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John Holt

John Holt¹⁾ was a prominent American educator and advocate of homeschooling and unschooling. Born on April 14, 1923, in New York City, Holt spent his early years in the city and attended public schools. After serving in the Navy during World War II, he returned to New York and enrolled in Swarthmore College, where he studied physics and mathematics.

After graduation, Holt worked as a teacher for several years in a private school before moving to Boston in the late 1950s. In Boston, he became a teacher and then a school administrator, working with troubled and at-risk students. Over time, however, Holt grew disillusioned with the traditional educational system and became increasingly critical of it.

Homeschooling and Unschooling

John Holt proposed homeschooling and unschooling as alternatives to the mainstream state education system. He believed that traditional schools stifle children's natural curiosity and creativity, and that they fail to meet the needs and interests of individual children.

“Children do not need to be made to learn to be better, told what to do or shown how. If they are given access to enough of the world, they will see clearly enough what things are truly important to themselves and to others, and they will make for themselves a better path into that world than anyone else could make for them.” from *“How Children Fail”*

Homeschooling is the practice of educating children at home, typically by their parents, rather than sending them to a traditional school. Holt believed that homeschooling allowed children to learn at their own pace and in their own way, and that it was a more personalized and child-centered approach to education. He wrote several books and articles advocating for homeschooling and providing practical advice and resources for parents who wished to educate their children at home.

Unschooling, also known as child-led learning or self-directed education, is a form of homeschooling in which children are not given a set curriculum to follow, but are instead encouraged to follow their own interests and curiosity. Holt believed that unschooling was the most natural and effective form of education, as it allowed children to learn in their own way and at their own pace.

In both homeschooling and unschooling, Holt emphasized the importance of allowing children to take control of their own education, rather than forcing them to conform to a prescribed curriculum or set of standards. He believed that children were naturally curious and eager to learn, and that they could achieve more when they were given the freedom to explore and discover on their own.

Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other persons' experiences, and find and make the meaning of our own lives. Whoever takes that right away from us, as the educators do, attacks the

very center of our being and does us a most profound and lasting injury. He tells us, in effect, that we cannot be trusted even to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value." from "*Instead of Education*"

Writing

In the mid-1960s, Holt began to write about his experiences as an educator and his views on education. His first book, "How Children Fail," was published in 1964 and quickly gained a following among educators and parents. In this book, Holt argued that the traditional education system stifles children's natural curiosity and creativity, and that it fails to meet their basic needs and interests.

Holt's second book, "How Children Learn," published in 1967, expanded on these themes and offered practical suggestions for how to create a more personalized and child-centered approach to education. This book was widely read and had a significant impact on the growing homeschooling and unschooling movements.

In the late 1960s, Holt became an advocate for homeschooling and unschooling, which he saw as an alternative to the traditional education system. He wrote several more books on education, including "Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education" (1981) and "Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story" (1984), which detailed his experiences with music education.

Holt continued to write and speak about education until his death in 1985. He is widely remembered as a pioneer of the homeschooling and unschooling movements, and his books continue to be widely read and influential today.

Complete Publications List

- **"How Children Fail"** (Holt, J., 1964)²⁾ - This book is a critical examination of the traditional educational system, and argues that it stifles children's natural curiosity and creativity.
- **"How Children Learn"** (Holt, J., 1967)³⁾ - This book expands on the themes of "How Children Fail" and offers practical suggestions for how to create a more personalized and child-centered approach to education.
- **"Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children"** (Holt, J., 1975)⁴⁾ - In this book, Holt argues that children have the right to make their own choices and live their own lives, and that they should be freed from the constraints of childhood.
- **"The Underachieving School"** (Holt, J., 1970)⁵⁾ - This book critiques the traditional education system from a social and cultural perspective, and argues that it is responsible for widespread underachievement among students.
- **"Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education"** (Holt, J., 1981)⁶⁾ - In this book, Holt advocates for homeschooling and unschooling as alternatives to the traditional education system, and provides practical advice and resources for parents who wish to educate their children at home.
- **"Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story"** (Holt, J., 1984)⁷⁾ - This book details Holt's experiences with music education and his views on the importance of music in education.

- **“The Right and Wrong of Compulsion by the State and Other Essays”** (Herbert, A., 1978)⁸⁾ - A collection of essays and articles on education and the rights of children.

These are the major publications by John Holt, and they continue to be widely read and influential in the fields of education and child development.

¹⁾ John Holt [Wikipedia](#)

²⁾ How children fail by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

³⁾ How children learn by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

⁴⁾ Escape from childhood by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

⁵⁾ The underachieving school by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

⁶⁾ Teach your own : the John Holt book of homeschooling by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

⁷⁾ Never too late by Holt, John Caldwell [Archive.org](#)

⁸⁾ The right and wrong of compulsion by the state, and other essays by Herbert, Auberon, 1838-1906 https://archive.org/details/rightwrongofcomp0000herb_z9f8

1. ^ Holt, J., 1964. *How Children Fail. (New Ed). (REV ed. edition)*. Da Capo Lifelong Books, ISBN 978-0201484021.

2. ^ Holt, J., 1967. *How Children Learn. (New Ed)*. Penguin, ISBN 978-0140136005.

3. ^ Holt, J., 1975. *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*. Penguin, ISBN 9780140218862.

4. ^ Holt, J., 1970. *The Underachieving School*. Pitman, ISBN 9780273403203.

5. ^ Holt, J., 1981. *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education. (3rd Ed)*. Lighthouse Books, ISBN B00SLU9KZC.

6. ^ Holt, J., 1984. *Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story*. Delacorte Pr, ISBN 978-0385287210.

7. ^ Herbert, A., 1978. *The Right and Wrong of Compulsion by the State and Other Essays. (Illustrated Ed)*. Liberty Fund Inc., ISBN 978-0913966419.

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