected to real-world contexts.

#### **Reimagining Assessment**

One of the most contentious aspects of traditional education is standardized testing, which Illich criticized for its narrow focus and dehumanizing effects. Alternatives to standardized assessments include portfolio-based assessments, project-based learning evaluations, and competency-based education models. These methods emphasize students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in meaningful ways, rather than their ability to perform on standardized tests.

#### **Lifelong Learning**

Illich advocated for a shift from education being confined to a specific period (schooling years) to a model of lifelong learning. This perspective is increasingly relevant in today's rapidly changing world, where continuous learning and adaptability are crucial for personal and professional success. Policies and programs that support adult education, professional development, and community learning initiatives align with this vision.

#### **Policy and Governance**

Implementing Illich's ideas on a broader scale would require significant policy changes. These might include greater support for alternative education models, flexible funding mechanisms that follow students rather than institutions, and the promotion of community-based educational initiatives. Policymakers would need to embrace a more pluralistic view of education, recognizing and supporting diverse pathways for learning.

#### **Challenges and Criticisms**

While Illich's vision offers a compelling critique of traditional education systems, it is not without its challenges and criticisms. Some of the primary concerns include:

##### **Scalability and Implementation**

One of the significant challenges of implementing a deschooled society is scalability. Traditional schools provide a standardized framework that is relatively easy to manage and assess. In contrast, a decentralized model would require new structures and systems to ensure quality and equity across diverse educational experiences.

##### **Equity Concerns**

While Illich criticized the traditional education system for perpetuating inequality, there is a risk that a decentralized, self-directed learning model could exacerbate existing disparities. Access to resources, mentorship, and learning opportunities could vary widely based on socio-economic status, geography, and other factors, potentially widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged learners.

##### **Socialization and Community**

Traditional schools play a crucial role in socialization, providing a space where children and adolescents can develop social skills, form friendships, and participate in community life. Alternative models would need to ensure that these social functions are not lost, offering opportunities for learners to connect, collaborate, and engage in communal activities.

## Resistance to Change

Education systems are deeply entrenched institutions, and significant changes often encounter resistance from various stakeholders, including educators, parents, policymakers, and even students. Shifting towards a deschooled society would require a cultural transformation and a reevaluation of deeply held beliefs about education, success, and societal roles.

## 2. Conclusion

Ivan Illich's "Deschooling Society" remains a provocative and influential work that continues to inspire debate and innovation in the field of education. His call for a radical rethinking of how we educate and learn challenges us to envision more equitable, flexible, and learner-centered approaches. While many of his ideas have found resonance in contemporary educational practices, realizing his vision on a broader scale involves addressing significant challenges and navigating complex socio-political landscapes. As we move forward, Illich's critique serves as a reminder to continually question and critically examine our educational systems, striving to create environments that truly empower all individuals to learn, grow, and contribute meaningfully to society. In doing so, we honor the spirit of Illich's work, fostering a more just, creative, and liberated world of learning.

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