

EDUCATIONAL ANARCHY

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[Assignment: Write a short essay making a point about education by responding to the essays we have read and the issues we have discussed. You may write about your own experience or analyze the ideas of the writers.]

(1) John Holt takes a very controversial stand in his essay, "The Right to Control One's Learning." It is his belief that "Young people should have the right to control and direct their own learning, that is, to decide what they want to learn, and when, where, how much, how fast, and with what help they want to learn it." He claims that preventing children from making such decisions destroys their freedom of thought. However, Holt's assumptions are very unrealistic. Furthermore, the arguments Holt offers to support his beliefs are shallow and poorly defined.

(2) In his essay, Holt states that children should be able to choose whether or not to go to school, but he offers no alternatives as to what these children would do if not in school. If young children chose not to attend school, someone would have to care for them throughout the day, providing them with not only the basic human needs, but also with a stimulating and thought provoking environment. In today's society, it is growing increasingly rare for both parents not to work. Therefore, some type of outside child care would be necessary during the day. It is difficult for parents to find responsible child care now for children who are too young to be in school; imagine if they now had to find child care for older children as well.

(3) Furthermore, not only does Holt fail to offer alternatives for young children not in school, he neglects to address the problems these uneducated children will face as they grow older. In modern-day society it is becoming increasingly difficult for adults with even a high school diploma to find competitive jobs. As society advances and becomes more complex the demand for adults with highly skilled training will increase. If an individual with a high school diploma has difficulty finding employment, how will someone with very little or no formal education ever find employment?

(4) Holt further claims that, if given the choice, children will attend school if only to please their parents. Although this may be true in the case of small children I do not feel it would be the case with teenagers. All teenagers seem to go through a stage during which they see little value in school. Seniors, in particular, who seem to suffer from the "disease" senioritis, often see school as nothing more than a waste of time. Although the desire to please their parents may still be present, that desire can easily be overcome by an impulse to have fun and abandon school.

(5) Holt further states that children should have the right to choose what they are taught. This idea is not feasible, however. Eight year old children have no business choosing what classes they will or will not take. Their knowledge of what is available would be so limited that they would probably have no idea which classes interested them. Even if the children did have an idea of what they were interested in then, it is very likely that their interests would change before they had completed their schooling. If they had neglected to take the basic classes, such as English and math, because they were not interested in them or felt those classes were unnecessary for their chosen field or profession, they could be set back by several semesters or years. Not only that, but it would be difficult for anyone to excel in any area or subject without a basic understanding of the mathematical concepts and the English language.

(6) In one paragraph, Holt tells of some parents who had a running bargain with their children. If the children cannot stand the thought of school, do not feel well, are afraid of something that might happen, or have something of their own that they very much want to do, they can stay home from school. Holt seems to think this idea is all well and good, yet he makes no valid point with it. He tells the reader nothing about how this bargain has worked. Have these children missed a lot of school? Have their grades suffered due to excessive absenteeism? Just what have been the results of this bargain? Not only does Holt fail to make a valid point with this paragraph, he also overlooks the long term consequences of such a bargain. If these parents continually allow their children to stay home because they cannot stand the thought of school or because they are afraid of something, they will never learn to face their problems and challenges. For example, if as adults they are asked to give a presentation for work, they might find it easier not to attend the presentation thereby saving themselves the stress of being afraid, acts that would probably cost them their jobs.

(7) Although Holt claims to have the best interests of young people in mind, he overlooks some very basic facts. If children did not attend school, special steps would have to be taken to insure they are properly cared for during the day and provided a stimulating environment. These same children who did not attend school would have a great deal of difficulty finding jobs in today's highly technical society. Assuming that they did choose to go to school, they might also suffer in the long run if they did not wisely choose their own classes; a mighty task for an eight year old. Contrary to Holt's beliefs, although our system of education may not be perfect, it is far better than the educational anarchy that would result if Holt had his way.