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## Implication of Ivan Illich's Deschooling Ideas to Educational Planning in Kenya

### **Abstract**

*Education is a basic necessity for wholesome living to every human being. Basic functional skills, knowledge and values are mandatory for life to have any meaning and be worth living. With the school being the most recognized agent for the provision of education, enormous resources are channeled through it by both the state and individuals to provide educational services. Resources on the other hand are universally known to be scarce; this calls for thoughtful and systematic planning of the process of resource mobilization and utilization for the provision of educational services to the society. This paper examines the process of educational planning in the light of Ivan Illich's ideas. Illich's concept of Institutionalization of Values, Illich's concept of the school, the paradox of the school as an agent of education and the relevance of Illich's school of thought in educational planning are the key issues that this paper will focus on.*

**Key Words:** *Education; Schools; De-schooling; Rituals*

## 1-Introduction

Ivan Illich was an Austrian priest and a philosopher who lived between 1926 and 2002. He was a close ally of Everett Reimer. Both questioned the idea of having obligatory schooling to all people. They regularly met at the Center for International Documentation (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. His radical ideas about deschooling the society came to light in the 1970's. This was a time when the western countries were going through what was known as the Industrial revolution. Other trends of the time included the rising educational budgetary allocations in the National budgets especially in the United States of America. Additionally, this was at a time when the Catholic Church was slowly moving to the third world countries such Latin America and Africa to spread Christianity. This is worth mentioning because his radical ideas about deschooling the society are not far much removed from his philosophical and religious affiliations.

## 2-An Overview of Deschooling Society by Ivan Illich

Ivan Illich (1970) called for the disestablishments of schools. He argued that many students, especially those who are poor, know that they are schooled to do (...) “to confuse process and substance (...)”. Illich held that:

(...) once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. “The pupil is thereby schooled to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is schooled to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work (...)” (Illich, 1970: 5).

According to Illich (1970), the school polarizes a society and grades the nations of the world according to an international caste system. This way, the school divides the society and undermines the social fibre. Illich (ibid) maintained that:

Countries are rated like castes whose educational dignity is determined by the average years of schooling of its citizens, a rating which is closely related to per capita gross national product. The very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes and treatments and professions are “academic” or “pedagogic,” and others are not. The power of school thus to divide social reality has no boundaries: education becomes unworldly and the world becomes non-educational (Illich (1970: 10).

Illich (1970) held that the school is recognized as the institution which specializes in education. Its failures are taken by most people as a proof that education is a very costly, very complex, always arcane, and frequently almost impossible task. School appropriates the money, and good will available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks. Work, leisure, politics, city living, and even family life depend on schools for the habits and knowledge they presuppose, instead of becoming themselves the means of

education. Simultaneously both schools and the other institutions which depend on them are priced out of the market.

Illich (1970) observed that the school was meant to give everybody an equal chance to any office. Many people wrongly believe that the school ensures the dependence of public trust on relevant learning achievements. However, instead of equalizing chances, the school system has monopolized their distribution. Illich (1970) held that:

(...)The school system rests on the assumption that most learning is the result of teaching. Teaching, it is true, may contribute to certain kinds of learning under certain circumstances. But most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives (...) (Illich, 1970: 12).

In Illich (1970)'s view, the school system performs the threefold function common to powerful churches throughout history. These Illich (1970) identified as: the Myth of Institutionalized Values, the Myth of Measurement of Values and the Myth of Packaging Values. According to Illich (1970), School initiates the Myth of Unending Consumption. This modern myth is grounded in the belief that process inevitably produces something of value and, therefore, production necessarily produces demand. School teaches us that instruction produces learning.

The existence of schools produces the demand for schooling. Once people have learned to need school, all their activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialized institutions. Illich (1970) argues that once the self-taught man or woman has been discredited, all nonprofessional activity is rendered suspect. In school learners are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates. Illich (1970) maintained that:

Once young people have allowed their imaginations to be formed by curricular instruction, they are conditioned to institutional planning of every sort. "Instruction" smothers the horizon of their imaginations. They cannot be betrayed, but only short-changed, because they have been taught to substitute expectations for hope. They will no longer be surprised, for good or ill, by other people, because they have been taught what to expect from every other person who has been taught as they were (Illich, 1970: 28).

This transfer of responsibility from self to institution, Illich (1970) observed, guarantees social regression, especially once it has been accepted as an obligation. He points out that; "the man addicted to being taught seeks his security in compulsive teaching (...) the woman who experiences her knowledge as the result of a process wants to reproduce it in others" (Illich, 1970: 28). Illich (1970) discusses that the school initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself. But personal growth is not a measurable entity. It is growth in disciplined dissidence, which cannot be measured against any rod, or any curriculum, nor compared to someone else's achievement. In such learning one can emulate others only in

imaginative endeavor, and follow in their footsteps rather than mimic their gait. Illich (1970) puts it that:

(...) the school pretends to break learning up into subject "matters," to build into the pupil a curriculum made of these prefabricated blocks, and to gauge the result on an international scale. People who submit to the standard of others for the measure of their own personal growth soon apply the same ruler to themselves. They no longer have to be put in their place, but put themselves into their assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek, and, in the very process, put their fellows into their places, too, until everybody and everything fits (...) (Illich, 1970: 29).

In Illich (1970)'s belief, people who have been schooled down to size let unmeasured experience slip out of their hands. To them, what cannot be measured becomes secondary, threatening. They do not have to be robbed of their creativity. Illich (1970) puts it that under instruction, such people have unlearned to "do" their thing or "be" themselves, and value only what has been made or could be made (Illich, 1970: 29). Once people have the idea schooled into them that values can be produced and measured, they tend to accept all kinds of rankings. Illich (1970) rests that:

There is a scale for the development of nations, another for the intelligence of babies, and even progress toward peace can be calculated according to body count. In a schooled world the road to happiness is paved with a consumer's index (Illich, 1970: 29).

While calling for the disestablishment of schools, Illich (1970) maintained that the School sells curriculum; "a bundle of goods made according to the same process and having the same structure as other merchandise. Curriculum production for most schools begins with allegedly scientific research, on whose basis educational engineers predict future demand and tools for the assembly line, within the limits set by budgets and taboos. This way, Illich (1970) held that the distributor-teacher delivers the finished product to the consumer pupil, whose reactions are carefully studied and charted to provide research data for the preparation of the next model, which may be ungraded, student-designed, team-taught, visually-aided, or issue-centered" (Illich, 1970: 29).

Illich (1970) observed that the result of the curriculum production process looks like any other modern staple. "It is a bundle of planned meanings, a package of values, a commodity whose balanced appeal makes it marketable to a sufficiently large number to justify the cost of production. Consumer-pupils are taught to make their desires conform to marketable values. Illich (1970) rests that thus they are made to feel guilty if they do not behave according to the predictions of consumer research by getting the grades and certificates that will place them in the job category they have been led to expect (Illich, 1970: 29). Illich argued that the school pushes the pupil up to the level of competitive curricular consumption, into progress to ever higher levels. Expenditures to motivate the student to stay on in school skyrocket as he climbs the pyramid. This way, Illich (1970) puts it:

(...) “that on higher levels they are disguised as new football stadiums, chapels, or programs called International Education (...) if it teaches nothing else, school teaches the value of escalation (...)” (Illich, 1970: 30).

According to Illich (1970), school programs hunger for progressive intake of instruction, but even if the hunger leads to steady absorption, it never yields the joy of knowing something to one’s satisfaction. Each subject comes packaged with the instruction to go on consuming one offering after another, and last year’s wrapping is always obsolete for this year’s consumer. The textbook racket builds on this demand. Educational reformers promise each new generation the latest and the best, and the public is schooled into demanding what they offer. Illich (1970) held that:

(...) Both the dropout who is forever reminded of what he missed and the graduate who is made to feel inferior to the new breed of student know exactly where they stand in the ritual of rising deceptions and continue to support a society which euphemistically calls the widening frustration gap a “revolution of rising expectations.” (...) (Illich, 1970:30).

Illich (1970), propounded that the school serves as an effective creator and sustainer of social myth because of its structure as a ritual game of graded promotions. Introduction into this gambling ritual is much more important than what or how something is taught. Illich (1970) held that (...) “It is the game itself that schools, that gets into the blood and becomes a habit. A whole society is initiated into the Myth of Unending Consumption of services (...) this happens to the degree that token participation in the open-ended ritual is made compulsory and compulsive everywhere (...)” (Illich, 1970: 31).

According to Illich (1970), the School directs ritual rivalry into an international game which obliges competitors to blame the world’s ills on those who cannot or will not play. Illich (1970) concluded that:

(...) the school is a ritual of initiation which introduces the neophyte to the sacred race of progressive consumption, a ritual of propitiation whose academic priests mediate between the faithful and the gods of privilege and power, a ritual of expiation which sacrifices its dropouts, branding them as scapegoats of underdevelopment (...) (Illich, 1970: 31).

### **3-Illich’s Concept of Institutionalization of Values**

Ivan Illich strongly argued against the current trend of institutionalizing values. For instance in his opening remarks, this is what he has to say about the school and the process of institutionalizing values:

The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is “schooled” to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive

work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question (Illich, 1970:1)

According to Illich, the school acts like a processing plant that produces “goods” in form of values and Knowledge. A school is demanded for what it can produce. Illich strongly argues against having the school as the main agent of passing values and Knowledge and that the only way through which the acquisition of values can be measured is with the use of certificates. His school of thought seem to have some sense especially when the society begin to imagine that any valuable value or knowledge can only be learnt in a formal set up i.e. in a school. When the state gives an ultimatum that formal education at the primary and secondary level is obligatory, is this not to suggest that what is freely shared in the society is of either no significance or no value at all. Look at how the innocent child is forced to learn even his/her own value in a foreign language. Does it make sense to have the child learn his or her own culture in a foreign language? If this is not slavery of some kind, then can somebody help me better describe this kind of a treatment to the school going child. Why should we use a foreign language to learn our own culture and traditions? Are we not losing direction? This is a matter that the government, policymakers and all concerned educational stakeholders should seriously look into. Are we going to sit and helplessly watch our most valuable culture waste away in the name of civilization or being assimilated to the so called “modernity”?

#### **4-Illich’s Concept of School**

According to Illich, a school is nothing less than a factory whose responsibility is to produce goods for resale with an aim of making a profit. The school is like a market where buyers and seller of knowledge freely interact. He further argues that the school produces and packs knowledge for any willing buyers at a price. Precious values that used to be freely exchanged in the society are now regarded as products sold at a price.

(...) Rich and poor alike depend on schools and hospitals which guide their lives, form their world view, and define for them what is legitimate and what is not. Both view doctoring oneself as irresponsible, learning on one’s own as unreliable (Illich, 1970: 4).

His school of thought is still relevant to policy makers even as they think of reviewing education to make it more responsive the needs of the society. Current trends in education regard any knowledge acquired outside the school environment as irrelevant and of no or less value. The current version or meaning of what true knowledge mean is somehow deceptive. In fact, one is regarded ignorant, illiterate and backward before he/she has set his/her foot in a school classroom. All that one learns outside the school is either given no or less regard by the modern society. You are devoid of meaningful knowledge before you are schooled. This should partly explain why we teach our children foreign values such as forcing them to communicate in a foreign language instead of having them learn what they must learn in a language they understand most. This is

punitive and inhuman. Why would be an innocent African child be made to slush grass the whole day for having communicated a point to a colleague at school in a language that is not English? Is it that true knowledge can only be learned in a foreign language? I don't believe so.

### **5-The Paradox of the School as an Agent of Education**

While it is true that there is some meaningful education that goes on in schools, scholars like Ivan wondered whether real education took place only in schools. The belief that education can only take place in schools is what Illich strongly spoke against. His line of thought was that the school was not the only agent of Education. In fact according to him, the school is currently doing more harm to the society than good. This is a line of thought I would also wish to support.

The view point that all that which has value must be learnt formally in a school is rather a misleading and an absurd school of thought. Before the introduction of formal schooling in Africa, people had their own way of exchanging values and knowledge. They could provide health care services to the society freely. For instance there are some certain leaves and roots of trees that are up to date known to very old people to be curing some certain ailments. The modern schooled person can't regard such an old man as this as having any form of education.

Ivan observes that the school has an effect of closing up the minds of individuals. By going through the formal schooling process people stop being creative. All that happens at school is mostly the memorization of concepts some of which are far removed from their immediate social realities. The school limits the creativity of the child. For instance, this is what Illich has to say:

All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society: school is recognized as the institution which specializes in education. The failures of school are taken by most people as a proof that education is a very costly, very complex, always arcane, and frequently almost impossible task (Illich, 1970: 8)

Another way the school has failed is the manner in which the school is creating new pockets of poor people in the society in the name of raising educational standards. For instance, those who have never gone to the school are regarded nearly useless to the society. Their Knowledge and skill is perceived to be of no or minimal use in the society. They are least allowed to participate in any productive activity where the schooled are involved. In fact if one does not attain a certain level of education, he/she is regarded as poor. This is a concept Ivan referrers to as modernization of poverty. It is true that the school is partly loosing direction. Instead of raising the living standards of people in the society, it is seriously in the business of creating more poor people; the ones referred to as unschooled. The business of rewarding people based on educational level is rather absurd. Why is the society often less interested in rewarding the unschooled person who does real work simply because he/she can't read and write? Of what significance is reading to a hunger stricken society? This is the kind of a mentality Ivan seems to be fed up with in as displayed in his statement that says:

Welfare bureaucracies claim a professional, political, and financial monopoly over the social imagination, setting standards of what is valuable and what is feasible. This monopoly is at the root of the modernization of poverty. Every simple need to which an institutional answer is found permits the invention of a new class of poor and a new definition of poverty...Now to begin and end life at home become signs either of poverty or of special privilege. Dying and death have come under the institutional management of doctors and undertakers. (Illich, 1970: 5)

This trend is a call to policy makers and other education agents to review the definition and purpose of what education and schooling is. The school has turned out to be a vessel where those who have the potential to be rich are separated from the potentially poor people by the use of a certificate. When one fails to attain a certain grade in a given subject, he/she is given a certificate labeling the individual as being a failure. The individual is of less value to the society now that he/she has not attained a certain set standard by the school. I agree with Illich at this point, that this should not be the role schools should be playing.

Illich strongly questioned the manner in which financing of education is done. He was concerned with the rising cost of education. Providing education through the school was and is very expensive. He questioned the items that governments funded in the school. He was for the idea that educational resources should go directly to the learner. The learner should be the one who decides what, where and when to learn.

Right now educational credit good at any skill center could be provided in limited amounts for people of all ages, and not just to the poor. I envisage such credit in the form of an educational passport or an “edu-credit card” provided to each citizen at birth. In order to favor the poor, who probably would not use their yearly grants early in life, a provision could be made that interest accrued to later users of cumulated “entitlements.” Such credits would permit most people to acquire the skills most in demand, at their convenience, better, faster, cheaper, and with fewer undesirable side effects than in school (Illich, 1970: 13)

This is a brilliant line of thought that governments and schools could embrace to reclaim and recapture the slowly diminishing role of the school as an agent of education. Governments have an obligatory role of making educational services available to all and most importantly to the poor and marginalized groups in the society.

## **6-Relevance of Illich’s school of thought in Educational Planning**

First, redefining educational planning in the light of Ivan Illich’s ideas would mean embracing the philosophy of liberalism in education. Liberalism is a school of thought that gives the learner an opportunity to decide what to learn. On the basis of this ideology, the school curriculum should not be as rigid as it is at the moment. Learners should from time to time sit with planners to decide what, where and when to learn what they need to learn. The planning process as it is today at whatever level of education does not give the learner an opportunity to participate in the planning process. This is not realistic. How does a plan become realistic if the



beneficiary is mere blind recipient of what is planned? In fact, in many countries, the planning process is very undemocratic. The learners are perceived to be recipients of what the policy makers have dictated to them. Is it not time that we redefined our educational planning process?

Secondly, Ivan Illich's ideas are of great significance to policy makers even as they reflect on the different mechanisms of how education should be financed. A lot of resources channeled to education by the government do not directly reach the learner. The felt needs of the learner are not a priority to policy makers. For instance expenditure on food and clothing are items that are to be funded by the parents. For children who come from originate economically disadvantaged background, this becomes a major obstacle that stands on their way towards attaining education at whatever level. For learning to effectively take place at school, proper nutrition A child that is not pro rarely concentrates in class.

## **7-Conclusion**

While it is a fact that schools have and still play a big role in serving as agents of education, many trends in the education sector have made us question the schools' effectiveness in serving as agents of education. The fast growing number of degree certificates holders at the primary school level in Kenya that have no bearing on the quality of education is an alarming trend. Why should the government adjust the teacher's salary upward even when the higher qualification attained by the teacher has no bearing on the quality of education provided to students.

It is also important to note that the educational planning process for decades has neglect the learner. The student has and is still least involved in the educational planning process. It is high time we moved away from this kind of a tradition and begin to appreciate the fact that the learner process.

Finally, resources channeled by the government or any other educational stakeholder towards the provision of education must directly target to benefit the learner. Corruption trends make it almost impossible for projects that do not target the learner to be of great impact to the learner.

**REFERENCE**

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