

Education
A Very Short Introduction

By Gary Thomas

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Has education changed much over the last 2000 years? How has it moved on? How has it stayed the same?
- John Locke argued that the child is a natural inquirer and experimenter. How far does it follow, though, that education should be inquiry-based?
- 'When informal education is good it is very very good, but when it's bad it's horrid.' Is this fair?
- Was Jean-Jacques Rousseau too optimistic about the child's nature?
- What are the strongest arguments for formal, as opposed to informal (or progressive) education? How would a progressive educator counter them?
- Psychologist William Hull said: 'If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn.' What is it about *teaching* that can be so dangerous for *learning*?
- Was John Holt correct to say that schools inhibit learning?
- What would characterise a market in which education is bought and sold? Can market conditions ever really occur in education?
- Some of the conclusions Jean Piaget drew from his natural experiments have become controversial. What has been Piaget's legacy?
- Do you think the innate potential for thinking and learning varies by very much among children? Can measuring any such differences among children by using IQ tests help us to design a school system?
- Why is there consistently such a large body of young people – around 40 per cent – who leave school with precious little in the way of achievement?
- Should the curriculum focus on skills for working life or on encouraging critical thinking?
- Philip Jackson suggested that one consequence of the 'hidden curriculum' of schools is that children learn to be docile and conforming. If this is true, what is its corollary?
- What are some of the consequences of the education system's ever-increasing reliance on tests and testing?
- What is meant by 'within child' problems? Are we correct today to shift the emphasis from the child to the school in trying to explain children's failure to learn at school?
- Ivan Illich envisaged 'edu-credit cards' which would be issued to people at birth and which would enable them to acquire the skills they needed 'at their convenience, better, faster, cheaper and with fewer undesirable side-effects than in school.' Why hasn't such a good idea caught on?
- Should education be adapting more dynamically in response to the changes brought by the Internet? What radical change might happen?

Other books by Gary Thomas

Thomas, G., & Loxley, A. *Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion* 2nd Ed. (Open University Press, 2007)

Thomas, G. *Education and Theory: Strangers in Paradigms* (Open University Press, 2007)

Thomas, G. & Pring, R. (Eds.) *Evidence-based Practice in Education* (Open University Press, 2004)

Thomas, G., & Vaughan, M. (Eds.) *Inclusive Education: Readings and Reflections* (Open University Press, 2004)

Thomas, G., Walker, D. & Webb, J. *The Making of the Inclusive School* (Routledge, 1998)
Thomas, G. (2012) Changing our landscape of inquiry for a new science of education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82, 1, 26-51.

Further Reading

Claxton, G. *What's the point of school?* (Oneworld Publications, 2008)
Holt, J. *How children fail* (Pitman Publishing Company, 1964)
Illich, I. *Deschooling society* (Penguin, 1973)
Jackson, P. *Life in classrooms* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968)
Ravitch, D. *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education* (Basic Books, 2010)
Wolf, A. *Does education matter? Myths about education and economic growth* (Penguin, 2002)