

P.L. Deshpande

Naiksaheb

SIXTEEN OR SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO I was working in the Directorate-General of All India Radio in Delhi. We were discussing in a meeting with the Director-General a series of talks on education for the National Programme. While the names of various educationists of an all-India reputation were being suggested, I made a mention of Mr J.P. Naik. The Director-General, Mr Jagdish Chandra Mathur, an ICS officer and a keen educationist himself, almost jumped from his chair and asked me:

“How do you happen to know Mr Naik?”

“My Guru”, I said.

“Same here”, said Mr Mathur.

The subject for discussion for the next 15 to 20 minutes was J.P. Naik, the man and his mission.

Naiksaheb, as we all affectionately call him though there is nothing of the proverbial “Saheb” in him, was not so widely known in the Delhi official circles then as he now is. Delhi has a habit of knowing people and valuing them by the official posts they hold. Naiksaheb did not hold any such post then. Mr Mathur had to educate the members of that committee on Naiksaheb’s outstanding contribution in the field of education.

“Where is he now?”, asked Mr Mathur.

“That’s one question, Sir, which very few people can answer about Naiksaheb”, I said.

I would rather quote Naiksaheb himself on his “whereabouts”. In a delightful article written for circulation among his friends*Naiksaheb

*This refers to the first article in this volume, “To Begin a Revolution with a Revolution”, written in 1965 when the Education Commission 1964-66, of which Mr Naik was Member-Secretary, was at the height of its glory – and labours. –Ed.

has let out the secret of his “everywhereness” and “nowhereness”, so to say.

I am not, dear Reader, a habitual dreamer. On the other hand, I sleep like a log and either do not dream at all or at least never recollect what I have dreamt, very probably because I do most of my dreaming when awake. (There are, of course, a few friends who assert that I hardly do anything else. But I am afraid they are a little unkind.)

So, there you are. Here is someone who like the seer described in the *Bhagwadgita* is fast asleep seeing dreams while the rest of the world thinks itself to be fully awake. It is a pity that the world does not have enough great dreamers like Naiksaheb who dedicate their lives to convert such wonderful dreams into realities which make life worth living. One has only to be by his side and watch him work. One feels exhausted by the magnitude of it. Yet there is an equal amount of pleasure too. It is like watching a sculptor chiselling out a statue out of hard stone. I believe this is due to a certain breeziness and ease in the manner in which he approaches and tackles the problems that face him. He just loses himself in the tasks on his hands with the ease of an under-water swimmer. And that is where perhaps we lose his track. Many a time I have found during a conversation with him that he was both listening and not listening. I wonder if there are one hundred different refuges in his mind for him to disappear, like the caves of the ancient seers where they could disappear, not as an escape from the world around them but to think with a greater concern on the problems of humanity and try if they could find out solutions for its ills.

Naiksaheb’s inward haunts can be extremely delightful too. One has only to have the good fortune to get an entrance into them along with him. They are not like the protective and lonely caves of the ascetics. They are more in the nature of treasure-houses of gems collected from oceans of literature, from thoughts that have illuminated the human race throughout the ages, and from his own experience, which is much stranger than fiction. Naiksaheb leaves one aghast by his erudition without making one feel that he is a Pandit. He has never indulged in impressing. As in a flower, the fragrance is already there. One should be lucky enough to get a favourable wind and possess a sensitive nose.

Though I would not pride myself on having a very sensitive nose, I can never forget the fortune of the favourable wind, which I had

years ago when my wife Sunita and I were driving with him from Kolhapur to Satara. It is about two hours' drive. During the course of our conversation someone made a reference to Robert Browning. And for the rest of the journey Naiksaheb lifted us and took us round the Browning-land. Line after line from Browning's poems started flowing out of him. It was not merely a feat of memory. It was a regular journey through that land of hope, of love, of sights sometimes full of clear sunshine, at others a little baffling due to the poet's cunningly putting a transparent veil on it and enhancing its mystery. Years have passed since then, but that blissful ride with Naiksaheb taking us round by the hand as it were is still fresh in our memory.

Theatre people, like us, I believe, are a little extrasensitive to the quality of human voice. Voice for us is not a mere vehicle of words. It brings along with it a distinct personality of its own. There is a natural quality of persuasion in Naiksaheb's voice. Even a casual "hello" from him suggests a sincere concern about others. Even when he addresses a crowd, apart from the conviction which he carries about what he says, this endearing quality of his voice makes you want to listen to him all the more. He always makes you feel that he is only helping you discover what is already lying hidden within you. If education attempts to take the students from the known to the unknown, Naiksaheb's teaching amply demonstrates this truth, whether it is a lesson for teachers in a training college; a public meeting, or just an informal conversation with friends. Half an hour with him, and you come out "a chastened man", as an eminent medical expert put it. Apart from his superb intellect and an unusual capacity for work, this rare quality of his silken and persuasive voice also contributes a great deal to this kind of "chastening".

To get back to the Browning story, Naiksaheb's recitation, I must confess, did come to us as a pleasant surprise. We had known Naiksaheb for quite some time but our conversation usually centred round education in general and rural education in particular. Naiksaheb's recitation and the tender discourse on love, with Robert and Elizabeth Browning as the point of take-off, disclosed something within him which was not only unknown to us but was also rather confusing. We realized our folly much later when we remembered that we had left him at the house of Dr (Miss) Chitra Naik who was then Inspector of Schools in Satara and was later to become Dr (Mrs) Chitra Naik. We had totally missed this third dimension, which made Naiksaheb's recitation so pleasing and so much in tune with the great

poet of hope and love. I feel ever grateful to that moment of luck which started the favourable wind. It is like being suddenly exposed to beautiful strands of music, with the experience ever vibrating in your memory.

THIS MENTION OF A MUSICAL EXPERIENCE takes me back to our first meeting. Though I take pride in calling him my Guru, I have never been his student in any of the educational institutions where he taught. I had lost my faith in formal education even while it was forced on me within the four walls of a school or a college. I met Naiksaheb some twenty-five years ago in Kolhapur and that too, of all the places, in a musical soiree. Mr Baburao Joshi, a legal practitioner – most probably by paternal compulsion – and a musician by choice was the common friend and host for the evening. The late Acharya Bhagwat, who was perhaps the dearest friend, philosopher, and guide of Naiksaheb, was also present on that occasion. There was a wonderful fusion of Gandhian selflessness and Tagore's unceasing pursuit of all that was sublime and beautiful in life in the Acharya's personality. For reasons best known to himself, he hid a tender heart under a rough exterior and a sharp tongue to match it. We know each other pretty well, he treating me with great affection and scantiest respect and I always touching his feet in all reverence yet suppressing my irresistible desire to pinch them. He never forgave my wife for marrying a good-for-nothing fellow like me though he had a paternal and immense affection for her. There were a few other friends who had come to listen to music. It was Acharya Bhagwat who introduced me and Sunita to Naiksaheb. The musical recital started and Naiksaheb's face gradually took on a strange resemblance to that of a passenger who realizes that he had boarded the wrong train after it had left the station and gathered speed. Later on I was to realize, with a sense of relief, that the performing arts such as dance, drama, and music were one sphere which had escaped his attention. The performing artistes should be thankful to him for that. He would have otherwise left many of us out of jobs, and made us take shelter under some school or another as schoolmasters which, in spite of Naiksaheb's best efforts, is still in many cases the last resort of the educated, semi-educated, and the maladjusted unemployables in our society.

Since I was not a stranger to Kolhapur, I had heard of Naiksaheb much before I met him, not only as an educationist but also as one

who in the course of official duties as Development Secretary in Kolhapur state had done a great deal to give that ancient town a new and modern look. I knew how he had brought down a number of old houses fully or partially to widen the roads and almost coaxed the simple Kolhāpur folk into believing that the new widened roads would even help them widen their outlook. He had established a reputation as a master town-planner, an expert on cooperative marketing of the village produce and had succeeded in creating self-confidence among the farmers in the surrounding rural areas. His “destruction” campaign had earned him an affectionate nickname, Pādā Pād Mantri – Minister for Demolition – from the people of Kolhapur who loved him and held him in the highest regard. There was no end to stories and legends about him — such as his filling the pockets of his famous half-pants and half-shirt with baked peanuts and munching them in the street while passing orders to his subordinates to bring down the obstructing houses and such other structures. There was yet another equally popular story about his working round the clock in his office in three shifts with his subordinate staff moving in and moving out according to the schedule and the boss sticking fast to his seat with a cup of tea and a handful of peanuts for his breakfast, and two cups and two handfuls of peanuts for his lunch. He always skipped dinner perhaps, they would say, to keep his waistline intact. It was also strongly rumoured and believed that he used the top of his office table as his bed with a few big size bound volumes of reports on education, agricultural reforms, etc., for his pillow, wound a towel around them for a softer touch, spread the morning newspaper for a bed-sheet – he had a fresh one everyday – and stole a nap or two between the shifts. The towel, people said, was perhaps his only other sartorial possession barring, of course, a pair of half-pants and half-shirts.

In a feudal set-up where officialdom always went with pomp and splendour and corruption of every sort, Naiksaheb’s austere living and extraordinary devotion to the welfare of the people in the exercise of his duties as a government servant was something which the poor state subjects had hardly ever heard of or seen before. Besides Naiksaheb being a Kolhapur man himself, many of them knew about his brilliant career as a student of the Rajaram College. They knew that he had sacrificed a comfortable future either as an ICS officer or a barrister at the altar of Gandhiji’s Satyagraha movement. They were fully aware of the fact that he had insisted on drawing a monthly

salary which was even less than that of a village schoolmaster, when he was entitled to ten times more than what he drew.

When I first met him at that musical session, his career as “Minister for Demolition” was over. But the intensity with which he studied the Kolhapur town and executed the town-planning programme suddenly came to my notice when I found him directing a stranger to a certain house. Naiksaheb was rattling off the various numbers and names of the houses near by with an ease that would have put a postman to shame. It looked as if he knew almost every house in the city and the name of its occupant and perhaps even the number of school-going children playing hide-and-seek with their teachers. It is amazing to witness his total involvement, and total withdrawal too.

I WONDER HOW MANY OF HIS ACQUAINTANCES know that he was probably the first “barefoot doctor” even before Mao proclaimed this idea to the underdeveloped world. He was given a two years’ sentence for participation in the Satyagraha movement in 1931. While he was serving the term in a jail in Karnataka, he noticed that some of the murderers, dacoits, and other convicts serving long-term imprisonments were assigned the duties of male nurses in the jail hospital. Their method of nursing the sick inmates of the jail was not far different from that of the tyrants who once upon a time passed as village schoolmasters and who were more inventive in the methods of punishment than those of education. Naiksaheb, who then was hardly twenty-four, requested the jail superintendent to allow him to nurse the ailing prisoners. He obtained his permission to borrow books on medical science from outside and studied them. After their release, most of the Satyagrahis opted for politics, some of them went back to their professions, and the shrewder among them secured offices of power after Independence. But young Naiksaheb went and settled down in a village in Karnataka and started his one-man free medical centre. It was here that he must have studied in depth not only the physical but the spiritual ailments of the villagers in our country and discovered that the root cause of their malady lay in the lack of education which could liberate them in the true sense of the term. He found an approach through his study of medicine. He went in as a political prisoner to the jail, came out as a doctor of medicine, again went in as a doctor of medicine in villages and emerged as an educationist. As he has no formal degree in medicine, he does not have any in education either. Yet years after he had given up his medical

practice, where he earned nothing except the blessings of the poor patients he treated, he is still well informed about the current developments in medicine. He once had a discussion with my brother-in-law who is an eminent gynaecologist in Bombay. After Naiksaheb left, my brother-in-law casually asked me where "Dr Naik" practised. "Nowhere", I said. He refused to believe that Naiksaheb had no formal education in medicine. "Even many of us who practise medicine are not aware of the latest developments in medical science to which Dr Naik was referring", he said, still insisting on calling him "Dr Naik".

It is said that after seeing the architectural design of "Shyamoli", a cottage built in Shantiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore for Mahatma Gandhi's stay, a world-famous architect had exclaimed: "Thank God, the poet did not practise as a professional architect. He would have left many of us jobless." Naiksaheb's phenomenal grasp of subjects varying from bricklaying to giving discourses on the philosophy of education and the tremendous range of interests he has must have made many an expert repeat what the architect had said. But here, again, one should remember that all the knowledge he has gathered and the deep interest he has taken in all that goes on in life is ultimately meant to serve the sole purpose of his life – peoples' education. I regard him as the real torch-bearer of the fundamental idea of education as spelt out by the two great modern educationists – Tagore and Gandhi. Said Tagore: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."

The growth of schools and colleges in the bigger cities with the English language as the medium of teaching was compared by Tagore with the growth of mushrooms. He uses the Bengali word *byanger chhata* ("frogs' umbrellas"). They bred human frogs in those city ponds, resulting in the creation of a new Indian society which talked like the British but never acted like them. They were severed from their fellow-men rotting in the villages in conditions of ever-growing penury. A few of these newly educated thrived and fattened while millions of their brethren were allowed to decay both physically and mentally. Thus the term "rural" came to be equated with ignorance and backwardness. It was Tagore who drew the attention of the "educated" to this lop-sidedness in Indian society. A country suffering from extra-accumulation of fat on one side and emancipation on the other was doomed to remain paralysed.

It is unfortunate that the anguish of such great minds as Tagore and Gandhi is not shared by most of the "educated" people, who still cherish the most unscientific notions about modernity. Gandhi's concept of Basic Education is perhaps the most revolutionary one in the field of education in modern times. It is, again, a great misfortune that this dynamic concept was choked to death by many of the Mahatma's own followers, who, after his death, tried with their own mediocre intellectual apparatus to imagine how Gandhi would have developed the Basic Education Programme. There is something rather tragi-comic about the way many of them handled this plan and twisted it into a lifeless ritualistic routine. I sometimes wonder how every dynamic philosophy in our country so easily gets itself transformed into a moribund ritual.

However, with his extraordinary intellectual calibre and first-hand knowledge of conditions in the rural areas, Naiksaheb succeeded in winning over educationists of international repute to the philosophy of Basic Education and its adaptability to differing conditions in different parts of the world. He could do this mainly because he refused to accept the ritualism which had entered into the minds and life-style of the Gandhians. Naiksaheb lives simply, dresses simply, and eats simple food. Yet he has never made a fetish of it. Even simplicity if it amounts to a ritual would sound odd to him. A ritual has its own appeal so long as the spirit behind it is alive. The moment the dynamic spirit, which is always in search of fresh ideas and plans of work, fades away, the ritual loses its impact and becomes a lifeless activity generating nothing. I have come across quite a few Gandhians who were never able to lift their heads above such daily ritualistic trifles. They refused to see the manifoldness of life. I have seen Naiksaheb move with complete ease in many different situations in life without compromising any of his principles. Wherever he has been, he has helped in lightening other peoples' burden and taken care not to be a burden to them by making any kind of demands to inflate his ego.

I HAVE SEEN HIM TOTALLY ENGROSSED in his work in the most uncomfortable surroundings. Once, while he was busy writing the history of the Department of Education of the old Bombay state during its centenary year, I came to know that Naiksaheb had come to Poona to go through some old office records. I was shocked to know that he had put up at a hotel called the Badshahi Boarding House. (One should not be misled by the word "Badshahi". Poona has

its own connotation for certain words and “Badshahi“ is one of them.) The room he occupied had hardly anything Badshahi or royal about it. It was cramped with three cots and a chair or two for the visitors. A naked bulb hung from the ceiling threw light on the disorder that reigned supreme in that “royal” parlour. Naiksaheb was sitting cross-legged on one of the cots. The other two were occupied by a wholesale onion merchant and a junior PWD supervisor on transfer. The onion merchant had brought samples of his merchandise as was easily seen from the onion peels scattered all over. The supervisor was supervising trunks, beddings, boxes of various shapes and sizes and such other domestic property. There was hardly any room left for a visitor. Naiksaheb’s cot was laden with files and records and other source material for the history of the Department of Education, a chapter of which he was dictating to a stenographer who had occupied one of the two chairs and was using his own lap as a substitute for a desk. The room smelt of smoke emitted by the railway steam engines. Street noises made any conversation impossible. To add to the din, there was an intermittent puffing and panting of those engines and outbreaks of shrill whistles which suggested anything from sheer joy to utter helplessness. An old fan added more noise than breeze to the atmosphere.

Unmindful of all this, Naiksaheb was giving the dictation. After a while he asked the stenographer to get it typed and send the other stenographer for further dictation. He had a severe cold and was coughing constantly. He told us some of the very interesting episodes he had come across while going through those records. I still remember the harrowing tales he narrated about the tortures suffered by the poor young Brahmin widows who had found shelter in Mahatma Jtirao Phule’s school for girls. They were found in classroom compositions written by these unfortunate young women.

NAIKSAHEB HAS AN ENORMOUS FUND OF STORIES and anecdotes. Most of them are from his personal experience. I wish he would write them out, especially the humorous ones. We were once sitting with him listening to such small tidbits till past midnight and rolling with laughter. That was the time when Sunita and I had decided to join him in a rural educational project in Malegaon in the Nasik district. The late Bhausaheb Hiray who was then Minister for Revenue in the Bombay state had started a pretty big rural education centre called Mahatma Gandhi Vidya Mandir. I used to teach in a college in

Bombay and Sunita in a high school in those days. Both of us left our jobs and joined this institution. Our visits to the Mouni Vidyapeeth at Gargoti, of which Naiksaheb was the main architect, had already converted us to his philosophy of education in the rural areas. We could meet Naiksaheb more often and watch him work from close quarters. There used to be endless discussions with architects, engineers, educationists, government officials; plans of various kinds were being prepared. There was no end to Naiksaheb’s trips from Gargoti to Malegaon, to Bombay, to Delhi. He would suddenly make his appearance at an odd hour of the day, with papers and files bundled in a bath towel under his arm. It could as well be at the dead of night. Naikshaeb blissfully unaware of the unearthly hour would pick up the thread from where he had left it during his last visit and start discussing the progress of the work, the difficulties encountered by us, and other matters relating to the project. (More than myself, Sunita had taken a deeper plunge into the project, though I am not averse to hard work so long as it does not involve me in mathematical calculations, drafting of constitutions, checking bills, etc.) Naiksaheb would even remember the measurements of the plinth level of some of the buildings that were coming up on the campus. In between the discussions Sunita would rush to our room which in fact was a fairly spacious yet unused bathroom in the new school building – and cook some food for him. I would quietly sneak out with Acharya Bhagwat and listen to his discourse on the stars in the midnight sky.

After finishing the work and whatever little food Sunita could offer him he would recline and before one could say Alexander he was fast asleep. Next morning he would jump into a jeep and proceed onwards. Sunita used to keep a pair of neatly washed and pressed half-pants and a half-shirt for him to change. That was his life-style, which we all admired, liked, and even made a little fun of.

UNFORTUNATELY THE MALEGAON EXPERIMENT FAILED to take shape on the lines on which it was planned out. I went to the world of performing arts, where angels like Naiksaheb fear to tread and our meetings became very infrequent. Years after that I met him in Delhi. He was an important man in Delhi, now that he was holding an important post in the Ministry of Education. Naiksaheb invited me to dinner and even suggested that we meet at eight in the evening. I was not exactly happy to find Naiksaheb getting into the formal ways and etiquette of the Delhiwallahs and inviting me to dinner and to add

insult to injury even suggesting the time of the dinner. Punctuality, I knew, had never been his strong point.

I went to the address he had given me at the appointed hour. It was raining cats and dogs and I had to wade my way through knee-deep water to get into the building after getting out of the taxi. It was quite a huge building and a floor or two, I thought, were used as hostels. Someone guided me to Naiksaheb's room. And there he was sitting on a cot with files and piles of books around, and a junior officer helped me take a few away from the chair where Naiksaheb asked me to sit and relax till he finished a little business with that officer. But for the din and noise and the onion merchant, things were not much different from the Badshahi Boarding House. I heaved a sigh of relief for one reason and the junior officer, who was asked to meet him the next morning and dispatched, for another. We sat chatting for a good half an hour and to my great surprise, entered Chitratai from the adjoining room. Naiksaheb had totally forgotten to mention that she was in town. She too joined us in the conversation. Another half an hour and no dinner announced. It was getting near ten and I do not know if I showed some signs of hunger on my face but Chitratai suddenly asked me if I had had my dinner. "Naiksaheb had invited me here for one. . .", I said, and poor Chitratai almost rushed out to find if anything was left in the hostel canteen. I was more than filled from within to find that Delhi had failed to corrupt Naiksaheb. It should have been the most unusual experience for "the man who came to dinner" in any one of the houses in Delhi – the host finishing his dinner before the arrival of the guest, the hostess being kept completely in the dark about his arrival, and the poor guest waiting to share pot-luck with the canteen cook. Yet it was such a great relief to discover that Delhi had failed to change this man who lived in one of the most formal cities and refused to surrender his non-formality. Even Chitratai, an eminent educationist herself, seems to have failed to educate her husband on "How to invite friends to dinner and to remember it".

SUNITA AND I WERE AMONG THAT SMALL GROUP of Naiksaheb's friends who attended his wedding. It was a beautiful wedding in the lovely natural surroundings of the Panhala Fort. Among others, his life-long friend and close associate in the Indian Institute of Education, the late Rambhau Parulekar was present to give his blessings to the couple. In spite of his old age, Rambhau had never lost his impish sense of humour. He took me aside and closing his eyelids – a

characteristic gesture of his whenever he was up to making some mischievous remark – whispered in my ears:

"Do you know, P.L., J.P. and I have been very close friends for a number of years."

"I know that, Rambhau; he has a great regard for you."

"Not as much as he has for Chitra. Mind you, he has been never so punctual with me. This is the first time I see him arrive on time and more so at the destination where we all have been expecting him to arrive."

Old Rambhau is no more with us, but he is one person whom we will all miss on Naiksaheb's 70th birthday celebration. And the other one is the late Acharya Bhagwat. But there are hundreds who will be wishing Naiksaheb a long and a happy life. One is surprised to find how from some unexpected corners one gets a spontaneous response to the very mention of Naiksaheb's name. At an international seminar in Vienna in 1974, I presented a paper on "The Impact of Modern Music on Youth in Rural Areas in India". During the course of the discussion that followed I referred to some observations made by Naiksaheb. I was sitting next to a Malaysian-Chinese dignitary from UNESCO. He turned to me and told me that he knew J.P. very well.

"And how's that?", I asked him.

"My Guru", he said.

An eminent thinker like Gunnar Myrdal quotes Naiksaheb profusely in his book, *The Asian Drama*. He has been rightly described as the educator of educators. He is honoured, respected, and invited for consultations and advice by countries all over the world. He once suddenly dawned before us in the lounge of the famous Dai-Ichi Hotel in Tokyo.

"What brings you here?", he asked me.

"The Japanese Kabuki, the Nov —"

"And the cherry blossom", said my wife.

"And you, Naiksaheb?"

"The primary education of the Japanese people", Naiksaheb said.

A couple of Japanese had already started bending and unbending before him and off he went with them for a meeting with the Japanese educationists.

Dai-Ichi is a five-star hotel. It was pretty cold even inside the lounge. Naiksaheb was wearing a khadi *achkan* and *chudidar* but the scarf which he wound round his head and chin to protect his ears from the chill outside was absolutely in the style of a villager out to sell

fresh vegetables in the early hours of the day in the weekly bazar of a town near by.

He has always carried within him that tiny little village Bahirewadi, where he was born 70 years ago. Here is a man who has always been up to date in his information, most modern in his ideas, contemporary in his attitude towards life, yet no power on earth has been able to sever him from his roots in rural India.

It was Gandhi who said that every project which men in authority undertook should have one basic thought behind it, viz. the betterment of the poor man's life in our country. And the only person who has become "powerful by knowledge" and attained fulness by sympathy whom I have had the good fortune of knowing is Naiksaheb. He is the one who, to quote the poet again, has realized as a teacher of teachers that "we rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar".

It is really a very happy coincidence that Naiksaheb should have made his first appearance in the world in a small remote village on 5 September, which is celebrated as the Teachers' Day in our country. His mission in life even at the age of 70 seems to me to see that in a country like ours, where the bulk of the population lives in the villages, every day should look like the Teachers' Day, with every villager fired by the desire to learn and every teacher yearning to teach.

His favourite poet Browning has, I am sure, given him a *mantra* as it were of six immortal words: "The best is yet to be." "Age cannot wither, not custom stale" the incorrigible optimist that Naiksaheb is.

Ivan Illich

The Alternative to Schooling

FOR GENERATIONS WE HAVE TRIED to make the world a better place by providing more and more schooling, but so far the endeavour has failed. What we have learnt instead is that forcing all children to climb an open-ended educational ladder cannot enhance equality but must favour the individual who starts out earlier, healthier, or better prepared; that enforced instruction deadens for most people the will for independent learning; and that knowledge treated as a commodity, delivered in packages, and accepted as private property once it is acquired, must always be scarce.

People have suddenly become aware that the endeavour of public education by means of compulsory schooling has lost its social, its pedagogical, and its economic legitimacy. In response, critics of the educational system are now proposing strong and unorthodox remedies that range from the voucher plan, which would enable each person to buy the education of his choice on an open market, to shifting the responsibility for education from the school to the media and to apprenticeship on the job. Some individuals foresee that the school will have to be disestablished just as the church was disestablished all over the world during the last two centuries. Other reformers propose to replace the universal school with various new systems that would, they claim, better prepare everybody for life in modern society. These proposals for new educational institutions fall into three broad categories; the reformation of the classroom within the school system; the dispersal of free classrooms throughout society; and the transformation of all society into one huge classroom. But these three approaches – reformed classroom, the free classroom, and the worldwide classroom – represent three stages in a proposed escalation of education in which each step threatens more subtle and more pervasive control than the one it replaces.