

## **Schooling as Violence**

### **How schools harm pupils and societies**

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## **1 Is formal education always good for you?**

**Conclusion** (pp. 17-18)

Formal education and schooling isn't automatically and inevitably of benefit to individuals and societies. Indeed, as the graphic and violent examples used here demonstrate, everything depends on the nature, purposes and priorities of education, the definition of what it means to be educated and resulting educational practices. What is missing in education is often as important as what is taught. Many more examples of schooling's role as an agent of violence will be described in the book in the chapters discussing the different ways in which schools are complicit in violence. However, before we explore the ways in which schools can act as violent and harmful institutions it is necessary to explore what it is about schooling that makes its violent role possible. What are the key aspects of schooling that create an organisational environment that can be supportive of violence? The next chapter analyses the organisationally dominant model of schooling internationally – authoritarianism.

## **2 Authoritarian schooling**

**Conclusion** (p. 38)

This chapter has argued that the dominant or hegemonic model of schooling internationally is authoritarian. Pupils have little say in how schools are run, what is

taught or how it is taught and this situation is perhaps at its most pronounced in large schools. It is this authoritarianism that provides the context for schools' role in the reproduction and perpetration of violence. In the light of this analysis the next chapter begins to explore ways in which schooling is involved in violence towards young people.

### **3 Schooling and violence**

#### **Conclusion (p. 58)**

The root causes of violence are sociological as much as biological, if they are biological at all. Authoritarian forms of socialisation seem to play a major part in increasing the likelihood of violent behaviour through imitation and legitimation. This has serious implications for the nature of schooling as often currently constructed. Four types of violence [direct, indirect, repressive, and alienating] were identified, all of which schools play a part in reproducing and perpetrating. However, schools don't necessarily have to be actively involved to reproduce violence – they can do this simply by ignoring violent threats to their pupils about which they could try to do something. This chapter has explored some the ways in which schools are implicated in violence through omission.

### **4 Control, surveillance, reproduction and perpetration**

#### **Schools and inhuman capital theory**

#### **Conclusion (p. 71)**

Historically, a key purpose for the creation of mass systems of formal schooling in industrialising countries was control and surveillance and preparation for subordinate roles in the workplace and wider society. This is why schooling was based on authoritarian modes of organisation. This model was spread by the need to control populations in the colonies. The model in its fundamentals has proved remarkably impervious to change, despite considerable change in both the workplace and surrounding societies. While its 'modern', bureaucratic form may well be responsible for change in relation to economic productivity and social modernisation, schooling also reproduces key negative aspects of the surrounding society such as inequalities based on race, class and gender. However, its authoritarian nature also allows it to go further than this to actively increase or multiply negative aspects as well, including violent ones. It is therefore time to add another dimension to discussions of the role of schooling in relation to society, that of active perpetration of violence.

We need to ask what it is about schooling that makes society worse as well as what schooling does to make society better or to keep it the same. As the following chapters will demonstrate, we need to consider *inhuman* capital theory in relation to the role of schooling.

## **5 Schooling as terrorism**

### Physical punishment

#### **Conclusion** (pp. 83-84)

In relation to physical punishment, schools in many countries are involved in both the perpetration of violence and the perpetuation of violence. Schools that practice this violence certainly don't make society a better place and don't just reproduce violence – they actively help to produce it. Meanwhile children are harmed by these violent practices. There may be no obligation on America or Somalia to cease this form of terrorism as they are not signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but all other states should ban its use immediately.

## **6 Schooling and learning to hate the 'other'**

#### **Conclusion** (p. 96)

Education ought to be about learning to respect others and to treat all human beings on a basis of having equal human rights. An appreciation of diversity while accepting the inherent humanity of all individuals should be the very essence of what it means to be 'educated'. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. While some schooling systems and individual schools do consciously attempt to combat group prejudices, negative stereotypes and discrimination, others do nothing and reproduce them while some actively perpetrate inter-group hatred, hostility and violence. People can leave these latter systems with formal qualifications at a high level but still be capable of holding violent and aggressive attitudes towards the other and of behaving in violent ways towards 'them' as well. We have seen the terrible results of this in the 'ethnic cleansing' and genocides in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Formal education is not necessarily an innocent bystander in such events.

## **7 Schooling as sexual abuse**

#### **Conclusion** (pp. 109-110)

Schools are not necessarily safe places for girls. Sexual harassment and violence can come directly from teachers. Campaigns in developing countries to get more girls into schools need to be balanced by attempts to change what can actually happen in them. Those boys and men that do behave violently towards females and indeed other males do not do so because of their biology. Violent forms of masculinity seem to be learned behaviour and unfortunately schooling seems to play a part in this. Kenway and Fitzclarence<sup>a</sup> summarise the negative role of schooling in regard to masculinity well, again making connections with other themes discussed in the present book,

If schools implicitly subscribe to and endorse hegemonic versions of masculinity, particularly in their more exaggerated forms, then they are complicit in the production of violence. If they fear 'the feminine' and avoid and discourage empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and affiliative behaviours and emotional responsibility and instead favour heavy-handed discipline and control then they are complicit. If they seek to operate only at the level of rationality and if they rationalise violence then they are complicit. If they are structured in such a way as to endorse the culture of male entitlement and indicate that the needs of males are more important than those of females then they are complicit. If they are repressive in their adult/child relations and do not offer adolescent students in particular opportunities to develop wise judgements and to exercise their autonomy in responsible ways then they are complicit. If they operate in such a way as to marginalize and stigmatise certain groups of students then they are complicit.

(1997: 125)

## **8 Schooling can make you ill**

Stress, anxiety and examinations

**Conclusion: testing, competition and aggression** (pp. 121-123)

Kohn<sup>b</sup> (1993: Chs 8 and 11) provides a detailed critique of the regular use of tests and grades using research evidence to support his argument that they demotivate pupils, harm the nature of learning that takes place, encourage cheating, damage the relationship between the teacher and learner and induce blind conformity. However, competitive testing on the scale and intensity described above is not only not good educational practice but is also a form of violence against many pupils because it harms them directly both physically and emotionally. Moreover, as Davies<sup>c</sup> (2003: Ch. 7) points out, there is growing realisation that conflict and indiscipline is a direct result of teaching methods, including testing, that encourage competition. Teachers who attempt to motivate pupils by encouraging them to out-perform their peers, and by instilling a fear of doing worse than others, may inadvertently be making them more disruptive. Those who encourage pupils to concentrate on mastering individual tasks are more likely to sustain order and hold the attention of their students. Highly competitive students may deliberately or subconsciously misbehave because they believe that combining being disruptive with getting good grades gives them added value and indicates that they are clever and this is precisely what Clark Pope found in her study in America,

At times these forms of classroom management required rather aggressive behaviour on the part of the students. All but Berto chose to contest a teacher's grading decision during the semester. Kevin regularly voiced dissent over marked errors on tests and quizzes, often resulting in a change of grade . . . With so many students and so many bureaucratic hurdles in the school institution, only the students who made themselves known, who spoke up and questioned authority got heard. Even if the student's performance did not necessarily warrant an extra point or a higher

grade, complaining loudly, strongly and regularly was thought to yield slightly better results, especially since teachers were strapped for time. . . .

(Pope<sup>d</sup> 2001: 152)

Conversely, as Davies<sup>e</sup> (2003) also points out, those at the other end of the scale are equally disruptive because it provides them with a reason for low grades other than low ability. While research in Britain suggests that low-achieving pupils react to competitive testing by becoming demotivated, losing some self-esteem and reducing effort (Henry<sup>f</sup> 2002), in France according to a UNESCO consultant psychiatrist,

The aggression some French youngsters show these days isn't a coincidence. They're up against a system, focused very much on itself, that doesn't respond to its needs. Education has become hostage to a system where young people have to submit to the rule of competition. This hampers individual performance and growth, in both education and social terms.

(L'homme<sup>g</sup> 2000: 4)

Does the massive apparatus of testing now in place in many educational systems really serve the needs of children or those of the state? All too often the response must be in terms of the latter. The damage that competitive testing is doing to pupils is clear to all who will see. While the selective and stratified basis of higher education and the need for occupational specialisation in the labour market means that qualifications are important to people, the onus should be on the education system to prove why a particular test is deemed necessary. The enormous over-emphasis on testing and grades gets in the way of learning and education and much of it could be scrapped tomorrow not only with no harm to education but also with many positive benefits.

## **9 Learning to kill**

### Schooling and militarisation

#### **Conclusion** (p. 135)

I am not a pacifist. I don't believe that war is never justified. Moreover, I have a brother who is a senior officer in the armed forces and I am very proud of him. However, the military is by definition a violent institution in that it exists essentially to fight wars even if sometimes it has to take on humanitarian roles. It ought to be a specialised and professional institution that trains only its selected personnel. Educational organisations may well discuss issues of war and violence but the aim should be to stress the need for peaceful conflict resolution or management wherever and whenever possible. War should not be regarded as the norm in education, the military should not have privileged access to schools above other organisations and military training should certainly not be part of the curriculum. Education needs to have as its top priority a framework for the development of democratic and peaceful individuals and societies and this is the subject of the final chapter.

## 10 Education for democracy and peace

### Conclusion (p. 143)

Formal education is, and always has been, a site of struggle between differing views about the nature of humanity and desirable forms of social organisation. Most of this book has discussed the widespread occurrence of authoritarian forms of schooling as a means of social control leading in some cases – far too many cases – to violence against pupils and the perpetuation and perpetration of violence in the wider society. In the view of the writer, however, the examples used in the final chapter of this book represent hope. There is nothing fixed or immutable about the nature of schooling. Schooling is socially and politically constructed and can be reconstructed as these examples show. This is not necessarily an easy or comfortable task as the weight of tradition, dominant ideology, perceived ‘common sense’ and vested interests often have to be challenged and overcome. These issues cannot and should not be avoided by all those involved in education. The issue of schooling as violence has certainly not been given the systematic international attention it deserves. Avoiding these questions and focusing solely on ‘technical’ problems simply means reproducing systems as they presently are. In many cases this is both foolhardy and dangerous. Education can be more democratic and geared to the promotion of the peaceful settlement of conflict as this chapter has illustrated. Nothing in education is more important than this.

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<sup>a</sup> Kenway, J. and Fitzclarence, L. (1997) ‘Masculinity, violence and schooling: challenging poisonous pedagogies’, *Gender and Education* 9(1): 117-133.

<sup>b</sup> Kohn, A. (1993) *Punished by Rewards* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).

<sup>c</sup> Davies, L. (2003) *Education and Conflict: The Edge of Chaos* (London: Routledge-Falmer).

<sup>d</sup> Pope, D. C. (2001) *Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic and Miseducated Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

<sup>e</sup> Davies, L. (2003) *Education and Conflict: The Edge of Chaos* (London: Routledge-Falmer).

<sup>f</sup> Henry, J. (2002) ‘Constant examining demotivates low achievers’, *Times Educational Supplement* 28/6.

<sup>g</sup> L’homme, C. (2000) ‘The violence they live with’, *UNESCO Sources* No. 126.