

Review: *Deschooling Our Lives.*

Edited by Matt Hern

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Hern, Matt, editor. *Deschooling Our Lives*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1996. 150 pp. US \$14.95 cloth ISBN: 0-865713-42-1.

Are you satisfied with today's educational system as a parent, teacher or participant? As an educator, have you thought or said these words before:

"They do not think of their classes until they have begun" (p.13).

I have heard these same words from educators when talking about their students. What is remarkable about these words is that they were written in the 1860's. More than 100 years have passed since the writing of these words, and yet our society continues to educate children in the same educational system.

"The failure of compulsory schooling becomes more obvious every day. Advocates are joining homeschoolers and deschoolers for charter schools, public alternative schools, vouchers, and much more"(p.1). *Deschooling Our Lives* is about putting the child at the center of education and giving them the opportunity to learn at their pace, on their terms. It takes into consideration how learning occurs: naturally, with curiosity, and at each individual's own developmental pace.

This one-hundred-fifty page book conveys the basic philosophy that education is "child centered." This theme holds true for each essay, yet the individual authors represent a spectrum of opinion on schooling. *Deschooling Our Lives* includes essays from Ivan Illich, John Holt, Leo Tolstoy, Matt Hern, Grace Llewelyn and others. The first group of essays covers the historical roots of deschooling, from the late eighteenth hundreds to the nineties. The remaining portions of the book are essays written in the nineties by educators, homeschoolers, homeschooled children and founders of alternative schools. Each essay is thought provoking and easily readable. A reading and resource list is provided at

the end of the book, and includes a list of networks and associations.

The authors may offend some educators at the suggestion of "deschooling our lives." The essays challenge assumptions about education and provide alternatives to the existing system. I approached *Deschooling Our Lives* with healthy skepticism. Is it possible to deschool ourselves? While the authors attest to the success of deschooling, this reviewer is left with unanswered questions. I found some authors' criticism to be accurate and realistic, as I reflected upon my own educational experience. Upon the conclusion of this book, I found that I wanted to pursue more readings in deschooling.

Educators, present and future students, and those who have an investment in our current educational system will have an interest in this book. While some readers may not agree with each author, the alternatives presented are worth considering. This book offers hope and a sense of direction for those who are considering alternatives to the existing educational system.

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