How to Grow a School - Notes

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Introduction:

You will find the words *sprout* and *grow* throughout this discussion because a good learning environment, the kind that meets children's real physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs, is like a garden. It begins with a seed,a vision of a better way. Then comes a sprout that must be carefully tended untilit matures and bears the fruit of happy, competent, purposeful, autonomous young people.

There is another reason I have used horticultural terms in the same sentence with *school*. In addition to teaching in and helping to run the Albany Free school a noncoercive, democratic inner-city school, for more than thirty years, Iam an inveterate gardener. And over my many years of teaching and gardening, Ihave gradually discovered how similar are the growth requirements of plants andchildren. Both need to be loved and nourished. Both need warmth and sunshineand open space. Both need to be appreciated and admired. Both need to be left alone to do their own thing, while at the same time they need to be protected from intruders and toxic influences. *Neither* need the addition of synthetic chemicals to regulate their development.

What my time in the garden has taught me is that plants don't require constant attention in order to reach their greatest height and beauty. If the conditions in the garden are right and everything is well established, then there is often not much for the gardener to do—aside from a little weeding, mulching, and watering—except observe and be patient.

There are warning signals to watch for when a plant is not thriving: a discoloration in the leaves, an infestation of insects, the failure of blossoms to setfruit. Each signal is associated with a set of possible causes. Perhaps there is a deficiency of an essential element in the soil. Or the pH might be off. Or maybethe plant isn't getting enough water or sunlight—or too much. The gardener's job is to interpret the signals correctly and make the necessary adjustments. Otherwise it's back to watching and waiting and, yes, admiring, because plants can feel the gardener's loving presence. Carefully controlled experiments have established this as scientific fact.

Patience is called for because growth cannot be rushed; it happens in its own time. There is no place in the garden for anxious managers. They make theplants feel anxious, too, and this only drags them down. And so it is with children. The learning process is as natural as the ripening of an apple or the blooming of a rose—a truth easily unseen in this era of hypertechnology and obsession with higher standards. Children are learners evenbefore birth. Their education begins inside the womb, where, bathed in their mothers' emotional experience and the mellifluous sounds of the immediate environment, they are already busy forming images of the unseen world outside.Some would go so far as to say that, just as the oak tree is contained inside the acorn, a fully developed intelligence already exists within every newborn, waitingonly for the right models and external stimuli to trigger its unfolding

We have gradually been conditioned to rely on the advice of so-called experts rather than to trust in our ability to learn from our own experience. We no longer risk letting our mistakes guide us to creative solutions to stubborn problems.

The entropic slide toward looking to others for answers lurks at the core of the issue I wish to address. Nowhere is it more evident than in the realm ofeducation, where schools are at once its cause and its effect. The ultimate—and

most insidious—result of the conventional educational model, as Ivan Illich pointed out many years ago in *Deschooling Society*, is that our minds themselves become schooled. Our ideas, our beliefs—our very thought processes—becomedependent on outside sources for validation. Our schools, in turn, simply mirrorthe culture that surrounds them. It's a vicious cycle.

Thus, I sense a certain danger in continuing, because we have no use for any more formulaic approaches, any more warmed-over copies of what was once a very natural and individualized task: helping our young learn what they need to know in order to be competent and happy as they move through life.

Above all, it will be my attempt to demythologize the artificial construct known as "school," which, like the Wizard of Oz behind his curtain of illusion, has inflated itself into something mysterious and foreboding. The following represents my attempt to throw back the curtain so that all may see how simple and basic is the process of educating children, so that we can reclaim it from the jealous hands of experts, bureaucrats, and academicians.

Chapter 1

Schools Worth Growing

Children brought the rest of their lives with them to school every day. She got to know their parents and learned about the goings-on at home. If a child came in angry or depressed, she likely knew why, and if she didn't, she would always find out.

Thus, a good school is an integral part of the child's whole world, not an out-of-the-way warehouse for the dry storage of youthful exuberance and imagination. It involves the child's whole being, addressing the needs of the heart as well as the head. This means that it fosters vivid emotional, intellectual, and physical experience. It is alive with motion, sound, and color. What is learned therein hastangible meaning and purpose. The goal isn't to "get through" a "curriculum" that consists of "subject matter"; rather it is to explore areas of genuine import and interest. Learning is relevant and exciting, and it is grounded in real activities that integrate different skills and branches of knowledge.

A good school recognizes the value of the exchanges between students. Again from *Teacher*:

> *From long sitting, watching and pondering (all so unprofessional), I have found out the worst enemies to what we call teaching. The first is the children's interest in each other. It plays the very devil with the orthodox method. If only they'd stop talking with each other, fighting each other and loving each other. This unseemly and unlawful communication! In self- defense I've got to use the damn thing. So I harness the communication, since I can't control it, and base my method on it. They read in pairs, sentence and sentence about. There's no time for either to get bored. Each checks the other's mistakes and hurries him up if he's too slow, since after all, his own turn depends on it. They teach each other all their work, sitting cross-legged knee to knee on the mat or on their tables, arguing with, correcting, abusing or smiling at each other. And between them all the time is this togetherness, so that learning is so mixed up with relationshipthat it becomes a part of it. What an unsung creative medium is relationship!*

In an organic learning environment, order isn't externally imposed. It isn'tderived from some standardized, sanitized, prepackaged source, because, asGeorge Dennison wrote in *The Lives of Children* (Random House, 1969), "The principle of true order lies within the persons themselves." Dennison once had asmall school for children on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and, like Ashton-Warner, he quickly discovered how the imposition of artificial order via teacher-generated rules, routines, and curricula only stifles the vital energy that fuels true learning.

A good school is a community, too—the real, not the euphemistic kind. It is a place of cooperative endeavor where everyone has a say. This is because communities are based on mutual consent, not the rule of force and top-down authority. In an educational setting that is at the same time a community, the children will be empowered to participate in school governance. They will havea true democratic voice in matters of substance, not just token participation in some form of adult-contrived "student council" that deals only with peripheral issues. In this way, students will consider the school to be just as much theirs as it is the teachers' and administrators'. They will

assume a natural responsibility for themselves, for each other, and for the school's well-being. Moreover,children who practice democracy at a young age are far better prepared to assume the mantle of citizenship when they take their place as adult members ofsociety. (Perhaps here lies one solution to the growing apathy of the American electorate.)

The competitive grading and ranking of students eats away at a school's sense ofcommunity. It pits students against one another, creating instead an atmosphere of separation and isolation—especially for the losers. Competition belongs on athletic fields and in gymnasiums, where the openly stated and mutually agreed upon goal is surpassing the opponent. It has no place in a community.

In schools that are communities, evaluation isn't a static, numerical measure of relative performance. Rather, it is a dynamic individual assessment of a child's overall intellectual, emotional, physical, and social development. Many schools accomplish this kind of evaluation by maintaining portfolios of a student's accomplishments throughout the year. Here at the Albany Free School, teachers,in consultation with the students and one another, write a narrative report abouteach student at midyear. The report highlights the student's achievements and outlines any areas of possible concern. The teachers then meet with parents to goover the report in greater depth.

Communities are inclusive by their very nature. Groups that exclude those who don't fit the mold or meet a certain standard are cliques, not communities. A community respects the individual differences of its members rather than demanding a uniform sameness.

It is important to remember here, however, that one of compulsory public schooling's founding missions was to "Americanize" those who came to this country in the nineteenth-century flood of immigrants, to create a homogenized consumer culture that would service both ends of the emerging industrial economy—a goal that has more than effectively been met. Recent efforts to introduce "multicultural education" into the schools are at least helping childrenbuild an awareness of traditions other than their own. A true learning community, however, will find ways to create and support an actual diversity among its members.

You may have noted that I have yet to use the term *freedom*. This might seem a bit incongruous, given that all of my professional experience has been in a "free school," but there is a good reason: Freedom, especially in the context ofchildren, can be a volatile, misunderstood notion. For some it evokes *Lord of the Flies*–like scenarios of a bunch of out-of-control young ruffians running wild and doing whatever they please.

In order to dispel such images of lawless anarchy, A. S. Neill, in his book *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (Hart Publishing, 1960), wascareful to differentiate between freedom and what he called "license." Students at Summerhill, in other words, are free to do what they want *as long as* they stay within the democratically arrived at laws of the community and aren't violating the sanctity and sensibilities of others. No one is ever free to cry "Fire!" in a crowded theater. That is license.

For others the idea of children being free in school suggests a bunch of spaced- out hippie kids wandering aimlessly through daisy-strewn meadows. It elicits thequestion "How will my child ever learn if he has the option to play all day?"Such a line of inquiry is quick to form on the lips of most parents visiting our school for the first time. I can only reply that here a lack of learning has seldom been a problem. It simply isn't necessary to coerce or manipulate children into learning, because they are naturally curious. They want to read compellingliterature, to write down their fantasies and dreams, to master numeracy, to discover how things work, to delve into the past and find out how it influences the present and future—in short, to become competent, knowledgeable, and independent.

Consider the words of a young Albert Einstein on the subject of schooling: "Onehad to cram all of this stuff into one's mind, whether one liked it or not," he wrote in his university diary. "This coercion

had such a deterring effect that afterI had passed the final examination I found the consideration of any scientific problem distasteful for an entire year."

"It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle," Einstein concluded, "that modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry. For this delicate little plan, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom."

When children are free to learn in the absence of carrots and sticks, when they engage in the process of their own accord and on their own terms, learning becomes a lifelong affair. Besides, children who learn for learning's sake, becausethey have located an inherent joy in the process itself, learn faster and more easily. And they retain what they have taken in because they are continually integrating the new skills and information into their daily lives.

a good school, whether or not it calls itself "free," allows children to makechoices, and lots of them, because it recognizes that becoming adept at making good choices is a prerequisite to any life well-lived. The practice of exercising daily choice over matters of work and play provides kids with an important opportunity to explore their own interests and passions. They discover what it feels like to have their inner motivation propel them forward, rather than a set ofexternal rewards and punishments.

Any school that is a true community recognizes that love is the most essential element of all. It bonds the group and generates the sense of oneness and belonging that all humans need to strive toward their highest purposes. In agreat many schools, however, the kind of caring and intimacy that go handinhand with love are inhibited by the tightly defined roles everyone is forced to play. When students are allowed to be only students, teachers to be only teachers, and administrators to be only administrators, the possibilities for interaction are greatly reduced. In a community, participants are encouraged to go beyond merely *playing* their roles. They are supported in *being* themselves. Only then do love and caring flourish.

The age segregation that is part and parcel of the conventional school model alsolimits the potential for togetherness. The mixing of ages in a school setting, on the other hand, creates an atmosphere that is much more congenial and familial.It is not at all uncommon in good schools for kids of different ages to become good friends, drawn to each other by mutual interests that transcend the numberof years spent on the earth.

Love involves spontaneity, touching, and always, of course, conflict—all of which most schools carefully try to keep out of their daily routines. Meanwhile, George Dennison's brilliant insight at the First Street School was that there are valuable lessons to be derived from allowing conflicts to play themselves out. Conflicts bring people closer when they are worked all the way through. If, however, conflict is suppressed by strict regimen and constant surveillance, theneveryone is frozen at "safe" distances from one another, and the unpredictable contact that contributes so much to love seldom occurs. Given the recentepidemic of school shootings, the actual safety of such an environment has beenthrown open to question.

The Albany Free School has a council meeting system to mediate the interpersonal rumblings that are inevitable in an environment where the participants aren't kept too busy and separate to be in close contact with one another. When members of the school community—teachers included—have a problem that they can't resolve on their own, they can call to order the entire school (except for the preschoolers) to help them resolve it. By prior mutual consent, everyone drops everything and gathers in a large circle on the floor in the school's meeting room (the preschoolers generally aren't included because it's hard for them to sit still long enough). The problem might be a conflict between two or more individuals; or maybe a precious belonging has been lost, stolen or broken; or perhaps someone wants to create or change a rule or policy.

The meetings are usually led by a student chairperson and are run according to *Robert's Rules of Order.* If the presenting problem is a fight of some sort, then the assembled group will begin helping the combatants to sort out what happened - who did what/said what to whom and why, how did it

start, and so on. The goalwill be to try to bring the various stories in line with one another, to air out the emotional content of the problem, and, above all, to get the upset parties talking*to* each other again, instead of *at* each other. A meeting will generally continuefor as long as it takes to help them reach a mutual resolution. Such forums take the toxicity out of anger by providing a safe space for people to air their grievances. They aren't a cure-all, but they are an effective way to keep resentment from festering, and to empower children to protect themselves fromharassment or unfair treatment.

Perhaps most important, a good school will "fit the child, and not the other wayaround," as Neill wrote in *Summerhill*. To illustrate this crucial point, he toldthe story of the time he encountered a boy breaking windows in Neill's cherished greenhouse. The young lad had only recently come to live at Summerhill and was filled with antisocial impulses. Rather than reprimand his angry new student, Neill decided to join him in his stone throwing. The very surprised boy, no longer feeling isolated and alone, soon laid down his ammunition and began to tell Neill what it was that was bothering him. After that he was able to put his destructive tendencies behind him and get more into the flow of the school.

Such flexibility is the hallmark of good schools. They will formulateindividualized strategies for children who are intellectually, emotionally, or physically stuck rather than insist that all students adapt to the same standard approach. Good schools will nurture individuality, not suppress it. They will continue experimenting with new ways of doing things instead of always relying on tried and true formulas that work for the majority most of the time. Theywill take chances and dare to make exceptions to their rules and policies.

At the risk of repeating myself, there is no single formula for a good learning environment, the essence of which is not to be found in external structures but rather in the people who make them up and the daily interactions among those people. Provided, that is, the foundational principles of a good school— organicity, relationship, community, democracy, flexibility, freedom, trust, responsibility, choice, love—are valued and nourished. When they are, the possibilities, as we shall see, are nearly endless.

Chapter 2 Deep Roots

In order for a new school to operate in a well-grounded fashion, it first needs to learn about its roots—the origins of the guiding ideals on which it is based. Moreover, any organization or social movement that fails to understand and honor its past is likely to lose its sense of direction along the way, perhaps permanently. This is because guiding principles are abstract concepts that can mean very different things to different people. Becoming familiar with theprinciples in their historical context ensures that their original meanings will be preserved and passed on to the next generation.

Also, anyone setting out to start an unconventional school would do well to know that there already exists a large body of accumulated wisdom—the best kind, the kind tempered by experience. Drawing on that wisdom can make it possible to avoid some of the pitfalls and blind alleys. Of course, everyone will still have to make his or her own mistakes. They are a necessary part of every experiment.

There is another, indirect benefit of a school's knowing the traditions from which it springs: In cases in which a school is trying something different in a place that is hesitant to embrace new ideas, or finds itself dealing with doubting parents, references to the work of earlier pioneers can create needed credibility and an air of reassurance.

The urge to find better ways to foster healthy, positive development in children is by no means new. It wasn't until the Renaissance, however, that any significant protest arose against the traditional means and methods of teaching children. The predominant approach to education until that time could beneatly summed up by the inscription found by archaeologists on an Egyptianclay tablet: "Thou didst beat me and knowledge entered my head." What schools did exist

were often staffed by teachers barely educated themselves. Discipline was harsh. The methodology consisted almost entirely of rote memorization and drill. Most children of the lower classes received no schooling at all, though they perhaps were the better for it, given the conditions in the schools they would have been forced to attend.

Among the first to challenge the educational status quo in any systematic way was the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is to Rousseau's natural philosophy of education that almost all present-day alternatives to teaching and learning can trace their roots.

Others soon followed, beginning with Swiss-born Heinrick Pestalozzi, whoattempted to put Rousseau's radical ideas into practice in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Prussia. Pestalozzi was followed a generation later in Germany by Friedrich Froebel. Froebel, like Pestalozzi, formulated aneducational "method" that would later be co-opted by mainstream schoolsaround the world.

As Froebel was nearing retirement, Count Leo Tolstoy decided to delay apromising literary career in order to start a freedom-based school on his ancestralestate not far from Moscow. Then, influenced by Rousseau and Tolstoy, Francisco Ferrer opposed the educational establishment in early-twentieth- century Spain by founding the libertarian Modern School in Barcelona. Both Tolstoy and Ferrer were persecuted by the State because of their anti- establishment beliefs, with Ferrer ultimately being put to death by the Spanish government in 1909.

At about the same time, the Italian physician Maria Montessori sought todevelop the therapeutic value of education, first in the asylums and later in her Children's Houses in the slums of Rome. Her contemporary Rudolf Steiner, meanwhile, was working to establish education as a means of personal and spiritual transformation. Like Pestalozzi and Froebel, Montessori and Steinerhad a worldwide influence. Their educational philosophies and methodologies became the basis for international chains of schools bearing their names.

In England in the 1920s, a young teacher named A. S. Neill was so shocked by the authoritarianism of the schools in his native Scotland that he founded a residential school where children could share power and responsibility with the adults. The publication of Neill's book *Summerhill* established the school as a model for a number of similar schools, found mainly in the United States.

The tumultuous decade of the 1960s in the United States brought forth a hostof widely varied educational innovators and critics too numerous to mention. One whose influence surpassed that of all others, however, was John Holt. Holtstarted out as a teacher in a series of progressive private schools and later becameso disenchanted with the state of American education that he ultimately challenged the very idea of schools. His voluminous writings would eventually influence an entire generation of parents to consider teaching their children at home instead.

Also in the sixties, the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers strove to counter thedominance of Skinnerian behavioral conditioning in mainstream educational methodology. In *Freedom to Learn,* Rogers advocated a shift in emphasis fromthe conventional reward-and-punishment approach to teaching in favor of self- initiated and self-directed learning.

Here is a closer look at the seminal figures that developed and refined the principles underlying good schools:

Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) stood the contemporary model of education completely on its head. He began by taking a sledgehammer to its philosophical foundation, namely the Calvinist notion that children are inherently lazy and untrustworthy and that it is society's role to mold theirminds and characters into socially acceptable form. Rousseau assumed the opposing starting point: The child is innately good. Or, as he wrote in *Emile* (Basic Books, 1979), "There is no original perversity in the human heart."

It is society that is evil, not children, Rousseau contended, and they must be safeguarded from its contaminating influence. The problem is the way in which social institutions, especially schools, distort children into their own image,forcing them all into the same mold, regardless of the fit.

Rousseau proposed that the development of the child is a natural unfolding, nota mechanical process that needs adult management and regulation at every turn. Children are born to learn, and, if given a nurturing, stimulating environment in which they are allowed to follow their own natural rhythms and mature at their own pace, they will largely educate themselves. Thus, he doubted that there should be formal schools at all. Whether there were or not, however, he believedthat the aim of education should be the free and uninhibited development of thelearner.

Rousseau was a much better philosopher than he was a child psychologist or father. He assumed that babies come into the world without awareness or feelings, and he gave up his own children soon after they were born. Nevertheless, he presaged by more than two hundred years Jean Piaget's widely accepted theory that children go through a universal set of developmental stagesas opposed to their being miniature adults with only quantitative differences in understanding and capability. "Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling that are proper to it," he argued in *Emile.* "Each mind has its own form, according to which it needs to be governed."

The early intellectual training of children that was about to be institutionalized throughout the Western world was anathema to Rousseau. He recommended that formal academic pursuits, such as the study of mathematics, science, or geography wait until at least the age of twelve. Prior to that time, he said, children learn best by actively engaging with the natural world through firsthand experience. Rousseau believed, like Maria Montessori would a century and a halflater, that education should begin with a cultivation of the senses and not the abstract intellect:

> "No, if nature gives the child's brain the suppleness that fits it to receive all sorts of impressions, it is not in order to engrave on this brain the names ofkings, dates, the terms of heraldry, globes and geography, and all those words without any sense for the child's age, and devoid of utility for any agewhatsoever, with which his sad and sterile childhood is burdened." (*Emile*).

With regard to basic skills such as reading, Rousseau's attitude was equally relaxed:

> "A great business is made of seeking the best methods of teaching reading.Desks and cards are invented; a child's room is made into a printing shop. Locke wants him to learn to read with dice. Now is that not a clever invention? What a pity. A means surer than all these, and the one always forgotten, is the desire to learn. Give the child this desire; then let your desks and your dice go. Any method will be good for him."

Rousseau also attacked the prevailing teaching style of his time. For him, true teaching was based not on authority and control but on a loving bond between teacher and student, within which the two could explore matters of interest together. He strongly advocated what he called the "inactive method," which in plain language meant letting kids find things out for themselves. Or in his words in *Emile:*

"Young teacher, I am preaching a difficult art to you, that of governing without precepts and doing everything by doing nothing. . . . In the first place, you should be well aware that it is rarely up to you to suggest to him what he ought to learn. It is up to him to desire it, to seek it, to find it. It is up to you to put it within his reach, skillfully to give birth to this desire and to furnish him with the means of satisfying it. It follows, therefore, thatyour questions should be infrequent but well chosen."

Rousseau was aware of how paradoxical a figure he was—"Common reader, pardon me my paradoxes I prefer to be a paradoxical man than a prejudiced one." Nowhere is this trait more evident than in the elaboration of his concept of "well-regulated freedom." One last time from *Emile*:

"Let him always believe he is the master, but let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to

want only what you want him to. He ought not to make a step withoutyour having foreseen it; he ought not to open his mouth without your knowing what he is going to say."

Over the next three centuries, every freedom movement in education wouldwrestle with this very same paradox.

Pestalozzi

Though a native of Switzerland—the homeland of the Protestant reformer JohnCalvin—Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) followed Rousseau in his rejection of the pessimistic and essentially Calvinist view of human nature that was providing the philosophical underpinnings for the then-emerging system ofuniversal compulsory education in neighboring Prussia. The Prussian initiative was the first of its kind in the world's history and would soon become the modelfor similar systems throughout Europe and the United States.

Pestalozzi strongly opposed the Prussian educational methodology, with its military-style discipline and rigid routines of rote memorization and drill. From *Evening Hours of a Hermit* (University Publications of America, 1977):

"Yet there is nothing hard and compulsory in the methods of nature. . . .

The nightingale's song vibrates through the darkness, and all natural objectsmove in thrilling freedom—not a sign of intrusive compulsion anywhere. . .

. Man loses the equilibrium of his power, the strength of his wisdom, in proportion as his mind is compulsorily given up to the pursuit of an object. Hence the natural way of teaching is not coercive."

Children, Pestalozzi believed, are born with innate gifts coupled with a natural desire to learn. Early education should be centered on immediate experience. According to Pestalozzi, all learning begins with firsthand observation of an object and moves gradually toward the abstract realm of language and ideas. In *The Education of Man* (Greenwood Press, 1951) he wrote, "To arrive at knowledge slowly, by one's own experience, is better than to learn by rote, in a hurry, facts that other people know, and then glutted with words, to lose one's own free, observant and inquisitive ability to study. . . . Life itself is the true basis of teaching and education."

Pestalozzi developed his own approach to education in a series of residential schools on working farms for displaced war orphans. He insisted that histeachers respect children's own interests. The teachers were instructed to serve asguides and role models and to be more concerned with the needs of the learner than the subject matter.

For Pestalozzi, it is love that is at the heart of real education. Also from *The Education of Man:*

"Pity the educator who feels he needs only to practice patience. What he really needs is a sense of love and happiness. Teaching, by itself and in itself,does not make for love, any more than it makes for hatred. That is why teaching is by no means the essence of education. It is love that is its essence. Love alone is the eternal effluvium of the divinity that is enthronedwithin us. It is the central point from which the essentials of education flow."

Pestalozzi's success made him an international figure in education. Prussia's nascent public schools sent representatives to study directly under him and bringback his ideas. Later in the century, Horace Mann and other American educators would visit Prussian schools and return with their template, thus indirectly importing Pestalozzi to the United States. In both cases, however, onlythe mechanical aspects of Pestalozzi's approach to teaching and learning were extracted, and the spirit was left behind. As Ron Miller notes in *What Are Schools For?* (Holistic Education Press,

1990), the institutions that ultimately touted Pestalozzi as “the father of modern pedagogy” bore little resemblance to the intimate, happy orphan schools where he first worked out his approach.

Perhaps it was the following contradiction at the core of Pestalozzi’s vision that proved to be its ultimate undoing: At the same time that he was passionately advocating noncoercion, spontaneity, organic learning, and a loving relationship between teacher and student, he was also swept away by the messianic hope thata system of education based on his methods would rescue the masses of childrenwho were suffering from centuries of feudalism and internecine warfare. He wasunable to foresee the deadening effect that systematization would ultimatelyhave on his ideas.

Froebel

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), who studied under Pestalozzi for a time, shared Pestalozzi’s faith in the power of a child’s innate desire to learn. He gave great value to children’s natural insight and intelligence, believing that they, like other growing, living things, should be nurtured according to their own inborn developmental program, not some externally imposed plan. From Froebel’s treatise on education, which was also entitled *The Education of Man* (University Press of the Pacific, 1986):

> To young plants and animals we give space and time, knowing that theywill grow correctly according to inherent laws. We give them rest and avoid any violent interference such as disturbs healthy growth. But the human being is regarded as a piece of wax or a lump of clay that can be moldedinto any shape we choose. Why is it that we close our minds to the lessons that Nature silently teaches? Wild plants that grow where they are crowded and confined scarcely suggest any shape of their own, but if we see them growing freely in the fields we can then observe their ordered life and form
>
> —a sun’s shape, a radiant star springs from the earth. So children who are early forced by their parents into a pattern and purpose unsuited to their nature might have grown in beauty and in the fullness of their powers.

A forester before becoming a teacher, Froebel saw learning as a process that mustbe rooted in natural relationships and conditions. He was convinced that when children are free to learn in their own spontaneous, self-directed ways, with play an integral part of the process, they will learn joyfully and of their own accord. External rewards and punishments are entirely unnecessary.

Like Pestalozzi before him, Froebel was adamantly opposed to the rigid methodology and standardization of the state-controlled school systems emerging throughout Europe. Again from *The Education of Man:*

> Each successive generation and each successive individual should go through the entire pattern of earlier human development—as does in fact happen—otherwise past and present would be incomprehensible. He should not do this by copying and imitating, which is a dead approach, but by the living way of free and independent activity. Every human being should reinterpret this pattern freely, and express human potentiality in an entirely personal and unique manner, so that the nature of man and of Godin its infinity and its diversity becomes ever more easily discerned Must we go on stamping out our children like coins, instead of seeing them walk among us as the images of God?

In 1816 Froebel started an experimental school for young children known as a Kindergarten—“garden of children”—that would later become an educational model throughout the German states. Froebel’s philosophy ran so counter to mainstream thought that Kindergartens were eventually banned in Prussia in the1850s.

Meanwhile, however, Froebel and his Kindergartens had attracted sufficient attention to spark an international movement. His ideas quickly spread to the United States, where they were incorporated into conventional educational practice in a circumscribed form never intended by Froebel—as an optional yearof fun and games before the “real work” of education begins at age six.

Thus unfolded the very same irony found in the legacy of Pestalozzi: Froebel's conviction that childhood should be steeped in freedom, spontaneity, play, and individuality—which he was all too eager to bottle and sell—ultimately became the property of a mainstream approach to education that to this day remainslargely antithetical to these principles.

Tolstoy

Few people are aware that Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) once started a school for as many as seventy peasant children at Yasnaya Polyana, his feudal estate in mid- nineteenth-century Russia. The school occupied an entire wing of the ancestral manor house.

Tolstoy was motivated, in part, by his own scathing critique of the systems of compulsory education that were already well established in the German states and the rest of Europe and that were soon to arrive in Russia as well. From *Tolstoy on Education* (University of Chicago Press, 1967):

> [Schools are] an institution in which children are deprived of their chief pleasure and youthful need of free motion, where obedience and quiet are the chief condition, where every misdeed is punished with a ruler Not only does such a school breed loathing for education, but in these six years it inculcates upon its pupils hypocrisy and deceit, arising from the unnatural position in which the pupils are placed, and that condition of incoherence and confusion of ideas, which is called the rudiments of education.

Tolstoy objected not only to the prisonlike conditions of the schools, but also tothe dumbed-down mentality that created them in the first place:

> That strange psychological condition that I call the scholastic condition of the soul, and which all of us unfortunately know too well, consists in thatall the higher faculties—imagination, creativeness, inventiveness—give way to other semi-animal faculties, which consist in pronouncing sounds independently from any concept, in counting numbers in succession, 1, 2,3, 4, 5, in perceiving words without allowing imagination to substitute images for these sounds, in short in developing a faculty for crushing all higher faculties, so that only those might be evolved as coincide with the scholastic condition of fear, and of straining memory and attention.

Tolstoy saw through the official rhetoric that trumpeted public education as the salvation of the common man. He witnessed firsthand people's resistance to having the state assume control of a substantial portion of their children's lives, as discussed in *Tolstoy on Education:*

> Germany, the founder of the school, has not been able during a struggle of two hundred years to overcome the counteraction of the masses to the school. . . . In spite of the Germans' feeling of obedience to the law, compulsory education even to this moment lies as a heavy burden on the people, and the German governments cannot bring themselves to abolish the law of compulsory education. Germany can pride itself on the education of its people by statistical data, but the masses, as before, for the greater part take away nothing but contempt for them..
>
> . . . Even the new country, the United States of North America, has not evaded that difficulty and has made education semi-compulsory. And it is even worse in our own country, where the most cultivated people dream of the introduction of the German law of compulsory education; and where all the schools, even those intended for the higher classes, exist only as bait forpreferments of rank and for the advantages accruing therefrom.
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> . . . More than that, school is not satisfied with tearing the child away from life for six hours a day, during the best years of a child—it wants to tear three-year-old children away from the influence of their mothers. All that is lacking now is the invention of a steam engine to take the place of wet nurses.

Prior to opening Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy took an exploratory tour of German,Swiss, and English

schools and was appalled by the authoritarian posturing. After a visit to one German school, he wrote in a diary entry (vol. 1, p. 157), "Terrible. A prayer for the king, beatings, everything by heart, frightened, morally crippled children."

Tolstoy met with an elderly Froebel while he was in Europe. Although impressed with Froebel's more liberal ideas toward education, he returned homewith the resolve to take them even farther. Tolstoy was also influenced by Rousseau's philosophy of education; however, he entirely rejected his Social Contract, which was based on the Platonic notion that an orderly society depends on the subjugation of individual freedom to the will of the society. Thispointed toward one of Tolstoy's biggest complaints about conventional schools:the rigid conformity by which they operate. From *Tolstoy on Education:*

> From this conception has sprung and even now springs that eternal tendency of pedagogy to arrange matters in such a way that, no matter who the teacher and who the pupil may be, the method should remain one and the same. . . . Education is the tendency of one man to make another just like himself.
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> . . . School is good only when it has taken cognizance of the fundamental laws by which the people live. A beautiful school for a Russian village on theSteppes, which satisfies all the wants of its pupils, will be a very poor schoolfor a Parisian; and the best school of the seventeenth century will be an exceedingly bad school in our time. Tolstoy's commitment to freedom and individuality in education was unwavering during the three-year existence of his school, which was immediatelymade clear by the sign above the door that read, "Do As You Like." He firmly believed that education has no ultimate aim and that all learning should be freelychosen. Reasoned Tolstoy, as recorded by his friend and biographer Aylmer Maude in *Life of Tolstoy* (Oxford University Press, 1930), "No one, probably,will deny that the best relation between a teacher and his pupils is a natural one, and that the opposite of a natural one is a compulsory one. If that be so, thenthe measure of all scholastic methods consists of the greater or lesser naturalness,and consequently of the greater or lesser compulsion employed. The less the children are compelled, the better is the method."

By all accounts Yasnaya Polyana was a vibrant, joyful, exciting place, the atmosphere freewheeling and intimate. Learning was centered around the children's own interests, inclinations, and rhythms. The following are Tolstoy's own comments about the school, gleaned from the closing section of *Tolstoy on Education:*

> Like all living beings, the school not only becomes modified with everyyear, day, and hour, but also is subject to temporary crises, hardships, ailments, and evil moods.
>
> . . . The children bring nothing with them—neither books nor copybooks. No lessons are given for home. Not only do they carry nothing in their hands, but they have nothing to carry in their heads. They are not obligedto remember any lesson—nothing that they were doing the day before. They are not vexed by the thought of the impending lesson. They bringwith them nothing but their impressionable natures and their convictions that today will be as jolly in school as it was yesterday.
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> . . . The school has evolved freely from the principles introduced into it by teachers and pupils. In spite of the preponderating influence of the teacher, the pupil has always had the right not to come to school, or having come, not to listen to the teacher. The teacher has had the right not to admit a pupil, and has had the possibility of bringing to bear all the force of his influence on the majority of pupils.
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> . . . They sit down wherever they please: on the benches, the tables, the windowsill, the floor, and in the armchair. . . . In my opinion, this external disorder is useful and not to be replaced by anything else, however strange and inconvenient it may be for the teacher. This disorder, or free order, is terrible to us only because we are accustomed to something quite

> different, in which we have been educated. Secondly, in this case, as in many similar cases, force is used only through haste and through insufficient respect for human nature. We think that the disorder is growing greater and greater,and that there are no limits to it—whereas we only need to wait a little and the disorder (or animation) calms down naturally by itself, growing into a much better and more permanent order than we could have created.
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> . . . I am convinced that the school ought not to interfere in that part of the education which belongs to the family; that the school has no right and ought not to reward and punish; that the best administration of a school consists in giving full liberty to the pupils to study and settle their disputes as they know best.

The school at Yasnaya Polyana was highly successful, but it came to an abrupt end when it was raided for the second time by the tsar's secret police, who claimed they were searching for "subversive material." Although Tolstoy's prominent standing as a member of the Russian ruling class enabled him to win an apology from the government, he suddenly sensed that he had lost the trust of his students' parents, whose deep anxiety was aroused by the repeated appearance of the police. As a result, Tolstoy decided to close the little school and return his full attention to his writing. *War and Peace* was published twoyears later.

Ferrer

Intending to challenge the church-controlled school system that was available only to male children of the rich, Francisco Ferrer (1859–1909) opened a series of coeducational secular schools in Barcelona for middle- and working-class children. He was a devout anarchist and saw education as a perfect meeting ground for his political agenda and his concern for the well-being of children. His "Modern Schools," as they were known, were to be places where students would be motivated by curiosity and not fear, and where they would learn to think for themselves based on their own observations and experience.

Centrally controlled compulsory schooling, contended Ferrer, was one of the primary means by which elite groups in society seek to control the rest of thepopulation. Or, as he observed about the educational status quo in *The Originand Ideals of the Modern School* (Putnam, 1913):

> The children must learn to obey, to believe, and to think according to the prevailing social dogmas. . . . There is no question of promoting thespontaneous development of the child's faculties, or encouraging it to seek freely the satisfaction of physical, intellectual, and moral needs. There is question only of imposing ready-made ideas on it, of preventing it fromever thinking otherwise than is required for the maintenance of existing social institutions.
>
> . . . Much of the knowledge actually imparted in schools is useless; and the hope of the reformers has been void because the organization of the school,instead of serving an ideal purpose, has become one of the most powerful instruments of servitude in the hands of the ruling class "Education" means, in practice, domination or domestication.

In the tradition of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Tolstoy, Ferrer placed great faith in children's innate curiosity and desire to learn. His Modern Schools neither rewarded success nor punished failure, and no exams were given to measure or rank student performance. Moreover, Ferrer wrote at length in support of the movement away from the authoritarian and fundamentalistic character of his nation's schools, which he felt was based on the irrational and unscientific tenets of the Catholic Church. Also from *The Origin and Ideals ofthe Modern School*:

> It is evident that the progress of psychology and physiology must lead to important changes in educational methods; that teachers, being now in a better position to understand the child, will make their teaching more in conformity with natural laws. I further grant that this evolution will proceed in the direction of greater liberty, as I am convinced that

violence isthe method of ignorance, and that the educator who is really worthy of his name will gain everything by spontaneity; he will know the child's needsand will be able to promote its development by giving it the greatestpossible satisfaction The true educator is the man who does not impose his own ideas and will on the child, but appeals to its own energies.

Thus, the Modern Schools gave great value to individual freedom, and toindependent thinking as well. Education was viewed as a process wherebystudents developed their own beliefs and values. Such ideas, not surprisingly, were not well received by the Spanish monarchy. The government arrested Ferrer in 1909 on trumped up charges of inciting a riot and executed himshortly thereafter.

The death of Ferrer marked the end of the Modern School movement in Spain. However, his martyrdom drew the attention of a circle of radical activists and thinkers in New York City—Emma Goldman and Will Durant among the most notable—who opened up a school modeled after Ferrer's on the Lower East Sidein 1911. Another twenty or so groups around the United States soon followed suit, marking the transfer of the Modern School movement to this side of the Atlantic. In 1913 the New York City group decided to form a land-basedintentional community in conjunction with its Ferrer School in rural New Jersey. The Stelton School and Community, as it was then known, lived on into the 1950s.

Some years later, the historian Paul Avrich would note in *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1980) how ironic it was that just as the latest freedom in education movement was gathering strength in the late 1950s, its immediate predecessor was passing away unnoticed.

Montessori

Maria Montessori (1870–1952) started her career as a physician, the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree. She worked in the insane asylums of Rome with what at the time were known as "idiot children," the mentally retarded, the emotionally disturbed, and the delinquent. A student of psychiatry as well—her mentor was Jean Itard, the teacher of the "wild child of Aveyron"—Montessori was determined to show that the children's learning deficits were the result of environmental deprivation in early childhood and not organic defects. She assailed the prevailing belief that such children are uneducable, finding againand again that when they were provided with large quantities of sensory stimulation and a nurturing, family-like environment, they learned at a rate that was in many cases comparable to that of so-called normal children.

Montessori was also disturbed by the lack of achievement in school by nondisabled kids. She suspected that the conventional educational model actually stifled development and wondered whether her methods would producebetter results. In 1907 she was given the chance to find out when she was placedin charge of the *Case dei Bambini* (Children's Houses), schools for three- to seven-year-olds in the slums of the Italian capital.

The Children's Houses were community-based institutions in every sense. They were located right in the tenements themselves, where the teachers also lived. The specialized learning materials developed by Montessori were manufactured in workshops located in the same building. Children returned home for their naps, and parents, welcome at all times, reportedly felt a strong sense of ownership and involvement in the schools.

Presaging John Holt and others in the 1960s, Montessori vehemently opposed the growing trend toward isolating children from the rest of society. Or, as she wrote in *Childhood Education* (Regnery, 1974): "If the child, from birth onwards, has to create his personality at the expense of his environment, he mustbe brought into contact with the *world,* with the outward life of man. He oughtto take part in, or better still, he ought to be in touch with the life of adults. Ifhe is to adapt himself to the environment he ought to take part in public life andbe a witness to the customs that characterize his race."

Montessori, like her predecessors above, abhorred the educational methodology of traditional schools, where children spent the day being led through endless mental drills by the teacher. In her words from *The Montessori Method* (Bentley, 1965): "In such a school the children, like butterflies mounted on pins, are fastened each to their places, the desks, spreading the useless wings of barren and eaningless knowledge that they have acquired The principle of slavery still pervades pedagogy, and therefore, the same principle pervades the school."

Though elsewhere in *The Montessori Method* she disparages Rousseau's "impracticable principles and vague aspirations for the liberty of the child," Montessori was in many ways a practitioner of his notion of "well-regulated freedom." The Children's Houses—they were actually set up as little homes, complete with kitchen, dining room, and bathing facilities—were meticulously structured and highly ordered environments within which students had a great deal of freedom of choice and movement. Also from *Childhood Education:*

> Here among these children, order came from mysterious, hidden, inner directives, which can manifest themselves only if the freedom permitting them to be heeded is given. To give this type of freedom, it was precisely necessary that nobody interfere with the constructive, spontaneous activity of the children in an environment prepared so that their need for development could find satisfaction.
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> . . . The fundamental principle [of scientific pedagogy] must be, indeed, the liberty of the pupil—such liberty as shall permit the development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child's nature.

Montessori's version of liberty in school included far more management and control of the environment than that practiced by Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana before her or by A. S. Neill at Summerhill soon to follow, but it still stood in stark contrast to the schools of her day. She wrote in *The Montessori Method,*"The first idea that a child must acquire, in order to be actively disciplined, isthat of the difference between good and evil; and the task of the educator lies in seeing that the child does not confound good with immobility, and evil with activity, as often happens in the case of the old-time discipline. And all this because our aim is to discipline for activity, for work, for good; not for immobility, not for passivity, not for obedience."

Montessori believed that children should be independent and self-directing at as early an age as possible. In the Children's Houses, they took part in the daily upkeep of the school/house and shared meals that they served to one another. The majority of the learning materials were self-teaching ones, and teachers wereinstructed to be sensitive observers rather than directors of activity, to take care not to place themselves between the children and their experience. Learning, Montessori felt, should occur for learning's sake, and not in order to please adults or meet some artificial societal standard. She entirely rejected the conventional educational model's use of external rewards and punishments, writing in *Childhood Education,* "The prize and the punishment are incentives toward unnatural or forced effort, and, therefore, we cannot speak of the natural development of the child in connection with them. . . . Punishments! I had not realized that they were an indispensable institution holding sway over the whole of child humanity. All men have grown up under this humiliation."

According to Montessori, children are guided by a divine life force, which she called *horme*. They are endowed with an "absorbent mind," a term she coined to describe the unconscious instinct that propels the growth process. Thus, learningis not an act of will, but rather an automatic response to this internal imperative.Or as she reasoned in *Childhood Education,* "It is clear that there must be a secret fact in the psychic 'creation' of man. If we learn everything through attention, volition, and intelligence, how then can the child undertake this great construction—since he is not yet endowed with intelligence, willpower or attention?"

Montessori's emphasis on order, cleanliness, and a "rational education" that heldthe promise of accelerated learning eventually won her mainstream appeal.Ironically, her success with the

marginalized children of the dispossessed made her a darling of the bourgeoisie throughout Europe and the United States.Today Montessori schools number in the thousands worldwide.

Steiner

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) formulated an approach to education based on his own highly esoteric system of philosophy, known as anthroposophy. A mystic who had experiences of clairvoyance even as a child, he was heavily influenced by Goethe, whose science writings he edited while he was still in his early twenties. Goethe opposed materialism, the idea that physical matter is the only reality.

It wasn't until late in life that Steiner turned his attention toward the educationof children, when one of his followers, the owner of the Waldorf-Astoriacigarette factory in Germany, asked him to set up an adult education programfor employees and a school for their children.

Echoing Rousseau, Steiner disavowed early intellectual training. According to hisdevelopmental scheme, children from birth to age seven explore their world primarily through the senses and learn by imitation. Focused education should not begin until the emergence of the second teeth, at which point children learn best by engaging their imaginations and their emotional lives. It is not until puberty, Steiner argued, that the thinking function becomes predominant and kids develop the ability to analyze, conceptualize, and think critically.

Steiner's predominant concern, however, was with the mainstream educational model's exclusive focus on empiricism and the rational mind. He believed there to be other equally if not more important dimensions of existence, and he setout to design an approach to education that would help children discover them. He wrote in *The Roots of Education* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 1968), "The world is permeated by spirit, and true knowledge of the world must be spiritual knowledge." He expanded on this idea in *The Education of the Child* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965):

> A materialistic way of thought is so easily led to believe that any further penetration into things, beyond the intellectual concepts that are, as it were,extracted from them, simply does not exist; and only with great difficulty will it fight its way through to the perception that the other forces of the soul are at least as necessary as the intellect, if we are to gain a comprehension of things. …Intellectual concepts are only one of the meanswe have to understand the things of this world.
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> . . . All perceptions must be spiritualized. We ought not to be satisfied, for instance, with presenting a plant, a seed, and a flower to the child merely as it can be perceived with the senses. Everything should become a parable of the spiritual. In a grain of corn there is far more than meets the eye. Thereis a whole new plant invisible within it. That such a thing as a seed hasmore within it than can be perceived with the senses, this the child must grasp with his feeling and imagination. He must, in feeling, divine the secrets of existence.

Steiner eschewed religious instruction in his school, opposing the kind of spiritual indoctrination that was prevalent in the church-based schools of hisday. Instead, he advocated that by "carefully guiding their imaginations" through a set of experiences involving nature, art, music, and creativity, children can be led to discover spiritual principles on their own.

In Steiner's view, education itself is an art, not simply a method of instruction, and the phrase "art of education" can be found throughout his educational writings. From *The Younger Generation* (Anthroposophic Press, 1967): "Waldorf School education is not a pedagogical system, but an Art—the Art of awakeningwhat is actually there within the human being."

Like Montessori, Steiner saw human development as an unfolding of potential from within. Her *horme* became his "vital force," which for Steiner was a kind of guiding spiritual energy emanating from the soul. Again from *The Roots of Education:*

With its power of seeing right into man himself, a concrete knowledge of man is the only possible basis for a true art of education—an art ofeducation whereby men may find their place in life, and subject to the laws of their own destiny develop all their powers to the full. Education should never work against a person's destiny, but should achieve the full development of his own predispositions. The education of a man today so often lags behind the talents and the tendencies which destiny has implanted in him. We must keep pace with these powers to the extent that the human being in our care can win his way to all that his destiny will allow—to the fullest clarity of thought, the most loving deepening of his feeling, and the greatest possible energy and ability of will.

In the 1990s the Waldorf approach would fall squarely under the rubric of "holistic education," a paradigm that, according to Ron Miller, founder of the *Holistic Education Review,* recognizes and attempts to integrate "the inner human qualities, such as mind, emotion, creativity, imagination, compassion, a sense of wonder and reverence, and the urge for self-realization." Or as Steiner expressed it in *The Essential Steiner* (Harper and Row, 1984), "We need a knowledge of man that works on the whole human being, as physical nourishment works on the blood. We need a kind of human knowledge which gives us blood in our souls, too, which not only makes us sensible, clever and intelligent, but which can also make us enthusiastic, and inwardly mobile, which can enkindle love in us—for an art of education which springs forth from a trueknowledge of man must be borne by love."

Steiner did not harbor hopes of spreading salvation by means of his Waldorf principles—the later proliferation of Waldorf schools around the world was the work of his followers—but he did want his school to serve as a practical exampleof effective teaching. He placed great emphasis on the role of the teacher as a model that students will strive to emulate (students in Waldorf schools remain with the same teacher throughout their school career) and urged his teachers to devote themselves to their own intellectual and spiritual development.

To be educators we must have a sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility is very strongly aroused by such considerations as I have put before you, and must lay hold of your hearts. For if you take up educationalwork knowing that what affects the young child will continue through the whole life as happiness or unhappiness, sickness or health, then at first this knowledge may seem a burden on your souls, but it will also spur you on to develop your forces and capacities, and above all, an attitude of mind as a teacher strong enough to sow "seeds of the soul" in the young child which will only blossom later in life. (*The Roots of Education*)

Today there are more than four hundred Waldorf schools worldwide.

Neill

A young English teacher, A. S. Neill fled the rigidity and brutality of the schools of his native Scotland in 1920 and founded Summerhill, a residential school for boys and girls, elementaryage through high school, in a small village about a hundred miles from London. He had come under the influence of Homer Lane,an American who set up several radically different reformatories for delinquent teenagers in the United States and England. Reflecting back on his associationwith Lane in the introduction to Lane's posthumously published *Talks to Parents and Teachers* (Schocken Books, 1969), Neill wrote:

Homer Tyrell Lane, of all the men I have known, was the one who inspiredme the most. I first met him in 1917, when I visited his Little Commonwealth in Dorset, England, where in 1913 he had been appointed superintendent of a colony of delinquent boys and girls who governed themselves in a small democracy, each person—including Lane himself— having one vote. . . . I sat up until three o'clock in the morning listening to Lane's descriptions of his methods. That night he showed me the solution

—that the only way to be was, as he phrased it, "on the side of the child." Itmeant

> abolishing all punishment and fear and external discipline. It meant trusting children to grow in their own way without any pressure from outside, save that of communal self-government. It meant putting learning in its place—below living.

Neill decided to model Summerhill after Lane's democratic, communal, self- governing reform schools. All policy decisions, including the hiring and firing ofteachers and disciplinary matters, were to be carried out in general schoolmeetings in which students and teachers each had an equal vote. Classes were entirely noncompulsory, and children were free to learn in their own timeaccording to their own inclinations.

In the tradition of Rousseau, Neill placed great faith in a child's inborn motivation to learn and grow. Or as he wrote in *Summerhill:*

> My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himselfwithout adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing. Logically, Summerhill is a place in which people who have the innate ability and wish to be scholars will be scholars; while those who are only fit to sweep the streets will sweep the streets. But we have not produced a street cleaner so far. Nor do I write this snobbishly, for I would rather see a school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar.

For Neill, freedom meant, more than anything else, respecting the right of children to make their own choices regarding their lives. His natural anarchismin the tradition of Tolstoy is clearly evident in these words from *Summerhill:*

> The function of the child is to live his own life—not the life that hisanxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows better. All this interference and guidanceon the part of adults only produces a generation of robots. . . . You fashion them into acceptors 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 train—a society, in short, that is carried on the shabby shoulders ofthe scared little man—the scared to death conformist.
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> . . . I believe that to impose anything by authority is wrong. The childshould not do anything until he comes to the opinion—his own opinion— that it should be done. The curse of humanity is external compulsion, whether it comes from the Pope or the state or the teacher or the parent. It is fascism *in toto.*

Neill was also influenced by Wilhelm Reich, the radical psychiatrist who would become his close friend and ally. Reich was deeply interested in the preventionof neurosis in children so that they wouldn't need a therapist's services when they reached adulthood. He believed that children are inherently good and that they possess an instinctive awareness of their own needs and how best to meet them. A primary cause of neurosis, argued Reich, is adult interference with this natural learning process. The answer, according to Reich, is "self-regulation," a term he coined to describe the ability to govern one's own impulses and manageone's own daily affairs. He was delighted to discover that there was a school for children operating on this very principle.

An ardent advocate of freedom for children throughout his long career, Neill was always careful to distinguish it from what he called "license." Students at Summerhill are free to do as they please, as long as they are not impinging on the rights and sensibilities of others. For instance, Neill never hesitated to defendhis greenhouse from a marauding youngster—unless he was new to the school and going through a difficult phase of adjustment, in which case Neill was known to join him in the destruction. He explained in *Summerhill* that parents could not always grasp the difference between freedom and license: "In the disciplined home, the children have *no* rights. In the spoiled home, they have *all* the rights. The proper home is the one in which children and adults have *equal* rights. And the same applies to school. . . . If a baby of three wants to walk across the dining table, you simply tell him he must not. He must obey, that's true. But on the other hand, you must obey him when necessary. I get out of small children's rooms if they tell me to get out."

Neill also credited Homer Lane with showing him the power of love in the learning process, an idea that, according to W. David Wills in *Homer Lane: A Biography* (Allen and Unwin, 1964), Lane borrowed from Pestalozzi and his orphan schools. Again from *Summerhill:* "Love means approving of children, and that is essential in any school. You can't be on the side of children if youpunish them and storm at them. Summerhill is a school in which the child knows that he is approved of."

At Summerhill, emotional learning and emotional health are valued more highly than academic learning. Neill believed that happiness and the ability to understand and express one's motives and feelings are the cornerstones ofdevelopment. He considered the greatest mark of success to be the ability to work joyfully and live positively: "To sum up, my contention is that unfree education results in life that cannot be fully lived. Such an education almost entirely ignores the *emotions* of life; and because these emotions are dynamic,their lack of opportunity for expression must and does result in cheapness and ugliness and hatefulness. Only the head is educated. If the emotions are permitted to be really free, the intellect will look after itself."

Like Rousseau, Neill scoffed at the efforts of educational reformers scurrying around trying to invent new and improved teaching approaches and curriculums, explaining in *Summerhill,* "We have no new methods of teaching, because we do not consider that teaching in itself matters very much. Whether aschool has or has not a special method for teaching long division is of no significance, for long division is of no importance except to those who *want* to learn it. And the child who *wants* to learn long division *will* learn it no matterhow it is taught." Since the publication of *Summerhill,* a growing number of Summerhill-type schools have been founded around the world. Today, despite ongoing harassment from the British government, Summerhill itself lives on under the leadership of Neill's only child, Zoë Readhead.

Holt

A submarine officer in the Second World War, John Holt (1923–1985) was horrified by the inhumanity of the U.S. atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He entered the teaching profession after the war with an eye turned toward the need for fundamental social change and the role that educationmight play in it.

Holt was far from alone in his criticism of mainstream schooling during the tumultuous 1960s. But his impassioned writing, first about his observations of individual kids engaged in the learning process and later about the stultifying effects of the conventional school model on children as a whole, placed him in the forefront of the loosely organized movement to reexamine American education all the way to its core.

The overriding conviction propelling Holt's thinking was the belief that childrenpossess an enormous capacity to make sense of the world on their own terms—when they are free to inquire, explore, and experiment, and when they are ableto participate actively in real world events. Although he was considered by someto be an idealistic romantic, there was a staunchly pragmatic side to his ideas, as shown in his contribution to the September 1972 issue of *Edcentric* magazine:

> The main reason for giving young people self-direction, autonomy, and choice in their learning is not so they will grow up to be revolutionary fighters against Fortress Amerika, or preserve some mythical innocence andpurity, or know how to live in harmony with nature and the universe, but quite simply because that is how people learn best.
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> . . .We learn best when *we* are deciding what we want to learn, when welearn for our own reasons and not someone else's, and when we have maximum control over the pace and the manner in which we learn.

But, concluded Holt, American schools, with their increasing obsession with grades and standards, had become bastions of fear and control. By the mid- sixties compulsory learning was already an oxymoron in his lexicon. In *How Children Fail* (Pitman, 1964), his first in a series of more than a

dozen books on education, he addressed the mental and emotional harm being done to children by the carrot-and-stick approach to education—even in the so-called progressiveprivate schools for the children of the well heeled where he had been doing his teaching: “We adults destroy most of the intellectual and creative capacity of children by the things we do to them or make them do. We destroy this capacityabove all by making them afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being wrong. Thus, we make them afraid to gamble, afraid to experiment, afraid to try the difficult and the unknown.”

After a decade in the classroom, Holt was ready to reject the idea of a set curriculum. He considered it preposterous that there exists an essential body of knowledge that every child should be required to know. Again from *How Children Fail*:

> We will not have true education or real learning in our schools until we sweep this nonsense out of the way. Schools should be places wherechildren learn most what they want to know, instead of what we think they ought to know. The child who wants to know something remembers it and uses it once he has it; the child who learns something to please or appease someone else forgets it when the need for pleasing or the danger of not appeasing is past. This is why children quickly forget all but a small part of what they learn in school.

In the early 1970s, Holt increasingly came under the influence of Ivan Illich,who at the time was attempting to expand the discussion of American educationbeyond schools to include all social institutions. An insidious, seldom consideredeffect of institutionalized schooling, according to Illich, is the way it takeslearning out of its living context and turns it into both an abstraction and a prepackaged article of consumption. The idea that one has to “get” an educationin order to succeed in life has reached mythological proportions, he lamented. And all the complaints notwithstanding, our schools are carrying out exactly the function they were intended to perform: maintaining the class system by sorting out privileged winners from not-so-lucky losers by means of bell curve grading, and programming kids for the boring and routine nature of most modern work. Echoing Illich, Holt wrote in *Freedom and Beyond* (Boynton Cook, 1995), “We cannot be in the business of education and at the same time in the business of testing, grading, labeling, sorting, and deciding who goes where and gets what. .. . It is the business of turning people into commodities.”

In the end, Holt, like Illich, became convinced that the idea of reformingAmerica’s system of public and private schools was a Sisyphean task. After nearlytwo decades of trying to contribute to the nationwide push for educational change, a discouraged Holt observed in *Instead of Education* (Dutton, 1976), “Movements to reform schools never last very long. They quickly fall out of fashion, reaction sets in, and most of the few schools that attempt to make humane changes give them up. Usually when this happens, the public gives a great cry of relief, and all of the long-term failings of the conventional schools*are blamed on the reformers.* Any evidence that, where carried out, the reforms actually worked is soon forgotten.”

Holt’s radical critique of American education spurred him to look for solutions beyond the realm of schools entirely: “I don’t want children to have to spend allof their time in places specially prepared for children, with people specially trained to look after them, no matter how nice those places and people mightbe. Children need much more than that—a society that is open, accessible, visible to all its citizens, young and old, and in which every citizen, however young or old, has the right to play an active, serious, responsible and useful part”(*Instead of Education*). The only way to achieve such a goal, reasoned Holt, is for parents to stop turning over the task of educating their kids to the society atlarge and instead to allow their learning to unfold in their homes and communities. “Homeschooling,” as it came to be known, became a fast- growing, essentially leaderless movement. Holt founded the magazine *Growing Without Schooling* in order to provide inspiration and guidance to those willingto take the leap of faith involved in turning away from institutional education. Aware that many anxious parents were turning their homes into miniature

schoolrooms, Holt quickly coined the term "unschooling" to describe the kind of spontaneous, organic, learner-directed education he envisioned.

For Holt, freedom in the learning process was always paramount, a point he made indelibly clear in his closing statement in *Instead of Education*: "Compulsory learning is a tyranny, and a crime against the human mind and spirit."

Rogers

A contemporary of Holt's, Carl Rogers (1902–1987) attempted to add a psychological underpinning to the freedom in education movement of the 1960s. He was one of the leaders of a parallel thrust that was trying to release psychotherapy from the strictures of Freudian psychoanalysis.

> Rogers named his new approach "humanistic psychology." Its goal was the development of the "fully functioning person," one who is, according to Rogersin *Freedom to Learn* (Merrill, 1969), "a creative person whose specific formingsof behavior are not easily predictable; a person who is ever-changing, ever- developing, always discovering himself and the newness in himself in eachsucceeding moment of time."
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> *Freedom to Learn* was an educational manifesto aimed at professionals manning the mainstream. In it Rogers urged that the true purpose of education should beto assist young people in the search for authenticity, meaning, and connection, not to stuff their heads full of abstract information and force them to compete for standardized measures of success. This goal can be reached only to the extentthat students are in charge of their own learning process—free to choose and then learn from the consequences of their actions.
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> A key ingredient in every individual's growth, believed Rogers, is self-awareness, which, again, develops only when children have control over their own experience and their relationships with others. He cited as a prime example a study set up to measure the factors most likely to predict the behavior of adolescent delinquents. Researchers concluded that it was the individual's degreeof self-understanding that had the greatest effect. Reflected Rogers in *Freedom to Learn:* "The significance of the study was only slowly driven home to me. I began to see the importance of inner autonomy. The individual who sees himselfand his situation clearly, and who freely takes responsibility for that self and for that situation is a very different person from the one who is simply in the grip ofoutside circumstances. The difference shows up in important aspects of his behavior."
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> Rogers exhorted American schools to apply the same principle to the education of all children. Like Holt, he was convinced that freedom and self-direction are essential conditions of true learning. His call to grant classroom teachers flexibility and local control enjoyed a fleeting audience at the height of the cryfor educational reform in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it has fallen ondeaf ears ever since.

The progression of ideas from Rousseau to Rogers is not as simple and direct as Ihave portrayed it here. Each individual had his or her own overarching agenda, which was influenced by the political, economic, and philosophical conditionsof the times, and each had his or her own style and emphasis. For Tolstoy, Ferrer, Neill, and Holt, children need to be free to direct their own learning, whereas many of the others—to varying degrees—saw the need for adult guidance and structural overlay. Rousseau, a source of inspiration to them all, paradoxically advocated both. Pestalozzi valued love above all else; Froebel, nature; Montessori, cognitive development; Steiner, creativity; Rogers, authenticity and self-awareness; and Neill, democratic, self-governing community.

And yet there is a definite thread that runs through the principles on which theseforerunners believed true education must be based. All were grounded in the conviction that learning is a natural, spontaneous impulse and that fear, compulsion, and control are its enemies. Together they

represent a tradition of dissent against mainstream educational theory and practice that has managed to survive four centuries of increasing centralization and standardization, one thatis alive and well in the new millennium.