



ADHD#5 - Schools, Part I

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Schooling for children is a confluence of social policy, personal preconceptions, historical revision, and deep politics. People think they understand how these schools affect students, communities, and society. I don't think they do. Let me list basic truths about the compulsory education system, which goes under the name of state, public, or compulsory schooling. I'll refer to it as "State Schooling".

- State Schooling is inherently mediocre. Individuality of a sort is recognized when schools specialize. This specializing targets a different average within the same mandate of mediocrity.
- State Schools are inherently institutional, hierarchical, reductive and specializing and, as such, cannot understand or facilitate personal growth or personally meaningful learning.
- State Schooling was conceived as an instrument of social planning and continues solely for this purpose.
- People erroneously think State Schools exist to serve them, and to provide advantage to them. This propaganda is contrary to the history, behavior and internal directives that govern school policy.



"Public schools do not exist to please Johnny's parents. They do not even exist to ensure that Johnny will one day earn a good living at a job he likes."

—Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

These points apply to public or private schools that follow the State School model. A *good* private school is usually just a school that hopes to do less harm in pushing the student body toward a higher average.

From these basic truths three consequences emerge.

- State Schools target the satisfaction of political interests not social interests. They manipulate students as a raw material or a source of energy. State Schools are factories.
- State Schools' interest in and support of any student is in proportion to that student's support of the school's objective. Like feed cattle, those who buy in to and fatten themselves on *the program* are encouraged with enticements but not freedom. Those who resist are viewed as flawed individuals

deserving of limited investment before being rendered for their resource potential. A good private school will shift these parameters to the comfort of the student, but the model is the same.

- State Schools are run by administrators trained to accept this model without questioning it, teachers educated in this model without seeing beyond it – in fact without even seeing it – and students who are carefully kept in the dark, taught to follow an authoritarian structure, maintained in a juvenile state, and discouraged from learning how to learn for themselves.

State Schools are like pharmaceutical companies: their actions are simple and predictable. You may support their objective, but you should object to their exploitation of children for other people's benefit.



I find these truths to be self-evident

- [Government-sponsored compulsory schooling](#) originated in Prussia as a means to ensure a disciplined militia. The idea caught on in the US as a means of subjugating the Catholic population, and was spearheaded in Massachusetts in the 1800s.
- The government enlisted the support of industrialists by assuring them the program would ensure a steady supply of appropriately educated factory workers. State Schooling gets much of its direction from foundations [subsidized by and beholden to industry](#).
- Educational psychologists, formerly involved in eugenics and other social programs, were enlisted to develop a Socialist educational program by training teachers and administrators.
- John Dewey, the father of American education, lauded Bolshevik communism in using schools to dismantle families, which he considered exclusive and isolating. He was skeptical of excessive concern for individualism and spontaneity.
- Ellwood P. Cubberley, the Dean of the School of Education at Stanford, saw children as raw materials "to be shaped and fashioned into finished products" in a process he compared to livestock management.
- Educational testing and the testing industry were created to rate and train members of the US Armed Forces, as was applied to education as the [factory management paradigm](#) became popular.
- In 1973 the US Department of Education commissioned the Rand Corporation to create a 7-volume study on how schools could be better used to foster behavioral modification. The training of teachers as *change agents* had started in the 1960s. It advocated operant conditioning, behavioral control, instigating conflict between students and parents, and the testing of students' values and obedience to authority.
- In 1990 Anita Hoge won her case against the U.S. Federal Government; its allegations included:
 - <> using taxpayers' money to amass psychological profiles on children using mandated assessment tests fraudulently presented as achievement tests;
 - <> scoring these tests for 'correct' attitudes and approving curricula to remediate incorrect attitudes;
 - <> obstructing public access to documents explaining attitudinal tests and programs;
 - <> subsidizing a private education system mislabeled a 'public' school;
 - <> subsidizing the practice of medicine without a license.



Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Elwood P. Cubberley

"Cubberley is a controversial figure in the history of education. He has been criticized for his emphasis on efficiency and bureaucracy to solve complex educational problems. Many of his views appear to us today as paternalistic, anti-immigrant, and undemocratic... For better or for worse, Cubberley's influence on American schools has been deep and lasting. As head of the Department of Education at Stanford University, Cubberley trained a generation of administrators in what was called the 'science' of school management."

– From PBS's "[School: The Story of American Public Education](#)."

Here's a recent teacher training manual titled "[Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making](#)". It's dated 2009, chaired by The RAND Corporation and funded by the US Department of Education.

"In our dreams...people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands... We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple...we will organize children...and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way."

– the [first mission statement of the General Education Board](#) (1906):

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

...

"A startling and dramatic improvement in American education requires only that we hang all the professors and burn down the schools."

– H.L. Mencken, journalist, satirist, and activist.

Women as teachers



An arithmetic class taught by Carrie Southworth at Morton School, 1907. The DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, Ithaca, New York, Verne Morton Photograph Collection.

– "The state maintains free public education to perpetuate itself and promote its own interests... Teachers should play an active part in securing acceptance by their communities of new social ideas and ideals... even though such ideals are at variance with those of the local community."

...

"In making curricula and in administering them one must inevitably face the question of indoctrination... despite the fact that these words generally have a bad connotation, that is what every teacher to some extent does every day."

– [Thomas H. Briggs](#), associate

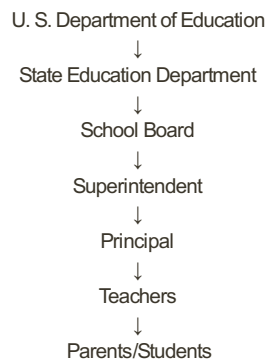
professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

"John Calvin was the second major religious figure to endorse compulsory schooling. Like Luther, he did so to spread his religious doctrine by government force. And like Luther, he offered the political authorities this inducement: his schools would preach 'the duty of obedience to rulers.' That must have been music to the ears of the political authorities of the time."

– Murray Rothbard, quoted [here](#).

It's a feedback system

Power flows down



"The chart above illustrates how power flows down in the government school system. It turns out that information travels in the same direction as power. All top-down bureaucracies share this fatal defect: a shortage of valuable information flowing up to them from below."

– James Ostrowski, quoted [here](#).

"Feedback which can be safely ignored by decision makers is not socially effective knowledge. Effective feedback does not mean the mere articulation of information, but the implicit transmission of others' knowledge in the explicit form of effective incentives to the recipients."

– economist Thomas Sowell

And the benefits are (NOT) ...

Advocates of State Schooling defend their educational objectives with the pragmatic assertion that any social program requires allegiances, the sharing of benefits, and the inclusion of other goals. These are the costs of forging support for programs that improve society. So let's look at how State Schooling, with its program of institutional thinking and limited freedoms, has affected society.

- Over the last 200 years functional literacy rates in U.S. communities where it was valued has dropped from 95% to 65%.
- Educational materials are now designed by committees charged with the political tasks of policy, socialization and behavior management.
- School policy, once wholly local, now includes less than 1 in 2,000 citizens.
- Abstract, creative, and conceptual skills are absent from compulsory curricula, notably so in mathematics, rhetoric, logic, law and health care.
- The creation of a pliant, dependent, and consumerist work force unskilled in independent living.
- The average citizen's discursive ability has dropped from an 11th grade reading level in the 1840s, to a 6th grade level in 2010.
- One third of high-school graduates will never read a book for the rest of their lives.

Today I learned that a 14-year-old friend of ours who moved out of state has just enrolled in a public school. He previously went to our local democratic [Sudbury School](#) in which there are no courses, no teachers, no grades, no classes, no academic requirements, and no tests. The kids are free to play most of the day if they wish. Students are required to contribute to community management, help maintain the building and grounds, and respect the rights of others. Despite never having any formal schooling our friend was found to be above average for his age on every academic measure.

That is not to say that all unschoolers learn, or that all those who are schooled don't. Rather, it implies that prescribed behavior relates to management, not learning.



Here are some references about the history and purpose of State Schooling.

[The Underground History of American Education](#), by John Taylor Gatto. If you read nothing else, read

Gatto.

Left Back, a century of battles over school reform, by [Diane Ravitch](#).

The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America, by Charlotte Iserbyt.

The Learning Project, views of authentic learning, by Lincoln Stoller (aka me), focusing on the process rather than the structure of learning.

The [Ludwig Von Mises Institute](#), ostensibly concerned with Austrian Economics, has a lot of material on public schooling.

Wikipedia has an interesting page on the topic of [education reform](#).

Preview of the next installment

In the next installment I'll argue that the ADHD diagnosis naturally emerges from these State School truths as a management technique.

I am not saying that ADHD behavior is not a valid problem, or that it is never a medical problem, rather that from a school's point of view it's a management problem. No matter what supercilious or empathic spin State School administrators put on the issue, their goal is to find a management solution.

Finally, while ADHD behavior does exist in schools that don't follow the State School program, it is successfully resolved without being treated as a medical issue such as is advocated by agents of the State School program. I'll discuss that as well.



"Wait! Wait! Listen to me! ... We don't have to be just sheep!"

Groupthink

There are elements of "groupthink" in both State Schooling and the public's response to the World Trade Center disaster. "George Washington" has collected testimonials from structural engineers that contradict the official explanation about [the mysterious collapse of WTC Building 7](#). His blog article titled "[The Mysterious Collapse of WTC Building 7 was Not An Inside Job](#)" reminds us of the lengths to which institutions go to serve their own interests, and the lengths to which people will go to avoid responsibility.

See [When Groups Don't Think](#) from the Utne Reader.

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