In Illich's call to deschool society and in the alternative school movement some fundamental concerns are ignored. Does Illich actually "deschool society" as he claims? And are alternative schools actually schools or a form of deschooling?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the question, 'What is a school?' By doing so it may clear up some unanswered questions about deschooling and alternative schools. Illustrations are drawn from Illich's "learning webs" and from Philadelphia's Parkway Program.

The paper did not uncover a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term 'school,' but rather sought to discern criteria to apply to expressions in which the term 'school' is used as a substantive.

On the basis of criteria developed, it was concluded that the Parkway Program was a school and that certain features of Illich's learning webs are also schools rather than deschooled plans. Alternatives are not forms of deschooling but gain their significance by serving as an alternative to a prevailing model; therefore a theory of freedom of choice must be developed before one can speak meaningfully of a school as an alternative school.

John Martin Rich*

What Is A School?

Of the many new educational programs and proposals, alternative schools and deschooling have each received considerable attention lately. However in both Illich's call to deschool society and in the alternative school movement some fundamental concerns are ignored. Does Illich actually "deschool society" as he claims? And how can we know whether society has been deschooled until we know what is a school? On the other hand, are alternative schools actually schools or a form of deschooling? Moreover, how can we know what counts as an alternative school unless we first know what is a school?

Thus the purpose of this paper is to examine the question, "What is a school?" By doing so it may clear up some unanswered questions about both deschooling and alternative schools (although the latter will be examined only briefly). Illustrations will be drawn from Illich's "learning webs" and from Philadelphia's Parkway Program. These illustrations were chosen because they both represent borderline cases which may supply useful data in helping to decide what counts as a school.

Our approach, first of all, is to avoid Platonizing the question by introducing any assumptions that there exists a 'real nature' of an entity known as a 'school'. Whether necessary and sufficient conditions can be stated for the application of the term 'school' remains to be seen, and therefore, at this point, we will withhold judgment on the matter. Our approach, however, is to seek contexts in which it may be correct or incorrect to apply a criterion or criteria to expressions in which the term 'school' is employed as a substantive. We will introduce and examine some characteristics people past and present have associated with schools in order to see whether there is some feature all schools share or whether they only exhibit a network of similarities — family resemblances, as Wittgenstein would say.

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I

John Bremer, the creator of the Parkway Program, also does not speak of the Program as a school, despite the fact that it has been popularly dubbed, "the school without walls." The Parkway Program was initiated by the Philadelphia Board of Education in cooperation with scientific, business, and cultural institutions along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway as a four-year program for students of high school age.[1] Students in the program choose their own activities from such offerings as the Museum of Art, Franklin Institute, the Insurance Company of North America, KYW and the *Philadelphia Bulletin* and *Inquirer,* and manufacturing centres as Smith, Kline and French. Although students in the program would be subject to the state's compulsory attendance laws, the only requirement in the program itself is the tutorial. Each member of a unit (consisting of about 160 students) belongs to a tutorial. A tutorial is composed of about 16 students, a full-time certified teacher, and a university intern. Students are assigned to a tutorial by lottery. Each tutorial attempts to develop basic skills; it also serves the purposes of evaluation, administration and communication. The major portion of the student's program is chosen from regularly scheduled courses along the Parkway, town meetings (which bring together all members of a unit to discuss common problems) and independent study.[2]

Although it is customary for some persons when speaking of a school to seek an identifiable physical plant to house the program, it would be accurate to say that the Parkway Program is a school without its own walls, as it uses the buildings of others.[3] So far we have identified two characteristics that have been associated with schools: a physical plant and the element of compulsion. The lack of a physical plant, however, does not seem to prevent one from making an arrangement to support learning, so long as the learners do not need complex equipment and the like. Of course 'making an arrangement to promote learning' is a rather rudimentary notion and, in itself, does not establish that such arrangements constitute a school.[4] Parents can make arrangements in the home to promote learning of their children, and on the playground older children can arrange to promote learning of younger children. Yet it would also seem odd to say that X is a school but that it is definitely not an arrangement to promote learning (or some synonymous expression).

We tend to associate institutionalized schooling with various legal and programmatic forms of compulsion, ranging from compulsory attendance laws to a compulsory curriculum. The Parkway Program, as indicated, lacks some of the compulsory factors found in more traditional schools, yet it is not entirely free of them. Is the fact that some compulsory features are present a reason for calling the Program a school? The compulsory features may help to identify schools in certain places today, although this in itself may prove misleading in light of the amount of compulsion found in various institutions and agencies in complex societies. Additionally, compulsory curricula far antedate compulsory attendance

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[1]John Bremer and Michael von Moschzisker, *The School Without Walls: Philadelphia's Parkway Program* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).
[2]*Ibid.,* pp. 23-25.
[3]*Ibid.,* p. 19.
[4]We eschewed the temptation to use the term 'organization' and its cognates rather than 'arrangement', because consensus is lacking on which one of the numerous stipulative definitions of the former term is preferable.

laws. And the incidence and extent of compulsory curricula have varied considerably since the introduction of the elective system.

Thus compulsory attendance laws, compulsory curriculum, and a physical plant are not primary or central factors in answering the question, What is a school? John Bremer, in speaking of students who matriculated in the Parkway Program, claims that "they entered a program, not a school; a process, not a place; an activity, not a location. What was absolutely essential was that each unit form a cohesive group, held together by the task of promoting their own learning"[5] Evidently Bremer is advancing a normative position as to what makes an educational program. His tendency to refuse to consider the Parkway Program as a school undoubtedly stems from his very low regard for schools he has observed. This low opinion is evidenced when he asserts that "the miserable state of human relations in most schools and school systems is well known. Force and coercion are everywhere."[6] No doubt this is why he wants the Parkway Program to have cohesive groups and a minimum of compulsion. What to Bremer is a good learning program, therefore, could not be a school. It is uncommon, however, to reserve the term 'school' to refer exclusively to undesirable or ineffective programs, arrangements, or activities, except in the case of some radical critics who tend to view virtually all schools as oppressive and consequently urge that their own proposals for educational reform should not be taken as a type of schooling.[7]

The Parkway Program is spoken of as "structured" on the basis of its tutorial groups and courses. In addition to a structured program where teachers and students are expected to work together in "cohesive groups," there is an implicit set of goals.[8] This prompts the question whether before one can speak of an arrangement as a school, it is first necessary for a set of goals to be formulated which would in some way be unique to schooling? Among those persons, for instance, who believe that the school's purpose is to develop the mind but is failing to do so, they claim that the school has become a "baby-sitting" agency or caters to life-adjustment, and the like. But here the move is to charge the system with neglecting its essential purpose for peripheral matters that should best be left to other institutions and agencies. It would appear in this case that what is called 'education' is defined by a definite goal or set of goals, even though those systems that fail to fulfill the goals are still referred to as schools.

To take one example: Arthur Bestor asserts that "genuine education, in short, is intellectual training." ". . . it is not lack of effort but lack of direction that has resulted in the mediocre showing of our public high schools." "It is a matter of adequate aims."[9] Bestor goes on to argue that the substitution of life-adjustment education for intellectual training leads to a lack of "genuine education." In contrast to some of the radical critics, he does not use the term 'school' normatively: in other words, whether or not the goal of intellectual training is fulfilled, he would still refer to the arrangement as a school.

Nevertheless, is it necessary before an arrangement can be called a school, for it to have a general function such as the promotion of learning, or must we state

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[5]Bremer and Moschzisker, *The School Without Walls*, pp. 21-22.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[7]Here we have in mind Ivan Illich, Everett Reimer and, more recently, John Holt.

[8]Bremer and Moschziker, *The School Without Walls*, pp. 86-87.

[9]Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1953) pp. 3, 8.

a goal such as intellectual training? There have been different types of schools: catechetical, dame, folk, Latin grammar, English public, infant, monitorial and polytechnical, to name a few. Differences in organization and curriculum also in many cases tend to reflect differences in goals. These different types of schools are arrangements for the promotion of learning, but there is no set of specific goals which they all share. While it may be presupposed in an arrangement that it is a deliberative activity in which intention, foresight and planning are involved, no specific goals are needed in order to speak of an arrangement for learning as a school.

II

In light of the conclusions drawn so far, let us see whether Illich's "learning webs" actually "deschool society," as he claims. Illich believes that a good educational system should have three purposes: "it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known."[10] We do not ask what someone should learn, he warns; rather, we provide the things and people that learners may want in order to choose their own goals and promote their own learning.[11]

Learning webs consist of the following four different approaches designed to enable the learner to gain access to resources which help him to achieve his goals: reference services to educational objects; skill exchanges; peer matching; and reference services to educators-at-large.[12] Illich's reference services to educational objects is based on several claims: that industry makes artifacts whose inner workings only specialists can understand; that educational materials have been monopolized by the school; and, as consequences, learning materials are scarce, professionalism grows, and learners do not have access to and understanding of objects needed in their own learning activities. Hence he recommends that "educational artifacts" should be made accessible to learners in tool shops, libraries, laboratories, gaming rooms, storefront learning centres and the like. Personnel placed in charge of the material would be more like custodians, and learners needing advice could be referred to "elders."

So far Illich's first learning web is not a school but an approach to make educational artifacts accessible; and therefore this approach could remain informal with each learner initiating his own activities. Skill exchanges, Illich's second learning web, introduce an arrangement for learning whereby persons would list their skills, their addresses, and the conditions under which they would serve as models as "skill teachers."[13] Thus his skill exchanges admit two factors which are almost invariably associated with schools — teachers and learners.

Peer matching, the third type of learning web, would enable learners to broaden the range of peers with whom they would associate, reduce the reliance on skill teachers, and heighten enjoyment by sharing newly acquired skills.

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[10]Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 75.
[11]*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 78-104.
[13]*Ibid.*, p. 87.

The fourth and final learning web provides a directory of professionals, para-professionals, and free-lancers, along with information about access to their services. Of the educational competencies needed (not necessarily in the same person) one would be to create and operate the network; another would be that of guiding students and parents in using it.

Illich claims that skills are kept scarce and shortages result from the formal school system; he wants instead to protect the right to teach any skill. He proposes various ways to channel public funds to noncertified teachers in order to overcome the scarcity created by the schools. "One way," he says, "would be to institutionalize the skill exchange by creating free skill centres open to the public."[14] The fact that Illich is willing to "institutionalize" suggests that, "convival institutions" notwithstanding, he has not really moved away, as much as he would have us believe, from the structure and formality associated with school systems. This is further admitted when he says in another place that "administrative, technological, and especially legal arrangements are required to set up such web-like structures."[15] Illich grants that the operation of educational networks would require administrators, but not as many or of the type required in the administration of schools. While the administrators would maintain the system and provide access to resources, pedagogues would help students to achieve their goals.[16]

Illich imagines that such a learning web differs greatly from organized schools because the administrators would not be required to perform such typical school tasks as maintenance of grounds and facilities, textbook-purchasing, curriculum-making, public relations and the like. Nor would the pedagogue be involved in record-keeping, lesson-planning, or child custody; instead the pedagogue would be available to judge the learner's proficiency, recommend resource materials and counsel on the matter of apprenticeship. In a word, the pedagogue would be "a professional educator" freed from the more typical (though not all) roles commonly associated with institutionalized school systems.

That administrators and pedagogues, however, no longer are required to perform roles which typically have been associated with school systems, does not in itself demonstrate that learning webs constitute a deschooled plan. The roles to be dispensed with do not in themselves, either singly or as a whole, preclude the conduct of a school; rather they are still considered by some professional educators an important contributory function facilitating the school's operations. It is doubtful that the elimination of any one role (e.g., record-keeping or public relations) or all of the roles would render a school inoperative. These roles constitute various types of support services any of which could be altered or eliminated once the goals and interpersonal relations in a school were formulated in a markedly different manner than those of traditional schools.

"To deschool," Illich says, "means to abolish the power of one person to oblige another to attend a meeting. It also means recognizing the right of any person, of any age or sex, to call a meeting."[17] Here Illich identifies compulsion of certain types as a principal characteristic of schools, and a deschooled society as one

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[14]*Ibid.*, p. 90.
[15]*Ibid.*, p. 78.
[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.
[17]*Ibid.*, p. 94.

which not only does not impose such compulsory regulations but which has been liberated through use of his learning webs. However Illich has simply isolated certain features of schools found in particular times and places whose elimination, he claims, would result in deschooling. But there have been schools without the compulsory features he deplores. Moreover, even if current arrangements for promoting learning were not characterized by these features, they would still be schools, although perhaps ones with different rationales, purposes, or modes of operation.

In conclusion, Illich has failed to make a convincing case that his proposed learning webs would result in a deschooled society. His skill exchanges admit teachers and learners, which we have always associated with schools. It would be strange to say that X is a school but it has no teachers and learners. If, for instance, what was referred to as a school was what is usually called a television studio, it would be more accurate to call it a studio unless arrangements were made for teachers and students to meet regularly in order to promote learning. Or, in actuality, it may be a television studio which sponsors a school.

Illich admits that he would like to "institutionalize" the skill exchange, and that administrative, legal and technological arrangements are needed to set up the web structure. We also see that administrators and pedagogues are needed for the learning webs, only some of their more conventional roles have been changed. Thus Illich identifies schools with certain types of goals and modes of operation; but as was indicated earlier, no specific goals or modes of operation are needed in order to speak appropriately of something as a school. Thus it would appear that arrangements could be called a school when one teacher and more than one pupil are involved on a regular basis for the purpose of promoting learning.

In contrast to the essentialists, Illich and other radical critics want to make 'school' a normative rather than a descriptive term instead of reserving the term 'education' as the normative term for making the distinctions sought. 'School' has thereby been transmuted into an opprobrious term which, in turn, precipitates the identification of their educational purposes as a deschooled plan. It would create less confusion to reserve 'education' as the normative term and use 'school' in a general, descriptive manner. Thus we would conclude the Illich's learning webs have not actually deschooled society.

III

At the opening of this paper we raised some questions about the alternative public school movement. The first question, Are alternative schools actually schools or a form of deschooling?, can be dispensed with rather quickly. We must first determine what is deschooling and Illich cannot be relied upon to provide an accurate answer. Quite simply, a deschooled society would prevail when all those arrangements previously referred to as a 'school' would be eliminated in a given society or, perhaps in the case of some preliterate cultures, never have developed at all. As best as can be discerned from the rationale of the alternative school movement,[18] the intention rather than to deschool is to develop new types of schools which contrast with but still preserve the traditional public secondary

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[18]See: Mario D. Fantini, *Public Schools of Choice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); Allen Graubard, *Free the Children* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and Vernon H. Smith, David J. Burke and Robert D. Barr, *Optional Alternative Public Schools* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1974).

school. In fact, it was partly in response to deschooling that alternative schools were initiated.

Another question raised at the outset: How can we know what counts as an alternative school unless we first know what is a school? Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the question thoroughly, some suggestions for investigation can be mentioned.

Once it is determined by the application of criteria that the given arrangements are actually schools, then one identifies the model on the basis of which the new schools are supposed to serve as alternatives. Before a school can reasonably be spoken of as an alternative to the prevailing model, it would need to offer teachers and students a modicum of choice. The next step would be to work out the characteristics and dimensions of the freedom of choice needed to allow one to speak meaningfully of a school as an alternative school.

IV

In conclusion, we did not uncover a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term 'school', but rather sought to discern criteria to apply to expressions in which the term 'school' is used as a substantive. By using the previous illustrations, it was indicated that a school is a deliberative arrangement persisting over a period of time that involves teachers and students for the purpose of promoting learning. Note that more than one student is involved, otherwise it would be a tutoring relationship; and that the arrangements persists long enough to be distinguished from an ad hoc meeting or conference. The arrangement can also be distinguished from parents teaching their children by pointing out that the central purpose of a school is the promotion of learning, even though it may under some circumstances assume such secondary functions as nurturance and affection which are more central to the family.

It was concluded that the Parkway Program was a school and that certain features of Illich's learning webs are also schools. Both Bremer and Illich use the term 'school' normatively rather than descriptively.[19]

RESUME

L'appel d'Illich pour une déscolarisation de la société ainsi que le mouvement de l'école alternative ignorent certains aspects de la question. Est-ce qu'actuellement Illich "déscolarise la société" ainsi qu'il le prétend? Et est-ce qu'actuellement les écoles alternatives sont écoles ou une forme de déscolarisation?

Cet article se propose d'étudier la question "Qu'est-ce qu'une école?". Ainsi certaines questions sur la déscolarisation et les écoles alternatives restées sans réponse, pourront-elles peut-être être éclaircies. Les illustrations sont tirées des "Toiles de connaissances" d'Illich, et du programme Parkway de Philadelphia.

L'article ne recouvrait pas un ensemble de conditions nécessaires et suffisantes pour l'application du terme "école"; mais il cherchait plutôt à discerner des critères pouvant être appliqués à des expressions dans lesquelles le terme école est utilisé comme un substantif.

A partir de ces critères développés, on concluait que le programme Parkway était une sorte de scolarisation et que certains aspects des 'Toiles de connaissances" d'Illich étaient eux-aussi, plutôt des plans de scolarisation que de déscolarisation. Les écoles alternatives ne sont pas une forme de déscolarisation, mais elles acquièrent leur signification en servant d'alternative à un model courant. Par conséquence avant que quiconque puisse parler précisément d'une école alternative, une théorie sur la liberté de choix doit être développée.