LEARNING WEB - TOOL TO CONVIVIAL SOCIETY

[ÖĞRENME AĞI – SAMİMİ BİR TOPLUM İÇİN ARAÇ]

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to consider the power of education and possibilities on creating a new educational relationship – a learning web – leaning on Ivan Illich's (1926 – 2002) thoughts. This reflective article is especially based on his production from the 1970s and presents a systematic analysis of its school and society-related criticism and his idea of learning web. Illich's purpose is to show that new educational relationship is possible and it would simultaneously increase educational equality. Illich's production is a demand for the liberation of education, the preservation of autonomy, and increasing respect for independent research.

Keywords: Ivan Illich, school, learning, web, education, media.

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı, Ivan Illich'in (1926 – 2002) düşüncelerine dayanarak, yeni bir eğitimsel ilişki (öğrenme ağı) yaratmada eğitimin gücünü ve olanakları irdelemektir. Bu yansıtıcı makale özellikle, Illich'in 1970'lerdeki üretimlerine dayanmakta ve okul ve toplum ilişkili eleştirisinin ve öğrenme ağı düşüncesinin sistematik bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Illich'in amacı yeni eğitimsel ilişkinin hem mümkün olduğunu hem de eş zamanlı olarak eğitimsel eşitliği artıracağını göstermektir. Illich'in üretimi eğitim özgürlüğü, özerkliğin korunması ve bağımsız araştırmalara duyulan saygının artmasını talep etmektedir.

Anahtar söcükler: Ivan Illich, okul, öğrenme ağı, eğitim, medya.

INTRODUCTION

Ivan Illich (1926-2002) is one of the most critical educational theorists and practitioners in the 20th century. (Finger & Asún, 2001) In the present article, we concentrate on his idea of learning web by systematic analysis. It is based on study in which Illich's critique of the educational system was subject to an immanent reconstruction and the concepts of *professional dominance*, *modernized poverty* and *schooled imagination* are analyzed in depth. (Saurén, 2008)

The greatest challenge in interpreting Illich's work is that his books should not be interpreted literally but as the revealers of self-evidence in society and as the pioneers of a new paradigm. Today, Illich's utopia for the learning web however is a reality in the new media which makes his ideas worth reanalyzing as today it is possible to have a look at it from a totally different perspective. Theoretically, it is almost impossible to place Illich's eclectic thinking within any separate or distinct trend. Illich's work can be seen as parallel to two of his *coeval witnesses,* Primo Levi and Paul Celan. (Hoinacki, 2002) While analyzing Illich's idea of learning web, we must remember his statement: "We have to live and work, we have to set an example of the time we wish to create". (Illich, 1970) This statement reminds us that creating a new educational system is not only building a structure, but also structuring new habits – new learning society. According to David Cayley (1992), Illich has been an exception among scholars because he has claimed that *the habits of the heart* are as significant to the sophistication as *the habits of the head.*

THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE

According to Illich, social change can begin with creating a new learning environment and liberating teaching. In order to advance social change, he has revealed *the social structure and illusions (phenomenology)* of the school system and proposed *a model for recovery (learning webs).* Educative society does not exclude all the schools but those ones that do not offer their students a chance to quit school going. (Illich, 1973, p. 24) The core of Illich's criticism is that people should be allowed to decide autonomously.

The most essential and famous writings of Illich's production was published in the 1970s. According to Finger and Asún (2001, p. 9), Illich's popularity was connected to the social movements of the 1970s. In the 1970s, when students were complaining about the crises in education during the backwash of the 1968 agitation, Illich suggested the exclusion of schools and teaching via learning webs as the option. At the same time, a report concerning education *Learning to Be the World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (1972) was published by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) under Faure. That report presented the vision of life-long learning aiming at people's harmonious development through scientific humanism, creativity, and participation. Clearly, Illich's criticism towards education and the institutionalizing role of UNESCO indeed interconnect. (Finger & Asún, 2001, p. 19)

CIDOC-institution established by Illich in 1961 can be regarded as the model for learning webs. Its purpose was to be a center of intellectual conversation and reasoning. The aim was to gather philosophers to discuss and think over topical questions. This kind of collaborative form was part of the era when for example the emergence of counter cultures, awareness and criticism, as well as the pedagogy of liberation were manifested.

The aim of this article is to dissect Illich's model for learning wed in a way that it could be utilized when creating concepts for the social spaces produced by the new media and learning opportunities they offer.

ILLICH'S CRITICISM OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Illich (2004) considers that individuals learn merely by participating autonomously in the encounters significant to themselves. In Illich's opinion, it is problematic that teaching is carried out through the *ritualization of progress* in schools. In the present system, attendance guarantees valuable learning, and upholds the presumption that "the increase of input" will automatically increase the value of output, which means that learning is measured by degrees and certificates. There is a significant difference between education and learning. The values provided by school rituals are quantifiable and school accustoms children to a world where everything is

measurable and the competition between human beings is more desirable than *personal development.* Illich (2004) defines personal development as growth in disciplined disagreement that is not measurable or comparable to others' achievements. Instead, it is creative, surprising, and immeasurable learning. (Illich, 2004) Illich (1978a) argues that several decades of trust in education has turned *knowledge* into *commodity*.

Postman and Weingartner (1970) state that the school system has not realized how this accelerating change will affect our time, and that the young will need the kind of abilities and attitudes that help to control the changing concepts in the changing world. In the name of the ritualization of progress, the school is selling industrialized curricula—the commodity collections that have been built like other commodities and which are distributed to the consumer student personally by the professional teacher. The ritualization and measurement are also being embodied by registering carefully the reactions of the final consumer of the curriculum at the end of this educational product, in order to get research results to enhance the planning of the next model. (Illich, 2004; Illich, 1978a, 1978b) Thus, learning in schools means consuming the learning elements that are the results of studied, planned, and supported programs.

However, Illich's work can be analyzed as a part of the critical idea of education and radical education in a way that suggests that in Illich's (2004) idea, the structural changes inside school are not enough. Replacing the modern schooling institution with learning nets lies behind a change that enables truly equal learning. Illich's thought typifies radical humanism (Fromm, 1970, p. 7).

The idea of the in-fighting between dominant culture and sub-culture which is typical of critical pedagogy can be found in Illich's texts. Dominant culture and sub-culture do not seem to represent juxtaposition but options in Illich's thinking. Illich does not encourage his readers to resistance but to world-changing *actions in everyday life.*

LEARNING WEB – LEARNING SOCIETY

Illich (2004, p. 73) believes in his utopia that we can offer new connections to the world for students – to educative society. In order to Illich's deschooling society to be realized, we should be aware of the need for new kind of research, counterfoil research, that is not just changing focuses as it does not produce equality but just change in focuses. Illich points out that research should expand from its present state: "At the same time, it is important to expose such research that the governing institutions spend great amounts of money in order to be able to market their own products more and more efficiently". (Illich, 1978a, p. 65)

The features of educative society are individuality, autonomy, action, unexpectedness, and hope. Typical of Illich's (2004) criticism towards the school system is the demand for making operational learning possible. According to Illich, operational learning is essential because people learn near the things. Related to a child's development environments, Rogoff (2003) considers salient how a child and his/her behavior is regarded: "whether it is seen as a part of a community, and of how wide community; whether it is seen as a part of a small community near centered action or whether a child's behavior is seen as a separate, researchable detail". It is essential to understand Rogoff's (2003) classification when evaluating school and the required changes for school. Illich has focused his criticism on the school system because it concerns all of us and acts an institution that accustoms us to the exercise of power. At school, children are seen as a part of the school community and where it is especially assessed what kind of role a child can take in other communities and society. Educative society includes linguistic richness and utility value without the corruption of language produced by professional language and artificially created needs. (Illich, 1978a, p. 29; 1978b, p. 57–58)

Educative society highlights meaningful and local life that enables citizens' autonomy, mutual interaction, and political awareness. Illich wants to break the traditional teaching process and extends the learning process in a learner's environment. Simultaneously, Illich's model can be seen to construct a model of *complicated learning environment*. (Bartunek, Gordon & Weathersby, 1983) Implementing educative society with learning webs requires giving up the traditional way of problem solving that pursues creating increasingly efficient bureaucratic

machinery by changing their focuses. That means influencing the quality of administration and the forms of power without intervening in the structure. Illich (2004, p. 78–79) has described a learning web that enhances learning and named four ways that students of every age group can implement various learning opportunities:

a. *a reference services to educational objects, that allows everyone to familiarize themselves with the tools and operations used in learning*. Learning tools could be stored available in public or at work places that they could be available for students in free time or during practical training periods. (Illich 2004) *People learn the best near the matter doing things that they enjoy but school makes people stupid and pushes them away from their natural ways of being chaining them in a controlled learning process*. (Illich, 1978a, p. 85; myös Illich, 2004)

b. *a skill web – skill exchanges, where experts can list their skills, contact information, and preconditions within which they can act as a example for those novices. In a skill web, teachers are teaching resources only when they agree to be teachers and can determine the time, place, and method needed in that as they please*. (Illich, 2004, p. 87)

c. *a contact web – peer matching, where learners with similar interests find each other*. With a contact web, people can describe a skill that they want to learn hoping that they would find a fellow student. (Illich, 2004, p. 79)

d. *the reference services to educators-at-large*, in other words *a catalogue that includes the contact information of freelancers, descriptions, and the conditions according to which their services are available.* (Illich, 2004, p. 78–79) According to Illich (2004, p. 88), a well-motivated learner does not need other personal help much than the instruction how to learn what he/she wants when asking for it. Illich (2004) suggests that a teacher could be selected by voting or asking advice from a teacher's previous customers.

With these means and contacts, students can self define their own goals and construct the educative society by their actions. Rogoff (2003, p. 157) notes that there are communities where the change in roles is not bound to age and the developmental phases are connected with socially noticeable events. Illich does strive for the liberation of learning so that learning would be tied to age; furthermore, learning

possibilities would be available for all regardless of age and previous education. "Changes take place in every generation due to the circumstantial influences." (Rogoff 2003, p. 3)

LEARNING WEB AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Illich divided the actual learning resources into two groups: *the teachers* who teach the skills and *the tools* that are needed in teaching the skills. He points out that *for the part of the most common skills, the person who illustrates the skill is the only human resource that we ever need*. Only seldom we recognize that we are receiving formal teaching. Unconscious learning takes place *especially when we are in touch with learning or working methods through action.* (Illich, 2004, p. 87–88) Crucial in Illich's (2004) thoughts is the idea that *the educational value of tools and processes must exceed the possible discomfort that occurs when separating students from the use of tools and processes*. Whittington and McLean (2001, p. 166) point out that Illich's model of learning webs is helpful when the form and meaning of retraining are evaluated. Furthermore, the authors estimate that in the future, the need for learning at work will lead not only the vocational education to transfer outside educational institutions but also to search for new models of vocational education.

According to Illich, compulsory education reduces the right of assembly that is defined as a basic right as it obliges people to meet each other at school. (Illich, 2004, p. 93) Due to this, the learnt obligatory presence marks all encounters narrowing democracy and preventing the communal political units from emerging. The central goal of the change, that Illich endeavors, is indeed to get free from the obligatory encounters and make everyone's right to assembly come true. In addition to this, Illich's change seeks the freedom to learn and define one's own expectations. (Illich, 2004, p. 103)

In educative society, *the creators and administrators of the webs* have to offer such freedom of learning that would make easier for students, skill teachers, educational leaders, and educational tools to meet. In this model, learning tools are available to everyone and matching skill models and peers is free of control. Furthermore, these encounters have to be *free of curricula and measurable learning*. One should, however, be able to receive guidance when asking for it. (Illich, 2004) Matching

people would be more enriching than suppressed pre-determined action. Illich does believe that matching peers would enable the emergence of local political units. (Illich, 2004, p. 96) In case of various groups, we could refer to the performance level of a group which results from group members' ability to find their roles and act in a group. Brown (2001) argues that social identity refers to an individual's own experience of himself/herself that is based on his/her membership in a groupIn the model illustrated by Illich, people who are thrown together and who share the same interests support each other's identity in a positive manner. In a learning web, a student works in an environment of learning, sharing, and caring. In order to the mentioned model to come true, Illich (2004, p. 103) introduces four theses of educational revolution:

a. *the liberation of tools* that ends the professionals' and institutions' control over the educational values of tools;

b. *the liberation of skills* which means the freedom to teach or practice skills (see also Illich, 1978a, p. 85);

c. *the liberation of critical and creative skills* when individual people have the possibility to rally people and hold meetings; and,

d. *the liberation from the obligation to mould needs to meet the available services;* in other words, the freedom to benefit from peers, select a teacher, instructor, or advisor.

The execution of a good educational system necessitates that learning is not bound to pre-determined goals and plans. In addition, the educational value of teaching methods has to be realized and their general and equal availability have to be guaranteed. (Illich, 2004, p. 103) However, a change in just a teaching method or arrangement is not enough, in Illich's (2004) opinion, because the hidden curriculum together with *the phenomenology of school* prevents the truly free and communal learning.

LEARNING WEB PROMOTES EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

The goal of the model that Illich has introduced is to enable educational equality and liberate learning to expand outside the school limits. According to Illich (2004, p. 78), educational planning should begin by asking *which kinds of things and people*

learners want to deal with in order to have learning take place. However, at the moment, educational planning has the administrative purposes as a starting point by evaluating primarily the learning goals. (Illich, 2004; Illich, 1973, p. 65)   Therefore, the change in educational system calls for dissecting merely the basic idea of the obligatory school than the compelling methods in use. (Illich, 2004, p. 65)

The educational institution described by Illich – a learning web – is a utopia that is meant to serve society that does not exist yet. An opposite question to this utopia is: "Why to build bridges that do not lead to anywhere instead of first governing a change in political and economic system?" According to Illich, the counter argument "underestimates the political and economic nature of school system and the political opportunities included in challenging the school." (Illich, 2004, p. 73) In the model of consumer society criticized by Illich, school planning is based on an assumption that sustains the power of professionals according to which life involves a secret that is only known by professionals. This is why people assume that the quality of their life depends on the amount of secrets they have learnt under the professionals' leadership. (Illich, 2004, p. 76) Rearing process would benefit from a society being liberated from obligatory schooling. Illich (2004) responds to those with doubts that it happens at the risk of enlightenment that exactly enlightenment is suppressed at schools. Thus, Illich (1978a, p. 81) sums up that in order to be able to educate them out from the prevailing model, people have to understand *the religious nature of schooling*. He refers to the fact that we do not question the power of schools and calls this "the blind spot of educational research that embodies the cultural distortion in society where technological development has been bound with technocratic control and freedom means freedom to choose between the pre-packed commodities." (Illich, 2004, p. 70)

Illich (2004, p. 70) argues that the structural option for teaching institution, research on learning webs, would represent *the actual scientific revolution*. The webs that aim at educational equality would be genuinely for the public good and Illich (2004, p. 6) suggests that four principle for studying would be sufficient for creating *a web of learning opportunities* where

a. *a child grows in a world filled with things* – the world is not restricted in school – the world is the school;

b. *adults act as the examples of skills and values* – everyone has the right to teach skills;

c. *peers inspire a child to argue, collaborate, and understand* – learners' mutual dialogue is a central part of learning;

d. *a child can be evaluated only by an experienced and appreciative person* because the attitude of the one who criticizes affects the evaluation and it always brings come consequences comparable to a diagnosis.

According to Illich (2004, p. 89), three dimensions can be distinguished in educational work: (1) educative information sharing as well as creating and maintaining a web, (2) advising pupils and parents how to use these webs, and (3) primus inter pares – an experienced advisor to acquiring education and in the difficult intellectual research journeys. Illich (2004) suggests, therefore, that briefing should be provided for parents, after which their role is to give children advice about what skills to learn, what methods to use, what kind of company to gravitate in, and what kinds of themes to deliberate. These opportunities are available but they are not considered as rearing opportunities because they are not under professionals' control and supply. Recognizing the value of informal learning opportunities would signify a remarkable change in thinking and could liberate citizens from the appreciation of measurable learning that serves the objectives of a consumer society. (Illich, 2004, p. 97) Unexpectedness and the autonomous freedom of action are the qualifiers of meaningful life in Illich's idea.

Learning is a utility value but teaching provided at schools alters it into exchange value. The teaching supply in learning webs is not a commodity because a learning web is *a convivial tool* and the basis of educative society that involves the political and cultural change. According to Illich (2004, p. 75), education would have constitutional guarantees in educative society and its tree purposes that serve an individual and community are

a. *to offer education to everyone who desire it regardless of time and age* – to guarantee total educational equality that is not bound to age or previous education;

b. *to empower those who had knowledge and skills to share their information with those who want to learn* – to liberate teaching and teaching methods from the power of institutions and professionals; and

c. *to give everyone who desires an opportunity to inform and publish their opinions in public* – to guarantee the absolute freedom of speech as well as the equality of learning and teaching.

In Illich's thoughts, the salient ground for educative society (despite the importance of fostering people's autonomy) is that educational equality does not come true in a consumer society. The demand for educative society is supported by the fact that any amount of money cannot fix the educational inequality of schools. (Illich, 2004, p. 5–10) Furthermore, critical human intercourse and participatory learning create meaningful society and place *pedagogical limits* to industrial build-up. (1973, p. xxii)

CONCLUSIONS

Citizens' schooled imagination and blind trust in professional services are the obstacles to the realization of educative society. (Illich, 2004, p. 23–24) However, Illich (2004, p. 102) believes that *unseating schools takes place inevitably and surprisingly fast and progresses all the time; and there is not any reason to make it faster or more slowly.* Illich's model of learning web can be assessed to pursue the avoidance of competition and information distribution that happens through social adhesion. It would result in cooperative participation that produces collective wellbeing. A group's social influence appears in the changes of an individual's attitudes and appraisals when he/she places himself/herself under others' evaluation. Evaluation can be feedback from a majority or minority. Social influence produced by the feedback of a majority is called equalization. (Avermaet 2001, p. 403–404) It is an essential part of Illich's thinking. At schools, the feedback of a majority is the one received from a peer group and functions as a socializing factor that produces equalization. From this point of view, Illich's description of how peer matching is

based on the same interests – not age – in his model of learning web becomes understandable.

The liberation of teaching from schools depends on the initiatives of those people who are educated at schools; therefore, everyone is responsible for their own liberation from school. (Illich, 2004, p. 24-47) Liberation necessitates recognizing the prevailing structure and becoming aware of the cultural and political influence of organizations with professional power. Illich (2004, p. 101) notes that *the call for true intellectual leadership has to ground in hope that skillful people take charge of the change even if the change cannot be turned into a program*. Besides new leadership, change requires creating such a society where personal actions are more valuable that *manufacturing objects and manipulating people*. According to Illich (2004, p. 101), peer matching and giving up curriculum will give birth to new educative leadership where pupils can select a master for themselves; then, a new kind of opportunity for sharing information will be enabled. From this point of view, Illich seems to have foreshadowed the new trends in education: indeed, his possible effect on directing learning and teaching at schools in the future may be surprisingly significant.

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