

**Leonard J. Waks, *Education 2.0: The Learningweb Revolution and the Transformation of the School*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2013. 256 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1612050362**

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### **Is Another World Possible?**

“The contemporary ideal is a pan-hygienic world: a world in which all contacts between men [sic], and between men and their world, are the result of foresight and manipulation. School has become the planned process which tools man for a planned world, the principal tool to trap man in man’s trap.” (Illich, 1970, p. 110)

Leonard J. Waks recognizes Ivan Illich as a primary influence in his opening acknowledgements, but never mentions him again or cites any of his work. While this is disappointing, it is true that Illich’s presence can be felt throughout the book and there is little doubt that Waks is drawing from his association with Illich at Pennsylvania State University if not from specific texts. In fact, a reader familiar with Illich’s ideas will find plenty to think about. What would Illich think of Waks’s networked learning center proposal? As technology affords more and more people opportunities for self-organized learning, is it possible to step outside the hierarchy and control of compulsory schooling *en masse* while still retaining the financial resources provided to public schools? Is it possible to leverage the freedom of the internet without falling into “man’s trap”?

Waks carefully builds a case that we can. The book is organized into four parts: The first includes a description of the industrial model of schooling and its failures; the second part includes description and critique of learning networks as they already exist in and out of schools;

the third part includes the introduction to a new network paradigm of education; and the fourth part includes suggestions for how to move toward the new paradigm as well as examples of how the process is already underway. Each chapter of each section is extensively footnoted and an appendix provides a comprehensive list of the most useful sources.

Beginning with the premise that the purpose of education is to mentor young people into adult society, Waks identifies the success of the industrial school as its function in establishing the norms of independence, individual achievement, and the reduction of all people to their institutional functions (an assertion strongly reminiscent of Illich's 1970 critique in *Deschooling Society*). He writes that, "Schools thus can be said to prepare young people for life in society by habituation in an impersonal normative order that replaces the close personal order of families and neighborhood ethnic communities." (Waks, 2014, p. 40)

Waks then makes a powerful case for the failure of the current "factory model" of education, both academically and in terms of social relevance, as the usefulness of its norms begins to fade in an economy that is more globalized and favors temporary contractual employment. He also argues that accountability reform measures *cannot* fundamentally remedy schools' problems but can only make them worse by rigidly enforcing professional mystique in an entrepreneurial environment.

To assist the reader in envisioning a new educational paradigm, Waks attempts to separate cognitive or academic education from socialization. He argues that the factory school is very inefficient and fundamentally ineffective in addressing cognitive and academic goals, while outdated in providing for children's socialization. He then suggests that the cognitive and socializing aspects of education should be separated in the new paradigm, with new institutions

providing “socialization and articulation” for the open networked learning, or “roam schooling,” that most young people will manage on their own or with non-compulsory mentoring.

Waks does a great job of demonstrating how the internet has already begun to break down “professionalism” and flatten hierarchies. He provides dozens of examples of young people bypassing conventional career trajectories to achieve success on their own terms, or adhering to conventional schooling expectations to arrive at a dead end in debt. Even more intriguing are the numerous examples of educational organizations that have abandoned the factory model and serve as examples of innovation.

Still, the thoughtful reader will find many questions to ponder. After decades of fully institutionalized life in the United States, how will families and communities who have been systematically undermined and are now under economic duress take on a broader role in the education and socialization of children? (Even in the examples provided by Waks, parents were often stunned and surprised by their children’s accomplishments in the virtual world.) Would the separation of the “cognitive” from “socialization and articulation” contribute to the unfortunate “hyper-rationalization” that has already become pervasive in society? Will we find even more examples of young people connected on the internet but alienated from life? Can the hierarchical allocation of social position (a consistent “success” of schooling) truly be undermined by Education 2.0? Or is this just a move from control to seduction? (Szabo, 2014) Put another way, if the internet and social media are turned increasingly toward the purpose of education and socialization, how will ordinary people retain unencumbered access to the powerful knowledge commons it represents? (Bollier, 2014) Ultimately, Illichians will understand Wak’s Education 2.0 as either an attempt to salvage a destructive institution and make it more palatable, or as a new invention altogether that will challenge the hegemony of education as we know it today.

While Waks emphasizes the innovative aspects of Education 2.0, he hopes to repurpose educational and social service funding for “socialization and articulation” institutions. Funding seldom comes without strings attached, making these institutions vulnerable to corruption by the professional class on behalf of elites. So, the internet and social media may have great educational potential and help a number of remarkable young people “by-pass” traditional education, as Waks aptly demonstrates. However, the “socialization and articulation” institutions that Waks feels would be necessary for *most* young people are a worrisome attempt to short-cut the painstaking work of actually rebuilding a culture that supports and encourages the young.

#### References

Bollier, D. (2014). *Think like a commoner: A short introduction to the life of the commons*.

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