**Finding Value in Exploring Summerhill**

**as a Modern-Day Educator**

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At a glance, the concept of Summerhill is chaotic, unrealistic, and idealizes the behaviour of children. To some degree, these might be true but there is still value in learning about Summerhill. In Neill's *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* he discusses the pressure to succeed that was experienced in normal schools in the 1960s, an ongoing struggle to this day. Summerhill is a school where students are self-motivated in their learning, promoting healthy self-esteem and confidence (Neill, 1960). Neill states that schools were teaching students to fit into a specific mould to contribute to the betterment of society (Neill, 1960). Schools are still promoting learning for success in the approval of others rather than the fulfilment of self as seen in the use of extrinsic motivation (Hayenga & Corpus, 2010). Teachers must continue to stand for the value of students learning with Amour de Soi rather than Amour Propre in their classes. The education system creates students who can contribute to this current society but does not stop to consider that the society they create is full of unfulfilled "robots" (Neill, 1960. p. 12).

Neill created Summerhill to be a school where students are self-confident and know that they are approved of (Neill, 1960). The environment at Summerhill "allow[s] children freedom to be themselves" (Neill, 1960. p. 4). Summerhill desires for children to reach their full potential but unlike normal schools, they believe children left to follow their desires will lead to natural interests and learning (Neill, 1960). At Summerhill, the school is happy to produce a student who becomes a street sweeper if that student is happy and reached its fullest potential (Neill, 1960). The lack of requirements of grades and certain academic achievements eliminate the school's part in extrinsic motivation. No adult will coerce a student into attending a class and therefore students who are in the classroom genuinely desire to learn and grow (Neill, 1960). Neill (1960) states that "Children when free have much less hate to express than children who are downtrodden. Hate breeds hate, and love breeds love. Love means approving of children, and that is essential in any school. You can't be on the side of children if you punish them and storm at them. Summerhill is a school while the child knows he is approved of" (p. 8). These children are not measured against one another are self-assured and not constantly comparing to gain approval (Neill, 1960). There are still social aspects of comparison among peers but students who aren't being scrutinized for not reaching the academic ideal are unlikely to make others feel lesser by bullying on the playground. By eliminating the feeling of potential inadequacy students focus less on success and more on learning.

In the Summerhill article, Neill (1960) raises concern towards how normal schools covert students into "will-less adults" (p. 12). Normal schools "fashion them into accepters of the status quo - a good thing for a society that needs obedient sitters at dreary desks, standers in shops, mechanical catchers of the 8:30 suburban train - a society, in short, that is carried on the shabby shoulders of the scared little man - the scared-to-death conformist" (Neill, 1960, p. 12). Though schools focus on IEPs and the need for special education, the purpose of fitting children into a mould is still widely accepted based on creating contributing members of society. A study by Hayenga and Corpus (2010) examined the effectiveness of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as the quality of motivators in middle school students. In this study, "Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a task for its own inherent rewards whereas extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a task in order to attain some separable outcome—such as approval from authority figures or special privileges in the classroom" (Hayenga & Corpus, 2010, p. 371). The study found that students with a ratio of high intrinsic motivation and lower extrinsic motivation of good quality were the most successful academically (Hayenga & Corpus, 2010). It shows the value of students' self-motivation leading to success in school, whereas when motivation from coercion is mostly used, it is not enough (Hayenga & Corpus, 2010). While teachers may promote lessons in a way that students are intrinsically motivated, the requirement for students to reach a certain academic level ensures there will always be an element of negative extrinsic motivation. Schools have and will continue to celebrate achievement concerning letter grade rather than personal growth.

Despite teachers' efforts to encourage positive development, students will continue to struggle to live a fulfilling life when taught that success is measured by other authoritative power whether parents, school or government. Neill (1960) says that "the function of the child is to live his own life - not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots" (p. 12). If educators want a society where students strive for happiness and fulfilment through passion and success rather than pleasing others, then they must create an environment where the definition of accomplishment is not simply determined by a checklist of academic abilities. Rousseau separates these two ways of self-love or self-confidence into Amour de Soi and Amour Propre (McDonough, 2020). In schools, there is a focus on Amour Propre by conditioning students to view success dependent on others' approval. This is supported by the wide use of extrinsic motivators in the education system. When teachers encourage Amour de Soi, self-interest is perfectly balanced with the care of others and students can gain positive freedom, finding fulfilment.

Some might argue that students gain positive freedom through learning compulsory elements (McDonough, 2020). While this is true that there are elements of positive freedom, when looking at what society schools mould children to fit, it is one with much negative freedom. While it is necessary for a person to learn and grow, to what benefit is it to force a child who finds joy in woodwork anything beyond basic human anatomy. When emphasizing the importance of creating students who are contributing members of society it is also important to consider whether the society, we have created is bringing true fulfilment to people (McDonough, 2020).

While it's clear that elements of educations contribution/influence on society have improved since the 1960s, there are still parts that educators must work together to improve. Summerhill provides an example for teachers on how there is value in children being free to learn. In modern-day schools, students are forced to fit into a mould and the importance placed on reaching a specific academic standard is still favoured over personal growth in viewpoints of success. Teachers need to endorse prioritizing student wellbeing to fight for creating a society where people are living happy, purposeful lives in context to themselves rather than a group of elites.

**Reference:**

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