

PREFACE

Schools are like radars. Through them we can discern the nature of our society. At the same time, we can apply other types of knowledge about that society in an effort to understand why our schools have acquired their current form.

It is important to understand our schools. They represent nine years of life for all of us, and twelve to fifteen years for many. Schools are marked by the surrounding society, but also leave their mark on us. This makes it necessary to acquire an experiential understanding of what makes a school a school. This is the underlying motivation of this book.

The book will have many shortcomings. If I have but one advantage in writing about this theme, it is that of being an outsider harboring few assumptions about schools. Yet this will also increase the chances of losing my way. There is certainly a great deal that has not been accurately perceived, and educationists might have expressed themselves in stronger terms. In this context, there is one thing that I hope some readers will keep in mind: this is not a book about teachers.

Nor is it a book about students. This is a book about social life. I have a strongly held belief that most people do the best they can within the framework of their social circumstances. It is the framework that interests me, and only parts of the framework. There is no need to repeat what is commonly said about schools.

For that reason, much more could have been said in each section of this book; arguments and counterarguments could have been raised, and conclusions drawn, about the doubtfulness of the case I am making. These deliberations have been left out. Readers are free to entertain any such doubts as they see fit. I have tried to carve out a whole. Polishing may hinder contact with the object. I have something important to say. And I want to say it now.

—*Nils Christie*
Oslo, September 1971

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If Schools Didn't Exist

A Study in the Sociology of Schools

By: Nils Christie

Edited by: Lucas Cone, Joachim Wiewiura

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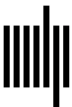
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