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"Until ... 1958, I had never questioned the value of extending obligatory schooling to all people ... have come to realise that for most men the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school."
(Ivan Illich, 'Deschooling Society", 1971)

"... power over the English school is so effectively distributed that it can only be effectively changed by consent, between legislature and executive, between teacher and pupil, and between school and community. Each party can frustrate the aspirations of the others, none can unilaterally and successfully impose its will."
(Barry McDonald, in "Educational Analysis",
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Perhaps other "educators", whose portraits were painted by Robert Lenkiewicz for this project, found it as difficult as I did to dissent from many of his assertions about the radical problems apparently inherent in schools, as institutions, as providers, or enablers of education. Too often, his views evoked the unease which has intermittently worried me, during thirty-four years of involvement in secondary schools, about the total effect of those schools on their members: those aspects which Stenhouse[1] saw as "the culture of the school" influencing "the experience of the pupils and teachers who work in it, in unplanned ways", offering "content which may contradict or reinforce the expressed curricular intentions, but which is not publicly acknowledged."

It is not easy to dismiss the notion that institutionalised education may be a contradiction in terms, if our educational purpose is to assist each pupil to achieve his or her unique potential. Jackson[2] identifies "four unpublished features of school life: delay, denial, interruption and social distraction ... produced, in part, by the crowded conditions of the classroom." More recently, Hargreaves[3] suggests that school learning includes adaptation to, or fear, or possibly hatred of the constraints of time and space which are characteristic of schools as institutions.

There is no shortage of recorded identification of phenomena relating to the institutional problems of the school. The following selection from "the literature" will, perhaps, help to establish the point. Gibson[4] stresses that, unlike most professionals, teachers have clients (the pupils) who are "compulsorily bound to come to him" and with whom he is required to have a relatively long term involvement. Stenhouse[1] proposes that this "conscript population" creates problems of "morale and control" distorting or displacing educational goals. MacDonald[5] concedes educationalists' uncertainty as to what causes learning or constitutes a successful learning milieu and observes that "schools in some way cause some learnings and impede others". Bliss[6] highlights some problems arising from the dissonance between the institutional values of the school and those which many of the pupils bring to it. Lister[7] claims that schools "cripple individuality, spontaneity, creativity and collective action."

Most experienced and sensitive educators will be aware of and concerned by these problems, apparently endemic in schools, by virtue of their institutionalised character. For those who have aimed to provide a relatively secure and unthreatening learning environment for their pupils, a more startling proposition of Robert Lenkiewicz's, as I understand it, is that this policy will probably have impeded the educational process that it was intended to serve. His view has much in common with that of Cooper[8], who warns of the inhibition of curiosity and personal growth in most members of society's institutions, as "victims of a surfeit of security that eludes doubt and consequently destroys life in any sense that we feel alive". Lenkiewicz's own argument relates more closely to an esoteric concept of exposure to beauty being linked with experiencing "the edge of terror which we are able to bear". For some of us, perhaps, this seductive notion can be added to the arguably well-established list of impediments to education which tend to (or unavoidably) afflict schools in consequence of their institutional characteristics.

This categorisation as impediments to education, however, depends on one's values. Loosely employing Taylor's[9] analysis of value statements applied to education, it can be crudely generalised that many people whose perspectives are primarily "assessment-oriented", "interest-based" or (depending on their view of society) "societal" would accept that few of these alleged institutional disadvantages as educational impediments. Some stances, too, within "empirical" or "epistemological" value perspectives would limit acceptance of the suggested problems. This article parts company with all of these people at this stage (if it has

not done so already) and addresses itself solely to those for whom "individualist" values play an important role in their view of the purposes of education, and particularly those for whom this is the pre-eminent value implicit in any concept of education.

Given that there are problems arising from schools' institutional characters, two rough categories of identification and consequent proposals for solution to these problems can be distinguished. These may be represented by two writers quoted earlier. Illich detects a deep seated malaise in institutions, which cannot be cured without scrapping them. Jackson speaks for those who, concerned for the anti-educational messages which the school institution unwittingly transmits to pupils, nevertheless believe that solutions can be found within the system.

Illich[10] rejected "superficial solutions" distracted by criticism of "pedagogical, political or technological" issues. These missed the point, he suggested, and the central issue was the replacement of that "hidden curriculum" (which "teaches all children that economically valuable knowledge is the result of professional teaching and that social entitlements depend on the rank achieved in a bureaucratic process" and which is inseperable from the school system), by a situation in which learning would be based on free "access to things, places, processes, events and records". His solution necessitates major social change, encompassing even the introduction of "a mode of post-industrial production" with tools and components produced "that are labour and repair intensive, and whose complexity is strictly limited." Radical, but improbable without a revolution, and almost as improbable in any post-revolutionary society. Illich himself warns of the dangers of the "rash and uncritical disestablishment of school" and lists "important negative functions" which the school performs in holding undesirable alternatives at bay.

Jackson[2] is primarily concerned with the school institution mediated through the classroom (see earlier quotation). Nevertheless his analyses and recommendations are more widely generalisable in the school system. He looks for observation, reflection and development rather than disestablishment and replacement. He stresses the complexity of classroom interactions and learning tasks, and the "limited applicability of learning theory to the teacher's work", primarily because of the controlled, unnatural conditions under which much learning theory tended to be evolved, and partly due to lack of a shared explanatory vocabulary between researcher and teacher. He warns of the folly of attempts (particularly in the United States, where he was writing) to transform teaching "from something crudely resembling an art to something crudely resembling a science". The best chance, he suggests, of reducing the institutional problems which he identifies, is by increasing understanding of what is happening in schools; a phenomenological approach. He hopes for encouragement of the trend (1968) towards researcher "participant observers" and fostering the growth of reflective "observant participators". He anticipates a consequent emergence of a range of shared perspectives and common language which should enable people "to ask questions about the school's operation that they might not otherwise have asked" and facilitate more fruitful teacher/researcher interchanges".

No radical solutions in Jackson's message: impatient reformers might regard it as a mere "tinkering with the works". To mix the trite images, however, there is a reluctance (which I share) to "throw out the baby with the bath water".

Reflection, I believe, on the detail and totality of careful observation of what our schools are doing is the way which will lead to eradication or, at worst, considerable reduction of the type of institutional disadvantage instanced earlier in this article. This reflection should take careful account of such criticisms and employ them as perspectives.

This gradualist approach is based on the assumption that schools are not irrevocably flawed. It also takes account of the balance of power in English education proposed by MacDonald in the quotation at the head of this article, which discourages radical innovation and attempts to impose unilateral solutions, whether radical or not.

The constraints of the brief contribution required for this collection have led to the expression of a personal view seeming to masquerade as a conclusion. It begs more questions than it resolves. It bows out amongst a welter of loose ends. It has oversimplified for the purpose of dismissing or supporting.

If I may atone, at this stage, for one of the more outrageous examples of the last malpractice, may I stress what must already be obvious - that Illich deserves better representation. For a brisk and readable critique of the deschooling solution to the problem of the school as an institution, the reader is referred to Lister[7], then Professor of Education at York, who was one of deschooling's early advocates and, five years later, wrote "both to praise it and to see beyond it."

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9. Taylor, W. (1978), "Values and Accountability", in Becher, T. and Maclure, S. (eds) - see 5 above.

10. Illich, I. (1973) - see 7 above.