

Why I Left School and Never Went Back!

By Ahmad Damen



have never let my schooling interfere with my education."

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Our home phone rang one September morning and my mother picked it up. It was the school principal asking why I hadn't come to school at the start of the semester.

"Did you transfer him to another school?"

My mother put the phone to her chest, looked at me, and asked: "Are you sure you want to do this? This is your last chance to back away."

"I'm sure," I replied without the slightest bit of hesitation or regret.

She spoke to the principal again and said: "I'm sorry, but my son has decided he's not going back to school anymore and I support him all the way."

"What do you mean he's not coming back?!" asked the principal. "He's one of our top students. Tell him I'll make sure he won't be bullied anymore here."

"No, you don't get it. It's not really about the bullying," my mother replied. "He's not going to go to ANY other school. I will make sure he gets the best education here at home."

The principal laughed at this ridiculous claim and tried her best to learn the name of the new school that I was transferring to.

This conversation could be interpreted as the setting of a fictitious situation or a wishful thought in some child's fantasy world, but this happened for real, down to the smallest detail. This is a story about something much more important and real than anything that's taught in



schools today; a story about reclaiming education as a tool for seeking and acquiring knowledge. The school system has been obsolete for a long time now, but we still like to engage in the same old habits even if they are no longer useful. Our fear of change might



Home-educated students typically score 15 to 30 percentile points above public-school students on standardised academic achievement tests. They live active, social lives and are considered above average when it comes to matters of self-esteem and community engagement. Home-based education is practiced in many countries around the world, for example, the United States, Australia, Canada, France, Hungary, Japan, Kenya, Russia, Mexico, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.*



end up being the greatest threat to our future in this fast-changing world and in light of Palestine's continual struggle with occupation.

I was not suffering from any physical disability, autism, or psychological disorder. I simply hated school immensely, like almost all students today. Going to school every day was a nightmare and nobody explained to me the purpose of this continuous suffering. I was constantly pushed by the system to try to become the top student in my class. I realised that in the process I was losing myself, my purpose, my creativity, and my common sense.

Another brick in the wall

Students have every right to hate school and despise it. Why? Several thinkers believe that schools are simply another

form of modern prisons. Let us think about the similarities.

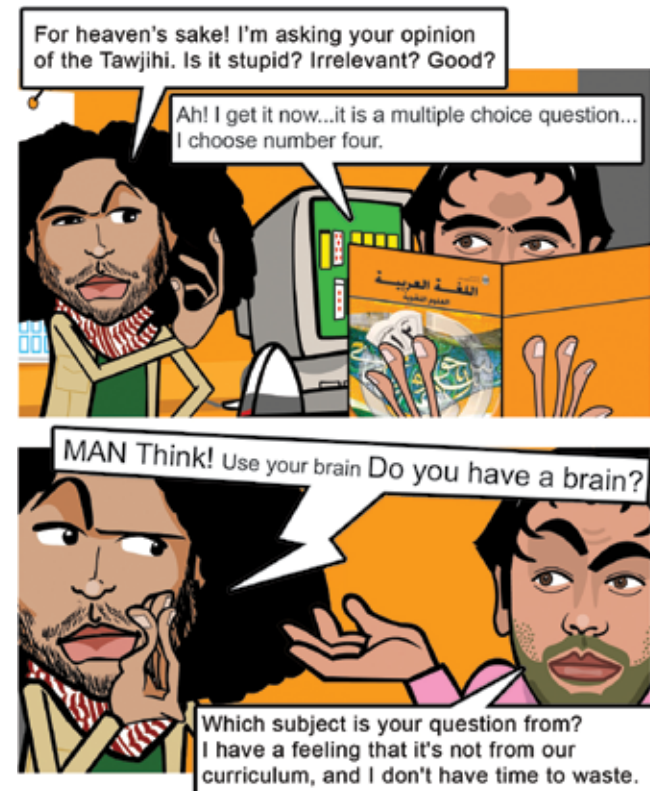
In both the school and the prison, inmates are restricted to one room for long periods of time and have to adhere to a common dress code. They even have to ask for permission to go to the toilet. They are treated like numbers and not as unique persons with various and diverse interests. They are each assigned a numerical value at the end of the year to facilitate comparison with others. They have to walk in lines and conform to certain illogical rules. If one of them breaks the rules then all are subject to collective punishment; negative re-enforcement is imminent and is the common factor. At the end of the day, nobody asks them what they would like to learn or what they would like to do with their lives. They are simply told to shut up, sit still, and trust the system.

This is because the school system was inspired by the eighteenth-century Prussian model of education. It was designed to prepare young children for future factory work. They were taught math and writing to help them with their future jobs. No wonder these subjects still carry more weight than others in today's system. Schools used to be part of the factory establishment; where do you think the idea of modern-day school bells comes from?

This system, however, has not proven to be effective or valuable today. We are told a number of myths in school: 1) School is the only way to get to college; 2) Going to school and then to college is the only way to secure a job; 3) What we learn in school and college will give us the skills we'll need later in life; and (d) School is a place for those who seek knowledge.



According to Sir Ken Robinson, every child is born with a deep natural capacity and a tendency to express these capacities through various and unique forms. The current system of mass education tends to suppress and push away students from their natural talents. Children are denied the opportunity to practice what they excel in, which in turn hinders their capacity to engage in the practices and professions they'd truly love in their own lives.**



All, and I mean all, the knowledge I acquired and now use in my life was acquired outside the school setting. I have three different jobs, one of them as the editor of the magazine you are holding in your hands. These skills are not easy to learn, and I would not have them if I had stayed sitting on my butt all day in school.

School (in its current form at least) is not for minds that learn by doing things or minds that prefer to experience solutions visually. These days, people who cannot sit still in the classroom are diagnosed with ADHD and forced to deny their own individuality and valuable qualities. Diversity is not ok in a school system at a time when diversity is all that matters for a healthy and balanced society.

A way out of this paradox

Most educational experts are likely to suggest small incremental changes to improve an already broken system. They are not going to admit that the system is obsolete because they have spent a long time in academic halls studying and refining this very system. If they admit that the system is obsolete, then they have wasted their lives chasing a ghost. The experts are not likely to admit it, but seriously concerned parents should figure it out on their own.

Who would want to send their children to such a prison and feel happy about it? It's either parents who do not have enough time to dedicate to their children due to economic or other pressing reasons OR those who – eager for some peace of mind – are happy to send their children away for the day. The second group's motive, in my opinion, is narcissistic. They are not as interested in their children's future or well-being as they would like to believe they are.

I don't have a ready-made solution for this complex problem. What I know is that we can at least be honest about what is happening right under our noses. We can open our eyes wide enough to see schools for what they really are. Knowledge and curiosity are powerful tools that have guided humanity since its very beginning towards advancement and development.

A very interesting project called Hole in Wall, by the Indian researcher Sugata Mitra, is one bright example. The project enables kids to invest a lot of time and effort learning without the aid of any formal educational environment. They are simply responding to their innate curiosity and need for self-development.

Students who would like to reclaim education and make better use of the 12 hopeless years they waste in school classrooms should be allowed to make their own decisions. Parents also should be offered various ways to provide their children with a better education. Unless there is a better system in place and until students are happy to wake up every day to learn something new and something interesting and beneficial on this journey called Life, then I don't think the law should oblige me to send my kids to school ... and neither should you!

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* <http://www.nheri.org/research/research-facts-on-homeschooling.html>

** http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sir-ken-robinson/do-schools-kill-creativity_b_2252942.html