

AT ONCE THE WORST AND BEST THING about public education — and particularly about public education in North America in the middle of the twentieth century — is the amount of writing and talking it engenders. And over the last few years, books and articles on education — public and private, orthodox and radical, elementary and advanced, theory and practice — have proliferated to the point where the layman has little choice but to abandon this field along with literature and sociology, to the experts who have time to plow through the compost in search of reclaimable material and the occasional lost gem.

This is too bad. Education is far too important a matter to be left to the experts, especially when their usual incompetence is so abundantly demonstrated, both in the literature and in schools. And as the public schools drift ever farther from the communities they purport to serve, as situations like that which caused the explosion in Digby, Nova Scotia last year become more common, the experts begin to believe that it is for them — not students, not parents, not the communities — that the schools exist. And they have been encouraged to feel this way by the abdication of power of teachers, parents, and students.

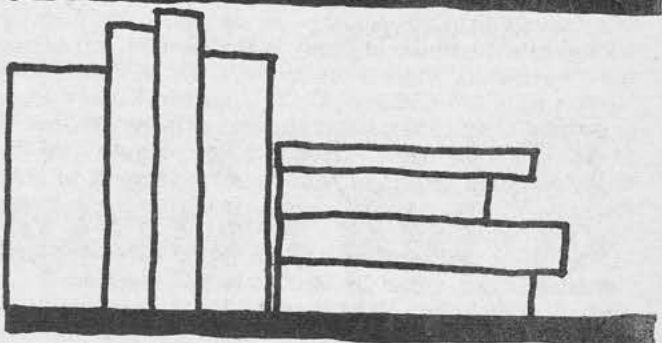
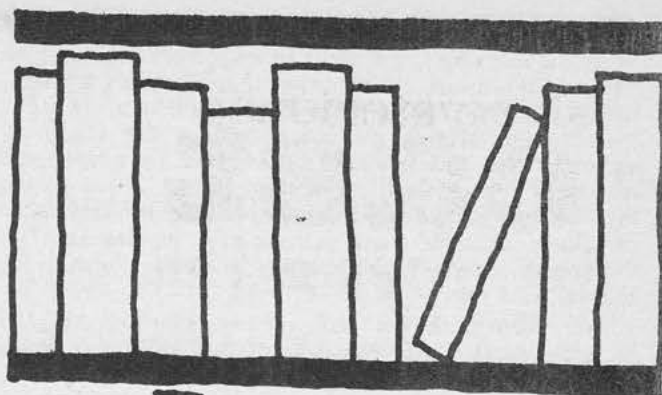
It is doubly unfortunate that the glut of educational writing has tended to alienate parents, since much of that writing is expressly aimed at correcting this situation, at involving the community in the education of its children, at making the school responsive to the needs of the children and their society.

And the writing is having some effect. The educational establishment is beginning to take the new ideas seriously, as is shown by the Plowden Report in England and the revolution in the infant schools there (See Joseph Featherstone's articles), and by the Hall-Dennis report in Ontario. One of the best, and most independent, of the new educational theorists, Herbert Kohl, is writing a regular column for that most respectable of educational publications, *Grade Teacher*. School systems are sponsoring workshops and even in some cases experimental classrooms based on the new ideas.

Perhaps even more important than this, however, are the alternative schools springing up across North America by the hundreds. United, usually by nothing more than their commitment to the value and integrity of the individual child, these schools represent the spearhead of a movement which is likely to revolutionize public education.

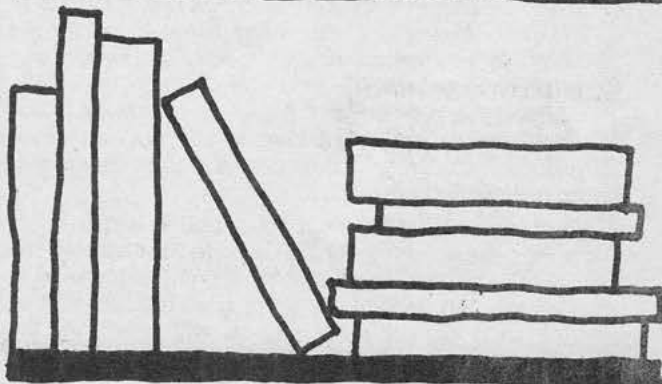
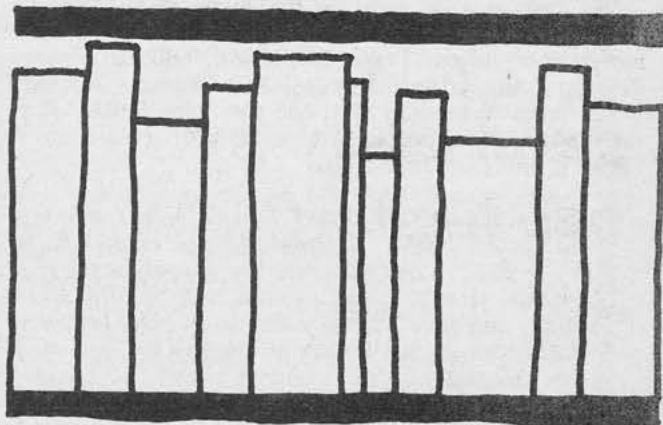
What are these new ideas? Where did they come from? and isn't it simply another fad, like progressive education and hundreds of lesser ones? The only way to answer such questions fully is to read a few of the publications in this field; *The Mysterious East* herewith offers you a thumbnail sketch of some answers and a detailed map of the terrain in which fuller answers lie.

A NUMBER OF FACTORS combined to produce this revolution in educational thinking. One important one was Sputnik, which went up in the fall of 1957 and set the American educational establishment on its ear. Out of the spate of recriminations and revolutionary attempts to teach kids more, earlier, which followed that revelation of Soviet educational advance, arose an intense interest in increasing the efficiency of schools. James B. Conant wrote his studies of the inefficiency of educational practice, Rudolf Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read*, and a national — and international — bout of educational speculation was under



SCHOOL BOOKS

russell hunt



way.

At the same time, and partly in reaction to the increased level of mere manipulation involved in Conant's schemes, writers like Paul Goodman and Edgar Z. Friedenberg began looking, without ethnic preconceptions, at the plight of children in our society and describing what the schools and society as a whole demands of children and how it affects their behaviour. And popular books like Bel Kaufman's *Up the Down Staircase* and perhaps even movies like *The Blackboard Jungle* began creating a wider audience for educational writing.

And then both the civil rights revolution and the increased concern for the plight of the urban poor began producing the books which form the real backbone of the alternative school movement — all the books studying the failings of the schools, not only in the ghettos, but among the middle-class. John Holt (*How Children Fail*, 1964) Herbert Kohl (*36 Children*, 1967), Jonathan Kozol (*Death at an Early Age*, 1967), James Herndon (*The Way it Spozed to Be*, 1968), all wrote in concrete, gripping ways of the dehumanization effects of the schools' treatment of their students, of the students' bright, inquiring minds going dead and uninterested.

And then, arising out of the work of Piaget and Montessori and especially A. S. Neill (*Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, 1960), many of these writers, and others, began putting their ideas into practice, in independent schools and elsewhere. And through these sources and the reports of John Holt (*How Children Learn*, 1967), Herbert Kohl (*Teaching the 'Unteachable'*, 1967), George Dennison (*The Lives of Children*, 1969) and others, there began to evolve a common body of belief and practice about education and the treatment of children; a complex of persuasive literature that led many people not only to be dissatisfied with public education as it is, but to attempt to change it, often by beginning their own, alternative form of education.

THE SCHOOLS WHICH ARE ARISING from this background embrace the most wildly divergent social and psychological ideas, deriving them mostly from Tolstoy, Piaget, Montessori, Neill, Carl Rogers, Paul Goodman, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, and others, and there is no central orthodoxy. But one basic idea which will be disputed by few people connected with an alternative school is this (from John Holt):

Nobody starts off stupid. You only have to watch babies and infants, and think seriously about what all of them learn and do, to see that except for the most grossly retarded, they show a style of life, and a desire and ability to learn that in an older person we might call genius. Hardly an adult in a thousand, or ten thousand, could in any three years of his life learn as much, grow as much in his understanding of the world around him, as every infant learns and grows in his first three years. But what happens, as we get older, to this extraordinary capacity of learning and intellectual growth?

What happens is that it is destroyed, and more than by any other thing, by the process that we misname education — a process that goes on in most homes and schools.

Beyond, then, a fundamental belief that it is possible to preserve this energy and a commitment to the idea that the preservation is best accomplished by treating every child as a unique, precious individual, there is almost no way of predicting what one of these schools will believe or do. Some are committed to serving as an example for the public

school systems; others see themselves as a genuine alternative which will in time replace the system of public education we now know; others do it for no other reason than that they like teaching kids and can't do it their way in the public schools; others to save their own children's enthusiasm for learning and knowing; still others because they see the complete development of children as a long-term tool for social change. Some charge tuition, some don't. Some hew to a curriculum, some don't.

But all of them are committed to the belief in the value of individual human beings; all of them believe that education which ignores a child's real needs in order to minister to the needs of society as a whole fails.

BELOW IS A LIST OF THE BOOKS and articles you can look at if you're interested in finding out more about these schools and the theories on they are based. Something that should be made clear is that the best books on education are usually the most concrete books, books which deal with some specific experience. When the author does this well — as James Herndon or John Holt, especially, does — the books become compelling in a way that very little literature does. You can't put them down.

The list is not meant to be complete, though I think that no book of really wide current influence has been left out. The comments represent my opinion; where there is no comment, I have not yet been able to read the book and only know of its existence secondarily. If you are only able to read one book, make it either *The Way it Spozed to Be* or *How Children Fail*; if you have an interest in theoretical underpinnings, *Growing Up Absurd* or *Coming of Age in America*. All four are excellent, readable, and moving.

This Magazine is About Schools

Out of Toronto, this is far and away the best periodical publication in the educational field, though it tends to become preoccupied with political-activist and social concerns. Something that makes it particularly appropriate to *The Mysterious East* is that not only is it Canadian, but the two primary forces behind the magazine — Robert Davis and George Martell — are both Haligonians, born and bred. Why is it that upper Canada siphons off the talent the way it does — and what can we do to attract such people back here?

In the meantime, you can subscribe to *This Magazine* at P. O. Box 876, Terminal 'A', Toronto. \$3.50 a year; \$9.50 for three; \$15 for five. Published quarterly.

New Schools Exchange Newsletter.

Arising out of a California conference on alternative education, the *Newsletter* is now an eight-page, offset-printed compendium of applications for jobs in alternative schools, advertisements of positions, letters on educational and related subjects, statements of present programs and philosophy by alternative schools, and photos. An annual directory of alternative schools is published. Anybody who is even slightly interested in such schools simply has to subscribe. You can get it for a year for \$10. To quote: "Subscription fees cover the Newsletter, the continuing directory of schools, and periodic positions papers . . . and whatever else we can help you with, related to experimental education. Free subscriptions will be made available to those in need." Write 2840 Hidden Valley Lane, Santa Barbara, California 93103, U. S. A.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Teacher. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1963.

An autobiographical account of her discoveries while teaching Maori children; it has turned a number of people on to the kind of teaching the alternative schools are interested in.

Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1961

Part of the attempt to improve education after Sputnik, and

Part of the attempt to improve education after Sputnik, and mainly concerned with scientific subjects and their teaching; quite abstract, but has some interesting consequences for teaching generally. Bruner writes well and the book does spring loose some good ideas.

Robert Coles, **Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear**. Boston, Little, Brown; 1967

Not directly concerned with formal education, but illuminating in its presentation of the way kids' minds work — especially kids who are in the process of being maimed by their society.

Dennison, George, **The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School**. New York, Random House, 1969.

The First Street School was an alternative education project, set up in New York's inner city. Dennison recounts the progress made by the kids at the school and the death of the school for financial reasons and in spite of convincing you it's possible to succeed — both with the kids and with the school. Perhaps the major thing the book demonstrates is that it's possible to create this sort of an institution on the amount of money already being spent on public education — that is, it's not necessarily a financially extravagant proposition.

Joseph Featherstone, articles on the British Infant Schools — appeared originally in *The New Republic* and are available as a pamphlet from Pitman Publishing Co. 6 East 43rd Street, New York 10017, U.S.A. Enclose 50 cents.

Encouraging both because Featherstone describes the methods in use and their results well, and because it is being instituted on a wide scale — partially as a result of the Plowden report (see below).

Friedenberg, Edgar Z, **Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence**, New York, Random House, 1965. Available in paperback as a Vintage Book. Also **The Dignity of Youth and other Atavisms**, Beacon Press, 1965.

One of the most original thinkers around, Friedenberg is able to apply anthropological techniques of observation to the institutions of his own culture as though he'd never seen them before and had no pre-existing beliefs about them. His case against public education is presented by pointing out what it is that the schools — and our society as a whole — actually *do* rather than what they claim to do, or what we want them to do. And he is a most delightful writer, as the article on him elsewhere in this issue shows.

Caleb Gattegno, **What We Owe Children: The Subordination of Teaching to Learning**. Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970.

Gattegno's basic point is one that needs to be made — though, I think, it is intuitively known to most good teachers: it is that what children learn ought to be learned in the same way that we learned to sit up, to walk, to talk: by building on the most basic skills and desires in the person and by internalizing the knowledge in some way that transcends "remembering." He argues also that such things, usually, are not taught, but are learned, and that a teacher can really do no more than facilitate such learning.

The problem is that a lot of what he says is not particularly well written, and some amounts to repetition of the obvious. And his not-so-concrete suggestions for the teaching of specific subjects have the ring of traditional educational recipe-swapping.

Many people seem to have a lot of respect for Gattegno's thought. I'm not one of them, but many of them are more perceptive than I.

Paul Goodman, **Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System**. New York, Random House, 1960. Also **Compulsory Miseducation, and The Community of Scholars**, New York, Vintage Book, 1964. And a number of articles appearing in various periodicals, including an important one on the "minischool" in *The New York Review of Books*.

MINERVA BOOKS Ltd.

5425 Spring Garden Road Halifax NS

has all books
reviewed in the mysterious
east

m
me
me
me

subscribe e

"The Hall-Dennis report has captured a surprising amount of popular attention and provoked lively and continuing debate on the nature and objectives of schooling." *Brian Crittenden*.

Means and Ends in Education

Brian Crittenden, editor

A critical analysis of the Hall-Dennis report by such educationists as Carl Bereiter, Douglas Myers, Andrew Effrat, and G. L. McDiarmid. \$3.00

Re-thinking Education

Proceedings of a conference on The Practical Implications of the Hall-Dennis Report. Contributors include Hon. W. G. Davis, R. W. B. Jackson, and W. R. Wees. \$1.75

Order from
Publications Sales

OISE

The Ontario Institute
for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Canada

name _____

address _____

Goodman is an anarchist – and probably the most creative thinker around these days. He thinks we should concentrate our energies on letting people be, and should work out creative solutions to the fundamental problems of our society – including education, which he is not hesitant about saying should be abolished. Reading Goodman cleans your mind out and everyone should do it whether you care about alternative education or not.

Hall-Dennis (*Living and Learning*, The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario, by Mr. Justice E. M. Hall, L. A. Dennis, and others.)

I don't recommend reading this, though I have been told there is a short version that's a bit more manageable. I do recommend getting a copy if you can, though, so you can browse through it and admire the pictures and think about the budget that went into it. The most spectacular thing about it is the charts on pages 78-9, which are, as far as I can see, quite useless but strikingly beautiful. The thing about Hall-Dennis is that its heart is in the right place, but its feet are in the establishment. You can get great quotes out of it, and, like the Bible, it makes pretty good ammunition in propaganda. But finally it can't make up its mind whether it believes its statement that the parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education their children shall receive or its statement that "the small school and the local school board have out-lived their day." And you can't have it both ways.

Nat Hentoff, *Our Children Are Dying*, Viking Press.
James Herndon, *The Way it Spozed to Be*, Simon and Schuster, 1968.

Probably the most consistently interesting and perceptive of the auto-biographical accounts of teaching experiences. Herndon gets you inside the kids and dramatizes what Friedenberg explains in the abstract.

John Holt, *How Children Fail*, New York, Pitman, 1964;
How Children Learn, New York, Pitman, 1967; *The Underachieving School*, New York, Pitman, 1969.

Holt is the dean of the new educational writers and in some ways still the best. *How Children Fail* remains the best description of the process as it occurs in the schools; *How Children Learn* is the most useful exposition of the new ways of teaching and looking at kids.

Kohl, Herbert, *Thirty-Six Children*, New American Library 1967, *Teaching the 'Unteachable'*, New York Review Publications, 1967; *The Open Classroom*, New York Review Publications, 1969.

Probably the most useful of Kohl's books is *The Open Classroom*, a sort of teacher's manual for the new kind of teaching and an immensely clear, practical and stimulating one. It is aimed at the high school level but much of what he says can be quickly translated to any other level. *Teaching the "Unteachable"* suggests some ways in which students usually labelled inarticulate and uncommunicative can be opened up, as does Kohl's first book, *36 Children*. It's been said that Kohl is the best teacher around; he's not the best writer. *36 Children*, especially, is sometimes stiff and awkward. But he's certainly worth reading.

Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools*. Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1967.

One of the first exposes of the scandalous treatment of ghetto kids by the schools, and still one of the most effective, partly because Kozol gives off an air of such incredible honesty. You believe in the people he's talking about; they never become stick figures in a morality play. You even care about the villains of his piece. And thus you understand something of how the system he's talking about got that way.

A. S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*. New York, Hart Publishing, 1960

Neill knew it before anyone else did, and said it all ten years ago. This remains THE classic book in the field; and Neill's position is still the most radical and the most thoroughly honest there is. Besides being a great teacher, Neill is a writer who'll loosen your head up as profoundly as Goodman or Friedenberg.

Lady Plowden and others, *Children and their Primary Schools*. A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Educators. Volume I: the Report, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967.

This is the most radical and comprehensive program ever proposed for a large public school system, and can function very much like Hall-Dennis in that it makes marvelous support in your school's propaganda. It is also useful as a source of fundamental ideas. Like Hall-Dennis, it is mammoth and not bedside reading; and, again, I've heard a shorter version is available.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. New York, Delacorte, 1969.

One of the most entertaining books around in this field; occasionally a little forced, but usually right on. It's directed more at the conventional teachers in a conventional school than at alternative education, but much of what they have to say about what has to be taught and what can be learned and what the schools really do is immensely valuable. You can buy gift copies of this for friends who are teachers.

Carl R. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*. Columbus, Ohio, Merrill, 1969.
I've heard enthusiastic reports about how this applies to alternative schools but haven't read it yet.

Ronald and Beatrice Gross, editors, *Radical School Reform*. Simon and Schuster, 1970.

An anthology of essays and magazine articles by some of the most important voices in the field; I've been told it's the best thing available, and probably the best short guide to the whole complex of ideas and issues, but I haven't seen it yet.

The Summerhill Society Bulletin

The Summerhill Society is an organization originally begun to start a Summerhill-style school in New York; they have become a clearing-house for information and ideas somewhat similar to the *New Schools Exchange*. They conduct public forums, run an annual workshop, and publish the *Bulletin* bimonthly. Recent issues have contained a bibliography for the free school movement (much fuller than this one) and a long review of Dennison's book. You can join the society by writing 339 Lafayette Street, New York, New York, 10012, U. S. A. Student memberships are \$2.50; individual memberships are \$10.00. Single copies of the *Bulletin* are fifty cents each.

Nat Hentoff, *Our Children Are Dying*. Viking Press, Compass Book.

An account of an experiment within the public school system, P. S. 119 in Harlem, and of the principal of the school. I haven't yet read it, but Hentoff is one of the better writers around.

Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method*. Shoken Books, New York, 1964

One of the classic sources of ideas important in the alternative school movement. The method often sounds like a straitjacket, but in practice it can be very flexible and effective; the book should be read carefully, and preferably after you've clarified some of your own ideas on the subject of education.

Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, *Tolstoy on Education*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Tolstoy is a major influence on an awful lot of free school thinking; this book contains, among other things, a description of the school he established and a statement of his basic theories of education.