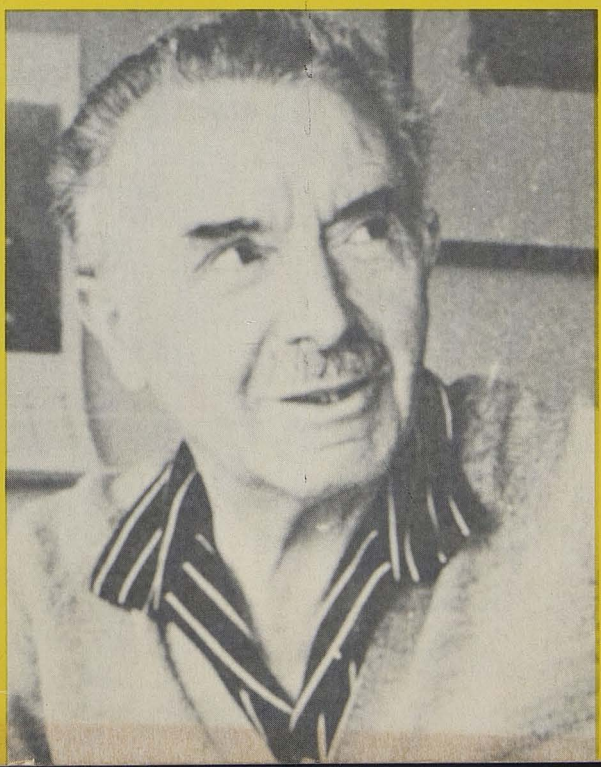
COOPERATIVE LEARNING & SOCIAL CHANGE

Selected Writings of Célestin Freinet



Edited and Translated by David Clandfield and John Sivell

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PREFACE

When Our Schools/Our Selves published *Building A People's Curriculum*, an anthology of work by the Quebec teachers' collective La Maîtresse d'École, the preface (by David Clandfield) included the observation that one of their major sources of inspiration lay in the pioneering work of a French pedagogue who was virtually unknown in the English-speaking world. His name was Célestin Freinet, and he had given his name to a movement of cooperative pedagogy that has swept across mainland Europe, throughout much of Latin America, and into parts of Asia and Africa.

Freinet's teaching and voluminous writings took place over a period of forty-six years, from 1920 to the year of his death in 1966. As many as seventeen books of his have been published in the years following his death. Halina Semenowic's international bibliography of the work of Célestin Freinet and his wife Elise devotes fifty pages of tightly-spaced titles of French-language books and articles by Célestin alone. She also includes a list of his works translated into other languages: Arabic, Danish, Dutch, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish (in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico and Spain), Swedish, and Vietnamese. Eighteen of his works have been published in the minority language of Catalan, two in the Basque language and one even in the international language Esperanto. Not one is listed for English. This appalling gap explains why virtually no books on critical pedagogy in English even mention him by name. And yet to many other language groups, his work has the same stature as that of Montessori, Pestalozzi, and Freire, all of whom are well-known in English.

As soon as the editors at OS/OS realized the collective blunder that had been committed by the English-speaking world, they issued the solemn undertaking to begin this process of translation as part of an effort to promote cooperative learning with real links to community and a broader social reality. Then things began to happen. An OS/OS reader quickly drew attention to a similar project that had just been launched by John Sivell at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. He too had been struck by the same gap in English pedagogical literature and was under contract to a small publishing house, Edwin Mellen Press, to translate the first of Freinet's works that would appear in English. This was a collection of Freinet's pedagogical parables and illustrations called *Les Dits de Mathieu* that first began to appear in 1946 and were gathered together in a book that took its final form in the year after his death. Earlier this year (1990) John's translation came out under the title *The Wisdom of Matthew,* and it offers a good introduction for the reader interested in Freinet's way of looking at the processes of learning and growing. John is now embarking on *L'Éducation du travail* (tentatively titled *Education Through Work*) for Edwin Mellen again.

During the last year or so, John Sivell and David Clandfield have had the chance to meet and talk about ways to bring Freinet's pedagogical techniques and educational philosophy to a broader audience, composed of educators, parents and students who would welcome Freinet's insights. The two of us soon set to work.

Our first move was to organize a conference on the cooperative techniques of Freinet at Brock University in St. Catharines to see whether a nucleus of people could be formed to begin work on spreading the Freinet message. In this project, we linked up with another of our OS/OS writers, Jim Cummins, who had recently encountered Freinet pedagogy in his work with the Portuguese community in Toronto. The conference (October 11-13) drew fifty or so teachers, students and others interested in education largely from the Golden Horseshoe area in southern Ontario (from Niagara round to Toronto). Two of the four presenters had developed many

of their own cooperative learning techniques before discovering the kindred spirit of Freinet (Lynne Dewick-McCall and her work on Child-Authorship in native schools in northern Manitoba; Dennis Sayers and his work in establishing an inter-school correspondence network linking Puerto Rican community schools in the US with schools in Puerto Rico). A number of the members of the Maîtresse d'École group came from Montreal to describe their work which had been consciously inspired by Célestin Freinet, particularly since one of them, Colette Noël, had herself worked with him at his school in France. Bill Lee was also present from southern California, one of the few scholars in the English-speaking world who had published articles on Freinet's work. By the end of the three days, enough interest had been stirred that the participants decided to constitute a Freinet group in Canada and the U.S. that would attempt to forge links with the broader international federation as well as others in English-speaking, French-speaking and Spanish-speaking North America. The first major project would be to attempt a more formal continent-wide founding convention in two years time. In the meantime, Our Schools/Our Selves hopes to publish the presentations made at our initial conference.

Our second initiative is this anthology, in which we both translated representative pieces of Freinet's work. In this we have had three objectives:

(1) to demonstrate briefly and clearly in Freinet's own words some of the cooperative learning techniques that have made him famous;

(2) to furnish examples of what Freinet calls "natural learning" to illustrate the process of observation and experimentation through trial and error;

(3) to establish clearly the broader social and political dimension of Freinet's work, as a socialist working to transform a State education system.

John's contribution has been the biography of Célestin Freinet that begins this work, and most of the extracts in the section on the cooperative learning techniques. The rest is David's. In this process,

we have exchanged our work and made suggestions to each other, and arrived at much of the selection in consultation. The final editorial decisions were, however, the responsibility of David. Accordingly he alone is to blame for any omissions or errors that may have marred the finished work.

The initial work on this project consisted in extensive bibliographic research, ably conducted by Katie Knox, and for which the Department of French at the University of Toronto provided valuable financial assistance. Our thanks are also due to George Martell, as our general editor, for his support and helpful advice, Howie Chodos and Catherine Kellogg for their design,Colette Noël for providing us with pictures and valuable documentary assistance William Clandfield for reproducing Colette Noël's school drawings, the Freinet-inspired printers at La Maîtresse d'École, and of course our own families for enduring once again a bout of obsessive work on the writings of Papa Freinet.

David Clandfield, Toronto
John Sivell, St. Catharines
November 1990

TRANSLATORS' NOTES AND A GLOSSARY

Freinet writes in a very personal flowery style that is not easily rendered in English. In our desire to get his work out to the broadest possible audience, we have tried to render his work in colloquial English instead of finding suitable English correlates for that style.

Freinet was not an academic and so his writing is mercifully free of Eduspeak and other forms of professional jargon. Nevertheless, there are certain key phrases that he coined or adapted and that crop up again and again in his work. We have, therefore, felt obliged to find standard ways to translate them.

L'École Moderne. The Modern School is the name Freinet gave to his vision of a school for the Modern Era, one that would stand in stark contrast to the traditional school. The name reflects two preoccupations of Freinet: the idea that the school must welcome and adapt modern technology in the service of an education for all the people, and the idea that out of this new kind of school could be born a new society built on socialist principles of justice and cooperation.

Le texte libre: Free Writing, the term Freinet uses to describe the short compositions that Freinet asks children to compose freely from their own experience or interests.

L'imprimerie à l'école: Classroom Printing, rather than "printing at school," in order to emphasize the fact that it is done in class by the students as an integral part of their work.

Le journal scolaire: The School Magazine, a rather lofty title that may imply the institutionalized extra-mural activity of many high schools, but is less misleading in our view than "school newspaper." It is the usual product of Classroom Printing based on a selection of pieces of Free Writing.

La correspondance interscolaire. School-to-school correspondence. This is the term used to described the "culture packages," consisting mainly in school magazines, that are sent back and forth in the mail between twinned Freinet classes in different schools. Dennis Sayers, who uses a similar technique with computers and electronic mail, calls it "interscholastic correspondence." We believe that the element "scholastic" carries unfortunate overtones for the Freinet reader (see below).

Le fichier scolaire: Educational files, the system of cooperatively collecting, cataloguing and storing documentation of any and every kind.

La Bibliothèque de travail (B.T.): Work Library, an admittedly arbitrary, literal translation of the French, which for Freinet denotes nothing less than a cumulative child-authored or child-inspired enyclopedia, and one that is now regularly published from Freinet classes' work from all over the French-speaking world.

Les fichiers auto-correctifs: Self-correcting worksheets, Freinet's version of materials to assist independent learning on tasks that will vary according to pupils' individual needs.

Les ateliers: Workshop areas are central to Freinet's notions of school architecture. We prefer the term workshop over "work station" or "activity centre," because of the importance of the craft-based quality of much of the work that Freinet considered so important in the elementary school (printing, engraving, painting, pottery, and so on). Freinet was deeply committed to production for use, as we used to say.

Les plans de travail: Learner-based schedules adds a word not in the French that it translates (*learner-based*) but, without it, the particularity of Freinet's approach to planning schoolwork may be muted by a sense of solid, immutable timetabling otherwise connoted by the unvarnished use of schedule.

Les brevets: Diplomas, although it is clear from the way he talks about them that a case could be made for "badges" or "credits." In the end the connotations of apprenticeship and qualification for work implied in diplomas won out over the exercise-based

implications of the "badges" awarded to scouts and guides, or the official connotations of "credits."

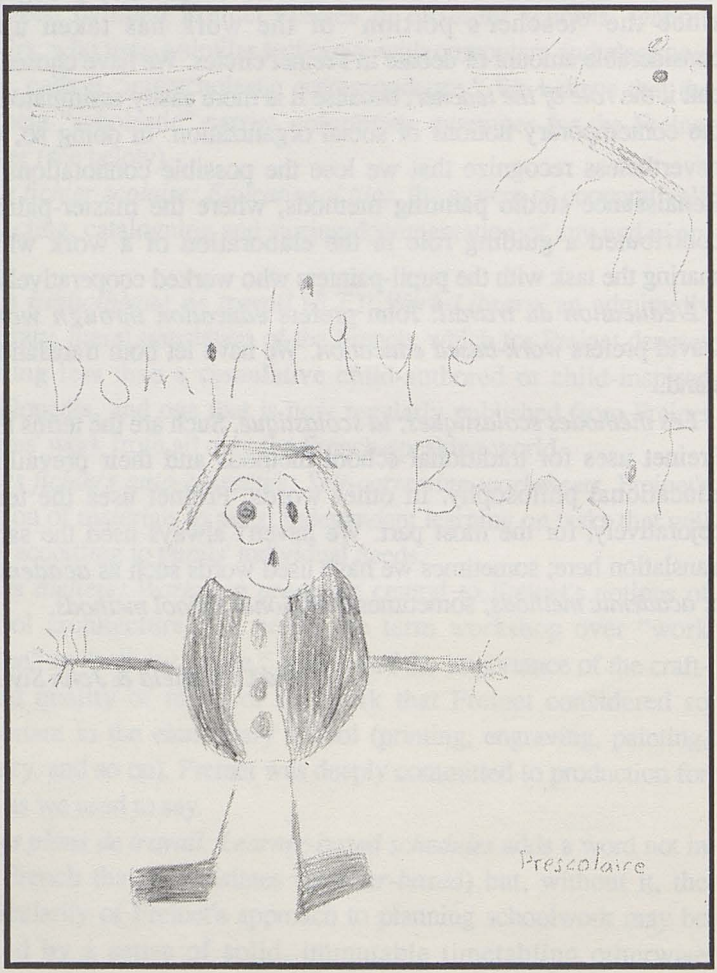
La part du maître: A critical notion in cooperative pedagogy, since the "teacher's portion" of the work has taken up a considerable amount of debate in Freinet circles. We have chosen to call it the *role of the teacher*, because it is more easily assimilated to the contemporary notions of social organization. In doing so, we nevertheless recognize that we lose the possible connotations of Renaissance studio painting methods, where the master-painter contributed à guiding role in the elaboration of a work while sharing the task with the pupil-painters who worked cooperatively.

L'éducation du travail: John prefers *education through work,* David prefers *work-based education.* We have let both translations stand.

Les méthodes scolastiques; la scolastique. Such are the terms that Freinet uses for traditional school methods and their prevailing educational philosophy. In other words, Freinet uses the term pejoratively, for the most part. We haven't always used the same translation here; sometimes we have used words such as *academia* or *academic methods;* sometimes *traditional school methods.*

David Clandfield & John Sivell

FREINET OF THE WOODEN CLOGS



by Dominique Benoit, Kindergarten
(a reminder of his peasant origins)

Part One

Who Was Célestin Freinet?

Célestin Freinet (1896-1966) was born in rural south-eastern France and lived his entire life there. Throughout his writing he often refers affectionately to his carefree village childhood, which influenced his life-long conviction that school must be a place for children to develop happily and optimistically. Moreover, he frequently recalls the early values that remained important to him as a teacher: creative and useful work, skillful observation of human beings and of nature, cooperation, respect for differences, common sense, community spirit, and social justice. This tranquil country life, however, was not in store for the adult Freinet.

During World War I Freinet was severely wounded. Doctors advised him to rely on a state pension so as to avoid the strain of regular work. Nonetheless, Freinet had trained as an elementary school teacher and was determined to follow that career. This

decision challenged him in a way that powerfully affected his approach to teaching methods. Freinet was not personally inclined to operate in a highly teacher-centred way. But in any case, he soon proved so weak that he simply could not use the accepted approach of his time: standing in front of the class all day, shouting orders and dictating lessons. Instead, Freinet grew to rely on individualized and learner-centred activities like child authorship, classroom printing, school-to-school correspondence, project work, and semi-autonomous learning based on self-correcting worksheets. However, while some parents enthusiastically supported Freinet's innovations, others bitterly opposed them as an attack on the established order of the school and of society at large. Thus, after a great success at his first school in the village of Bar-sur-Loup, Freinet met such hostility among some parents at his second school—in the more middle-class village of Saint Paul—that he decided to resign as a public schoolteacher. In 1935 he opened his own independent school at Le Pioulier, which is still functioning today.

To pool ideas and to share the huge burden of developing extensive support materials for innovative teaching, Freinet established the forerunner of the flourishing present-day Modern School Cooperative Institute (Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne) in 1926. The institute published a newsletter, sponsored workshops, and offered an increasing range of materials and equipment at cost. In the same year Freinet took his first steps toward what many see as his "trademark" teaching innovation: exchanges of parcels and written material between classes (and their families) in different parts of France. Such initiatives illustrate Freinet's view that cooperation must function in multiple directions: pupil-pupil, teacher-pupil, teacher-parent, pupil-community, and so on.

At the outbreak of World War II, Freinet's well-known activism brought him rapid internment as a socialist. Although held in the non-occupied sector of France, he was in real danger. After eighteen months, he was released on house arrest and secretly joined the

Resistance. Freinet's experience with cooperative ventures and his many correspondents all over France made him a very valuable organizer, especially in the rural area around Gap. After the War, he returned to his school at Le Pioulier. At that point, the social climate was becoming more receptive to Freinet's teaching methods, but the innovator declined offers to re-enter the state educational system. In those earlier post-War years, the risk of undermining the school's special character by such a move was probably still too great, and he continued running the school as an independent laboratory for research, field-testing, and workshops. Very recently, however, in the 1989-90 academic year, the staff and parents at Le Pioulier began discussions with the French government aimed at returning the school to the state system as an officially recognized experimental and resource centre for innovative teaching.

REACHING OUT

As many of the readings in this translation clearly show, Freinet was faced with a very awkward organizational problem. On the one hand, he understood that innovative teachers could do their best work only if they received strong logistical support: this meant published classroom materials, practical books on teaching methods, and occasional conferences or workshops. To provide such support, some kind of association or professional body had to be set up. On the other hand, Freinet powerfully distrusted anything like a "patent method" or a "teaching formula." He knew only too well how centrally-imposed textbooks and courses of study could undermine teachers' best efforts to tap their pupils' natural interest in regional events or activities that central planners would never take seriously. Obviously, little would be gained by setting up a professional association as rigidly centralized as the Ministry of Education that the association's members were trying to replace! One of Freinet's first steps was to establish a newsletter to inform teachers about conferences and local workshops, to exchange

teaching tips, and to offer a forum for debate. Freinet began teaching in 1920, and his original newsletter—*Classroom Printing (L'Imprimerie à l'École)*—appeared as early as 1927. Publication ceased during World War II, but in 1945 he brought out the first issue of a second magazine, *The Educator (L'Éducateur)*, which is still being produced. All along, moreover, he located publishers for inexpensive and useful handbooks by himself or others on innovative teaching techniques. By 1937 he had established an ambitious paperback series called *Handbooks on New Techniques for Popular Education (Les Brochures d'Éducation Nouvelle Populaire,* BENP). After the War, this initiative continued, and two other series were added: the *Modern School Library (Bibliothèque de l'École Moderne,* BEM) and *Modern School Teaching Documents (Dossiers Pédagogiques de l'École Moderne).*

In all series, the books were produced by a wide range of different authors. Often; classroom teachers from a number of schools would cooperate to treat various aspects of one broad theme in a single volume. And starting with a 1930 Portuguese version of an early text by Freinet himself, under the same title as the first newsletter, *Classroom Printing*, many of these works were translated into languages other than French. To help arrange major conferences, and then to produce and sell (at cost) classroom materials and equipment, Freinet and his collaborators in 1926 founded a professional association, the State School Cooperative (Coopératif de l'Enseignement Laïc, CEL). In 1948, a second body called the Modern School Cooperative Institute (Institut Coopératif de l'École Moderne, ICEM) was proposed, to handle the strictly educational activities of the group (legally established in 1951), while the CEL remained responsible for obtaining and selling materials and equipment. Finally, in 1967 the International Federation of Modern School Movements (Fédération Internationale des Mouvements de l'École Moderne, FIMEM) was born. At the very beginning, the original association had just 10 members. By 1928 there were 100; the number quickly rose to 250 in 1930, and 500 in 1932. Despite the anti-socialist hysteria in pre-

War France, the group prospered. And even after the War—when superficial changes in Ministry policies on education led some members to leave the CEL—the size and vigor of the association continued increasing, with at times as many as 20,000 members in France alone. Additionally, international groups—beginning in the late 'twenties in Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland—have swelled the numbers even further.

As with the newsletter and the book series, the ICEM and the FIMEM were not designed as centrally-controlled monoliths. Local activities are encouraged alongside larger conferences. Information on successful techniques, materials and equipment is shared, but no uniform method is imposed. Freinet's own contribution was great; yet, there were rarely signs of a stifling personality cult. His ideal was always to test, perfect and promote effective "techniques" but never to dictate a single, all-controlling "method." He was always wary of any heavy-handed organization that might crush individual initiative. Even the movement itself, despite its debt to him, does not give Freinet's name a central place in its title: typically, we see "Modern School Cooperative Institute," "Modern School Movement," or—at most—"Modern School (Freinet Techniques)."

SCHOOL COOPERATION

Compared to most North American school systems, French education remains even today astonishingly centralized and controlled. And this was especially the case in the early years of Freinet's career. Freinet consistently resisted this hierarchy. Works like *No More Textbooks* (*Plus de Manuels Scolaires*, 1928) reflect Freinet's aim to help pupils escape from the worst abuses of over-centralized school planning. In spite of such resistance, however, one thing was always clear to him: if nothing else, the picky textbooks and detailed syllabuses imposed by the Ministry of Education certainly did provide teachers with a wealth of convenient—if boring!—materials, and with clear advice on

exact—if ineffective!—teaching techniques. Thus, if educational innovation were to have any chance of success, forward-looking teachers would have to help each other create a similarly complete, but much more appealing, environment of support.

It is important to note that Freinet's approach to educational cooperation is not identical to what is called Cooperative Learning in North America. Normally, North Americans stress in-class cooperation among pupils. This concern is present, of course, in Freinet's thinking as well. A democratic, tolerant and cooperative classroom atmosphere is crucial to all "modern educational theory" (if not practice). However, in the social and political circumstances of France in the 'twenties and 'thirties, Freinet and the CEL/ICEM were quickly led to recognize the *additional* need for cooperation among teachers, and between teachers and the wider society.

Classroom printing, one of Freinet's best-known innovations, offers an excellent example of the far-reaching cooperative network that he recommends. As early as 1922—after only two years of teaching—Freinet realized that even a very simple press, able to print just a few lines on a half-sized sheet of paper, could open the way to a number of valuable forms of cooperation. First of all, selecting, editing, type-setting, printing and distributing the texts entail voting, peer counselling, and labour-sharing: all important forms of in-class cooperation. But there is much more. Once an effective printing system is in place, pupils can build up a stock of child-authored texts to be used later for educational projects and reading practice. Learners can also easily produce good-quality multiple copies of flyers and school magazines for exchange with other classes in different parts of the country or even abroad. These simple exchanges, in turn, may lead to more ambitious schemes like exchanges of culture packages (parcels of local information, pictures, regional products ...) or even of pupils. At the same time, participating teachers are helping each other not only through the provision of pedagogically useful cooperative materials and experiences, but also through discussion and mutual encouragement. And parents or other members of the wider

community outside the classroom can also become involved by reading school magazines or sharing in the preparation (and receipt) of parcels. The outcome is a broad environment of support and understanding for educational innovation. This way, three of the main partners in school change—pupils, teachers, and society—are each given a chance to know what is going on, to make a contribution, and to share in the outcomes. Such cooperation gained rapid acceptance. Freinet's own printing-centred exchanges began with just one other teacher in 1924, and then a second in 1925. But by 1930 hundreds of exchanges were in operation all over France and, at the urging of the CEL and other groups, school newspapers were officially accorded reduced-rate postal status; after World War II this valuable concession was reaffirmed by the French parliament, but only for school newspapers "produced through Freinet-style techniques of classroom printing" (National Assembly Record for 22 July, 1954).

EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Classroom printing brings to mind the issue of educational technology. Throughout his career, Freinet was intensely interested in technological innovation. It is thought-provoking to speculate on the part he would have taken in the current development of computer hardware and software. Certainly, in his own time he was an open-minded—if demanding—experimenter with new technologies. He often praised the simple, honest and genuine life-style of unpretentious villagers, but he was no starry-eyed nostalgic! It would be a mistake to suppose that Freinet's rural origins and his hard-nosed approach to science and technology made him an opponent of new educational tools. He was always ready to consider the potential of recent inventions and, as with printing, he was equally insightful regarding the utility of traditional technologies that had not before been put to classroom use. When Freinet stresses the idea of flexible "techniques" instead of a single

rigid "method," one of his main points is precisely that new inventions must be field-tested so as to bring the best of them into the up-to-date teacher's changing repertoire.

Even with classroom printing itself, Freinet—as excerpts in this collection attest—experimented not only with metal type but also with stencils, dittos, and lino-cuts. Then, having decided in 1922 that type-setting was the best solution, he still kept looking for equipment that would perform better than his first little press. By 1925 he had made his own design, which he had a local artisan produce. And when the CEL began operating in a big way as an equipment distributor (especially after 1937), Freinet presses were a major item in its inventory. Moreover, as time went on a wide range of other technological devices was added. In 1925 Freinet managed to convince the town council to purchase a film projector for the school. Soon afterwards, the 1927 CEL congress agreed to establish a cooperative film library for all members to share and, in 1928, the movement's newsletter changed its title from *Classroom Printing* to *Classroom Printing, Film, Radio and New Techniques for Popular Education.* In 1931 a CEL member proposed the adoption of an early teaching machine, devised to introduce children to arithmetical operations; this interest in learner-controlled technology never waned, with Freinet himself presenting the latest audio-tape teaching materials developed by ICEM members at the 1964 conference, the second-last he was able to attend. And all along the CEL continued collecting, printing and distributing tried-and-true teacher-made materials in the *Work Library (Bibliothèque de travail)* and the *Cooperative Resource File (Fichier scolaire coopératif)* series, so that a large and sophisticated but user-managed publishing enterprise could serve the real needs of pupils and instructors alike.

Whenever we read Freinet's comments on such technological advances, it is clear that his interest in them was double: of course, he saw the obvious possibility of making the classroom more colourful and less monotonous, but he also kept returning to the *empowering* effect of technology for both pupils and teachers. To

ensure this empowerment, the technology must be carefully selected and employed. In the classic factory context, machinery may be no better than a means of oppression, trapping human beings in soul-destroying patterns of repetitive and valueless action. Not surprisingly, then, Freinet showed no enthusiasm for educational technology designed simply to monitor or control learner behaviour. On the other hand, he had a strikingly modern ability to understand the power of well-chosen technology to individualize and enrich users' experience. To do this, the technology must permit a high degree of personal control over the content, order and rate of the learning experience. This kind of flexibility is easy to see in the case of such dramatic technological innovations as classroom printing, where the press is at the centre of a complex of activity fed by free compositions arising naturally from pupils' genuine experiences, or the film library, where once again relatively expensive and complicated tools—the projector and the films themselves—let the teacher and pupils structure the educational experience as they see fit. Still, we should not overlook this same characteristic in much less "mechanical" technologies. Faced with classrooms lacking the most elementary resources, Freinet also finds time for very simple devices like self-correcting worksheets, files of pictures and texts for projects, and collections of seasonal and thematic support materials for lessons; in each case, the point is to build up appropriate educational technology to facilitate free and flexible planning that can rapidly adapt to whatever currents of interest naturally stir.

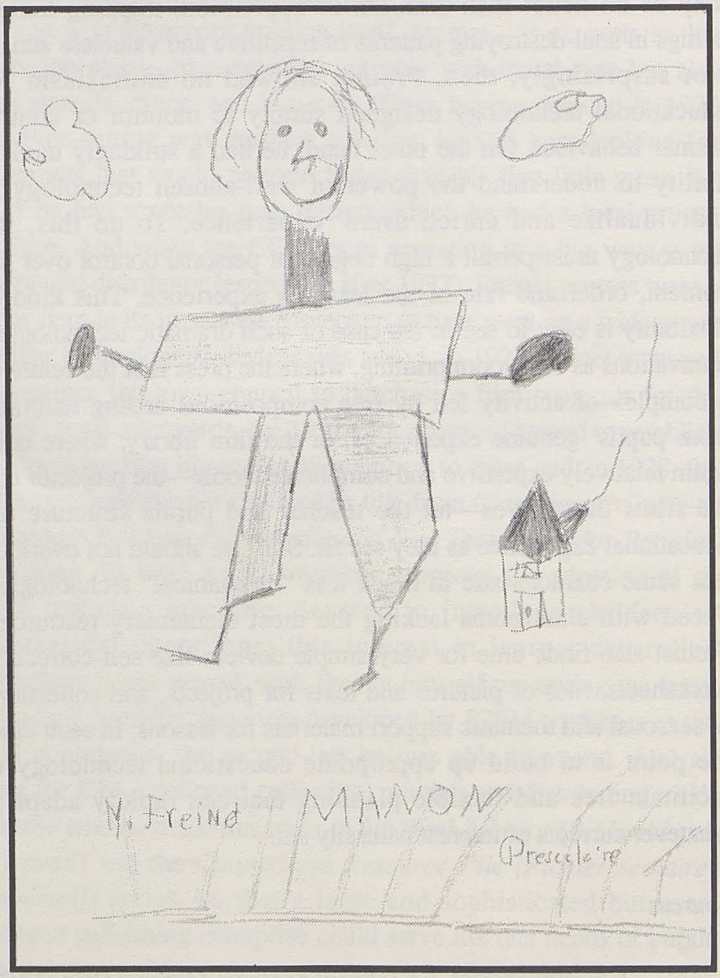
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FREINET OF THE BIG HANDS



by Manon, Kindergarten
(a reminder of the importance he attached to labour)

Part Two

FREINET'S TECHNIQUES FOR THE MODERN SCHOOL

There are many possible access points to the work and legacy of Célestin Freinet. But the core principles that it embodies are grounded first and foremost in concrete classroom practice. Over and over again Freinet insists on this. Whatever he is writing about—mathematics, school discipline, teacher-training, his own life story, school-community relations, parental participation, State education policy—he always comes back to the classroom. What is done there ultimately shapes everything else. It is the inductive, materialist approach par excellence.

When Freinet writes about the classroom, he assumes his readers agree with two fundamental goals:

—to share the schooling experience more evenly between

teachers, learners and community;
—to use whatever modern technology has to offer to make this possible.

But this is far more than shallow "participatory democracy" and a love affair with gadgetry. Freinet's concept of cooperation is pervasive and his commitment to technology is critical in tone. It is a perspective influenced by movements similar to what we have experienced in Canada: agrarian cooperativism, the Antigonish movement, Prairie Co-operatives, the CCF, the Caisses Populaires Desjardins, and such urban counterparts as Housing Co-ops. There are also important aspects of "appropriate technology" and conservationism that today's democratic socialists are having to learn from the environmental movement and such "small is beautiful" advocates as the Schumacher Institute and The Other Economic Summit.

Most of the ensuing extracts are taken from Freinet's *Les Techniques Freinet de l'École Moderne* (Paris, Colin, first published in 1964), a commercially published paperback that summarized many of Freinet's techniques for a large French readership. It has gone through at least ten editions and been translated into German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, and Portuguese. Two of the sections have been taken from smaller brochures published and distributed through the Freinet movement's own co-op (CEL—Coopérative de l'enseignement laïc): *Le Texte libre*, Cannes, CEL, 1962 (first published in 1947) and Le Journal scolaire, Cannes, CEL, 1967 (first published in 1957).

1

ORIGINS

It would be arrogant to insist that our techniques provide perfect answers to every question asked by teachers today. Still, we can claim that they do offer really new options. Nowadays, the democratization of education and the need to improve school success require something better than the outdated theories of traditional teaching. Innovative thinking that improves other areas of human activity applies to education, too.

The Modern School Movement's "Freinet Approach" is quite prepared to face the acid test by giving ordinary teachers what they really need. And we know we have to avoid the temptation of vague, over-simplified theories. Above all, our approach shows how the timeless theories of education's greatest thinkers can actually be put into practice. And these successes may be observed in thousands of schools where their practicality has been recognized as the way to the future.

I don't pretend to be some kind of genius destined to be a leader. Indeed, I very nearly joined the large majority of my colleagues, who were satisfied to repeat their comfortable and undemanding little routines until the day they retired. However, when I got back from World War I in 1920, I was a "wounded hero" with lungs so weak I could never have spoken to a whole classroom for more than a few minutes. Yet despite my respiratory problems, I might still

have been able to carry on somehow with conventional methods. But I just couldn't face the prospect of holding forth in front of pupils whose drowsy eyes showed perfectly well that they didn't understand a thing. And there was no way I was going to punctuate my classes with the familiar choruses:

—Listen up, will you!

—Have you finished banging your feet against the desk?

—Tell me what I just said ...

Going that route would have been a waste of time, and anyway I probably wouldn't have been strong enough to carry on. Like a drowning man, I reached for some buoy to keep me afloat. It was a matter of life or death for me.

If like most of my colleagues I'd had the lung-power to push ahead despite my listless pupils, I might well have convinced myself that the old ways were acceptable after all. I might have relied on constant teacher-talk—the prime tool of traditional instructors—and my educational experiments would never have happened.

Underlying my research was a personal need for better methods to help improve my own effectiveness. But there was also a passionate desire to render full justice to a profession that I loved and in which I was determined to continue.

Also, another feature of my personality and aspirations drove me to leave the beaten path: an emotional and intellectual need to belong to a social class and to a teaching profession that reflected the realities of the environment that had made me what I was. This problem was always in my mind; I had to find a way to do my work without being cut off from my colleagues.

When I got the idea for classroom printing, I could have followed the modern fashion and taken out a patent, as Madame Montessori did, for all the equipment necessary for my new approach. But if I'd done so, I would have lost touch with my co-workers from the very beginning.

I didn't hesitate to take a very different route: instead of trying to control the secret of that discovery, I deliberately shared it with my

colleagues. At the time, we pioneers were not numerous but we already had a small cooperative movement with a magazine to publish collections of child writing. And we also had exchanges of materials, a system of class-to-class correspondence, and the beginnings of a conference series for teachers interested in cooperative learning. So we'd already broken out of the vicious circle of sterile individualism. We'd laid the foundations of our movement for cooperative methodology.

But getting back to the start of my career, my problem was to break away from the traditional approach that suited my healthier colleagues so well, and to find a new methodology better adapted to my limited physical strength.

Thus, I used a tactic adopted by all researchers; I followed the same process of experimental trial and error that we later recognized as central to our entire classroom methodology...

[To find my way, I read widely and visited schools and conferences in Italy, Germany and Russia.] But when I was all alone in my classroom, without help and without the moral support of the educational innovators whom I admired, I felt desperate. None of the theories I had read or heard could be adapted to my village school. The only really impressive practical examples that I had seen were in a few Swiss schools where pupil numbers were low and teacher quality remarkably high, conditions very different from what I had to face. I had no option but to fall back on conventional techniques, giving lessons that no one understood and using textbooks that—even when they were simple enough to be comprehensible—were utterly unrelated to my pupils' own experience. ... It was all just memory-work, as boring to my pupils as it was to me.

It was exhausting and depressing; yet, I had no choice but to fake my classes like an actor counterfeiting emotions in the hope of momentarily catching the eye of an inattentive audience.

Colleagues advised me to be patient: "You'll get used to it ... You need to establish a certain rhythm, even if it's a bit sleepy, just to survive!" And the inspector had nothing better to offer than praises

for the wonderful accomplishments of Ms. X or Mr. Y: "You should see their classes!" Which was just a devious way to remind me of my own professional incompetence.

Extract from C. Freinet, Les techniques Freinet de l'École Moderne, Paris, Armand Colin, 1964.

2

FREE WRITING

FREE WRITING MUST BE GENUINELY FREE

Readers will probably think we're overstating the obvious. But school traditions are so ingrained, they've so deeply affected most of our teachers, they've done such a good job in weakening confidence in children, that nobody minds if official policy says we should let kids write freely..."but we do realize, don't we, that kids do have to be steered towards the right topics.... after all, we can hardly be expected to let them to write just whatever they like."

The result is that we end up doing free writing as we used to do assigned compositions. We schedule free writing into the school timetable. In other words, rather than giving the kids a topic to write on as we did before, we now let them choose their own topics. But that kind of exercise really ought to be called: Composition on a topic of your choice.

If the kids don't feel like writing anything at that moment in the timetable, we'll make them write anyway. If they can't come up

with a topic they feel strongly about, they'll just have to try. Or else we'll slip them an idea or two.

The compositions done this way will be read, but that's all. They'll be corrected and copied out into a special notebook, and this does have some merit from both an educational and a human point of view. And this approach does mark a step forward from the traditional composition with an assigned topic. But only in the rarest of cases will it result in the most important features of genuine free writing: spontaneity, creation, life, a lasting personal link with the world, and a deep expression of the child's inner self.

Free writing must be genuinely free. This means writing only when you've got something to say, when you feel a burning need to set down in writing or in pictures something bubbling up inside you.

Spontaneous writing is an activity children will do on a corner of the table late at night; on their knees, while listening to their grandmother relive the extraordinary stories of life in days gone by; on their schoolbags, while waiting to go into class; and also, naturally without prodding, during the free periods scheduled into the school day. In this way, we can be sure that the writing produced represents, in a living way, the things that most deeply stir the children's feelings, the things that mean the most to them, the things that have the most educational value.

But then those of our colleagues who haven't yet tried the technique will say that we aren't providing leadership for the children; that we're lowering ourselves to their level rather than raising them to ours; after all, the riches promised from free writing will be the exception rather than the rule. We'll rarely get enough writing to make it worth while, because the children don't like working when they don't have to, and they soon run out of steam. Or else the same minority of kids will do all the writing, so the changes will be superficial.

FREE WRITING MUST BE MOTIVATED

These objections are natural enough and are quite justified as long as we don't move beyond the framework of the traditional school, where students are given a chance to do productive work as rarely as possible, and even then according to a military rhythm.

The point is that we need a complete change in the motives for writing, along with conditions in which it will be done. Grass and flowers have trouble growing in soil that's been made barren by pseudo-science. We've got to rediscover the humus from which life can resume its beneficial cycle.

In this way we'll reap the success shared by all classes whenever they work on their printing presses. Once writing has a meaning and purpose—communicating with other friends and adults nearby or far away—children come naturally to experience the need to write, to express themselves, just as they come to experience the need to talk in earlier years.

From this point onward, our problem will no longer be how to organize our teaching so that the children learn to read and write willy-nilly, but rather how to make the most of this new need the children feel to engage in real work and express themselves, how to keep the flame alive, and how to channel its energy into educational activities.

If we neglect the motivation provided by the printing press, the mimeograph, the school magazine, and school-to-school correspondence, free writing could easily end up as just a flash in the pan. The result would be the onset of disillusionment and a return to educational darkness and fallacy.

So here's what we say to teachers: give free writing a try. But don't stay only at the first stage, because you're bound to be disappointed. Move on to the school magazine and inter-school correspondence, things that will stimulate new levels of activity.

This free writing will then become an active part of your new teaching practices.

(In the central chapters of the booklet, the techniques for generating free writing at the primary school are spelt out. We are shown how the class chooses one or two first drafts of such writing to work on together. A draft is written on the board, and then the class works with the author to improve the text, to make it clearer for other readers. Spelling errors are first corrected and then grammar, style, and substance. Many of the examples are taken from rural schoolteachers' experiences working with split-grades or single-room schools. Here is an example cited from one such school in central France:)

HOW A CLASS WORKS TO FINISH A PIECE OF FREE WRITING

Georges S., 12 years old, a student capable of the best work or the worst work in the class, has his piece of writing chosen:

> *During the holidays, I had made a small pool. A little boy had come to play. He lay down and then went to sleep and then he fell into the pool. He got out soaking wet. His mother came and told me that I had pushed him in. I told her how it had happened.*

Georges writes his work on the board, and quickly corrects his own spelling mistakes. Now it is time to explain the text: "Is this a miniature pool surrounded by clods of mud?"After some talk we get it straight: Georges dug out a ... we have to think of the right word. And then there was a leak in a pipe crossing the yard... Ultimately, one small group is given the job of making up a small paragraph to clarify the first sentence.

Now for the bit about the tumble. Georges answers our questions, and this will allow a second group to go to work on composing the second paragraph.

Finally, the last but one sentence is too heavy and the composition ends too quickly. Georges and Maxime will work on that together.

The youngsters in the primary grades are given the job of coming up with a series of alternative titles from which the class will make its choice.

Now that the four groups are at work, I can leave them for a while to look after the Grade One pupils.

Then I come back to the composition. Let's assume that we choose the title: "By the Water's Edge". The three paragraphs have been quickly edited into the final version:

> *During the Easter holidays, I built a small pond. I had noticed a leak in the pipe crossing the yard. After several days' work, I dug out a rectangular hole 45 cm. deep, 1.5 metres wide and 2 metres long.*
>
> *Bernadette's kid brother came to play in the yard. He had some fun throwing stones into my pond and floating feathers on the surface. Then, since it was hot, he lay down beside the pool and fell asleep. As he turned over in his sleep, he rolled into the water. This woke him up, and he jumped out of the water soaking wet and crying.*
>
> *His mother came along and got very angry. She accused me of pushing him in. I told her what had happened. But she wouldn't listen and took her little boy home.*

Thus, thanks to a very useful exercise, we turned a bare, mediocre piece of writing into a more substantial piece that had much more to interest its readers.

(Many will recognize features of Process Writing that became so popular in the late seventies and eighties in North America, but the process is engaged in collectively and cooperatively.

Freinet, however, does not see this cooperative production of the text as an end in itself. The life of the text does not stop with the final draft. The last chapter explains how free writing leads into the pedagogy of the Modern School.)

If free writing went no further than this, its inclusion in the normal round of activities of our public schools would already mark a big step forward. It would be a breath of fresh air as well as a clear reordering of our priorities to meet the functional needs of our children. Its use allows us to go beyond the level of theory in language arts and get into the heart of language building in a social context.

But it will also be realized that we can't slam the door shut, once it's been opened if even for an instant. Our job rather is to open up a large French window to brighten and strengthen all our educational practice.

This involves what we call the pedagogical development of free writing. It means making the maximum use of this free writing for the cultural values we want to promote.

Below we lay out one possible sequence for such a development, a sequence that can be adversely affected or slowed down only by the inexperience of teachers not used to these techniques and the partial or total lack of the new tools needed to make it work.

1. The hand-written school magazine. Each student has a special notebook into which she copies the text chosen and finished by the class. At the end of the month, a magazine made up from these texts is sent off to classes on the correspondence network.

2. School-to-school correspondence. Ask our office to help you join a group and get you the corresponding classes you need.

3. Duplicated magazine: with our economically-priced Freinet ditto machine or our automatic mimeograph machine.

4. Printed magazine.

5. Drawings reproduced by lino-cuts, or with a special stylus on a stencil.

6. Specially made albums to put on display or to send to the correspondents.

7. After putting each piece of free writing up on the board, try a treasure hunt for words (a vocabulary exercise based on the text).

8. After each piece of free writing, you can include grammatical remarks and exercises.

9. Work on one of the following themes:
   survey of village life;
   historical or geographical research;
   scientific work;
   classroom presentations;
   living mathematics.

As you progress through these pedagogical development techniques, you will be moving from the stage of free writing into the techniques of the Modern School.

Your school cooperative will be in place to organize and develop your workshops and other facilities; you will begin work to set up the Cooperative Resource Files that will quickly turn into one of the essential tools for your class, with the fine and extensive Work Library.

You will then be able to launch your students into Learner-based Schedules and Classroom Presentations. You will use the Self-Correcting Worksheets. You will engage in Free Drawing. Your class will become a hive of activity, where work, order and discipline become the normal features of life triumphant.

The technique of Free Writing cannot be an end in itself. It's a step we can take now without further ado in all our schools, indeed it's official policy—but it's only one step on the road towards Freinet pedagogy whose successes you can hear about from thousands of schools across France today.

We hope that as you close this modest booklet, you will feel your heart opening to the winds of change blowing in from the Modern School.

Extract taken from Célestin Freinet, Le texte libre, B.E.M. #3, Cannes, 1960 revised edition

3

CLASSROOM PRINTING

We were all looking for a practical and technical oasis beneath the desert sky of dry academia. For instance, in order to inject a little life into the classroom, some innovators came up with the "class outing." Obviously the word "outing" was badly calculated to please parents who hardly thought they sent their children to school so that they could go on little strolls! And inspectors had no great desire to comb the local fields looking for some class they had to observe!

Nonetheless, the class outing was a life-saver for me. Instead of drowsing in front of some reading passage, as soon as school started in the afternoon we all went on an outing into the fields around the village. Going through the streets, we stopped to admire the work of the blacksmith, the cabinet-maker or the weaver, whose confident mastery made us want to practise their skills. We got to know the countryside in all seasons: in winter, when the farmers beat their olive trees to bring the ripe fruit down on tarpaulins spread out over the ground, or in spring, when the opening orange blossoms seemed to cry out to be gathered. We no longer limited ourselves to an academic view of flowers, insects, stones or streams. Rather, we felt the identity of these objects with all our souls, not just rationally, but with a full range of emotions. And we brought back little treasures: fossils, catkins, clay, or a dead bird...

Naturally, in that new non-academic atmosphere we had direct access to kinds of understanding that were quite different from the

traditional learning of the schoolroom. We spoke to each other in a friendly way; we shared with each other a kind of education that came from our own experience and that very obviously benefited pupils and teacher alike. When we got back to the schoolroom, we wrote up the high points of our outing on the blackboard.

But all that was just a momentary chink of light in the dreary wall of traditional teaching. Everything died after the initial excitement. For lack of innovative equipment and satisfactory methods, I had no way to escape the old routine for handling printed texts: "Now class, open your books at page 38, *Gluttony*" (or some other topic that was equally boring to my pupils). And all the time we were reading about *Gluttony*, we were thinking back to our lively and meaningful outing. Language itself took on a new force when used in the context of our exciting adventures. There was a complete and inevitable split between real life and the classroom. And because of that contrast, the schoolwork we were forced to complete lost every vestige of lively interest: it became a picky and meaningless chore.

AT LAST AN ACTIVITY THAT REDEFINES THE LIMITS OF THE CLASSROOM: PRINTING

Then I got the idea of having easy-to-use printing equipment to transform the lively accounts of our excursions into printed pages to replace the standard reader. That way, reading the account would be as fascinating and meaningful as creating it. It was a simple and logical scheme, so simple that I was amazed that no one had thought of it before. So I tried to put my dream into practice. Luckily, an aged printer was able to provide a small press, framed in wood, with small-sized composing sticks; theoretically, this would enable us to print up our excursion notes. In fact, however, we were hard put to print more than 5, 6, or 7 lines, just enough to fill the 10.5 X 13.5 cm pages we used at the time.

To begin with, I didn't expect the pupils to stay interested for long in a job that was both complicated and precise. I was so

accustomed to the kind of work that you just force the class to do that I never even imagined the option of less oppressive and more enjoyable activity.

But I was wrong. The children were extremely interested in setting up the type in the composing sticks and printing the pages, even though the equipment was really primitive. They got hooked by the process not just because actually manipulating the type was fascinating, but especially because we all rediscovered one of education's most normal and natural cycles: observation, thought, and then natural creation of an ideal text. This was the text we set in metal and printed out. And everyone present—especially the author—was deeply moved by the outcome of the printing cycle, a splendidly presented text with the quality of a real document.

This first discovery formed a basis for all the educational innovations we developed later. We had rejoined a natural circuit that dry academic methods had broken. From then on, the pupil's own thoughts and lives could become central elements in their education

Extract taken from Celestin Freinet, Le texte libre, B.E.M. #3, Cannes, 1960 revised edition

4

THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE

Thousands of Freinet-Style School Magazines are printed regularly, in France and abroad. Taken all together, they constitute the most impressive and the richest collection of child-authored materials ever seen to date. Their importance in France has recently been legitimized by a special law authorizing Freinet-Style School Magazines to be mailed at the reduced magazine-rate.

Unquestionably, the school magazine is a key feature of modern teaching in France and abroad.

THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE TECHNIQUE

Every magazine has its Editor and its Editorial Committee. They receive, and if necessary, solicit texts to be printed, and they examine these texts in order to determine their suitability for publication.

This model may be appropriate in the middle school, with children who are able to take individual responsibility for the various jobs. But it isn't possible in the primary school, with children can who only rarely produce a publishable text on their own.

The Freinet-Style School Magazine is an anthology of free texts produced and printed day by day according to the Freinet Method, and brought together in a special binding at the end of the month. The publication is then distributed to subscribers and to groups exchanging magazines from other schools.

But what is this free writing? What gives it its interest and originality, as well as its educational value?

In many classes, compositions have no other outcome than to be corrected and graded. Likewise, many teachers are convinced that pupils can neither think nor create and that they can benefit only from what the instructor or the textbook offers. If so, the pupils will turn out "assignments" but never "creations" likely to reflect their real personalities.

Such old-style compositions, even if they are letter-perfect, can never give life to a school magazine.

In our classes children express orally and, later, freely write down whatever they feel a need to communicate with their classmates or their pen-pals. But they don't write just any old thing. The "spontaneity" everyone desires is not so simple. Children at school express themselves in an environment that teachers must make as educational as possible, in order to reach goals based on genuine life-skills.

Child self-expression according to our approach automatically involves social interaction through the influence of the school

magazine and school to school correspondence. Children no longer want to write about what just interests them personally; they see the need to write about thoughts, feelings and actions that may also interest their classmates and their pen-friends.

Child-authored texts, chosen by a show of hands, are collectively revised, both for accuracy of content and for grammar, syntax and spelling. Thus, each composition passed to the classroom printers is the result of a work-method that preserves childlike thought while offering technical help until the day when pupils are able to work independently and to produce texts and poems that other's input would only spoil.

FROM FREE WRITING TO THE MAGAZINE

Free writing, initiated by our group thirty years ago, is in the process of replacing current methods of composition, inside the classroom and out.

It has real advantages, but these risk being undermined if the process is halted half-way through. It's as if engineers enthusiastically traced and smoothed a new road, but then cut it off the first time it had to cross a ravine. In many cases, the teacher-engineer doesn't have the resources to bridge the gap. Of course, we could simply improve the road as it stands, which would at least be useful as far as it goes. But all the same, it would remain a dead-end that would soon fall into disuse. Alternatively, we could attempt a long and inconvenient detour around the obstacle.

You must not stop half-way through. Once your pupils produce a carefully perfected text that inspires pride, you must ensure that it is transformed into a daily record in the pupil's notebooks, and then into part of the class's school magazine. Make the most of all the new possibilities for exchanges that this "bridge" to the wider world opens up to you.

But how can we make such a school magazine a reality?

(Here follow nine and a half pages offering a number of options for the reproduction of school magazines. As the last one listed is by far Freinet's preferred method—and is also the one attracting the most attention, admiration, and imitation in France and abroad—only its account is translated verbatim.

Freinet begins with option a) handwriting. He suggests that even this simple approach, producing just one copy for circulation, can be an attractive group project with each child contributing one or more pages carefully written out by hand. And he comments wryly that, even with adults and in the unpromising circumstances of a detention camp in 1941, such a venture proved most satisfactory ... although "for non-educational reasons, it didn't survive beyond issue number one."

Option b) is lino-cutting. Linoleum cuts offer the possibility of better-quality illustrations; they also initiate pupils into the demands and satisfactions of exploiting simple technology.

Dittoed copies are option c). This approach can greatly increase the number of copies, although the quality of reproduction is less than ideal. Offering pupils' work the dignity of top-quality presentation is important. Thus, the limitations of this technique rule out purchasing expensive new equipment; however, Freinet advises that, until they can do better, teachers may well use machines already present in the community.

Option d) is stencils. Stencilled copies are clearer and longer-lasting than dittoed ones. If cut on an unworn typewriter, stencils produce very sharp letter-shapes, and the number of good copies is much higher than with dittos.

Finally, children can draw their own pictures right on the stencil, which is an advantage that even type-setting—the preferred method—cannot match.)

THE PRINTED MAGAZINE

Whatever method of reproduction you start with, you'll be caught

up in a process leading inevitably towards classroom printing, unless from the outset you have been able to acquire equipment that lets you regularly put out an attractively printed and illustrated magazine of the sort that is produced these days by the thousands in France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Greece, Africa, America ...

The fact is, printed magazines are best because:

—type-setting always offers better-quality appearance than does copying.

—we quickly tire of reading a dittoed pamphlet, even perfectly run off, whereas a printed page with a tasteful layout is always easy on the eyes.

In practice, children spontaneously prefer printed magazines, especially if they're illustrated and coloured. For them—and this is the acid test—even stencilling is a second-rate procedure.

But the main reason why printing is best is the educational advantages it offers. Oddly enough, these come from precisely the features that one might be tempted to view as handicaps!

Type-setting, we are told, is slow and picky. After first painstakingly sorting all the characters, it's necessary to construct words letter by letter, and texts line by line. On the other hand, a single person can quickly make a lino-cut or type a stencil that will permit almost instantaneous production of hundreds of copies. And yet, in practice, printing is never monotonous. Even adults are attracted to the finer details of typesetting because the technique allows us to create beautiful and permanent copies of texts we admire and that we feel deserve the best possible treatment.

Children setting type have the feeling that the text comes into existence in their own hands. They give the text permanent life and they make it theirs. With this technique, there is no interruption of the total process leading from getting an idea to expressing it, to producing the magazine, and finally to posting it to pen-friends in other schools. Each step is present: writing, group-editing, type-setting, illustration, preparing the paper, inking the type, printing, collating, and stapling.

This craftsmanlike continuity of the total process is the chief educational value of classroom printing. It helps stop the school from conveying the damaging idea that others create our education and our future for us. It returns the school to simple, fundamental concerns, to self-confident values on which pupils can build their lives securely.

Even more than adults, children are very susceptible to the magic of printing. In practice, they opt for stencils whenever they are producing long texts, especially documentary ones. But for literary texts and poems, they insist on the dignity of printing. If you ask a pupil how many of his or her compositions have been printed in the magazine, the answer will be something like: "three printed and two stencilled."

Some adults object that printing causes an extra burden of work, and even wastes time. They'd change their minds if they saw the vast increase in writing and if they had the chance to join in themselves. If so, they'd understand that some kinds of painstaking work are desirable because they have a place in the cycle of individual creativity.

After all, you could just as well say it's a waste of time to climb up some tricky mountainside. Maybe so, but mountaineers enthusiastically accept that difficulty, so as to enjoy the view, tame the peaks, and feel their own strength.

(There is considerable discussion these days as to where Freinet would stand on helping young children learn the complex typesetting skills that are a part of computerized desk-top publishing. My hunch is that he would support it but there are others who feel that it mystifies and conceals the material processes of the printing press, and regrettably by-passes the manipulation of type, the handling of a technology readily understood by its use. Ed.)

Given the opportunity to create a permanent record of their memories, dreams, struggles and successes, children accept the

challenge of overcoming similar obstacles. To reach their goal, they're capable of astonishing self-discipline.

And beyond this initial advantage of printing, there is the additional value of school-to-school correspondence and exchanges. The printed page is an expression of the pupils' personalities released to the wider world. Later, they hear reports of how well their magazine was appreciated, which extends their initial joy in the work of its creation.

Pupils may become bored in a free-writing class without a magazine or an exchange system. They may tire of stencils, which give results that are only half-satisfactory. But they are never bored with printing if it facilitates a school magazine and school-to-school exchanges.

There's always success in every class where the school-magazine technique, backed up with adequate equipment, is practised according to the principles of our methodology.

We cannot guarantee equal success for schools or teachers who—for whatever reason—stop half-way through because they lack either the knowledge or the ability to bridge the ravine and to pursue this journey to its end.

(At this point Freinet devotes two short chapters—four pages—to specific production details and to educational principles. As clear applications of the main points recur in other sections, none of this is translated here.)

CONTENT OF SCHOOL MAGAZINES

The form and content of school magazines arise naturally from the very principles of the Freinet method that directs their production.

The essence of that method is to start not from adult wishes, thoughts or conventions, but rather from the interests and concerns of children as expressed in their free writing.

Teachers must not intervene directly in the order or choice of

compositions selected for printing; this choice must be made through a legitimate vote that is really beyond the control of the teacher.

The problem is that these necessary conditions for a school magazine will be sacrificed so as to obtain improved appearance for adult consumption. We have to find a solution to this conflict, so as to satisfy both sides.

I know very well that any magazine needs some degree of order in its presentation. Readers expect compositions or reports to be classified according to regular features or central themes, with overviews and leading articles, documentaries, stories, local news, games, etc. Several schools have tried this, but their goal has been to make the magazine less an educational instrument than a forum for liaison with the village and the parents. Sometimes they've even seen the magazine as a means of seeking better funding. These are worthwhile goals, but they're not a classroom concern.

In practice, at least at the primary level, the school magazine should just be a collection of free compositions by the children. It should faithfully express the chief interests of the pupils in their own terms. If the class is lively and if it enjoys a rich academic and social environment, the magazine will have variety, depth and originality. If not, its lack of focus and its superficiality will reflect the poverty of the environment. In these circumstances, it is difficult for us to misrepresent the situation, except by turning our backs on our own principles and falsifying the magazine in the ways outlined above.

This doesn't mean we should pay no attention at all to steps that may help the magazine look its best. We've already noted that free writing, as we see it, isn't simply a spontaneous process. Free writing arises from the life of the class, from requests by pen-friends, and from pupils' sense of duty to turn out a magazine that interests all their readers, young and old. This creates an awareness of social responsibility going beyond free writing in the narrowest sense. But let's be realistic: in some instances, the desire to produce a good-looking magazine may result in a new form of rigidity that forces children to follow rules and imitate forms with no reality in

the developmental process our teaching is meant to promote.

These warnings apply particularly to the primary classes, at the age where interest is lively and energetic, but also hard to pin down. At this level, every day brings new centres of interest with educational value that may only be fully explored in later classes.

Recognizably magazine-like formalities can only come in at about age twelve or thirteen, and more particularly in junior high school, in intermediate schools and in high schools. At that age, our method can very well benefit from a publishing plan and a lay-out scheme very similar to what pupils see in actual newspapers or magazines.

Our school magazines have no intention of proving anything or of doing in-depth reporting. They just offer glimpses of real life, transformed into a daily record. Experience confirms that children and adults appreciate that goal very much. Reactions from adult readers, critical letters, and requests for pen-friends are sources of motivation that encourage the creative efforts that a school magazine both requires and permits.

But see for yourself! Ask us for samples that you can pass out among your pupils. From their reaction you'll understand that our type of school magazine really is within reach of your group, and that you can count on success if you help give your class its own school magazine.

(Freinet next devotes about twenty pages to specific techniques of production and to advice on applications within the particular structure of the school system in the France of his time. Although far from uninteresting, this long section is probably not as directly generalizable as the segments that have been chosen for translation.)

RAPID GROWTH OF SCHOOL MAGAZINES IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

Naturally, countries bordering on France have seen the most rapid development of Freinet-method school magazines. School magazines in Italy are very numerous and have a strong family resemblance to ours in France: the same lively basis in free writing, the same format, the same use for exchanges. The Republic of San Marino has set up equipment for printing school magazines in all its classrooms.

Numerous Swiss school magazines embellish our formula with very high quality, which is admirable just so long as it does not introduce the kind of rigidity against which we must always be on guard.

In Belgium, the country of Decroly, school magazines are also numerous, but more influenced by thematic organization than may always be desirable.

German school magazines have more austere typography than ours, but they are richly illustrated with lino-cuts that revive and continue the engraving tradition of the Middle Ages.

Holland has beautiful magazines, totally within the tradition of our techniques. A few Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Greek magazines represent the first steps of our movement in countries where distance and language differences combine to make our influence slower.

In the Americas, Cuba and above all Mexico are showing the way. Many Spanish teachers were once members of the Modern School movement; now they're refugees from Franco in Central America, where they've carried both the techniques and the spirit of the movement. The Freinet Experimental School of San Andrés Tuxla (Mexico) has sent us lively magazines that closely reflect the authentic life of the children and that also have a splendid physical appearance.

The school magazine movement has likewise grown up all over South America, where the term is "school periodicals." They're written by the children, but oriented more towards liaison with

society. They're often village magazines with an influence on education and culture that cannot help but be powerful. A few of these magazines are printed; others are stencilled.

Under the direction of Mrs. Alice Freire de Maciel, a Modern School Cooperative Institute has been set up and is now functioning in Montevideo. It coordinates planning and projects that are already making their mark on teaching practice in those countries.

This spread of the use of school magazines across the world is encouraging evidence of the adoption of our approach. Also, it provides us with opportunities—which still need to be pursued—to focus psychology and teaching practice on their real concern: children in their environment.

Extract from C. Freinet. Le Journal scolaire,
Editions de l'École Moderne Française,
Coopératif de l'Enseignement Laïc—Cannes, 1967

(The remaining sixty-odd pages of Freinet's book—Parts II and III, and the Appendices—offer, respectively, a long, detailed and informative survey of practical uses for school magazines, especially in the French context, a brief discussion of school-to-school correspondence, and eight examples of free writing by children aged 6 to 14.)

5

SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE WITH A PURPOSE

Despite my early success with classroom printing at Bar-sur-Loup, I felt the creative cycle was not yet complete. Of course, the texts we printed in class were read in the village and were usually enjoyed

by the parents, but that wasn't enough. The pupils wanted and deserved a wider audience.

With that in mind I initiated school-to-schoool correspondence. A good friend in Saint-Philibert-de-Trégunc (up on the Atlantic Coast in Brittany, far from my school in the South), bought printing equipment and introduced free writing to his class.

The resulting exchange of texts between our two classes was so successful that it encouraged many other such projects, with or without school magazines, and exciting exchange-visits of pupils, too. In my class we printed twenty-five extra copies of each composition, which we sent to Saint-Philibert every two days. In return, we received a regular stream of compositions from their class. So, at no great cost we enjoyed a two-year-long exchange that—especially for a first-time effort—was a giant success not often bettered in later years.

From the beginning, we shared the lives of our friends in the North. In our minds, we went with them as they walked in the forest or fished in the sea. Their coastal world was brought to us so clearly that we seemed to feel the very force of the storms that made them tremble. As for us, we told them of the orange-blossom and the olive harvests, the Mardi Gras celebration, and the production of perfumes, so that our beloved Provence was carried all the way to the northern coast.

And then one day there was a major event: the first parcel arrived! It contained dulse and seashells and a thick bundle of delicious crêpes. We ate some and gave a taste to each pupil in the next grade down; then, everyone in our class went home at midday with a carefully divided share for the parents. I needn't describe the great enthusiasm aroused by this amazing parcel! And the parents' response was swift: We'll have to send them a parcel, too ... oranges, persimmons, olives, Provençal bread. And so the return parcel was prepared with tremendous excitement.

Our classes took on new life. The cycle was now complete: free composition had been grounded in real-life experiences that could be shared with both parents and pen-friends. We discovered a

powerfully child-based motivation to direct our pupils' free expression.

At present, some teachers using free composition complain their classes don't turn out enough material. If so, it must be because the activity is not properly directed towards a school magazine and a program of school-to-school correspondence. Without such natural outlets, children feel they're just doing busy-work no better than a grammar exercise. The magic is lost. The child no longer wants to write.

It's different when a magazine and a letter-exchange scheme are operating well. Then children feel like telling all about what happens in their lives, as they do in their own families. And they don't just relate physical events; they also go into personal thoughts that the school usually never glimpses but that we now understand are at the very heart of individual development.

This immediately brings us to the essence of our teaching approach. By re-establishing the cycle of life, by assuring constant motivation through creative work, we get beyond dry academic exercises and reach a far superior form of classroom activity. Such involvement, which enriches and matures the individual, is the cornerstone of genuinely human education.

The key features of empty academic activity are rules, books and teachers ... all forcing pupils to produce work with absolutely no basis in real life. Such work can never interest or influence pupils in a deep way. It's pointless drudgery, invented by adults who see things from a narrowly adult perspective and who systematically attack any sign of genuine energy because—in their unnatural view—real-life activity is a waste of time and effort.

Extract from C. Freinet, Les Techniques Freinet de l'École Moderne, Paris, Colin, 1964.

6

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Some teachers, still under the influence of traditional methods, collect and correct students' free writing every day, just as they do with homework and exercises. And the next day, they're the ones to decide which are the best compositions, the ones that deserve to be printed up. There, barely disguised, we see the old-style authoritarian control that can so easily become absolute tyranny. Nothing could be more misguided. Just think of what would become of your relationship with your own child if you continually thwarted her, if time and again you reproached her for being less than perfectly grammatical or perfectly eloquent. Imagine her rushing home from a wonderful outing and already preparing in her mind the way she'll share her joy with you. In those circumstances, you can be sure she'll forget all about politeness, because that'll be perfectly unimportant to her. She'll run in without knocking and pour her excited thoughts out in a style of speech full of life but also, obviously, rather less than bookish! If you crush her enthusiasm and scold her:—"To begin with, be polite! Now, go back out, and knock. Okay ... now wait 'til I invite you to speak, and watch your grammar!"—The child will obey, but she'll also get the point: in future, she'll tell you only what she knows you want to hear. She'll measure her words and monitor her grammar so as to avoid your annoyance and scolding. And she'll never open up to

you again.

Well, it's the same at school. If you make too much of an issue of awkward writing on slightly smudgy paper, if you accept nothing until the grammar has been reviewed and the vocabulary revised, and if on top of all that you slap on a grade that totally deflates all enthusiasm, you'll break the spell. With such methods you may well get students to write accurately, but you'll never stimulate lively free writing.

PRACTICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CLASSROOM

In education, questions of productivity are always related to questions of classroom facilities. In many respects, then, modernizing the facilities is a precondition for improving the whole educational system.

However, modernization doesn't simply mean buying new equipment. And it's much the same with teaching methods; we've got to do more than just try to increase pupil participation, or even organize cooperative work or print a school magazine and set up school-to-school exchanges of letters or parcels. All these things bring only surface improvements unless we change the basic idea of a classroom as a place where teachers are like puppet-masters controlling everything.

We need a fundamental change in our basic ideas about teaching, a change in methodological, psychological and human terms. Only then will we see not only new organizational principles but also a new spirit in the classroom.

Let me describe my own first innovations at Bar-sur-Loup. As soon as I started using classroom printing, it was obvious that a much more fundamental change in every activity was also necessary. This example may help you see how organizational and philosophical improvements find their way into the classroom.

Elise Freinet, in *Origins of a People's Pedagogy (Naissance d'une pédagogie populaire*, Maspero, Paris) outlines how the use of

a new teaching activity revealed the need for a whole new outlook:

To offer an environment where the child can develop freely, the school must meet certain criteria of practical organization that avoid confusion and distraction.

Dreams are cheap! And Freinet dreamed of movable tables, folding chairs, children's libraries, display cases, aquariums, and looms. He dreamed of a school building designed with little workshops arranged all around a central room, with no interfering doors, so that the pupils could select their work areas as they pleased. But dreams are not realities.

So, to bring about at least a simple improvement that would bring him right down among the children, where he could share their thoughts and emotions, Freinet did something that has become a symbol: he removed the platform from the front of the room. He did away with the silly superiority that it brought, and placed his desk right on the floor alongside the pupils. As for the platform itself, by adding four strong legs he transformed it into a sturdy table to hold the printing equipment. Under it he built a storage shelf for paper and printed pages: in all, a real printing workshop. Then he rearranged the old table-and-bench units as conveniently as possible, using the most worn-out ones to support display tables with level tops. He collected a few unwanted chairs, put up shelves on the walls, and reorganized his old cupboard. To his great regret, however, there was nothing he could do about the prison-like windows that were so high up that no child could see out of them!

By then the class was a very different place. You could breathe easier there, and you could work with more comfort and energy. All the same, Freinet still felt he needed some additional artistic resource to bring indoors the beautiful landscape that he and his pupils admired during their excursions.

A school theatre seemed out of the question, and Freinet neither played an instrument nor sang. In the end, he decided to try an old, reliable device: films.

The town council provided money to buy a simple projector, and a local photographer rented the school recreational and educational films at a low price. From that time on, school work could be broken up—at appropriate points—by brief moments of relaxation that made life more enjoyable for teacher and pupils alike. A small record collection provided an extra touch, and with these resources—along with free drawing, which was introduced very early—Freinet's classroom had a natural tone very different from the out-dated severity and learner passivity that characterized his principal's room.

Today things are simpler; making changes requires less courage. Over the years members of the movement have co-operated to develop classroom equipment that really can improve pupil progress and reduce teacher frustration.

Let me describe this equipment in more detail. To begin with, it did not just materialize in our classrooms merely because we began dreaming of new methods. It slowly evolved through our struggle to modernize our facilities. One new device would lead to another, each time with improved success. In that way, classroom-based research, rich practical experience, and healthy skepticism gradually came together to build up a monument made stronger by each little stone.

Then as now, we were always doing field tests, first in the Freinet Experimental School and then in the classrooms of open-minded and energetic colleagues. Thus, we kept the really effective improvements and rejected any that turned out to be disappointing. For instance, once we got classroom printing under way, that discovery naturally led us to school-to-school correspondence. All such connections very logically extend our pupils' learning and self-expression not only in projects, reports, history, and geography, but also in arithmetic, folklore, and every other subject being up-dated as we modernize our methods.

As time went on, our focus on projects or activities centring on genuine pupil interests permitted the school to create a very

abundant stock of child-authored texts on many topics. So, we needed some kind of flexible cataloguing system to make them available, which led to the idea of educational files that could constantly be extended. And that approach in turn encouraged us to stop relying on textbooks as such, although we retained selected parts of some books by cutting out sections and gluing them on cards as part of the new files. Similarly, that was the origin of the Work Library (B.T., Bibliothèque de travail), the next best thing to a child-authored encyclopedia of cultural and scientific information because its contents were inspired by themes and topics present in the pupils' own free writing; and this kind of innovation is typical of a whole range of educational reforms that are now progressing faster and faster.

Such new independence of pupils from their teacher requires an individualized approach to work, most obviously exemplified by free writing. Individualization is also promoted by self-correcting worksheets, which permit learners to build up their basic skills in an ordered but flexible way. Self-correcting worksheets free not only pupils but also teachers from the kind of useless memorization that was so important in old-fashioned education.

Although these materials take up little space, they do need to be stored properly. If you neglect that, your results are liable to be a lot less impressive than you might have hoped. And unfortunately storage space is hard to find in modern-day classrooms, perhaps even harder than in the past when we were testing these innovations!

Of course, the ideal situation would be to have both well-designed materials and purpose-built classrooms. We have developed a number of such integrated plans, but school architects have never paid the least attention! So in the meantime, it's reassuring to note that a modern-style school such as we propose can be made to work in any classroom that meets basic standards of lighting, space, and hygiene. A little initiative on the part of the teacher can make up for a lot. For example, the various workshop areas—for printing, stencilling, lino-cuts, pottery, and the like, and for information files—can be set up along the walls, in the corners,

or even out in the corridor. This way the materials remain in plain sight; they arouse the children's curiosity and are right at hand when the class goes to work each day.

Our movement's best classrooms, the ones that have offered their pupils the most rewarding experiences, have always been in simple village schools designed before World War I. This plainly shows that a chief advantage of Freinet techniques is precisely the ease with which they can be put into effect without expensive renovations...

On the other hand, there's still one real obstacle to modernization: over-large classes. What can a teacher do with a group of 35, 40 or 50 pupils? And overcrowding is especially problematic with very young children, no matter how well-designed the classroom may be. With severe overcrowding, teachers can't even fall back on old-fashioned discipline. About all they can do is try to limit the damage a bit.

Thus, apart from working for improved methods, materials and facilities, the Modern School Movement has always stressed the need to reduce class sizes.... And it's gratifying to note that at last we've been heard. "Twenty-five pupils per class" is now the watchword not just of our movement, but of all teachers and parents, too.

A NEW APPROACH TO CURRICULUM PLANNING THROUGH LEARNER-BASED SCHEDULES

Traditionally, schools receive their curricula from the outside—sometimes directly from the Ministry of Education—in the form of textbooks, courses of study and timetables. Teachers then plan each day of the week on forms that structure activities hour by hour.

That's one way of doing it. In its favour, we must admit that it does encourage careful planning—which sometimes even claims to be scientific—and it gives teachers, directors and parents the impression that things are getting done. But there's one problem: is this approach really suitable to the pupils' needs? Thus, is the work

really getting done in proper conditions? Are the outcomes really satisfactory?

Some teachers have entirely done away with timetables and curricula, so as to focus classroom activities on pupil needs, interests and concerns. They've given their children free rein. This can be an ideal solution, the one we would all prefer... but only when the teacher is outstandingly gifted, so as to manage the very difficult job of guiding pupils in such circumstances.

Outstanding teachers, however, are not so common! In the real world, we usually find ourselves struggling to offer lively lessons to our pupils. What most teachers need is a third option in between the extremes, and our movement is devoted to discovering, perfecting and popularizing a combination of freedom with overall planning. Instead of having teachers set up a rigid curriculum in advance, we suggest that they sit down each Monday with their pupils to lay out the week's work in the form of learner-based schedules.

These weekly schedules are flexible and yet never lose sight of a larger scheme that the teacher establishes in advance. A real-life example will show how the interests of the class can influence the development of learner-based schedules within an overall framework. The following report was sent in by Mr. Nadeau from the town of Azur in western France:

...(Before the school year begins, I get the classroom ready by) setting out all the workshop materials and the other resources so that everything is easily accessible. This preparation may seem trivial, but it's pointless to suggest to children that they work out a schedule of activities if we fail to make available the equipment and materials that those activities require.

After three days of getting accustomed to the room, and of rearranging things to everyone's satisfaction, we really get down to work. The officers of the Class Cooperative have been elected, duties have been passed out, the room is spick-and-span, all the equipment is ready, and everything is set to go. In fact, we've already tried our first free-writing activity, but things haven't been going too smoothly. To my delight, I've heard the older children in

the class wondering out loud when we'll set up their work schedules. These schedules have become such a part of the school that without them the pupils feel hard put to organize their time.

In fact, there are four distinct types of schedule:

—the overall schedule

—the yearly schedule

—weekly schedules

—daily schedules

I myself set up the first two schedules before classes begin. We refer to them all the time, especially when discussing the details of weekly or daily learner-based schedules. It is the latter two plans that we set up in a genuinely cooperative way.

The overall schedule is a general framework comprising what Freinet would term "functional activities" growing out of the creative work that children perform or observe. Devising it does not mean categorizing static bodies of fact that must be learned; rather, this document presents the various processes that pupils will evoke while writing or asking questions in class.

Thus, for instance, to children autumn is not really defined in the way adults often present it: falling leaves, frost, the loss of summer sunshine, and so on. To children, this season means playing outdoor sports, raking up and burning leaves, gathering mushrooms, and similar things. These are the activities that preoccupy them at this season.

Once we recognize these interests, we can prepare the necessary support materials. The overall schedule, therefore, helps us select relevant Work Library items, files, pictures and so forth without delay.

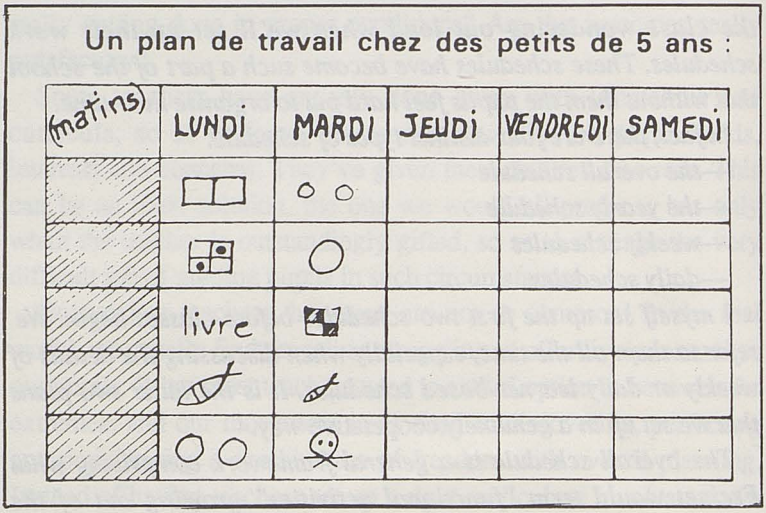
My own overall schedule is strongly based on models proposed by Freinet, but adapted and extended to include activities that are especially important to children in my part of France.

Each item in this schedule has a number corresponding to a section in my files, where there are various sorts of worksheets:

—option-sheets, showing the range of approaches that may suit a topic: both written projects and practical creations

—vocabulary-development sheets

Un plan de travail chez des petits de 5 ans :



—outline-sheets suggesting relationships among various centre s of interest, and how to make use of these networks in history, geography or science

—lesson-sheets for teacher-centred activities, because I must say I still do use a few of these!

I should stress once more that all this has been prepared and classified so as to help me keep up with the quick-moving interests of my pupils; and all this, more's the pity, is still far from being complete or perfectly developed.

To my way of thinking, these teacher files are extremely important. Over and above the time-saving that they permit, they allow me to record improvements revealed by experience, so as to do better when the same focal interest recurs the following year. These files are constantly being reworked. Perfecting them is a long-term objective that can probably never be finished; nonetheless, they soon become an indispensable resource.

Alongside the overall schedule, I develop a yearly plan. This is simply an outline of what the official curriculum requires us to cover before the end of the school year: arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, science, and so on. For this purpose, I've created a notebook with pages ruled to present each item in the

PLAN DE TRAVAIL N° 30 du 11/5/81 au 16/5/81

NOM : elisabeth Courtou

Responsabilités : ..... je m'occupe de l'atelier d'art

		Liste des activités gérées collectivement (C) en groupe ou seul	Fait	Pas fait	½ heures passées (8 par jour)
LUNDI		Les pourcentages aux élections (recherche)	✓	V	X
		Bibliothèque : J'ai choisi : Les vents dans les saules	✓	V	X
	C	Présentation du plan de Savigny (pour la vente du journal)		V	X X
		Ateliers de musique avec Catherine (mélodies)	✓	V	X
		Chant : Ma doudou	✓	V	X
	C	Exposé : BT Son La vie, il y a 500 ans à Troyes		V	X X
MARDI		Brevet sur la conjugaison - "les temps simples"	✓	V	X
		Théâtre avec valérie et catherine : "3 filles au service militaire"	✓	O	X
	C	Utilisation des modes non conjugués		V	X X
		Problèmes de volume cm^3 m^3 dm^3	✓	V	X
	T	Divisions - Conversions Livret LD 75	✓	O	X
	C	Radis et phasmes "observations avec daniel		V	X X
JEUDI		Débat : Les sondages	✓	V	X
		Exposé sur les scrutins (recherche dans le dictionnaire	✓	V	X
	C	Grammaire : le groupe compl. d'objet direct		O	X X
	T	lettre pour répondre au journal : "histoire d'enfants"	✓	V	X X
	C	Athletisme : j'ai installé un lancé de balles		V	X X
VENDREDI	T	J'ai rangé l'atelier art et accroché les peintures	✓	V	X
	T	Correction. Imprimerie du texte de Fabrice : le laboratoire	✓	V	X X
	C	La division : poursuivre après la virgule		V	X X
	T	J'ai passé mon brevet 2 3 d'opérations et fait les n° 251-252 Cahier 9	✓	V	X
	C	Matches de hockey - en 3 équipes de 8		V	X X

Signatures et remarques : enfant : chtalie — maître : — Parents :

curriculum with a little box beside it. This may look like an old-fashioned teaching plan, but in fact the order of the points in the book need not be followed at all strictly. The one exception is history, which I always treat chronologically, but otherwise I try to follow the evolving interests of my pupils.

Thus, for instance, in arithmetic we began with the conventional start-of-the-year review, but as soon as our first package came fro m one of the schools with which we were corresponding, we decided to make our pen-friends a map of our village. This involved learning about scale models; and then we began contemplating a visit to the other school, which got us looking at the calculation of distances and speeds ... in other words, we were soon jumping back and forth all over the standard curriculum.

In the circumstances, a guide is obviously necessary. How else could we keep track of our goals or measure our progress toward s them?

When we cover a topic, I blacken the corresponding box. I fill in the box proportionately, as we gradually master the point in question. Also, each time I fill the box a little more, I record the date. This way, my book offers a precise and convenient record of what has yet to be introduced, and what still needs a little more time. I then direct my efforts accordingly. The yearly plan is therefore not just a guide ... it's also a reminder of my duty, after all, to the official curriculum.

Many of my pupils—especially those preparing for the first school certificate—copy out the yearly schedule and learn to fill in the boxes themselves. They keep an eye on their progress and sometimes reproach me: "But sir, we still have all this to finish ..."

Both these schedules are very useful each Monday, when we work out our weekly schedule. Some Mondays we seem to have more than enough to do in the following week but other times we're at a bit of a loose end. In the latter case, we know just what to do: we select a few interesting topics whose squares are still white and start pulling together the resources to study them

Extract from C. Freinet, Les Techniques Freinet de l'École Moderne, Paris, Colin, 1964.

7

EVALUATION

In modern-day society, examinations are indispensable. As soon as a selection process is wanted—for admission to certain educational institutions and later to certain jobs—we need a mechanism, other than wealth or political influence, to indicate qualifications and aptitudes.

We may add that, where France is concerned, examinations, even when they have no practical purpose, are considered as individual testimonials, in the same way as decorations, or those "diplomas" that have always been sought after and framed, or medals. A school organization that would aim to do away with them or cut back on them would run into the unanimous opposition of parents. These are realities that, for the time being at any rate, we must take into account. What would be the basis on which we could build an examination system that would meet the needs of school and society taken together?

...For a long time now, we have been seeking the solution in a new form of evaluation, by improving existing practices or by recourse to short tests. Neither one nor the other of these solutions would ultimately have remedied the shortcomings that we have been condemning.

And so we have gone beyond the school to seek out possible models, and specially one that we found in the scout movement from whom we have adapted the complex system of "badges" (or diplomas).

For some ten years now, we have have been trying out this diploma system at the Freinet School in Vence. Similar

experimental efforts in other schools persuade us that we are on a right track that is worthy of our attention.

What's it all about?

We take our starting point in a number of different principles:

—Our teaching must be directed more and more towards a work-based pedagogy. Less and less will there be any occasion to pay attention to abstract verbiage and pure skills. Armed with the tools and techniques of labour, we must be more an more in a position to show the result of our labour.

—In 1967, schools can no longer be satisfied with measuring technical abilities in arithmetic, spelling and writing. Other cultural features, not strictly intellectual ones, play a part in the social behaviour of individual people and in their way of life.

An examination of the list of "diplomas" that we have planned will allow the reader to get a better sense of the range of directions and skills that schools should increasingly take into account.

List of required diplomas

Writer. Reader. Good language user. Historian. Geographer. Water engineer. Air engineer. Vegetation engineer. Insect collector. Mineral engineer. Fire master.

Optional diplomas

Gatherer. Fruiterer. Climber. Hunter. Explorer. Beekeeper. Livestock farmer. Builder. Cook. Electrician. Chemist. First Aid Giver. Artist. Printer. Engraver. File manager. Traveller. Actor. Musician. Singer. Potter. Carpenter. etc.

How do we organize this "diploma" system? Our children write compositions and poems, conduct surveys, carry out prehistoric, historic and scientific research projects, play music, perform on stage, run the printing press, do measurements, practise engraving, work in the garden, go on trips, and so on.

Early in the year, in November, they are already thinking about producing the works and masterworks that will be presented at the end of the year for the diplomas.

From Easter onwards, every child chooses the diplomas she wants to try out for. The range of choices clearly shows that the children whose work does not fit the traditional school mould are enabled to pick tasks that correspond to their own needs, their own inclinations or their own abilities.

The contents of diploma requirements have been worked out. We have published them in an issue of our series "Brochures for the New People's Education." Whenever a child feels that she can meet these requirements, she can try out for her diploma. Grades are awarded for the various stages of the work, and at the end of the year, on the days specified, an official board examines the work produced and awards the diplomas. In the course of a solemn ceremony accompanied by a general exhibition of the students' work and in the presence of the parents, the diplomas are given out.

The experiment that has been going on for several years in many schools shows:

1. That the children are highly motivated by the diplomas and that, to earn the largest number, they are capable of engaging the greatest efforts, across the range of activities.

2. There are no failures. The very worst students do earn at least three or four diplomas, however insignificant. Their honour is preserved, and their parents' honour too. And this is not to be sneezed at.

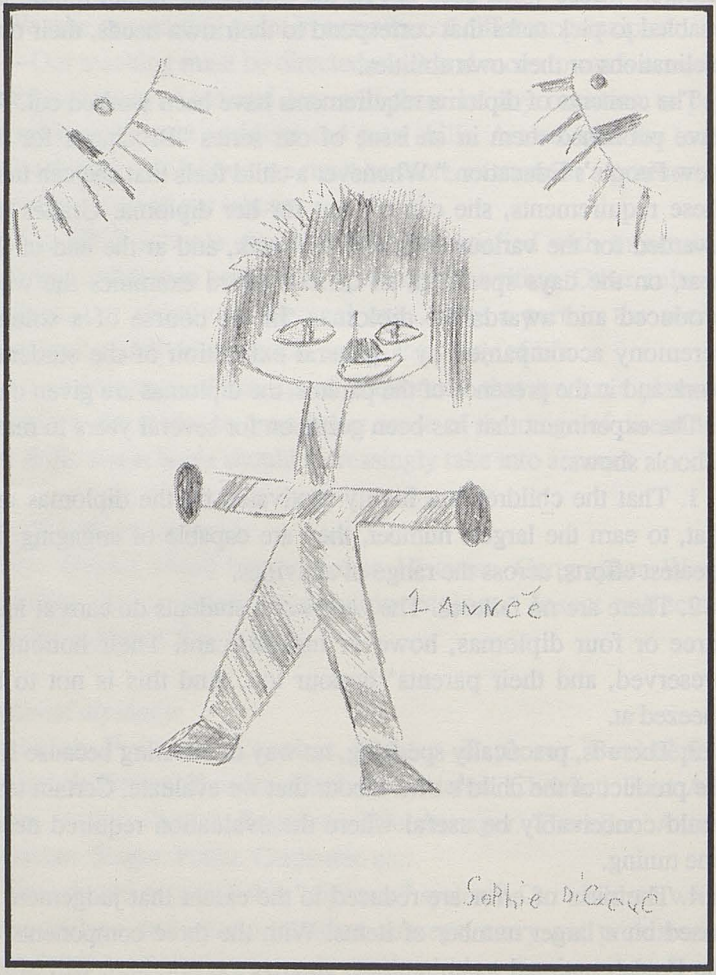
3. There is, practically speaking, no way of cheating because it is the product of the child's own labour that we evaluate. Certain tests could conceivably be useful where the evaluation required needs fine tuning.

4. The risks of error are reduced to the extent that judgement is based on a larger number of items. With the three components of the French national examinations, an error on one item will affect one third of the final mark. With diplomas, an error on one item will only affect one fifteenth or one twentieth of the final mark.

5. The diploma system is particularly valuable for student guidance.

Extract from C. Freinet, Les techniques Freinet de l'École Moderne, Paris, Colin, 1964

FREINET IN STRIPES



by Sophie, Grade 1
(a reminder of the brightness he insisted on in his school)

Part Three

Examples of Natural Method at Work

If cooperative networks and classroom techniques constitute Freinet's great contribution to pedagogy, his observational records of children learning constitute a valuable guide to the learning process that acts as its underpinning. For Freinet, *le tâtonnement expérimental*, the experimental process of learning through trial and error, makes it possible to move forward without recourse to a teacher-dominant, book-based pedagogy.

This raises two questions that the succeeding extracts address:

1. How do children actually negotiate their own way, by trial and error, through such complex school tasks as learning to read and write, learning to shape their writing to meet standard norms of spelling and grammar, and learning to reason scientifically? Each of the three extracts shows one of these learning projects in action. Doubtless, we wouldn't feel comfortable with Freinet's grammar exercises today. The

discipline of applied linguistics has since evolved to discredit this kind of grammatical analysis. Also modern teachers might feel uneasy with a text development process that seems to aim for a "house" style (and a rather flowery one at that). Nevertheless, the value of the three segments transcends such reservations. There is no need to reproduce the same exercises as we let "natural learning" take its course—particularly if we are not driven by a national examination system as Freinet's school was. The importance lies in the faith that learning will flow from motivation inspired in part from collective work, driven by peer interest and approval.

2. What is the appropriate role for the teacher in this process? This has always been a central question for Freinet teachers, as reflected in their countless reports, articles, booklets and convention workshops on the topic. The fact that Freinet pedagogy is child-centred does not mean that it is undirected. Freinet's approach presumes natural learning to be fuelled by the urge to gain mastery of tasks that draw learners together in collective enterprises. The role of the teacher, then, is to construct tasks that require cooperation and to help learners see the point of activities expected of them in school. For the child seeking eventual admission to the adult community the teacher also acts as a model whose behaviour acts as the standard against which the child can measure her own progress (see the first extract); and as a facilitator who will keep the motivated child(ren) on task, by providing periodic milestones and signposts along the learning path (see the third extract).

These extracts are taken from three of Freinet's own CEL booklets in the series "Bibliothèque de l'École Moderne", that in turn were based on material that had been published in *L'Éducateur* in previous years:

La Méthode naturelle de lecture, Cannes, CEL, 1961 (first published in 1947)
La Méthode naturelle de Grammaire, Cannes, CEL, 1962

1

NATURAL METHOD FOR READING AND WRITING

(In this booklet, Freinet describes his observation of the growth and learning of his own daughter, Baloulette, as she acquires the ability to read and write by what Freinet calls the Natural Method, without recourse to traditional school methods and without pressure to conform. It is important to remember that the period Freinet is describing ran from about 1932 to 1938. In the early stages, Freinet shows Baloulette's early play with pencils and crayons, developing gradually from freely-drawn lines and figures to representational drawings and then to drawings from which emerges a story that the child only recounts or explains after the fact. This explanatory/narrative text is written out by Freinet himself alongside the drawings. The essential features for Freinet are the insistence that narrative explanation not structure the drawing but grow out of it, and that explanation be used to accommodate accidents and "mistakes" instead of yielding to the temptation to make corrections. Once this step is successfully negotiated, Freinet describes the emergence of the gestures of writing from this drawing process. These lead in turn to the development of autonomous drawing and writing, but we shall limit ourselves to this crucial transitional stage here. It is only when the process of expressing herself in writing is beginning to stabilize that the process of reading the expression of others'

thoughts and feelings will begin. Naturally, the approach followed there will be global and holistic.)

THE TRANSITION FROM DRAWING TO WRITING

In this relentless climb through experimental trial and error, the helpful influence of the social setting (Freinet's school, Ed.) cannot be denied. But isn't traditional education itself an influence, making different demands, since it imposes its own thoughts, its own gestures, its own rhythms and its own rules?

The fact that we removed Baloulette from the tyranny of traditional school methods doesn't mean that we vowed to cut her off from the outside world, like a new Swiss Family Robinson, nor that we abdicated a positive role in her education. The difference is that we intervene in other ways, contenting ourselves with showing her the best possible examples, providing her with the tools she needs to satisfy her urge to create, to express and to make connections. We are "helping hands" to accelerate her tentative experiments first, and then her personal development.

As we relate the details of this evolving process of acquisition, we shall take care to point out the technical aids that constitute the essential feature of our contribution to the training and learning of children.

Baloulette sees me writing with great ease, as if I were performing a natural act. It is no more surprising for her than seeing me read. Because it's so easy to read, it can hardly be any more difficult to write.

Plate (X) characterizes this transitional stage in Baloulette's experimentation: methodically composed figures are joined into repetitive strings and are arranged in vertical tiers.

1. Some girls are going to school: they are carrying lunch baskets;



Plate X

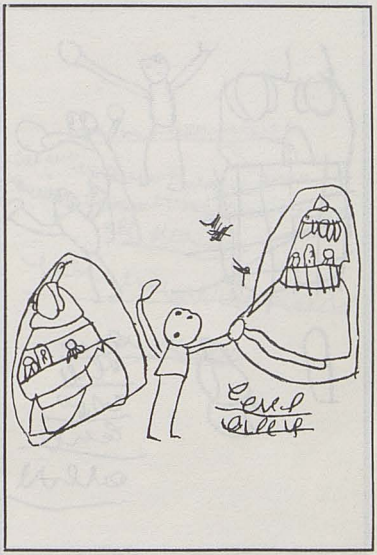


Plate XI

2. Here are a row of trees lining the road;

3. This little boy doesn't want to go to school: he has lost his basket.

Baloulette is not satisfied with an oral explanation to follow this, but writes it out herself instead. The rapid strokes of the pencil demonstrate that she has already acquired a sure mastery of the gestures involved but as yet no evidence of differentiation in the writing is apparent.

Baloulette has noticed that when I write down an address, I underline the name of the city and that I also underline my signature. No doubt she has intuitively understood that this underline is a vital feature of the process of writing. This observation guides her experimentation towards a primitive technique which has preoccupied her for a period of several weeks. When she has completed her page, she signs and underlines.

In Plate XI, Baloulette has now embarked on a new stage: her page is divided into two parts, the upper part containing a drawing, the lower part a handwritten text which is the necessary

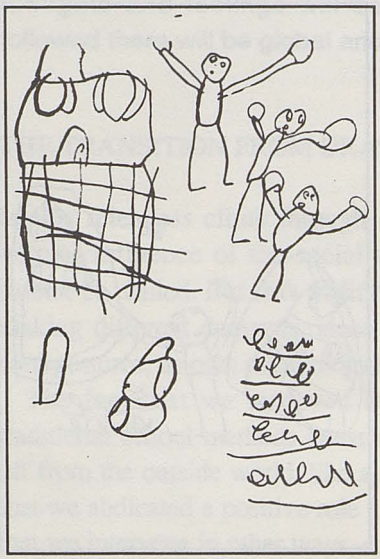


Plate XII



Plate XIII

complement for the narrative explanation of the picture—or which may be nothing more than one of a series of trials in the continuing effort to imitate a technique that adults apparently consider important.

By Plate XII, Baloulette begins signing her work.

Then, following the same principle of repeating successful graphic figures, she writes out the same motif, two or three times—underlined naturally.

Now the same underlined, repeated motif in Plate XIII occupies space in the body of the drawing and no longer as an appendage.

And then, another development. In addition to this primary motif that will only be discarded when it has outlived its usefulness and when something better can take its place, the first evidence appears of other (barely) differentiated symbols that have all the appearance of being a more analytical effort to write.

In the succeeding plates, we can gradually gauge the slow differentiation of symbols that constitutes the birth of writing.

The first differentiated symbol comes into view: the crossed lines



Plate XIV

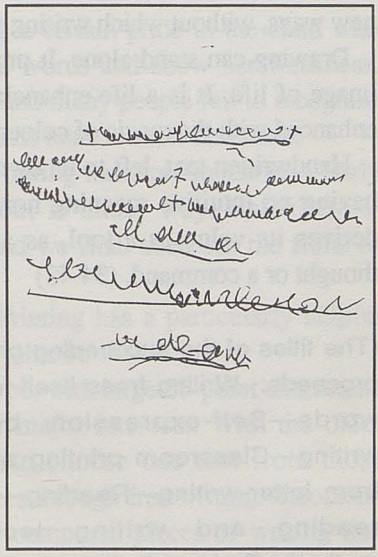


Plate XV

that imitate the letter t. This is a first triumph, easily and simply reproduced. Simple, it's true, but it is nevertheless a triumph for the child. A passage has been negotiated that will serve as a support and a prop for other triumphs. We also note, in the following Plate XV, a return to drawing in vertically tiered strips with the text completing the page. First appearance of e and i. Also the letters t and l, o and a are gradually emerging.

In Plate XV, we note, in addition to the symbols mentioned above the synthetic organization of the text with a title (underlined) and signature (likewise underlined).

A major first step in the development of writing has now been taken.

Writing, first as a simple signature, then undifferentiated text incorporated into the drawing, then as a complement to the drawing, is now beginning to assume an independent life. Drawing, too, will continue to develop in ways specific to that medium, and we shall not consider them here.

But following this split, it will now be necessary to branch out in

new ways, without which writing will have no reason to exist.

Drawing can stand alone. It produces beauty, life, or at least the image of life. It is a life-enhancing creation, especially when it is enhanced with the magic of colour.

Handwritten text, left to its own devices, is nothing but doodling having no intuitive meaning nor any beauty to recommend it. It derives its value as a tool, as a medium to express a desire, a thought or a command. (34-43)

(The titles of the succeeding chapters tell us how the method proceeds: Writing frees itself from drawing—The meaning of words—Self-expression before reading—Improving writing—Classroom printing and autonomous texts distinct from letter-writing—Reading—Towards the final mastery of reading and writing techniques—Results of the method—Pedagogical conclusions—The new natural method. The short chapter on Classroom Printing will offer a glimpse of the growth of literacy later in the process. This is the critical point at which Baloulette will jump from her self-centred writing into the desire to read what others have to say. It is the point at which Baloulette understands the relationship between reading and community.)

CLASSROOM PRINTING AND AUTONOMOUS TEXTS DISTINCT FROM LETTER-WRITING

Baloulette is 6 years 6 months old (the acquisition process has probably, by this stage, been delayed a little by an accident that kept her in bed, away from school).

She can write and can do so on her own. This does not mean copying, but expressing herself through writing, and, I must say, in a very satisfactory way for her age.

She still cannot read and doesn't want to read. When she receives a letter, she has it deciphered for her. It may very well be that this

obstinacy in not reading conceals a certain pride in the child who doesn't want to stumble over the words and show her weakness. The feeling is not specific to her and many people fail to recognize its importance in the way individuals react to such situations.

It is undeniable, however, that during these preliminaries a fairly conscious but slow development is under way. Baloulette is mentally photographing words and we shall soon see the fruits of this.

The technique of Classroom Printing has a particularly helpful influence. This is how Baloulette joins in.

Every day the infants set the type, with large 36-point characters, of a short text expressing their major interests. With the older pupils, the general practice is to choose one text from those composed by the pupils themselves through free writing. Baloulette is between the two groups: she composes pieces of writing that aspire to being printed along with the juniors. She longs to appear in print, just as she wants to write letters... She can succeed because, as we have seen, she knows how to combine letters and sounds. One characteristic of this new technique that differentiates it from her letter-writing technique is that it gets rid of the redundant use of the reference points and boosting devices that will continue in her letter-writing (Balouette often includes key words out of order and repeats words to maintain confidence in her letters, Here is one of her first pieces of writing. The book reproduces it half in handwriting, half in printed form; the succeeding translation can only be a rough guide to the "primary French" of the original. Ed.)

17 March 1936
Lasnite wen Lucine and Germaine and Pigeon camto bed, Pigeon din wano potot lite so Pigeon gotup and potot lite. And Pigeon wind. Momma bang on wal and we wenna slep.

Translation

Last night when Lucienne and Germaine and Pigeon came to bed, Pigeon didn't want to put out the light. And Pigeon whined. Momma banged on the wall and we went to sleep

And this is Baloulette's achievement. Her example shows us that the child can readily engage in interesting activities at school—and they needn't be manual ones only—before even acquiring the techniques of formal reading. Our accomplishments through the practice of Classroom Printing, as we have described them in our publications, are the living illustration of this.

On April 30 1936 (Baloulette is 6 years 8 months old), the little ones have just received a fine set of 36-point character type. It is sorted and ready for use.

Baloulette volunteers to help the little ones set type.

She stands by the chalkboard and manages to obtain the following piece of writing from them:

Max
Max is still talking
about his green and red
carr.
Brrrm!...

Only one mistake in this piece (carr).

She then helps them set the type, and the instinctive confidence with which she gets them to pick out the letters has to be seen to be believed!

Max managed to set his name! Was he ever happy!

"Now," he says, "I want a piece of paper. I want to write my name to send to mom."

"...You see," he remarks proudly,"I set it myself!"

I leave for a moment. When I come back, the block is ready for printing. Baloulette is busy fitting it into the press.

"Papa," she says ,"I'd like to learn to read and write."

And Baloulette who, apparently at least, cannot read is getting the little ones to read. Then she is coaching them to do a good job copying and illustrating. And the class is pleased.

2

NATURAL METHOD AND GRAMMAR

The following is an outline summary of the various stages in the development of linguistic competence through a natural process of trial and error.

STEP ONE: *At Nursery School and Kindergarten*
The first pieces of writing, transcribed from the children's own stories in kindergarten or nursery school, are naturally excessively simple: subject, verb, occasionally a complement. There is or should be a predominance of isolated words serving as attention-grabbers, interjections and exclamations. We say "should be", because teachers often feel obliged to impose a more academic style on sentences consisting of one or two words, albeit often accompanied by fulsome gestures.

The teacher may write out:

Lucien built a swing.
The rope broke.
Marcelle came tumbling down.

This is accurate, it's faithful to the original, but it's as cold and as lifeless as a court summons. We would prefer it to be closer to the

child's own language:

Wow! What about Lucien's great swing, eh?
Wham! the rope broke.
And Marcelle... crash, bang, wallop!

Let's remember that our language is not an arbitrary, logical set of rules but an essential living vehicle for communication, that we don't speak and shouldn't write in 1963 as people did in the year 1900.

STEP TWO: *First Complications*
But quite soon, the pieces of writing produced become complex, with adjectives, pronouns, conjunctions and negatives, all of which appear very early in children's language even though the child is unable to identify or define such notions.

I've got a black cat.
The other day, she had kittens.
One was black, and one was white.
They still can't open their eyes.

At this stage in our classes, children are trying hard to form their own letters and write their own material, and this is where the work of composing and creating really begins, a process we have already described in our booklet entitled *Méthode naturelle de lecture* (B.E.M. 8-9 Cannes).

We put a lot of stress on this point: however clumsy they may be, the pieces of writing thus produced are the first essential forms of practice; they are just like the first efforts to ride a bicycle. Pay no more attention to the mistakes they contain than you would to a beginner falling off a bike. The main thing is for children to experience and hold on to the need to write. This need will help them overcome all difficulties.

At this stage, we still avoid any systematic reference to grammar

and syntax. The living exercise itself is sufficient...

STEP THREE: *Building the text*

At this stage, which corresponds to the first primary school grades, we shall still avoid introducing any technical references to structure, sentence composition, or the names and functions of words. Our first priority is to ensure that the child is able to ride the bicycle.

The difference is that it will be necessary, in full view of the children, indeed with their full collaboration, to do our utmost to adjust the original text to match the innermost thoughts of the child-author. This can be done not by obstinately clinging to the original wording but through a process of editorial exaltation, through the bringing to full flower of a thought still in germination.

Mimine had written:

At night, I hear the owl calling: to-whit, to-whoo!
I'm in my bed; I hear her call.
Keep on singing every night, my little owl!

This piece of writing is simple, but it only renders the bare bones, the first glimmerings of observation and thought, without any affective enrichment. The class worked on the text to enrich it and did so, quite naturally, by a process of syntactic complexity, that is by adding one or more clauses, inserting adjectives and other new forms.

And so the text became:

At night, from her little nest, the owl calls out: to-whit, to-whoo!
Oh! splendid owl, what joy you bring to all our hearts, as in my bed I hear you call.
Keep on singing every night, my little owl!

Again at this stage, these finishing touches are done without any concern for grammatical explanation. Together, we polish up our

piece of writing to make sure that it renders to the utmost our deepest thoughts, and that is the only genuine goal for expressive writing.

The children for their part intuitively learn the useful words and turns of phrase that give this expression depth and splendour. Using the principle of experimental trial and error, they will try in the future to move towards this level of sophistication.

In the course of the first three steps, it is exclusively a constant commitment to free expression and the collective work on polishing the texts that bring about an initiation to written grammar.

At the end of this stage (later primary grades) in all our classes, we obtain through collective revision pieces of writing like the one that follows, so closely patterned on children's expressive speech that you can imagine the intonation of the voice and the expressions on the face.

UP IN THE MOUNTAINS

Joseph went up into the mountains all by himself, on his own, all the way up the Rochebarron road.
He was looking for his uncle who was fetching wood in his cart.
Oh! how awful it would be if an eagle grabbed him, that giant eagle flying around over his head! Thank goodness his uncle yelled out. The eagle flew away at top speed.

Joseph PEROSINO, 9 years

STEP FOUR: *Introducing remarks about grammar and syntax*
Until now we have been content to touch up our pieces of writing, to polish them and add finishing touches. We have provided no grammatical explanations. We have simply been editors, and our pupils have followed our example and worked unceasingly to improve their expressive writing.

We have clambered on to our bicycles as best we could, we've already carried out a number of complicated moves, but without the slightest hint of explanation.

Now we shall support and strengthen this exercise with a number of elementary explanations, by giving a name to the parts of the bicycle, by justifying certain movements and certain practices:

"Pedal with the ball of your foot, because it gives more flexibility. Always put the rear brakes on first... Then you can... etc."

We'll do the same thing for our pieces of writing. From now on our revisions will be accompanied by technical explanations that justify it and improve conscious understanding.

One child brought the following piece of writing:

THE DANCE

My dad told me that, as a young boy, people danced in the barn.
People danced every Sunday.
The music-man climbed on a barrel and played, and the others danced.
It made a lot of noise, because people had clogs, and the music-man also banged his clogs.
Then they had a break and they drank a glass of wine and they started all over again.

It's a text that needs polishing thoroughly, both syntactically and grammatically.

A piece of writing must always say exactly what is meant and the reader, even an uninformed reader, must fully and perfectly understand what the writer wanted to express.

We often ask the question: will the kids in the exchange school clearly understand?

People danced in the barn. Isn't there a word, a qualifier, we

could use to make this barn more specific? Let's try to find this qualifier: *dark barn, painted barn,* or *my narrow barn,* or *the rickety barn...*

We'll make the clarification and the child will thereby understand, without recourse to definitions, the function performed by a qualifier.

The children in the exchange school would probably like to know what instrument the music-man was playing. It should be specified by using the appropriate noun-phrase. We'll write *the fiddle-player.*

We should also find a vivid, maybe humorous, way to describe the movements of the music-man tapping his big clogs. *And to add even more to the din, the music-man let his own hefty clogs join in the dancing.*

They drank a glass of wine. What sort of wine? How did they drink it? Standing up or sitting down?

We'll write: They drank a glass of the local wine.

We'll then rewrite the text making further improvements of a grammatical nature; avoiding the dangling modifier *as a young boy;* the repetition of *people danced*; repetition of the conjunction *and.*

We end up with the following piece of writing:

> *When my dad was a young boy, people used to dance every Sunday in our huge barn.*
> *The fiddle-player stood on a barrel, playing while the young couples danced. It made a lot of noise since the dancers were wearing large clogs and, to add even more to the din, the music-man let his own hefty clogs join in the dancing.*
> *From time to time the dancers paused to drink a glass of the local wine, and then they started all over again.*

The text is now in final draft form. Certain ideas have been incorporated, others proposed. This process of working through the building and modification of written forms, in order to match

thought and its expression, constitutes the pre-eminent, essential contribution we make through our techniques to the process of language development. In this respect, nothing of the sort was done before we came along. Through the use of free writing conceived in this way, and through the collective process of editorial revision under the teacher's supervision, we are giving our pupils mastery of the tool.

This basic technique, rather than all the exercises, however systematic, that we could graft on to it, is the real cause of the amazing advances we have made in our classes and the unflagging interest of the children in creative construction.

We construct grammar and language. When you've constructed a road, you know that road and you're all set to make the best use of it.

STEP FIVE: *Grammatical and syntactical work based on fre e writing*

When the earlier building phase has caught the active attention of the children to certain words and expressions, to specific usages, we'll then be able in the later primary and junior grades to develop and strengthen the gains already made with some success.

The formal acquisition of grammatical knowledge

We have said that grammatical knowledge would be utterly useless if the process of experimental trial and error functioned normally. As this isn't always the case, we do have to make provision for a certain series of grammar exercises that are, moreover, required to meet the demands of official syllabuses and examinations. They are neither dangerous nor compulsive as long as they are nothing more than what they are supposed to be, adjuncts that always leave language acquisition in the forefront.

This is how we do things:

1. As soon as the text is fully revised on the chalkboard, every day we engage in a rapid parsing exercise. The operation is a lot simpler than people think if an oral command of the language has

been acquired first.

— nouns are easily recognized, common nouns and proper nouns;

— the same is true for qualifying adjectives and verbs; for anyone who has practice in living a language, all efforts to provide definitions are superfluous;

—the pronoun is a little more tricky to determine; we shall return to it often.

—we'll recognize in no time the use of articles and adverbs.

If this conceptual test is carried out quickly for every piece of writing, without recourse to special rules or rote-learning, our children will soon be up to answering any question they are likely to be asked in tests and exams in their junior years.

2. This recognition work helps spot the gaps we can fill by introducing some special exercises:

— on various plural and feminine endings;

— the use of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns you can illustrate their meaning by pointing and also by possessives (when to use one's and his);

— and above all for the verbs that we shall see cropping up everywhere in the dynamic parts of the sentence and for which we can make up numerous conjugation exercises.

3. You can also do a few more or less classic grammar exercises, as long as you harbour no illusions about the scope of their usefulness, which is related to the spirit in which you use them.

The same is true of our self-correcting exercise files for grammar and conjugation.

They already have, by their own nature, an advantage over traditional exercises in that they are self-correcting. In other words, children can work through them at their own pace and make their own corrections. This serves at least partially to cut down on the authority the teacher can wield over them.

But there is also a tendency to use them mechanically, going through from A to Z, reducing comprehension and good sense to a minimum, and that is a danger. There is one way of working with

these exercise files that has the virtue of being sensible: by using particular combinations of holes punched in the side, you can fish out the exercises that can fulfil the children's purpose best.

4. Sentence analysis: it's impossible for the children if you present it as a riddle with foreign-sounding names.

Even in our own materials, we do explain that complex sentences contain a main clause which is the main one because it is necessary for the comprehension of the passage. If it is dropped, the sentence no longer makes sense.

If there are two similar clauses that can't be dropped, they constitute two co-ordinated main clauses. Other clauses, that can be dropped if the case arises are subordinate.

Everything else consists in details and formalism that you can read all about in your grammar books.

5. How far does copying out texts help in the acquisition of grammar and spelling?

We don't put much faith in it and limit copying in our classes to pieces of writing worked out together on the chalkboard. And even then not in the same way every time. We far and away prefer to replace this kind of copying that quickly becomes a dead routine by the kind of constructive work done with free writing, albums, letters, reports, and presentations.

Typesetting on the printing press is on the other hand a kind of work that we use regularly with those children who, for a variety of reasons, make far too many mistakes.

This form of work means that the child can't write just anything that comes into mind. Words are formed letter by letter and the line must be perfect. It is a technical imperative that the child is aware of. It is not tied to an aimless exercise, but to a piece of work powerfully motivated.

This kind of experience makes it worth reconsidering the relationship between manual and mental learning.

6. And dictation?

Dictation has been much maligned, and with justification if people delude themselves that it is an adequate tool on its own to

help pupils learn to spell. It is harmful for the child if it's only a school exercise where mistakes are ruthlessly punished by deducting marks and ranking the pupils.

But once this enslavement to school routine is broken, we realize that the use of dictation can actually be beneficial.

Our children like dictations, because they provide them with a regular opportunity to measure their own performance against past performances and against those of others. But standardized dictations for examination purposes have a significant drawback. They intentionally include an accumulation of difficult words and expressions which invite failure unless preceded by a massive dose of cramming.

We recommend another form of dictation, better suited to our pedagogy of experimental trial and error. In standardized dictations, grammatical difficulties and spelling problems are bunched together in a few sentences. It's as if a horse being trained to jump were confronted by a series of obstacles that never give him a chance for a breather and that he'll end up refusing. When you make a mistake like that during training you may never be able to put it right again.

In practice, our children rarely have to confront such an accumulation of difficulties. If they do, they just give up. We dictate passages made up of everyday speech, and when the children run into difficulties that could give them a sense of failure, we quite simply help them out. Our pupils are then in a position to copy out a passage as long as a page without making mistakes. They are saved.

The teacher has no correcting to do. We all share in the victory.

We aren't going into the technical details of grammar and vocabulary here on purpose.

(In a convoluted paragraph, Freinet explains that a deeper, continuing understanding is more important than technical details that can always be mugged up when needed for exams by outside agencies.)

All we can tell you here is that children taught using our

pedagogy always come out on top in composition on the School Certificate exam, because they have a good command of written language, they make fewer mistakes in dictation than their traditionally-educated rivals, and they are better at answering questions, with a measure of logic and good sense that are always much appreciated.

Vocabulary and Word Hunting

Vocabulary also occupies a large place in the preoccupations of teachers with responsibility for cultivating language. That was understandable at the turn of the century, when children, living in poverty, only had a rudimentary vocabulary.

At that time, it was certainly necessary to teach them one way or another, willy-nilly, words to help them enrich their language and help them understand the books they will be exposed to later. In those days, only the sons of teachers and the middle class had a well-stocked vocabulary that allowed them to approach literary works.

Things have totally changed nowadays. In the wake of the intensification of communication through newspapers, the press, radio and television, children—all children—command a very rich vocabulary from a very young age. They know and understand everything. They may not know very well, but they are no more at a loss for words, even if these words still don't amount to much in the way of concrete expression.

It is useless then to claim to be teaching new words to these children. All we need to do is to work from what is there and confine our energies to ordering, specifying, vivifying, and humanizing this vocabulary.

It is in view of this new reality that we no longer call our exercises vocabulary, but word hunts. From the diversity of thematic material derived from our free writing and according to the level of difficulty, we review, we categorize, we make more explicit the words which are still features of child language, but which must be placed in a broader living context.

The word hunt, as we understand it, is always part of our free writing of which it makes full use.

1. SIMPLE VOCABULARY: Search for words relating to a centre of interest derived from a passage of free writing.

For example, a passage on boats will yield the following word hunt:

BOATS

Rudder, oars, sails, hull, anchor, port and starboard , lifeboats, cables, pulleys, pitching and tossing, seasickness, loading, unloading, cranes, dockworkers, bridge, hammock, captain, cook, stokehold.

If the topic is hunting, there will be no shortage of words either. ... and so on ... All you need to do is incorporate into the process an examination of the structure and function of the new words that we have the good fortune to receive as part of a living context.

The range of these word hunts is virtually inexhaustible. It will nevertheless be a good idea to work out a general table of potential centres of interest in order to avoid possible repetitions of themes.

This kind of word hunt aims only to build a better knowledge of words

2. VOCABULARY CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO GRAMMAR; Starting from certain words in the passages of free writing, we shall be able to go over the various spelling difficulties they entail. Then we rework, in a more lively fashion, hence in a more interesting and useful fashion, the vast array of exercises presented in our school manuals.

In primary years:

Find words containing particular combinations of letters:

ai, oi, ur, on, un, etc....

br, bl, pr, etc....

ar, vi, our, etc....

In junior years:

Review the major spelling difficulties that cause students to come to grief: vowel combinations, plurals of certain nouns, s, ss and c, compound nouns, etc....

3. HOW WORDS ARE FORMED: Ours is not a logical language like Esperanto, and its rules almost always have exceptions.

With Esperanto, it would be easy to show the process by which, from a simple word (or root), new words are created by adding prefixes and suffixes.

Take any grammar book and you'll soon be able to work out a list of such exercises.

4. FAMILIES OF WORDS, SYNONYMS AND HOMONYMS: Regular work in this area should always be based on words commonly used by children and words they themselves suggest. This will enable you surely and comprehensively to create an intimate understanding of a mass of words that the children will thus learn to dissect in terms of meaning as well as spelling.

(We now conclude with the closing words of the book.)

...I hate textbooks because they caused me far too much suffering and I realize now that my reactions were not unusual.

To remind myself of the ideas that I had completely effaced from memory, the other day I leafed through a modern grammar manual, modern in the sense that it was in colour and important concepts had been highlighted but without the slightest change to the underlying principles of the work.

X., a big fourteen-year-old boy, was terrified. That same evening, he wrote the following piece:

I get so frightened when I see a grammar book and its

pages are shown to me. It was terrifying just how many idiotic strict rules there are crushing me under their weight, bearing down on you so that you cannot get up again quickly.
These word endings; these words that might be verbs or nouns are nothing but a whirlwind and a flood of rules pouncing on my words as soon as I write and I don't know which ones to use any more.
Under their threat, I sink and drown. But will I succeed in swimming through them one day?

If the large mass of children rejected by the school system could speak, they would tell us how grammar and vocabulary textbooks have paralyzed them, how the very thought of the intellectual and moral anguish they have caused makes them feel physically sick—a nausea bordering on neurosis. It goes a long way to explaining the almost total failure of such instruction.

We go beyond the useless routines and the textbooks that put them into a programmed sequence. We offer you a new thrust, a degree of confidence and decisiveness which will be put to the service of life and smash down all obstacles.

The natural method of grammar and spelling will renew the pedagogy of language teaching.

C. Freinet, La Méthode naturelle de grammaire, B.E.M. 17, Cannes, 1963

3

NATURAL METHOD AND SCIENTIFIC ENQUIRY

(This booklet provides a discussion of the possibilities for "Natural Method" in the field of scientific enquiry, observation and experimentation at the elementary school. It has much in common with the British Nuffield Science projects of the 1960s, enquiry-based science teaching in North America, and various other initiatives that take the radical point of departure for science curriculum as the natural curiosity of the child. In addition, Freinet teachers working on projects to be reported to the annual conventions of ICEM were urged to observe and record in detail children's work and discussions on scientific projects. Such close attention and analysis anticipates the later work of Douglas Barnes, published in *From Communication to Curriculum* (Penguin, 1979), and the intensive study of classroom language in the 1980s. The extract printed here is taken from a classroom diary of such research—it would be called Action Research today—compiled by a Freinet teacher called Pierre Bernardin in the late 1950s. Such work was helping develop what Freinet called "the school crucible" for the future development of the Natural Method of Science Teaching. Two questions emerge that are central to Freinet pedagogy: the importance of allowing children to make mistakes and learn from them; and the importance in working out the proper role for the teacher in

co-operative learning. After all, Freinet is not an advocate of undirected learning.)

A SLICE OF LIFE IN OUR CLASSROOM

One day, when a child asked, by means of the question-box, "Where does the wind come from?", the whole class set to work on the problem.

The children's thoughts were jotted down by the teacher during the period. They are reproduced here in all their spontaneity and in all their freshness, but also in all their clumsiness. All their defects are reprinted here intentionally.

(The teacher's interventions are shown in italics)

WHERE THE WIND COMES FROM

April 11

JACQUES. Wind is a movement of air. We need to know how you can make wind.

All right, then, how can you make wind?

MICHELE. Blowing.

RENÉ. Waving your hand.

MICHEL. Shaking a cloth.

JACQUES. Running.

LIANE. When a truck goes by, it moves the air.

MICHEL. Slamming a door.

MAURICE. There's even wind that works by itself. When I'm next to the stove, it's hot on top but down on the ground you can feel a draught and your feet are frozen.

We'd better find out if Maurice's observations are true.

April 14

GUY. It must be the wind coming down the chimney.

ALAIN. What Guy is saying can't be right. You can't have air coming in while smoke is going out.

GÉRARD. The draught must be caused by the flames. When you're out in the fields, you make a fire. If I put a handful of hay on a pitchfork and I put the fork close to the fire, about two feet up, the hay comes off the fork; it's taken up and swirls about and flies away.

RENÉ. But if the draught is caused by the flames, it comes from inside the stove.

I think it would be a good idea to check the direction of the draught thoroughly. Try and find that out for tomorrow.

April 15

RENÉ. My grandpa told me to wet my hand. I put it about three feet from the stove, just above the floor. I felt the cold coming from the side where the doorway is. The draught is coming from the door.

ANDRÉE. I did the same experiment. What René says is right.

GÉRARD. In other parts of the room, you can't feel anything.

LOUIS. You've certainly got to have air coming in to the stove because it's going up the chimney with the smoke. I wet my finger and I put in front of the draught hole. You can easily feel the air going in.

RENÉ. Right then, that's the answer. When it's hot somewhere, a draught comes towards the heat. That's what makes wind.

Is that a good enough answer?

MAURICE. Yes, but what about the wind outdoors?

RENÉ. Well, it's the same thing. There are places where it's hot and others where it's cold. Automatically, you get wind.

You've already made a lot of discoveries. You've found out that air moves towards the hot area to replace the air that is rising. That's a definite conclusion. But, despite all that, there's still something you haven't explained: why does air go up?

SERGE. Because it's hot.

But that's not enough, and anyway you aren't explaining

anything, because when a pot of water gets hot, it doesn't rise.

RENÉ. Oh! This isn't going to be easy to work out.

April 17

GÉRARD. It really is true. Hot air rises. You can feel it really well over the top of the stove.

GUY. That's true and we've known that for a long time. The hot air is what makes the flue-flap swivel over the stove.

EVERYONE. That's right.

JACQUES. The hotter it gets, the faster it goes round.

RENÉ. OK, but this doesn't tell us why hot air rises. I read in a book that you can even blow up balloons with hot air.

April 18

MAURICE. I think I've got an idea. If hot air rises "in the air," that must mean that it's suddenly become lighter.

Why suddenly?

RENÉ. It's just a matter of common sense.

MAURICE. No, it's not just common sense. It's not as obvious as it looks.

Maurice must be right. He is giving you an idea. Now it's up to you to see if you can prove it.

RENÉ. But it is obvious. If air rises, that means it's become lighter; and so it goes up above the other air.

But then, why does air become lighter when you heat it up?

April 20

RENÉ. Last night I did a big experiment, but it didn't work. I weighed some water in a tin and then I heated up the tin with the water in it. I put on a lid to stop the water evaporating. When it got hot, I weighed it again. It was still the same weight. That's why water doesn't rise in air. It's because it doesn't change weight.

And if the weight had changed, what would you have concluded?

RENÉ. That the water had gotten lighter.

Do you all agree?

ANDRÉE. No, because the water could have evaporated.

RENÉ. No, I'd put a lid on it.

LIANE. Yes, but when the steam wants to get out, it lifts the lid.

So you can see for yourselves that the experiment wasn't precise. You have to be very careful.

April 21

GÉRARD. But we don't need to find out why hot air rises. We've seen that it does, and that's enough.

Are you all happy with that for the time being?

EVERYONE. You bet!

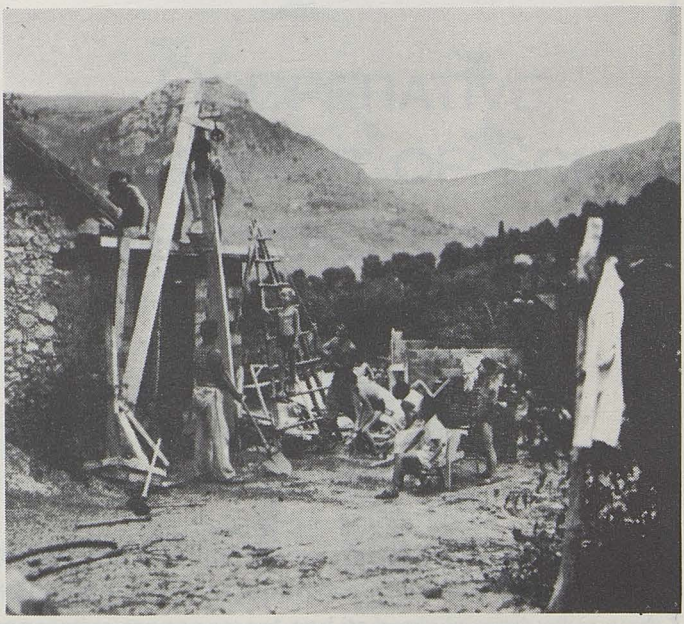
OK then, who can sum up for me everything you've found out so far: where does wind come from?

(This summary is worked out by a group).

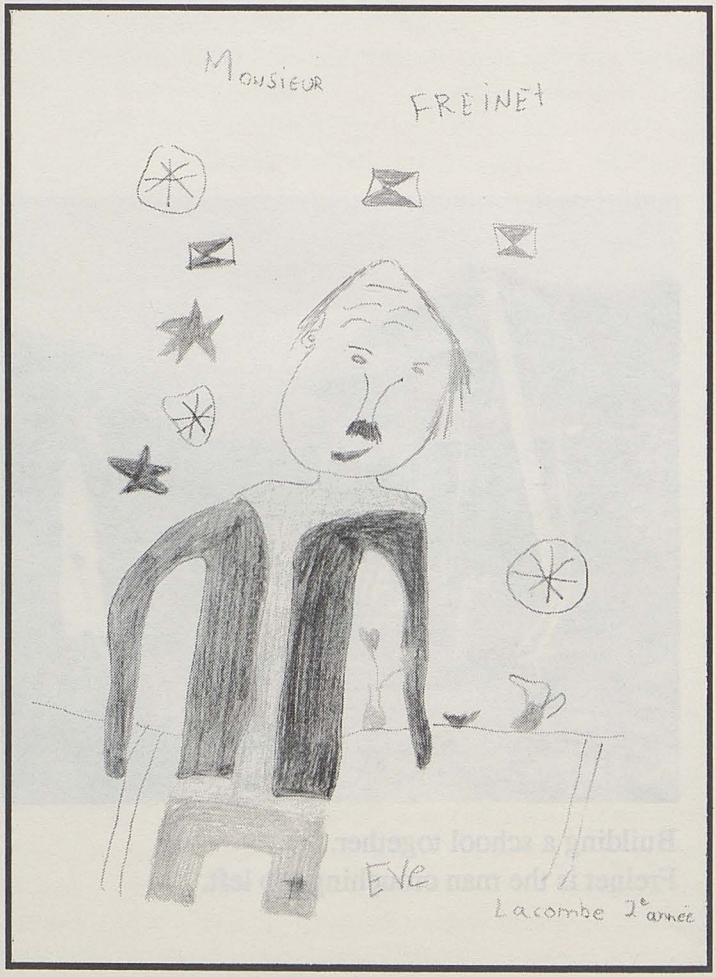
"When it gets hot somewhere, the air heats up, gets lighter, and rises very high. To replace the hot air, cold air arrives. This is the wind." (Read out by MICHÈLE)

(The book reproduces several such examples of Freinet classroom discussions, many of them first published in the Freinet movement's own magazine, *L'Éducateur*. Out of them come Freinet's reflections about the core of cooperative experimental method in science teaching. The question-box alluded to above receives the children's questions about the observed world. But the distinction is developed between pupil's slips phrased in ways that invite the consultation of ready-made resources (e.g."What is ink made of?") and those that reflect alert observation and stimulate experimentation (e.g. "I've noticed that metal objects usually sink, but that ships don't"). The latter are closer to the spirit of the "free writing" out of which Freinet's pedagogy developed in the 1920s. The role of the teacher is to steer the students away from the former approach to the latter, to make collective enquiry a genuine possibility. Then not only is the learning grounded in

experience whence it can grow more surely, but also it applies the process of learning to the real world of the child's own social and physical environment.)



Building a school together.
Freinet is the man crouching top left.



by Eve Lacombe, Grade 2
(a room he decorated with children's art and full of useful objects)

Part Four

Cooperative Management of School Life and Discipline

The two extracts that follow reveal two essential features of Freinet's notion of appropriate schooling: its basis in cooperative management and its basis in productive work.

To illustrate these we have chosen extracts that focus these principles on the moral dimension of Freinet schooling.

In the first, the Class Co-op is shown functioning as the arbiter of the social and moral life of the school. This children's parliament, which meets at the end of every week, does not limit itself to such a role. It can also be involved in planning future curriculum projects, in raising and disbursing funds, and in promoting better relationships with parents and the community. But its quasi-judicial role, in which the teacher is

sometimes forced into the role of moderator and mediator, is the one that illustrates the risks that cooperative learning must face while at the same time offering its principles as the solutions to problems that often create insurmountable difficulties for traditional schooling.

In the second, Freinet is writing within a specific social context—the end of the fifties which saw a rise of youth violence that seemed to be sweeping through Europe. It is important to read Freinet's response to this phenomenon not as a jeremiad on the work the devil finds for idle hands to do. It is in fact a plea for the reinstatement of joyful, satisfying, productive work in place of mechanical routine and commercialized play bereft of material benefit. Read in that light, the work seems astonishingly ahead of its time, and topical for today's readers. For a new age of youth in crisis, escalating violence, massive deskilling of industrial labour, and the commercial exploitation of violence in children's culture, Freinet suggests a restructuring of adult-child relationships within schools and beyond based on productive work in which genuine satisfaction can be achieved.

Both extracts are from CEL brochures by Freinet that appeared in 1960, and they bear the imprint of that era as the first post-war generation reached adolescence:

L'Éducation morale et civique, Cannes, CEL, 1960
La Formation de l'enfance et de la jeunesse, Cannes, CEL, 1960

1

THE WALL JOURNAL AND THE WEEKLY CO-OP MEETING

Within the complex range of teaching techniques, there is one that we recommend over all others. That is the wall journal.

Every Monday, we post our wall journal out in the corridor, well within the reach of all the children.

On a large sheet of paper (60cm X 40cm), underneath a strip coloured in by the children, we draw four columns with the headings:

Criticisms — Congratulations — Wishes — Accomplishments

A pencil is attached to the panel so that children can at any time freely write what they have to say. Erasing is forbidden. All written remarks must be signed, thereby cutting out any imputation of tattling. A tattletale is anyone who, in the secret hope of reaping the benefits, sneakily informs on the behaviour of one of his classmates to the teacher or anyone else in authority. Whenever a member of a community says what she has to say in public, however serious the charge, she should be praised for her moral and civic courage.

At the Freinet School, the last two hours of class each week are devoted to the School Co-op meeting. This is a meeting, as we shall see, specially designed to give the Co-op pride of place in the life of our school.

The duty monitors have cleaned the large classroom from top to bottom and have arranged the chairs in a semi-circle around the two tables where the Co-op's executive officers will be seated. The

recording monitor has finished setting up the tape-recorder and has installed the microphone in order to record the proceedings. There are flowers on the tables.

Other duty monitors have arranged the exhibition of the work of the week in the corridor and, if necessary, in the second classroom. Our plan of work necessitates concrete achievements which both children and adults are happy to see in their completed state. The diplomas also have pride of place, along with albums, descriptions of daily life, letters received from corresponding schools. Paintings deck the walls; if we have been using the kiln, then the tables are covered with ceramics.

The children's parents and the teachers inspect the artifacts, in the company of the children anxious to show their masterpieces, albeit in their terms. They are proud of their achievements and resolve to do better when their work is not so good.

Naturally, there are poor weeks, and the teachers have to bear at least part of the responsibility for them. They must discuss the reasons fairly and honestly, not with the aim of excusing or justifying themselves, but in order to do better.

Then there are the good weeks, exhilarating, rich and promising, which make us feel positive about ourselves and make better people of us. But individual success is also incorporated into the success of the group. And any children who have nothing much to show for their own efforts will boast of the work of their classmates, as if they themselves had a part in it.

This weekly exhibition acts as a prelude to the Co-op meeting that is about to begin. It does a lot to help create the right atmosphere. It tempers our failures and revitalizes flagging enthusiasm. And most of all it is positive rather than negative. It accentuates the constructive part of our being. It helps us move forward and upward.

This state of mind is very important for our moral development. Schools spend far too much time on brutal criticism, testing, and punishment. They give credit for success and not for effort, with the result that 80% of the children are handicapped by permanent

feelings of failure, for which they compensate with a variety of responses, some more acceptable than others.

It is important to make sure that this Co-op meeting doesn't turn into a disciplinary hearing, something that would rob of it any value. You must at any cost, even if it means glossing over some of the problem areas, make your meeting at least 51% positive. Good things, lively events, encouraging signs should always win out against shortcomings, failure and wrongdoing. It's your job to focus on good examples that will raise the whole tone of your group. And when general opinion seems to be conspiring to crush one of your pupils, don't hesitate in the end to come to her rescue. Make her promise to do better the following week. She won't keep her promise! But she will make every effort to keep it even if she doesn't succeed. Never cut off your children's horizons, otherwise they will get lost. Always open up spaces, show them a light at the end of the tunnel, guide them along paths that one day they may venture to follow wholeheartedly.

The meeting is called to order by the Chair.

This is a solemn moment and this indispensable atmosphere of solemnity must be prepared and maintained. The adults are in their appointed place, all in a row, because they will obviously have their role to perform, and an important one it is, too. All the children are there, for this meeting is eagerly anticipated by everyone as a unique chance to affirm the sense of belonging to the community, and belonging actively not as schoolchildren but as grown people.

The secretary reads out the minutes of the previous meeting. The Chair makes a few announcements and then the meeting proper gets under way.

One of the youngest readers comes forward to read out the weekly journal of the lower school (kindergarten/primary). The two other classes (juniors/seniors) have a common journal.

Here are some of the criticisms from the lower school journal. Since many of the infants cannot write, the teacher or an older child has written out their remarks as they were dictated. During the ensuing discussion, we explain that the only criticisms to appear in

the journal should be those that have social implications, not every little personal grievance or tease that we don't need to know about: he pinched me, he pulled my hair, he scribbled in my book, etc.... You will see from experience that the imposed limits work well and that criticisms are considered to the extent that they have interest for the community as a whole.

(Freinet's list is longer than the selection given here)

— Criticisms of Gillou for damaging the beanstalks by trying to pick beans to eat (everyone)

— I criticize Janot for jumping out the classroom window (Claudine)

— I criticize Xavier for picking our next door neighbour's cherries (Sylviane)

— I criticize the one who broke the boat I had made for the exhibition (Patrice)

— I criticize Elizabeth for punching me when I walk past her (Evelyne)

— Severe criticisms of Xavier for tripping people up in class (Freddo)

— I criticize Marc for throwing tomatoes (Gilles)

The criticism on the junior school journal are clearly more serious. (These) extracts ... show the considerable range of complaints, covering all the complex cares and interests of children's life. (Again an edited list)

— Criticisms of Michelle, Ariane, Odile for not getting the wall journal ready in time.

— I criticize Ariane for stealing Alain Gérard's radishes (Odile)

— I criticize the one who messed up the toilets that I had to clean (Roland Van)

— I criticize Eliane Delmas for wasting three sheets of paper to draw one map (Alain Gérard)

— I criticize Freddo for leaving the scissors in the garden (Didier)

— I criticize Alain Gérard for knocking me over to grab

my rope and for finding my bread and cheese on the wall and grabbing the chance to eat my bread and for telling me to get lost (Ariane)

— Criticism of Frank who missed his shift on the printing press (The seniors)

— We criticize the little ones who always hang around the lockers and make a mess (Everyone)...

The custom of writing criticisms on the wall journal is so well established that some children even criticize themselves:

— I criticize myself for picking medlars from a tree I thought didn't belong to anybody (Bernard)

— I criticize myself for doing a rotten job when I was on duty (Alain S.)

— I criticize myself for punching Paul out (Xavier)

The Chair reads out each of the criticisms.

The author of the criticism gets up and explains the charge if necessary. The accused pupil gets up in turn. If it is a serious charge, both pupils are asked to come up to the table in front, just as in court. The debate is sometimes lively and close-fought. The children quite often have unsuspected talents for arguing their case, demonstrating intelligence, subtlety and a knack for saying the right thing that are quite uncanny. Witnesses are called. The Chair is required to control the debate to avoid jostling and disorder, just as in court.

During these discussions, all the secrets of school life come to the surface or at least can be guessed, sometimes even ferreted out, and this robs them of their essential characteristic as secrets. Sometimes adults are implicated, too. They must defend themselves with the same good grace, taking care above all not to play on their authority—which would irrevocably distort the debate—but acting on an equal footing with the children. This is a sine qua non for the normal working of the proceedings.

But—and it is a big but—the Co-op executive and the Students' General Meeting are not the kind of imitation court tried in some children's associations, involving consideration of the evidence and

an official declaration of the verdict.

We almost never impose penalties, except where circumstances dictate compensation for damage caused: the one who jumped out the window will wash the windows next day; the one who swore at the cleaner will be assigned to cleaning the cupboards for him; the one who broke some panes of glass in a neighbour's greenhouse will accompany the teacher or an older pupil over there to apologize and offer to pay for the repairs. These are normal penalties. They speak for themselves; they are not really punishments, only compensation for harm done.

At the end of our Co-op session, we are not left as some might think with a list of punished pupils but only with children glad of the chance to air their grievances, to get their sins off their conscience, and to have a clear and freer mind.

For this is the essential moral import of the practice; both sides are called to account for their responsibilities and the normal consequences of their behaviour: evasions and deceits, all kinds of subterfuge are unmasked in this process. The individual is exposed as he is.

This consciousness-raising has a considerable moral impact. It often happens that the accused child, after defending himself vigorously, feels cornered by the weight of evidence. He begins to cry. There can be no better end to the criticism than this descent into one's inner being, this public confession that acts as both sanction and liberation.

In truth, children are extraordinarily sensitive to such things. Indeed some of them actually fear this moment of truth. If they are the object of a charge they think of as pretty serious, they sometimes try to dodge the verdict. By chance they are fetched by their parents just before the meeting gets under way or have to be excused urgently when the dreaded moment approaches.

They are all very nervous when called upon to explain themselves. And, just as importantly, the meeting ends quite calmly. The ones who were on the carpet vow to themselves to do better next week. Their accusers do not take on triumphant airs for all that.

These meetings have become so much a part of the children's daily lives, that when a child feels she's being got at she no longer says: *I'm telling teacher,* but *I'm criticizing you on the wall journal.*

At the start of the school year, Paul, a newcomer to the School was extremely trying. Every week's wall journal was peppered with criticisms of his anti-social behaviour; and he always defended himself against these criticisms doggedly. In desperation, the Co-op Meeting decided that until he showed signs of improvement, Paul would not be allowed to write his own criticisms on the Wall Journal.

And so it was.

Two meetings later, Paul asked to speak: "I have not been criticized this week. I want to be allowed to criticize again."

And it was done.

Sometimes there are more serious incidents, morally speaking, that are brought via the wall journal to the attention of the Co-op Meeting.

One day, the following happened:

— I criticize the one who stole some sugar from the box while working in the kitchen.

The signature is Michel's, one of the seniors and the oldest pupil in the School.

Michel explains, but he is reluctant to name names. The meeting insists. The parties named are F. and F., the Treasurer and President of the Co-op respectively.

The incident, as everyone realizes, is pretty serious.

Mamma Freinet, in her desire not to overdramatize, tries to play down the crime:

"To some extent the cook is also to blame for leaving a box of sugar lying around on the kitchen table. So it's hardly surprising that the people working alongside are tempted to take some sugar. Who else would have given in to the temptation?"

Just about everyone raises their hands except Michel.

"What about you, Michel? What would you have done?"

"I'm the Co-op secretary. I would not be worthy of this position if I had stolen some sugar in such circumstances."

This President is quite often put on the spot like this. He had been elected because he has qualities that the pupils appreciate anyway. He is intelligent, subtle, understanding, but he was educated first in traditional schools and he still shows the marks. And so, because of this, he does not always behave as an exemplary President should.

This behavior provokes reactions that sometimes re-emerge in the free writing we shall be citing in an ensuing chapter
(but not in this volume, Ed.)

It is at such moments of truth that the teachers' role may become especially precious.

First of all, they must not fear (as children do) to expose themselves, to recognize their own weaknesses and faults, and to make their own commitment to do better. Such an attitude will encourage a more humane, forgiving outlook in teachers, along with the understanding needed to improve the moral climate. Teachers will be the better able to take stock of the past, but without closing off prospects for a brighter future.

Their impartiality, their sense of justice, the care they will bring to the consideration of specific problems, their concern to defend the weak against the strong while still making every effort to maintain a high moral tone in the class discussions: all of this will contribute to a sense that the teacher is always the natural arbiter. School deliberations are always conducted freely, but the children turn to the teacher for the final decision.

It is in these special moments that the teachers' voice can take on a unique resonance. It is precisely at the moment when children are looking deep within themselves, hesitantly and anxiously, that they are ready to welcome with enthusiasm any generous thoughts, suggestions, or examples that teachers can mention with a strong measure of confidence and hope. To be sure, there's a knack to it. The best among us will succeed 100% of the time. But however much we succeed, there's no escaping this real life situation. All of

us must work, without preaching, without sterling speeches, without empty verbiage, to create a moral atmosphere that allows for a humane discipline through our education for labour.

There is in our school no better disciplinary technique than one derived from work, whose moral and social virtues we have already proclaimed in our first book: *Education through Work* (*L'Education du Travail*, Paris, Editions Delachaux et Niestlé).

We shall simply recall for the record that when work is well organized, when each of our pupils or each of our working groups is prompted to engage in a rich range of activities well-reasoned and properly suited to their abilities, punitive sanctions of whatever sort become useless. There's no point in doing anything other than helping and encouraging the pupil who's having trouble setting up a piece of apparatus; giving a hammer and nails to a child who needs them; giving advice to a child preparing a presentation; sitting down, if only for a moment or two, by the child at the edge of a wood listening to the crackling of the pine-trees and the rustling of the insects in order to create a sensitive poem out of the inexpressible and the unknowable.

We have attained harmony. And if we do reach this balance and this harmony, we have by the same token created a moral environment, which an individual can no longer abandon without a wrenching feeling, just as a fish cannot leave without pain the water essential for its survival.

The influence of this moral environment is blatant: on days when work is not well organized, if we haven't discovered anything to engage the enthusiasm of our workers, then there is disorder, deceit, cheating, fighting. All you need to do is look at the attitude of newcomers, who have not got used to working on their own and deciding where their own interests lie. They wait for orders, not so much out of a respect for orders as out of a desire to accommodate them with the least effort. They bring to class all the amoral or immoral habits of the social setting they have left behind. For quite some time they act as an unsettling, disorderly influence, because in our dynamic class settings they act like the foal which was kept tied

up for too long and which, once freed from its halter, runs around wildly, this way and that, without rhyme or reason.

These are the pupils who, at the beginning of the year and sometimes well into the year, are the main focus of the wall journal until the social milieu has disciplined them, restructured them and absorbed them into its heart.

When the criticisms have all been read, we go on to congratulations which, being more optimistic and constructive, form the opposite extreme of the session.

There are two features of these congratulations:

The children congratulate some of their classmates, for instances of special kindness and helpfulness, for good work done, for a masterwork completed or a meritorious deed:

— I congratulate the juniors and the seniors for working on the hot-air balloon (Eliane and the rest)

— I congratulate Richard for doing my drawing on the ditto machine. (Pierre)

— We congratulate Jean-Lou and Pierrot for putting in the volleyball netposts. (The seniors)

— I congratulate Paul, Steven and Freddo for setting up the aquariums to keep animals. (Pierre)

— We congratulate Mamma Freinet for making a beautiful edition of Children's Art and putting our drawings in it. (Everyone)

— I congratulate Christian for looking after René when he was hurt and for helping Cécile make him better. (Richard)

— I congratulate Steven and everyone who did a good job on the little book of poems. (Frank and Jean-Paul)

But very often the children also congratulate themselves, something that answers a certain need for guileless avowal quite free of any sense of bragging because of the public judgement that sanctions such a declaration.

Here are some examples from the seniors (edited list):

— I congratulate myself for running off 160 copies on the

ditto machine. (Paul and Evelyne)

— I congratulate myself for typing 4 letters for the School. (Christian)

— We congratulate ourselves for cutting back the thornbushes. (Daniel, Paul, Roland & Freddo)

— I congratulate myself for doing a good job tidying the classroom Monday night. (Freddo)

— I congratulate myself for helping the little ones when we went for a walk. (Roland Van)

— I congratulate myself for helping Cécile in the kitchen. (Eliane)

— I congratulate myself for making fritters. (Alain Gérard)

— I congratulate myself for printing up 360 sheets. (Paul)

We always take the congratulations very seriously, however anodyne they may be, because they represent by definition the expression of exceptional effort of good will in the service of the community.

For the most spectacular congratulations we applaud or lead a round of cheers.

The "Wish List" is extremely important. Here the whole life of the community—classroom or dormitories—will come up for regular scrutiny. To ensure its continuation, the teachers must give it maximum attention, by explaining honestly the difficulties that may stand in the way of meeting the demands.

The end result of such a rubric on the wall journal obviously assumes a thorough reconsideration of the teachers' behaviour and of their relationship with the pupils.

Here are some of the demands as formulated:

— We would like the people in the senior dormitory to take less time getting up. If this doesn't change, I'll stop doing my turn on duty. (Bernard)

— I'd very much like to know who knocked the plums down in Paul's garden. (Alain Gérard)

— I would like to swap duties. (Pierre)

— We would like a nice swimming-pool in the middle of the schoolyard. (The seniors)

— I would like Didier to clean up his desk. (Pascal and Jean-Luc)

— We would like to organize firework displays and parties. (Jean-Lou)

— We would like people to write more clearly on the wall journal. (Paul)

— I don't want to be in charge of the printing press any more. (Jean-Pierre)

— I would like the exhibition to be organized better. (Paul)

— I would like a music book to help me learn to play the guitar. (Franklin)

— We would like to cut down the bough which interfere s with our soccer game. (The seniors)

— We would like the hot air balloon to be finished before the Convention to show that we are persevering and serious. (The juniors)

And finally the fourth rubric—Accomplishments—which rounds out the others by showing the constructive nature of our meetings and by linking work closely to community life and different aspects of discipline.

— I made a great insect box. (Paul)

— I did a good class presentation with Jean-Pierre (Roland Van and Jean-Lou)

— We built some model planes. (Richard, Frank and Jean-Lou)

— We cleared out the area round the ditch. (Gilles, Daniel, Paul, Pinus and Denis)

— We painted two beautiful wall-hangings. (Michelle, Eliane, Maria and the infants)

— We adapted two aquariums for animals. (Steven, Freddo and Paul)

— We did a good report on what we did in our workshop. (The seniors)

— We compiled a lot of notes about pine-trees. (The juniors)

— I got my glider off the ground in record time. (Caer)

— We did a great wall-hanging. (Pilar and Eliane)

— We worked on the garden. (The infants)

— We washed all the infants' aprons Thursday morning. (Eliane and Maria)

— We showed we are persevering, serious and fast-working. Our hot-air balloon was finished Monday night. (The junior/senior engineers)

— Our hot-air balloon took off and went up in the air 100 metres. (The juniors)

— We planted beans. (Everyone)

— I typed out two stencils and also I typed up two letters for the school mail-plan. (Michel)

When certain topics brought up in these sessions seem to call for more discussion, we organize a meeting around a special theme, for example: "Should we allow smoking?"

There is a debate leader. Usually teachers are in the best position to perform this function. They can allow the various opinions to be expounded at length; they can steer the debate and help the meeting reach conclusions.

Extract from C. Freinet, L'éducation morale et civique, B.E.M. 1960/6

2

EDUCATING TROUBLED YOUTH IN TIME OF CRISIS

I don't know if the summer of 1959 will, at some stage in the future, appear to be a memorable date in the history of troubled youth in France.

We all knew, either from reading about it in the press or seeing it on the screen, about the wild excesses of criminal behaviour among young people and children, either singly or in gangs, in America. But France is not America, or so we thought. Don't we have family structures and a social fabric strong enough to resist the rising tide of immorality and delinquency?

Then we were told about the Anderumpers in Denmark and the Skunna Folke in Sweden. And that's beyond all comprehension. A privileged younger generation that has no reason to fear the poverty of the lower classes nor the threat of war, a younger generation that seems to have no legitimate grievances, is running wild on the streets in a sort of mediæval frenzy.

And in the peoples' democracy of Poland, where the powers that be take a special interest in the future of young people, hooligans are threatening public order and the workplace.

Teddy Boys in England, Tokyo Joku in Japan, Halbstarken in Germany, Tsotsis in North Africa, Nozem in Holland, Vitelloni in Italy, the evil is spreading throughout the world like an epidemic.

France had its own gangs and delinquents, to be sure, but the

younger generation seemed to be resisting the infection.

But that has changed. As of now, France has its "Blousons noirs." ("black leather jackets") .

Suddenly, alarming news is pouring in to cloud our clear blue summer skies:

"A veritable pitched battle is waging in the suburbs of Paris between two groups of young people who are looting a café and attacking the customers."

Journalists hungry for copy during the "silly season" of summer seize on these events dangerously. Some of them even go so far as to bribe the rival gangs so that a genuine battle can break out for the benefit of the cameras of both press and newsreels. The Chief of Police is galvanised into action, and announces that 10,000 young people in Paris have organized themselves into gangs and that his men are taking care of it. Order will be restored and maintained... But the root causes of the growth of these gangs remain untouched. A show of force will not be enough to solve the problem.

"In Bandol, on the south coast, a gang of young people from neighbouring Toulon carrying an assortment of arms attack a camp of seaside holidaymakers. The energetic intervention of the police (firing their revolvers) is needed to separate the gangs from the tourists and arrest some of the hooligans."

For all that, the problems are just as threatening as ever.

The "Blousons noirs" stage a demonstration in Lyons where they beat up three Italians, and in Cannes where they engage in a veritable pitched battle with police.

Is all this the product of fashion, or is it all the result of the bad example or helping hands of ringleaders, and all we need to do is to capture them and lock them up? Maybe. But such movements are not spontaneous. There have always been fashionable trends, bad examples and ringleaders. Some kind of youth crisis with varying degrees of acuteness has always been with us as evidence of the classic conflict between generations. When the upshot is a range of disturbances along the lines we have just mentioned—and, sadly, the list is a long one—it means that something has gone wrong in

the workings of our society.

The choice is either to react immediately or to go into a decline.

There is no point sticking our heads in the sand by saying that kids will be kids and that law and order will prevail. We urgently need to discover the causes of the problem if we are to solve it.

That is the purpose of the present study.

(Freinet then lists various historical factors that are often given to explain the phenomenon of youthful violence
—the decline of parental authority resulting from the dislocation of family life in wartime, with both parents away from home and children left to their own devices; the decline in public morality as witnessed by black markets and other efforts to beat the system during the wartime occupation;
—a deterioration in the social environment, apparent in overcrowded living conditions, impersonal urban renewal projects, the evacuation of public space and the loss of community and neighbourhood;
—the trivialization and escalation of violence in commercialized youth culture, especially the movies;
—the gross irrelevance of school learning aggravated by massive increases in enrolment, crowded classrooms, huge impersonal prison-like schools, all combining with the other social factors above to alienate the Youth of 1959.)

Theorists can calmly study the deterioration of education that results from a rapid acceleration in changes to the social fabric. But parents and teachers don't have time to wait for the high priests of research to finish their analysis and make their decisions. They are confronted with a daily reality that imposes its own rhythms, and they are consequently obliged willy-nilly to find an acceptable way of coping with it.

To tell the truth, for some twenty or thirty years now we have been witnessing, in a world whose prevailing principles have become obsolete, a total collapse, with all of us trying to find the

answers that best suit our own temperaments but that turn out in practice to be no better than any other.

Our society in all respects resembles a machine careening out of control, racing so fast that we can no longer adjust it: the gears spin at will, sometimes in sync as chance would have it, but most of the time jarring against each other, thus causing mechanical wear, seizures, and dangerous breakages.

Whatever the cost, we must restore this machine to working order. It's a question of life or death. We are now going to give it a try.

(Freinet now runs through some of the options often recommended but never effective:
— a return to authoritarian discipline in school;
— a reward scheme;
— making schoolwork more attractive (illustrated books, field trips, radio, movies, TV;)
— turning schoolwork into play;
— emphasizing the explanation of moral precepts.
Freinet reviews and rejects most of the contemporary pedagogical theories of his time.
This position is best captured in his rebuttal of pedagogy based on play.)

EFFORTS TO ADAPT AND REORGANIZE THE PREPARATION OF OUR YOUTH IN THE SOCIETY OF 1959

Will Play Be The Prime Motivator of Children's Activities?I

Our son never wants to do anything in class, the parents complain. He's called lethargic and passive, as though he was thoroughly lacking in life and nothing mattered to him. And yet if only you

could see him when he's playing! Then he really gets cracking, you never saw such vim and vigour and excitement! He's just not the same child!

Ah! if only he could give to his schoolwork one fraction of the energy he shows when he's playing!

The parents aren't the only ones making this observation. The school system is also coming to realize that play injects children with levels of energy that for a long time were considered inappropriate in a school setting. Play always seemed to be the enemy of work.

Contemporary pedagogy has tried to co-opt play and tame it, much as industry attempts to harness and channel widely scattered but powerful forces.

Games have been devised to teach reading, writing and counting. There are games to teach history, games and contests to improve geographical knowledge, games for drawing and games for music; games to help focus attention, games to excite the imagination , games to enhance motor skills, games to stimulate initiative and games to promote tactical problem-solving. Radio (read "TV" in 1990—Ed.) exaggerates this trend to the point at which our whole lives are saturated with it. How long before we have games for eating and breathing?

Kindergarten classes are stuffed with so-called educational games. Our homes are full of toys. Shop-windows are overflowing with them. The toy industry is one of the most profitable in France today.

"Children at play, parents make hay." So do the teachers, we might add.

What's more, we could easily end up believing that we have finally found the final answer to all our educational problems. After all, psychologists and pedagogues today are doing their utmost to show that play is a natural part of the life of both children and adults, that it is a fundamental activity we cannot do without. Their conclusion is that we are right to focus our attention on play in the search for educational and cultural progress.

We could add that new ways of organizing work mean that

everyone will have large amounts of leisure time, and we have yet to discover any alternative to play to occupy this leisure time. In that case we may well wonder if we'll ever find a better way to overcome the crises currently troubling today's youth.

And yet, we can't help a residual sense of skepticism and anxiety. The great vogue for play has often done little more than accentuate the loss of stability.

The fact is that play does not prepare people for life. It burns people up, wastes what might appear to be excess energy, energy that would otherwise remain unused. It recalls those dams made of sticks and stones often built across mountain streams in one place or another. They serve no purpose either as irrigation or as a source of power. They are designed simply to cut the flow, slow down the rush of water, calm the turbulence to make it that much easier to harness and handle further down.

Play only marginally helps prepare people for the activities of their later life, even if, in certain cases, it provides exercise for some specific skills or develops certain senses. It distracts us from life; it tends to make us confuse life with something that is only a pale reflection of it. For this reason it distorts our perception of genuine problems.

Pedagogy based on play tends to divide people's life and behaviour into two zones: the serious, constructive zone, which includes the totality of normal, instrumental acts—notably work in all its forms, with its many demanding and tedious obligations—and the recreational zone destined to compensate for the stress required by life; this latter is the privileged zone of play.

This separation of life into two opposing zones, one requiring effort, sacrifice and suffering, the other filled with excitement and pleasure, does much to create the instability that besets us today. It is understandable that such a way of looking at things impels those who are not prepared for it to shun work and suffering in search of pleasure. And this in the last analysis is the drama of our time. It explains why the child is a living corpse at school and has no desire to subject herself to any obligation, but comes alive in the zone of

play.

Worse still, this trend is irreversible after puberty. We must find a work-based pedagogy for young children. Only then can we restore a sense of life to people, through the development of those aspects that are vital to them.

To overcome the crisis, we must reconsider child-adult relations within the framework of work and make as many adjustments as possible to our common behaviour on that basis.

Contrary to popular belief, neither idleness nor play is natural to the human race. You only have to see how young children react to situations before they are corrupted by society. The worst punishment you can inflict on a child is enforced immobility. Children appreciate nothing so much as tasks that match their capabilities and that yield results they can see directly.

Lighting or stoking the fire, cooking a meal, laying a table, bringing food to the table, riding a horse or a bicycle, these have always figured among the favourite occupations of children and they still do. It's only because such activities are thought to be dangerous, expensive, or obsessive for parents seeking a quiet life that they have been replaced by imitation versions in the form of toys: a dinner set for fun, toy soldiers or a series of miniature cars.

As paradoxical as it seems, a child not spoiled by play or profit, only resorts to play when she cannot work. If only we could restore to all ages and in all contexts, at school as in the family, the work function, we would also find the key to the optimal conditions for individual and social stability.

The task will obviously be difficult, just as it's difficult to rethink the economy of a country.

The first job is to detect the lines of force, the resources we can exploit, the potential we can develop. That is what we have been attempting in our brief indictment of an educational approach we have condemned as obsolete.

But even if our case is so clear that there is no room left for doubt, we still have to overcome the resistance of the mass of

people locked into the old system and refusing to change their ways of doing things. We also collide with those who profit from the status quo and who don't want to lose their competitive edge even if it should mean jeopardising our common future.

We do realize that our *work-based education* will have to reckon:

—with administrators at all levels who will bridle at having to rethink the construction, maintenance and development of school buildings to suit their new functions;

—with merchants who will try to avoid losing their investment in manuals and play-tools that will have no place in our new school;

—with parents who have no other desire, after a grindingly hard day's work, than a bit of peace and quiet, even if it means using tranquillizers that undervalue people and undermine the basic principles of their lives;

—with teachers themselves who were trained in the old methods and who will be slow to adapt to the new working techniques.

It will take a bold approach, and the determined action of a dedicated group of pioneers who will, through their achievements, provide the technical proof that renewal is possible and that it will make a difference.

We shall have to plan:

—the reorganization, through work, of the life and education of children within the family;

—the reorganization of work in the schools;

—the reorganization of life and work at those times when the children are not in the company of their parents or teachers.

THE REORGANIZATION, THROUGH WORK, OF THE LIFE AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

"When children have fun, parents' troubles are done"— so goes the old adage.

But a quiet life for parents and an education for children rarely go

hand in hand. If you don't want any troubles of this kind, don't have children.

When you have a highly-strung child, the temptation is to cope by giving him a few tranquillizers, without worrying about the effects they may or will have on the life or later behaviour of that child. Obviously it's a lot better to try to discover the causes of this nervous tension in order to put it right.

Take care of your children's health—the most important thing—and then make every effort to find them work that matches their capabilities as often as you can. You'll never be disappointed. Remember what you would have liked doing when you were small. Avoid issuing formal, authoritarian commands for minor tasks that lack interest: "Get me a coffee"—"Bring in some firewood"—"Watch your baby brother" Therein lies routine, the unpromising part of work, the inferior part. And it's precisely for this reason that you unload it in order to keep the superior part, active and constructive, for yourself.

Don't forget that fostering the notion of work in this obviously selfish way will discourage the child and put her off work altogether.

Don't hesitate, rather, to keep some of these routine tasks for yourself in order to leave the child with the satisfaction that comes from important work.

The little five-year old can certainly not lay the table by himself right off the bat, the task is too long and complicated. Get the plates ready for him, hand him the spoons and forks so that all he has to do is lay them out. And if it's not perfect, don't gently chide his mistakes; when he's not looking, give him a helping hand so that you can say "See how good it looks!"

At an early age, a child can make her bed and sweep up, but always approach the process in the same way, with friendly help. In the beginning, you'll have a hard time avoiding the familiar failing of assigning a task and then refusing utterly to help in any way that could be construed as cheating. Don't inflict on your family the old school habit of giving out an assignment and then sitting back

before correcting and judging it, thereby running the risk of putting the child off for good.

Give your children responsibilities from an early age, responsibilities that match their capabilities and their age: one of them can make sure the fire doesn't run low or clean the table. Others can sweep the stairs, feed the cat, or arrange flowers in vases.

If you live in the country, you'll have no trouble finding plenty more opportunities for work: mending clothes, gardening, tending the livestock.

Despite all this, don't forget that the kind of work we do has changed and that children nowadays take greater interest in the operation of a mechanical device than in looking after plants and flowers. In an age when just about any up-to-date practical parent has a complete set of tools in a workshop corner, it's a good idea, as soon as possible, to set aside, if not a room, at least a space under the stairs, a corner in a passageway or basement, as the site of the children's workshop. Your four and five-year-olds will be happy and proud to be able to build model houses and trucks, or work with scissors and cloth.

Finally don't forget that all children really enjoy free drawing, most of all when they can produce giant pictures, and they will enjoy any kind of drawing, at least to the extent that the school itself can nurture and stimulate this enthusiasm.

Obviously in this era of toys, tools worthy of the name are getting rare. We have to direct the inexhaustible ingenuity of inventors and toymakers towards perfecting tools designed to meet the needs and capabilities of young children. Simple features that reduce the likelihood of beginners hitting themselves on the thumb, channels that reduce the risk of using a saw, but real saws, rasps, gouges, a transformer, a wirecutter, a lamp assembly, and so on...

There's a world of objects waiting to be invented in this domain. If we could use the prodigious sums of money currently being spent on the production of useless toys, we could soon provide all our children with genuine tools as their first step on the road to the

adult world.

We must also put a stop to a slide into bourgeois comfort that produces the most deplorable ways to bring up children: "I had to work hard when I was a child," we say to ourselves, "and so I now want my children to enjoy playing and taking it easy like children in good families." Children now bring us in family allowances which justify waiting upon them or having others wait on them rather than getting them involved early on in the business of work around the house.

Children of working people, even in the country, are nowadays brought up like petits bourgeois. Gone are the times when, back at the turn of the century, we were given jobs to do from our earliest years: seeing to the chickens, looking after the goat or the cattle, watering the garden, taking manure out to the fields, picking fruit or fetching water. Apart from occasional evenings after dinner or Sundays, we rarely had time for playing.

It may have been overdone in some cases, in view of the nature and quality of the tasks we were given to do. There may even have been unfortunate cases of abuse. But at least we were integrated into the life of our parents and the village. We knew when the lambs were being born and how to feed their mothers; we knew what time of year saw the wheat ripen and what was involved in taking the cattle and donkey out to pasture. It was part of this presence which we were talking about earlier and which tied us concretely, technically to our surrounding environment.

Today's children have no knowledge of the incidental life of their parents. It's as if they didn't have these parents and didn't live in the village or neighbourhood. They are "disintegrated," bereft of these vital roots in community whose virtues we are now beginning to find again.

"But all they need to do is play!..."

"Ah, yes! They can talk with astounding expertise about comics or movies. They will rattle off the makes of cars or great sporting feats. But they have no knowledge of work. It's as if they were in another world that has deliberately been allowed to cut itself off

from ours. Less than ever now can we talk of presence."

We can measure the consequences of these mistakes in the Children's Clubs and Summer Camps where children neither can nor want to do anything, as though they were destined later to become soft-handed princes.

Our job is to accomplish a complete about turn. We must return cautiously, humanely—for we must certainly do nothing to justify a revival of child exploitation—but return all the same to a maximum participation of children in the life of the family, the school and even society at large. Not in order to benefit from children's work (it's often far quicker to do the job oneself), but because our educational priorities dictate such an approach to prepare our young for real life.

THE REORGANIZATION OF WORK DURING THOSE TIMES WHEN CHILDREN ARE NOT IN THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS OR TEACHERS

The problem of adult presence outside of class time did not exist—or certainly wasn't as pressing—at the turn of the century. Children after school weren't left on their own. If the door was locked, they went off to join their parents somewhere else or waited with neighbours.

On holidays, children worked in the fields or in the workshop, just like the adults. When we were young, at the turn of the century, we would never have found any other children to play with—except for the teacher's children, and this privilege did them no favours. We used to look after the goats or the cattle, we used to water the garden, or gather windfall apples.

Times have changed. Nowadays, and for reasons we have enumerated, children after school are, nine times out of ten, left to their own devices. The house is empty. Sometimes it's locked up

and the children have nothing else to do but wait in the street. It is the same story on weekends.

These are the brutal facts, this is the serious situation, and no-one seems in any hurry to do anything about it.

What do children do to occupy their time for these long hours?

Well, they do what they can, as surroundings and circumstances permit. They play, if there's enough room, which is not always the case. But they no longer have access to nature for play, the trees, the bushes, the barns, the old sheds, the river and the animals. On the contrary they are beckoned by tempting, dangerous pursuits: bicycle-racing, motor-biking, punch-ups, and by entertainments that, when abused at least, are profoundly harmful: movies, radio, TV.

And since they absolutely need some form of company, because they can't stay on their own, they join up with other classmates, in chance encounters. There are good encounters, and then there are deplorable encounters that serve as a training-ground for delinquency, gangs, organized groups, with all the vices that grace our century.

This state of affairs is obviously a serious one for children before puberty. It can become tragic beyond that age, for nothing constructive has been planned by way of a beneficial presence for adolescents who are no longer wanted in school and who are of an age to perceive the attractions of bars, alcohol, thieving and prostitution.

People are surprised at these corruptions. They should be surprised rather that there aren't more. You have to believe that human nature is less evil than we are told, if somehow it succeeds in finding the right way through a labyrinth so full of perilous dead-ends.

Another factor that contributes to the worsening situation of our adolescents: before the recent social legislation –which we in no way intend to malign—a considerable proportion of our fourteen-year-olds entered the workplace or apprenticeships. Days then were long. When the young worker got home, he was worn out and no longer felt like going out to find a piece of the action. Only the middle

classes could afford the luxury of idle pursuits.

The poor organization of school and apprenticeship programs at all levels nowadays leaves all adolescents with a large amount of leisure time that we have yet to find a way to fill up; inadequate housing conditions, the sound environment, radio and noise are making the situation worse. The child's social environment has been allowed to deteriorate without any efforts being made to find or plan possible, essential improvements.

What answers do we propose:

Let's not count on force and police intervention which will only make matters worse.

Dedicated people have dwelt on this problem. Young people, journalists, priests have tried to make contact with the gangs and organized groups, not only to study their ways of operating but mainly to achieve a better humane understanding, through experience, of the true reasons for the social decline we are witnessing.

Everyone agrees: these children, these young people have reached this stage as a consequence of being left alone and in the total absence of any life goals or reason for doing anything.

One of the current suggestions, even in official quarters, is to organize youth clubs. But what will the kids end up doing in these clubs? The only thing that people think is pedagogically worthwhile: games and sports and, on the side, radio and TV whose dangers and shortcomings we have already elaborated upon, except for those cases where exceptionally gifted adults will be able to offer young people the presence they are deprived of in the first place.

Only one answer can really be provided here too: *Work-based Education.* Now there's no question of organizing round-ups and sending off to work-camps all the adolescents who fall into the hands of the police. Young people must be given the same opportunities that we provided to children in primary school. They must be offered genuine work, with a real purpose, that suits their personalities, that meets their needs, that stands a chance of

restoring to them the self-confidence and dignity that they have lost.

It is even possible that these young people cannot all be fully recovered. They have been put off work in the family and work in school; we'll have a hard time persuading them that there is any feasible solution to their anxieties. But gradually, if we begin at the bottom, we'll climb that mountain again.

How can we imagine this *Work-based Education* for adolescents?

An accelerated introduction to the Techniques of the Modern School will prepare the ground. The Modern School Convention at Mulhouse, which dwelt on the question at length, favoured the methodical organization, in villages and in city neighbourhoods, of after-school programs and weekend clubs designed for large numbers of children and adolescents.

These clubs would include the sports programs that have become so popular on a grand scale. But we would have to plan their organization to include the new kind of workshops for living work.

These will not be apprenticeship programs nor pre-apprenticeship programs. They will offer activities, a goal, a sense of purpose for this mass of youngsters that the school system has been incapable of mobilizing.

To succeed, a broad range of work opportunities will be needed, from which each individual will choose according to preference: painting and drawing, pottery and ceramics, photography and movie-making, radio and assembling radio-sets, printing and reprographics, science and electricity, carpentry and carving, sewing, etc....

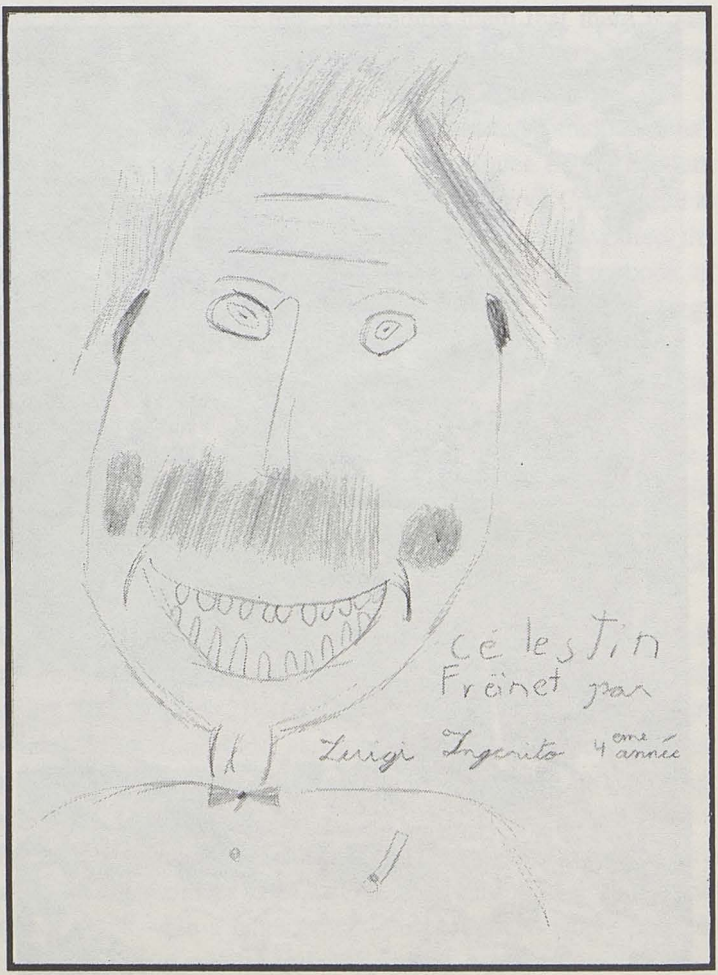
Each club, which would not necessarily have to be located in a new building, would have to include a certain number of special-purpose rooms, with a large general-purpose room where possible for shows, puppets, movies and slide-shows.

The staff would consist half of teachers, who instead of supervising evening homework (a feature of the French school system) would be paid for extra classes, and half of artisans, supervisors and workers.



Freinet in the School Garden

FREINET OF THE SMILE



by Luigi Ingenito, Grade 4
(a reminder of the joy he brought to work-based education)

Part Five

CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Critics of Freinet's pedagogy sometimes suggest that despite its apparent openness to the community, the logic of the Freinet techniques tends to fold the processes of learning back into the school institution. After all as the networks of schools develop and the child-authored resources accumulate and are shared, a special effort is needed to bring the local school back to its local community setting. The two succeeding extracts show two ways in which Freinet pedagogy approaches such a challenge.

The survey is a popular technique, since it not only reveals to the learners ways of understanding beliefs and values in a social setting, but also because it enables the community to learn about itself through the agency of the learners. The one we reproduce here has an interest that extends far beyond that particular community at that particular time; it would be surely of interest to many teachers, learners and communities to engage in their own version of what kids should learn and then measure that against what kids are taught.

Ways to incorporate volunteer helpers into the classroom often preoccupied Freinet teachers too. By introducing community experts, the teacher can create the sense of the interdependence of knowledge and skills on which community life is based. The teacher is not called upon to surrender what she has to offer by way of intellectual tools to integrate such variety in school life, but is nevertheless forced to yield pre-eminent authority before the community—another step that must be freely taken to achieve a co-operative commonwealth.

1

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR KIDS TO HAVE LEARNED IN SCHOOL?

(So far we haven't been able to track the following piece down to its original appearance in French, but it has appeared twice in English, one of the few Freinet publications that had until this year. It is a checklist of things people surveyed by Freinet thought their children should have learnt by the time they had completed their schooling. Internal evidence suggests that it was done in the 1950s (after 1948—Declaration of Human Rights—and before the spread of TV in the late fifties).

The choice of the categories that organize the survey's report does not pose much of a challenge to the traditional organization of learning, although once or twice the flavour of Célestin Freinet's Modern School comes through (in the ones asterisked): Reading; Writing; Speech; Numbers; General Skills and Knowledge; History; Geography; Manual Work and Practical Life*; Gymnastics and Sports; Music; Cinema and Radio*; Art, Social Accomplishments, Aesthetic Sense, etc.; Moral Characteristics*; Citizenship.*

Naturally, what people considered important within each category is much more interesting. To make for ready comparisons, all scores were reduced to a number from 1 to 10, each reflecting the relative importance of each one when compared with all the rest. To keep the list manageable, we'll restrict the report to the scores of 8 to 10, the most important

in the respondents' eyes.)

Reading

Ability to read books or letters easily	10
Ability to read and understand newspapers and magazines	9
Ability to enjoy good and fine books	9
Ability to use a dictionary	9

Writing

Ability to write a letter without mistakes	10
Ability to write a report	8
Ability to draft a telegram	8
Ability to reply to a questionnaire	8

Speech

Ability to speak correct French	10
Ability to use a telephone	9
Ability to carry on a discussion	8
Ability to speak readily in public	8

Numbers

Ability to add subtract, divide and multiply	10
Ability to understand a pay-slip	10
Ability to calculate area, volume, profits, living expenses	10
Ability to do rapid mental calculations	9
Ability to measure, weigh and count notes	9
Ability to read a plan or a map	9
Ability to calculate the cost price of a product	9

Ability to understand a tax assessment	9
Ability to make out a postal order	9
Ability to use a table, a scale, a price list	9
Ability to assess and estimate without measuring	8
Ability to read an insurance policy	8
Ability to calculate a health scheme reimbursement	8
Ability to understand a graph	8
Ability to read a map in order to find the distance between two towns	8

General Skills and Knowledge

Ability to look after an invalid	9
Ability to treat a wound	9
Ability to bandage	9
Ability to apply splints to a broken limb	9
Ability to apply artificial respiration	9
Ability to stop a haemorrhage	9
Ability to stop nose-bleeding	9
Ability to treat an injured person	9
Ability to read a prescription	9
Ability to handle dangerous or inflammable liquids	9
Ability to light or put out a fire	9
Ability to read a thermometer, a barometer and a chronometer	9
Knowledge of human physiology	8
Ability to remove a foreign body	8
Ability to carry out simple electrical work	8
Ability to grease and repair a bicycle	8
Ability to mend a tire, to repair a puncture	8
Ability to read a meter	8

History

Knowledge of the history of labour	8
Knowledge of the history of economic progress	8
Knowledge of the history of the workers' struggle and of revolutions	8
Knowledge of the history of the last two wars	8

Geography

Highway code	10
Knowledge of the rivers, mountains and towns of France	9
Knowledge of communication routes	9
Ability to plan a long trip	9
Ability to use a timetable	9
Knowledge of agricultural and industrial production	8
Knowledge of the French colonies	8
Ability to read an ordnance map	8
Ability to read the Michelin map	8
Ability to use a compass and find one's bearings	8
Ability to use a town map	8

Manual Work and Practical Life

Ability to mend clothes and shoes	10
Ability to wash clothes	9
Ability to clean the house	9
Ability to sew on buttons	9
Ability to ride a bicycle	8
Ability to change fuses	8

Ability to find names in a directory	8
Ability to sew and darn	8
Ability to iron	8
Ability to prepare an ordinary meal	8
Ability to do the household washing	8
Ability to look after a baby	8
Ability to ask for information without feeling shy	8
Not being a slave to tradition	8
Ability to give clear indications of the way to go	8

Gymnastics, Sport

Ability to swim	10
Skill in mountain climbing	8
Ability to do rescue work	8

Music

Ability to enjoy good music	9
Ability to play a musical instrument	8

Cinema, Radio

Ability to understand radio	9
Ability to understand the cinema	8

Art, Social Accomplishments, Aesthetic Sense, etc.

Ability to appreciate a fine edition	9
Dress sense	8
Appreciation of museums	8
Ability to appreciate works of art (sculpture, etc.)	8

Moral Characteristics

Knowledge of moral laws	10
Avoidance of sectarianism and class prejudice	10
Knowledge of oneself	10
Fairness	9
Community sense, willingness to help	9
Loyalty	9
Ability to be oneself	9
Co-operative living and mutual aid	8
Charity	8
Acceptance of responsibility	8

Citizenship

Knowledge of Civic Laws	10
Respect for Human Life and Liberty	10
Knowledge of the Declaration of Human Rights	9
Readiness to fight for peace	9
Possession of a social ideal	9
Readiness to obey chosen authorities	8

2

BRINGING OUTSIDERS INTO THE SCHOOL

The traditional school, as we have said, operates in a closed setting. It is only in recent years that the elementary teacher has been authorized to venture, as the occasion, arises into the garden, down by the river or out in the fields to get some living sustenance there. Then as often as not everyone hastens back to the security of the four walls of the school not so much to digest this sustenance as to rid it from our system. This jealously-guarded isolation of the school is the inevitable consequence of a whole education system that we condemn.

By our techniques, on the other hand, life freely enters our school which, for its part, goes out as much as possible to meet life. Work in the garden, school walks, study trips or field trips, both individually and in groups, form a normal part of our working life.

We must go even further.

We have said, notably with respect to questions children ask, that far from presuming to claim knowledge of everything, the teacher must recognize the constant necessity of personal research and learning, by appealing for help to all possible sources, both inside and beyond the school. But it is also necessary that adults, and the children's parents above all, get used to considering their collaboration in the educational process a natural thing. We know that to attain this end we are swimming against a powerful backwash, one created by the past history of a school system turned

that to attain this end we are swimming against a powerful backwash, one created by the past history of a school system turned in on itself, mysteriously clinging to its isolation, where the craftworker no longer dared to enter because he felt out of place, overwhelemed as he was by a spirit of intellectualism that abrogated to itself the monopoly of intelligence and power.

If we have cast off this academic mask, if we have succeeded in rediscovering the norms of work in the service of the truths and complexities of real life, the school will no longer be a church that people enter with hats doffed and hands clasped, taking care not to clatter their old hob-nailed boots on the echoing flagstones. No, it will become a workshop, a construction site in which all workers would feel in their element, certain of being able to carry in their own stones, however modest, to add to this building for which the exercise of intellect will only provide the finishing touches.

Accordingly, we shall no longer fear to call upon adults who are outsiders to the school.

When we have some tricky work to do in the garden—special seeding, tree care such as pruning or grafting—we shall ask a knowledgeable peasant in to help us, teach us and guide us. We won't expect him to give a class, but only to show us how he does it. Always with the understanding that we can later round out his technical contribution with theoretical explanations or with the necessary scientific caveats.

If it's a difficult piece of cabinet-making, the cabinet-maker will come in one early afternoon to get us started. At other times it will be the basketmaker, the blacksmith, the mason, or a laundryworker.

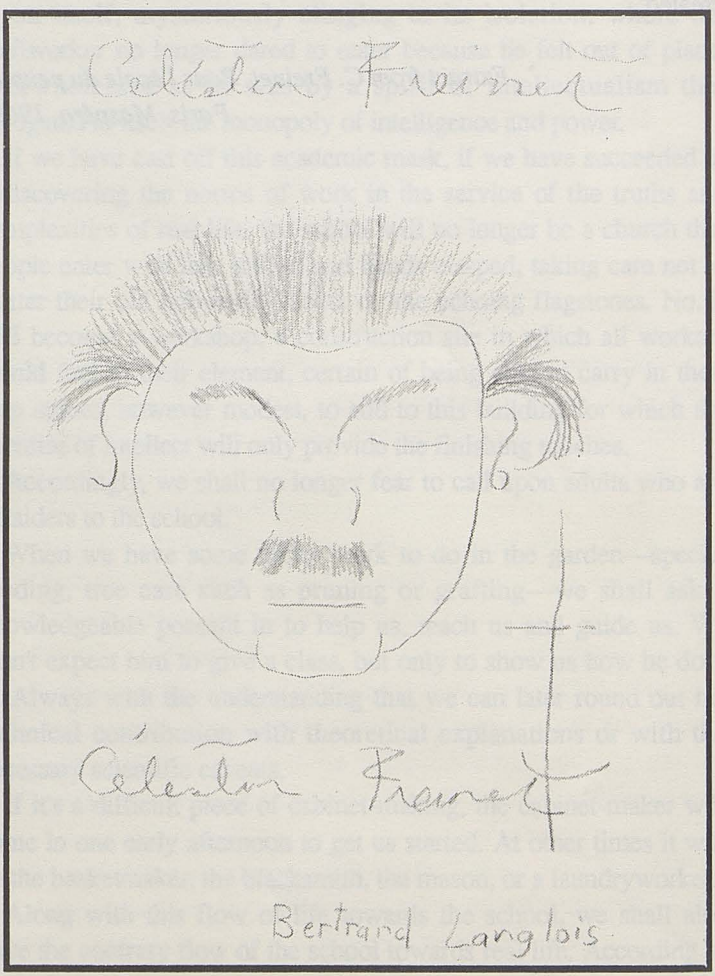
Along with this flow of life towards the school, we shall also have the contrary flow of the school towards real life. According to our school's needs, pupils will go and interview the cook at the hotel, an old woman at her fireside or the colonial settler back in retirement.

You can imagine everything that the school stands to gain from such interaction: the practical possibility of making up for the teacher's lack of skill in certain areas (for the teacher cannot claim

work that traditional schooling always tends to dominate and supplant; the harmonious integration of the new life thereby created.

Extract from C. Freinet, Pour l'école du peuple, Paris, Maspéro, 1969.

FREINET'S DEATH MASK



by Bertrand Langlois, Grade 7
(Freinet lived to be 70)

Part Six

CREATING A MOVEMENT AND A POLITICAL AGENDA

Freinet frequently makes it clear that if we are to adopt cooperative learning techniques we must link the social model of the school to a vision of an alternative society beyond the school. Otherwise cooperative work-based education will be cut off at the knees.

The following two extracts aim to show something of the evolution of the political dimension of the Freinet movement.

The first is from a militant proletarian manifesto written by Freinet in 1933 when he was still a member of the Communist Party. He left the CP not long after. The second comes from ICEM's platform for an alternative education politics in 1979 (with its emphasis on de-streaming, egalitarianism and the school as an agent of cultural and economic reproduction) .

In both cases the stress is on the cooperative and work-based project that Freinet began in Bar-sur-Loup after the War to End All Wars.

1

CALL FOR A STRONG, UNITED ORGANIZATION OF WORKING-CLASS PARENTS

People are opening their eyes; the so-called "neutral" school system is dropping its mask of hypocrisy and aligning itself more and more with the interests of the governing elite. The cultural barrier it had erected against the faltering aspirations of the working class is gradually losing its strength. And so the interests of the governing elite now require the school system to work directly against the interests of the working classes.

When capitalism was still on the rise, the ruling class had to rely on the best educated segments of the people—those who as yet offered no threat to it. As a result, the school system was given public support. New buildings went up in cities and rural areas, and our curriculum was boldly progressive and secular. At the end of the war, the International League for Educational Renewal still, briefly, believed that it could reform the public school system peacefully within capitalism.

But the danger was apprehended; the powers that be soon realized the extent to which the principles of educational renewal stood in opposition to the authoritarian and oppressive requirements of today's society, and the progressive momentum was soon brought to an abrupt halt. The fascist countries have resolutely brought their subjugated school systems into line. And France too is embarking on the same course. We have pointed out how the growth of poverty,

catastrophic cutbacks in school maintenance and construction, scandalously high class sizes, and the general assault on progressively-minded teachers are all unmistakable signs of creeping fascism that so far the working class has, with some success, opposed.

But while this direct assault on the resources of our public school system was going on, there has also been another kind of battle, more insidious and equally dangerous. It is being waged not by the State itself, but by all reactionary forces—including the Church—that have a stake in reinforcing the power of the current establishment: children are being organized outside the school in order to indoctrinate them. Youth clubs, scout troops, Catholic youth groups all disseminating among working-class children the ideology of social harmony and class collaboration while current events are revealing the fragility and deceit of such notions. Within the schools, right-wing efforts are under way to influence education directly through the organization of parent associations who will naturally have the right to know and to criticize what is going on.

Sadly, the parent associations currently in existence are all reactionary-minded groupings composed of a tiny minority of parents that claim nevertheless the right to speak on behalf of the masses. The 90% of the parents who are working-class have no organization at all, cannot make themselves heard and are reduced to bearing the brunt of measures proposed by a handful of reactionaries.

It is utterly essential that such a state of affairs be stopped and that the vast mass of working-class parents become aware of their rights and responsibilities.

In the first place, the people must take a greater interest in the true education of their children. They must be told and they must understand the nature of the kind of working-class education that we favour in opposition to traditional forms of education, so that, armed with this understanding, they can fight for the triumph of our ideals.

We have many friends active in the union movement as well as in

the progressive political parties. They are certainly well placed to provide useful explanations about new directions in curriculum and teaching methods. But the time has now come, in cities and in rural areas, to establish Leagues of Working-Class Parents that will bring together the vast mass of parents, who will intervene directly to insist on respect for the rights of their children, who will stand firm in the defence of teachers under attack because of their commitment to progressive causes, and who will do everything necessary to ensure the development of truly liberating forms of education.

The establishment of these Leagues of Parents will, we think, be much easier if we try to define the reasons for their existence and the directions they should be taking. This is why we are proposing the following agenda to which emerging Leagues can refer for inspiration and guidance in the struggles ahead.

A) A PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AROUND THE SCHOOL

We repeat our oft-stated educational principles: the process of education is in no way to be limited to what goes on within the walls of the school; on the contrary, it is first and foremost a process that is conditioned by the social, economic, and hence physical setting of the children.

Anything that can contribute vitality within an atmosphere of calmness and harmony should be the primary focus of attention for working-class parents.

1. Working-class children are always cramped by the conditions in the slums and back alleys. They need playgrounds for the summer, playrooms in the winter, and meeting rooms and reading libraries all year round.

2. At this time of economic crisis in particular, children often go without nutritious food. A minimum demand is for the creation of free lunch programs.

3. Children can only work well if they can breathe well. It is

absolutely essential that unhealthy school buildings be closed down and that spacious, well-lit classrooms be opened in their place.

4. Teachers can only contribute usefully to the needs of the children if numbers are kept down. Overcrowded classes must be split up.

5. Education requires most of all a spirit of peace, calm and harmony. Teachers cannot be expected to make a total commitment unless their material needs are properly provided for and they can enjoy a considerable measure of freedom in their classes. Working-class parents must give unconditional support to progressively-minded teachers in their struggle for these demands.

B) A PROGRAM FOR CHANGE WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Parent associations have an undeniable right to be informed about the education of their children.

In order for them act usefully, working-class parents must have some sense of the things that distinguish working-class education from traditional middle-class education.

Without dwelling at length on these distinctions, we would like to set down the essential features:

1. Discipline. Too many parents, who are used to playing the tyrant's role in their own family, are still persuaded that education is not possible without harshly authoritarian discipline.

It is precisely because the ruling class can only exist if this oppressive ideology is accepted by the masses that it lends support to this belief which is completely denied by the facts.

By appealing to children's creativity, to their innate tendencies to order and harmony, by organizing cooperative, community schools, almost as embryos for tomorrow's socialist society, we can prepare citizens capable of overcoming the forces of oppression whatever shape they take.

Consequently, Working-Class Parents are radically opposed to punitive sanctions, corporal punishment, impositions and

detentions, and the despotic authority of the teacher. They demand the transformation of schools into working cooperatives, involving the collaboration of parents themselves and in which every effort will be made to encourage individual creativity.

2. Learning. Disorderly acquisition of knowledge under pressure is one of the forms of capitalist stultification. Children are made to learn more and more, to overload their memory, to wear out their appetite for knowledge, their curiosity—and all to the detriment of the deeper development of individuals.

There once was a time, at least, when this form of instruction, the pursuit of credentials, could provide those who made it with certain social advantages. Nowadays students have no place in society; unemployed intellectuals are starving just as much as the uneducated.

What better proof could be offered that the goals of education have been perverted?

Working-Class Parents are opposed to the intellectual force-feeding of children. They protest against homework, against rote-learning, against cramming for exams. They demand educational practices designed to meet the needs of individuals and to develop their true potential.

3. Education for living and through living. Traditional education is afraid of real life; it is locked up inside books that have been gutted of content; it tends to turn children into eternal pupils rather than future workers able to think intelligently and decisively about the job they have to do.

Working-Class Parents are opposed to book-learning that is distinct from real life. They demand a curriculum that is integrated with human effort, with work as it is done in the real workplace.

4. Opposing dogmatism and cramming, and advocating honesty and truth in education. As we have been saying for years now, traditional schooling does not aim to open eyes and develop minds, but only to prepare the docile servants needed for capitalism.

It imposes knowledge that is neither understood nor desired by children. It teaches beliefs that children have neither the right nor the tools to question: the doctrine of obedience, the doctrine of

patriotism, the doctrine of family, the doctrine of armed defence, the doctrine of war, and so on.

Working-Class Parents demand above all honesty and truth in education. They refuse to let their children be taught ideas that have nothing to do with the realities of everyday life. They do not want their children to be parrots, they want them to be free beings, imbued with acute critical faculties, able to make their own choices in life, without waiting for others to give the orders or instructions. And within the framework of this essential truth, they demand that teachers be completely free in their choice of methods to allow children to mature to their full potential.

C) EDUCATION OF CHILDREN BEYOND THE SCHOOL

The education provided by the school system is only one part of the complex human development that should be guaranteed by any rationally constituted society.

The influence of the social setting has enormous importance and working-class parents will have to take a special interest in it:

1. Reading. Reject harmful books and magazines. Recommend magazines and papers that meet our educational needs more effectively.

2. Theatre and Cinema. Make plays and films for children; organize regular special shows and screenings for children.

3. Youth groups. Organize Working-Class Pioneer groups in communities everywhere. They should be formed and run in the same spirit as the Leagues of Working-Class Parents.

All we have done here is to give a general idea of what could constitute a charter for working-class parent associations.

Now a word or two is needed for the trade unions, for progressive political parties, and for grassroots organizations, particularly those dedicated to the fight against fascism. We ask them to work in all communities and neighbourhoods to set up working-class parent associations to defend the aims we have been outlining.

We are not asking for some vast holy union centred on the school, but rather a deep commitment and positive unity of action for one of the undertakings that has received least attention until now and yet that promises to bear the most fruit.

As far as this program of honesty and freedom, creativity and liberation is concerned, all working-class parents can and must agree. The task is to develop the personalities, to train the people who can assume a leadership role in the forging of a new social destiny. And for this task, what is needed is a Common Front.

These various Working-Class Parent Associations would naturally form federations at the regional or national level with the support and control of working-class organizations such as progressive unions, socialist parties, antifascist organizations and all groups who endorse the aims of their constitutional charter.

We do not want to have such an initiative viewed as serving any special partisan interest. We think it's worth recalling that well before the current powerful trend towards the common progressive front, we had, some ten years ago, worked through our Public Education Cooperative to engage the fraternal collaboration of several thousand working-class educators of every political stripe, clearly showing that where the liberation of children is at stake it is always possible and easy to secure the agreement of all people of good will.

The task now is to work towards a powerful coordination of progressive forces in society.We hereby invite all progressive organizations in the country to join us and notably all our teaching colleagues who are aware of the urgent need to fight against the forces of reaction and to make ready for the victory of our new working-class education.

Extract from C. Freinet, Appel aux parents, B.E.M. 56-58, 1969

(A League of Parents along the lines proposed by Freinet materialized briefly in the 1930s, but it did not receive support from the political parties of the left or the labour unions, whose

view was blinkered by the demand for short-term solutions to the problems of the Great Depression. But Freinet maintained his commitment to the political role of parents and to the need to build a coalition between parents and teachers around the cooperative learning of the Modern School Movement. In the Movement's journal, *L'Éducateur*, a parents' page was a regular fixture, and Freinet's own commitment to parent activism did not waiver despite the concern of some teachers that parents might form a reactionary counterbalance to their efforts to achieve lasting progress.)

2

THE MODERN SCHOOL MOVEMENT'S CALL FOR A PEOPLE'S SCHOOL SYSTEM

(In 1979, the Cooperative Institute for the Modern School (ICEM) published *Perspectives on a People's Education (Perspectives d'éducation populaire)* in which they summarized the state of Freinet pedagogy more than a decade after his death. The closing passages in that book spell out their program of political reform. Built on the cooperative, work-based pedagogy of Freinet himself, their recommendations extend his principles into local school governance—the adoption of team teaching, the replacement of performance review by cooperative self-management, and so on. Some of the principles link with the struggles for republican socialism in France—an end to funding for religious education, an end to creeping incidental fees, and guaranteed access to small local schools. Some of the historical Freinet is still alive and well—the emphasis on the one-room school,

offsite education and exchanges, Freinet-inspired architecture and furniture. In other respects Freinet's concern to make full use of modern technology has been updated stressing the importance of having educators seconded to mass media, for instance. Then there are the policies that all democratic socialists will recognize as central to their position– racial and gender integration, the right to lifelong learning. Out of all this we have chosen to extract their views on streaming, curriculum, and student evaluation.)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

All government policies (length of school attendance, age norms, programs rigidly arranged into years and subjects, the compartmentalization of elementary and secondary education...) amount to conditions that combine to straitjacket a system with a single set of values and processes designed to segregate and select people.

We believe that effort is urgently needed to redefine our understanding of curriculum, supervision, disability and retardation that underlie the practices of remedial withdrawal.

This complex of reforms should be matched by a reorganization of schooling into cycles.

We affirm our adherence to a *genuinely comprehensive stream, unaffected by age-streaming.*

We believe in the value of mixed classes (by age and by level of ability), with small numbers, infused with the spirit of a pedagogy based on success through free writing, group work and individualized study, standing in opposition to the principle of "ability grouping" which, while claiming to equalize opportunity, actually streams the classes.

(a) Organizing into cycles

We propose organizing school learning into cycles consisting of several years.

There will no longer be one teacher per class, but rather a school broken up into workshops, small groups, etc. In those groups, within the framework of cooperative pedagogy as we have already defined it, each child will develop at her own pace.

Organization into cycles and cooperative pedagogy: this structure of cycles will allow for:

— teamwork; teachers obliged to compare their practices, their objectives, their knowledge of the children and the progress achieved by each one, the way in which groups communicate...;

— the mixing of groups: abolishing the practice of compartmentalizing school life into classes and programs will allow for varied groupings, for children of different ages and abilities to be brought together all the time or else for specific projects. Within a framework of cycles and cooperative pedagogy, mixed classes constitute one of the solutions to school failure because they bring about a blending of abilities, skills, interests and thereby encourage an attitude of mutual cooperation;

— flexibility in learning patterns, currently compromised if not prevented by the existing constraints of class size and programmed curriculum.

Such is the case with helping children learn to read. Unwaveringly mechanical methods multiply the chances of irreversible failure, but the whole process could be approached without anxiety and with every hope of success by all the children, if the objective was not limited first and foremost to getting everyone to read by the age of seven. And what is said here about reading applies to all other forms of learning.

It makes sense to take into account the wide range of rates and levels at which learners acquire knowledge and the ability to express it. And this is true not only among children of the same age but also within the experience of a single child (nowadays, "being

at grade level" means achieving equally well in different subject areas, because getting all the kids through the program at the same time is believed to the sign of good teaching when in fact it is absurd and elitist).

But *recognition of this right to be different must be accompanied with all kinds of differentiated incentives and aids:* appreciation for all kinds of expression and achievement, not only those connected with oral and written language; introduction of practices and tools that favour individualized work; group projects having a variety of aims and voluntarily entered into by those affected (making things, doing research, reinforcing what has been learnt...); self-evaluation of work done.

If any alternative plan is based on the notion of schooling as a process designed at all costs to bring every learner up to a standard level of learning by a given age, then it would consist solely in perpetuating segregation even while claiming to destroy it. This is the argument we use to attack the illusion and even the mystification of remedial assistance, based on the so-called basics alone and a standardized approach to teaching and learning them.

Guidance:

In this plan to organize schooling into cycles, children and adolescents will have constantly been brought into contact with the community and the world of work, both by opening up the school for the participation of guests from outside (parents, non-parents, workers, unionists...) and by engaging in joint projects with adults in the workplace (it will be important to specify to what extent and at what age all the young people could be systematically involved in production with the aim of improving community and technical training).

Affirmative guidance (rather than the kind that occurs as chance or fate dictates) will be made possible by the conjunction of three factors:

— refusal to accord more value to one kind of work or play than another;

— constant engagement, at all school levels, in projects that involve expression, production and exchanges with the community;

— continued participation (gradually increased as pupils move up through the school) in work-related projects (investigative research, periods of training with companies, etc.) whose goal is not specific job-training but rather to provide opportunities for information, participation and critical reflection about social and professional life.

Ideas about how long studies should normally take or about the appropriate age to learn this or that should not be used to decide the best time to provide guidance to the individual student. The counselling will take place when the necessary amount of information has been profitably acquired and once the skills needed for the level of counselling envisaged have been demonstrated.

(b) Curriculum and evaluation

Currently defined by year and grade, curriculum will have to be organized into cycles based on objectives relating to the acquisition of work-habits, skills and sophistication in which pride of place would go to learner initative, production for use, free expression and free research, and the social life of young people.

It is important that this cycle-based curriculum not be presented as a series of rigid and impermeable compartments but as open-ended inventories of work projects, activities, areas of knowledge, abilities, in other words of objectives expressing in concrete terms the ends in view for each age group. The educational setting will be stimulating enough—in terms of its activities, its equipment and the relationships between participants—to allow children to take over, to explore in various ways and at various speeds, within an integrated framework of activities, the whole range of work projects in ways that no program could claim to summarize.

The main thing, in fact, is to break with an intellectualist, encyclopædic notion of culture. You cannot break up culture into a set of fragments dealt with separately. What we advocate is a living culture, that rejects the compartmentalization of knowledge, and the

segregation of activities (e.g. into mental work and manual labour). There must be no division into noble and serious learning on the one hand, and secondary kinds of learning on the other that for the most part are neglected or even completely negated.

Technological education, art education, manual education, physical education, cooperative activities must all find their natural place in a timetable that cannot be arbitrarily broken up into isolated segments.

Throughout the years of common schooling, manual education, followed by vocational and technical education, will be undertaken by all students, at the same level of sophistication and with the same dignity as other subject areas.

But we refuse to dissociate school knowledge from the development (even professionally) of the young person's creative genius and cultural background.

School guidance will cause teachers to open up their class to the modern world and their immediate surroundings. Children and adolescents and adults too must be equipped to understand the events of their age: the world of work; social, economic, union and sporting institutions; current events in the world of science, technology, art or sport. An important place will be reserved for regional sport.

And so throughout this common school experience, the child and later the adolescent will be able to exercise her full potential, allow her personality to emerge fully, in order ultimately to be able to make an informed choice about the social niche that she feels best meets her capabilities and wishes.

Like any curriculum model, the one we are outlining here assumes a form of evaluation to match, one that remains true to the spirit and objectives that guide the learning process.

In this sense, curriculum narrowly centred on abstract, mechanical rote-learning is naturally and effectively complemented by marking and examinations, since the objective is to give priority to subjugation and selection.

We utterly reject:

—the false knowledge acquired through collective learning that

makes no allowance for the emotional life, nor the intellectual development, nor the cultural reference-points of individuals and groups;

—marking that is always subjective, unfair, demeaning, a tool of selection and repression;

—success in the classic examinations which constitutes no measure of individual growth, self-knowledge or future success in society;

—the very technique of the exam which has numerous anomalies (that are useful to the system...): encouragement of rote-learning for success at any cost, and paralysis of any creativity; a large part of the result left to chance; measurement of the result rather than the effort; measurement of "a body of knowledge" only, neglecting skills; high proportion of failures, which creates psychological damage and promotes antidemocratic social stratification.

In conjunction with the curriculum model mentioned above, we recommend throughout the cycle of lifelong learning the adoption of a system of evaluation that matches the learning and political objectives set against cramming and the selection of an elite. Borrowing the university notion of credits, what we are proposing is however different in a number of respects. Under the name of "diplomas" and "chefs d'œuvre," the research activists of the Modern School Movement have set up a system of measurement and evaluation that calls for the appreciation of the individual learner, the group and the teacher.

In the framework of a curriculum whose finer points still need work, these diplomas are defined as follows:

—refusal to make distinctions in value between the mental and the manual;

—constant effort to bring the child and the adolescent to a successful achievement which will provide a source of satisfaction and an impetus for fresh efforts (broken down into a series of steps if necessary);

—engagement in real activities that are not specific to the school setting;

—a call for creativity, in the first instance of a manual kind;

—evaluation of work accomplished to be done by the school community working along cooperative lines.

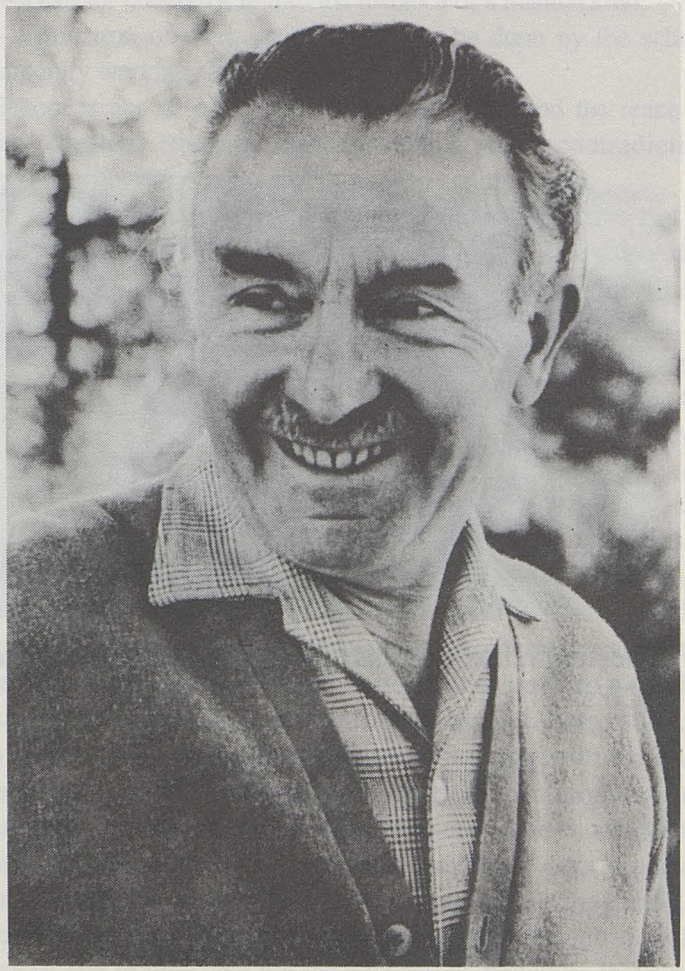
School is not an oasis, a favoured refuge beyond the reach of social conflict. Running right through it is the contradiction between those who oppress and those who are oppressed.

Armed with the belief that a genuine socialist society cannot be built with alienated individuals, ICEM calls on everyone engaged in the fight against exploitation to lend all their strength to help transform the school system, one of the places that serve to reproduce social divisions and the dominant, authoritarian ideology. ICEM has committed itself for many years to the fight against the cultural alienation and oppression of youth and, therefore, believes that no significant changes will occur in the school system—and beyond it in the rest of society—if a stand is not taken against cultural tyranny and the authoritarianism of a hierarchy anxious to preserve an outdated moral, cultural and political order.

The program we are presenting to the agents for change in this country is not exhaustive: it doesn't claim to enumerate all of the possible changes; far from being idealistic, it is based on a number of significant battles and of solutions found through these battles; in this respect, these policy proposals are in keeping with the usual approach of our movement; engaging in experimentation and then altering the institutional setting in order to create the conditions for change. We think that the recommended courses of action are likely to open the way to a school genuinely designed for all the people, in a political context whose goal would be to spread through all walks of social and professional life the cooperative principles that act as their foundation.



Célestin Freinet with his class at Bar-sur-Loup in the 1920's.



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COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Selected Writings of Célestin Freinet

Edited and Translated by
David Clanfield and John Sivell

Célestin Freinet (1896-1966) spent his whole life teaching in small rural elementary schools in the south of France. From this base, he pioneered an international movement for radical educational reform through cooperative learning.

Freinet's Modern School Movement has provided the network through which a broad community of teachers have come to know his remarkable variety of innovative classroom techniques, derived first and foremost from his own work as a teacher in the 1920s and 1930s. Much of his pedagogy seems every bit as fresh and relevant today as it was in his own time: the importance of creative and useful work for children learning and close observation of how they do it; a direct appreciation for the natural world; a commitment to developing appropriate technologies for the classroom; and a strong emphasis on linking school and community with the wider issues of social justice and political action.

This translation is the first to bring a broad selection of Freinet's work to an English-speaking audience.

David Clandfield is an associate professor in French and Cinema Studies at New College, University of Toronto.

John Sivell is an associate professor in the Department of Applied Language Studies at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario.

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