

Jeff Landale

Medford, MA

Asma Abbas

Political Studies

The Emancipatory Potential of Unschooling

Unschooling is a pedagogical philosophy pioneered by educationist John Holt in the 70s and 80s and has been written about and lived by others up until the present day. Reacting to the failure of schools to respond to students as subjects with self-direction rather than objects to be formed in a preconceived image, unschooling is a learner-led pedagogy, in which the student chooses what to

looking at the historical precedents, major authors, and the transformation of the movement as new modes of communicating, new authors, and new readers appear.

The analysis will consist of a political exegesis of the movement, parsing out the anarchist and libertarian impulses to move away from the state (whether by retreating into the private sphere or avoiding



study, when and where to study it, how to approach it, and so on. Unschooling explicitly describes itself as emancipatory.

My thesis will contain a description of unschooling, an analysis for emancipatory social and political implications and potentials, and a critique. The descriptive part will describe the structures of unschooling, differentiate it from other alternative pedagogies such as homeschooling, various private schooling systems such as freeschools or Montessori, and examine the history of unschooling both as a pedagogical philosophy and as a social movement,

the state entirely), theories of childhood development underpinning unschooling, and a theory of the development of an autonomous subject central to the unschooling pedagogical philosophy.

Finally, the critique will situate the analysis of unschooling within the project of an emancipatory pedagogy, as imagined by thinkers such as Paulo Friere, and by doing so examine the emancipatory potentials embedded within unschooling as well as the threat that unschooling can subtly recreate the same social structures as before, albeit this time hidden under a newly “naturalized” garb.