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Date December 8, 1969

MONTESSORI AND SUMMERHILL

by

STANLEY ROY WIEGAND

A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

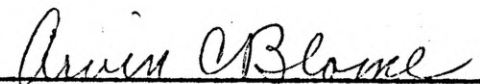
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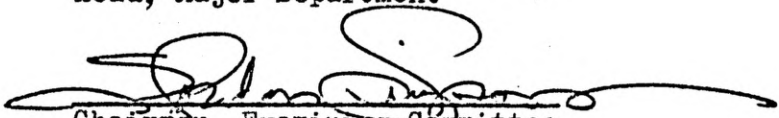
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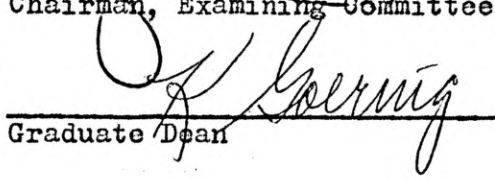
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ABSTRACT

This paper consists of four main parts. The first part gives the "feeling" of Summerhill, a school in England. The second part is an account of Montessori and her beliefs in education. Third part recounts the author's experiences with a monitor system in Wallace, Idaho. The final section considers the common elements in the three preceding parts.

Summerhill springs from a commitment to the individual freedom of the students. They learn responsibility and a sense of respect for someone else's rights but it's the method invoked in the learning process that preserves the spirit of individual freedom. In this school the teachers and the students are on the same level so the students do not fear the teachers.

Montessori did most of her work with defective children and primary school-age children. She developed a scheme that made it possible for the students to work individually on the things that interested them. She also developed what she called a "prepared environment." This term referred to the materials that the students used with the teachers help. They were self-instructing and self-correcting.

The monitor system is a helpful means to allow for some transition from a traditional to a democratic classroom. The monitor system is only designed to be a temporary step in the change from an authoritarian to a permissive atmosphere in a school.

American education can gain much from the models set up at Summerhill and the Montessori schools. Individual freedom is being defined in concrete terms in these schools. The monitor system is an introduction to the benefits that might accrue from the beliefs common to Neill and Montessori. In this way, students would become more free in school.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American education appears to be facing the problem of taking a closer look at the authoritarian-style classroom. It appears that a dichotomy exists in that the government is established on democratic principles and the classroom in the American educational system is established on authoritarian principles. To bring these two areas closer together, it is necessary to determine the role of freedom of student expression in the American classroom and to contrast and to compare it with that of other educational systems.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In light of the need already mentioned, the author, through a review of the literature and personal observation, will attempt to determine the contribution of permissiveness to the satisfactory development of freedom of expression.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Summerhill

Summerhill is a school where ideas like freedom, more student involvement, and just living have been put into effect with success. Some of these ideas are very innovative, but some are as old as man himself.

The first basic idea of Summerhill is that the students have a lot of freedom in the way that they express themselves. This freedom is not absolute because this would imply that the student can do anything he wants to do and this is not possible if we are to have some degree of order. Also, it does not mean social freedom because the rights of others must be respected. What it does mean is individual freedom. The individual should have the right to make his own choices so long as these choices do not infringe on the rights of other people. To illustrate this point, a teacher has no right to force a student to learn Latin because this learning is an individual choice. However, if the student misbehaves in Latin class and disturbs others, then he should be dismissed from class because he has interfered with the freedom of others.¹

¹A. S. Neill, Summerhill-A Radical Approach to Child Rearing (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1960), p. 356.

The second basic idea at Summerhill is to allow as much self-regulation as possible. This self-regulation is accomplished without outside authority in things psychic and somatic. A belief that is inherent in self-regulation is that human nature is basically good and not destructive. Common sense must be used with self-regulation. To use an example, just because a baby doesn't want to go to bed doesn't mean that he should not. If he stays up, he will become irritable and this is not good for him. This applies in other situations as well.

Many people think that this approach is wrong because it limits the child's freedom but it becomes apparent that these kind of freedom advocates are the ones that give freedom its black name. In short, a child should not have any rights or all rights, it should be a sensible permissiveness.

The third basic idea is of life versus anti-life. If a person does not live naturally, he is anti-life. It is this attitude that causes wars and hate in the world. An anti-life person is pro-death and he is trained to seek life negatively. He is ready to follow masters, live in an authoritative society and die for his master's ideals. In essence, he becomes a crowd follower. He considers living naturally to be wrong. The person that trains his child to do something that isn't natural is anti-life. A pro-life person would never strike a child, tolerate our penal code or sit in church and claim

to be a miserable sinner. To illustrate this idea from another standpoint, if Mr. Y is doing something that is not harmful to anyone else; then, the people that object to what he is doing are anti-life. Anti-life people are not death-seeking; they just fear life more than death. To summarize, pro-life suggests fun, games, love, interesting work and anti-life implies duty, obedience, profit and power.²

The underlying factor in the philosophy of Summerhill is love. A child who is free to be himself is being loved and Summerhill is a place where free and happy children live. This foregoing statement summarizes and exemplifies the basic ideas that orient Summerhill.

History of Summerhill

The school of Summerhill was founded in 1921. It is situated about one hundred miles from London, In Suffolk, England. The children in the school range in age from about five to sixteen. The children are divided into three age groups. The divisions are as follows: five to seven, eight to ten, and eleven to fifteen. There are a few foreign children that also attend school. There are generally twenty-five boys and twenty girls

²Ibid., 343.

at the school. The children are housed together according to the three age groups and only one or two seniors have separate rooms. There are usually two to four children in a room; they do not have room inspection; yet, no one picks up after them. The children are free to decide about dress and any kind of costume is acceptable.

There are several differences between Summerhill and other public schools in England. One of the biggest differences is that class attendance is mandatory at other public schools but not at Summerhill. At Summerhill where freedom of the individual is a basic priority, the desire and responsibility to attend classes rests upon the student and not on an external authority. This contrast extends to other facets of student participation; for example, participation in sports is voluntary at Summerhill while compulsory in other schools. An interesting occurrence at Summerhill with regard to attending organized activities is that older children attend more regularly than younger ones do.

Summerhill is regulated in many ways by the English government. Certain specifications are delineated and a group of inspectors visit the school periodically to determine if they are being executed. However, the specifications exhibit a considerable amount of flexibility.

One of the government requirements is that the older students pass an examination and, thereby, obtain a State Certificate.

This mechanism regulates the quantity and content of the material to be studied by the older children. Since the younger children do not have to take the examination, their studies are not regulated and there is a wide latitude with regard to how they spend their time.

Summerhill is not a state-supported school and this factor allows the purse strings to be pulled in the desired philosophical direction. Due to its private support, the whole idea of freedom can be more faithfully realized. The school is supported by the parents and, therefore, the standards of the parents are a limiting factor to some extent.

To summarize, Summerhill is quite different from the other schools of England. Many of the students who are disruptive in a normal public school, are sent to Summerhill. The students who transfer from the most rigidly disciplined schools are the ones that usually take the longest to adjust to the atmosphere at Summerhill. A succinct evaluation of the difference between Summerhill and the public schools in England is that Summerhill emphasizes freedom of expression and the normal schools stress acquiring knowledge.³

³Ibid., 77.

Basic Methodology of Summerhill

At Summerhill, the school is made to fit the child. The children make the rules in the school and conduct it as they see fit. In other words, the school is not based on an adult concept of what a child should be and what he should learn. Again, the design of the headmaster, Neill, is to allow the children freedom to be themselves. To initiate this objective, he had to stop all overt discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, and all religious instruction. This man believes that a child basically is a good not an evil being or, in other words, that the child is innately good and wise. When adults act anti-life and force their false ideas on a child the potential for bad becomes that much more apparent. Then, when the bad manifests itself, the conclusion often reached is that not enough adult supervision and training occurred. However, Neill disagrees with this conclusion and, using Summerhill as evidence, claims that if a child is permitted to be himself, he will be good.

Self-Government

The teachers and students at Summerhill are on equal levels. An outgrowth of this lack of traditional classroom configuration is that the students have no fears about talking to their teachers on topics that are very meaningful to them, but considered

inappropriate in a normal school. This openness frequently is displayed during the private lessons given by the headmaster. The private lessons are not assigned but are given upon the request of the child. The child makes a request whenever he has a problem. The headmaster feels that the private lessons are only for emotional release. The author feels that Neill fails to give proper emphasis to the private lessons as a form of existential counseling.

The students respect the rights of the teachers and the teachers respect the rights of the students. The students are not coerced into behaving according to the teachers' standards. Consequently, the gulf between students and teachers is lessened and the teachers are closer to the students. If a child misbehaves in class, it is usually the rest of the class that takes action against the child, not the teacher.

The students generally make many of their own rules and govern themselves. To facilitate this sense of order and priority of rights requires a time allotment in the school schedule devoted to this end. At Summerhill, the General School Meeting is held every Saturday night. All the students and all the faculty members attend. There is no bureaucracy in Summerhill's self-government. A different chairman is appointed for each meeting. The bedtime officers cannot accrue a monopoly on the power because

they are seldom in office more than a few weeks. Since all the students participate in the meeting, it is more democratic than the type of meeting in which elected representatives, such as the student council, determine the rules for the entire student body.⁴

At the school meeting each student and teacher has one vote. The teacher's opinion carries no more weight at these meetings than does the student's. The outcomes of the meetings do not always reflect the administration's line of thinking but, rather than rejecting the proposals, the administration resorts to adaptation. However, to allude to these deviations is not giving the proper emphasis because the rules made by the students usually correlate closely with the opinions of the faculty and the administrators. The students make their own laws and they are usually good ones.

Summary of the Review of Summerhill

It is hoped that the description of Summerhill has been simple and direct in order to connote the "feeling" of Summerhill. Just as Neill does not concern himself with the training of people in his pedagogy, the author does not concern himself with elaborate explanations of Neill; he prefers that you perceive Neill.

⁴Ibid., p. 46.

MARIA MONTESSORI'S SYSTEM

Basic Ideas of Maria Montessori's System

Montessori believed in freedom for both the teacher and the student. She felt that neither the teacher nor the student should dominate one another. When a student in her system masters an exercise and expresses a desire to begin a new one, the student asks the teacher to help him. The teacher does not extrinsically designate the learning process; thus, limiting his own and the student's freedom of expression. The freedom is not absolute as evidenced by the cessation of actions that annoy others. Montessori and Neill both denote the interpretation of freedom - not as absolute freedom but as individual freedom. The individual is free to do as he chooses as long as he does not interfere with the freedom of others.

There is no group instruction in the Montessori school but there are often group games. This activity it is felt provides for group communication and social adaptability. Also, the children do not have to be quiet in order to be considered "good". Noise often is an indicator that children are interested in what they are doing.

The division of children into groups is not based on chronological age. Groups will usually be composed of older children and younger ones. The older children help the younger ones with

various tasks. Since prestige is associated with independence in the Montessori school, the younger children dispense with the help from the older students as fast as possible.

Another salient belief of Montessori is that the pupil is an individual who works at his own rate and on a subject of interest to him. She finds that if a student performs a certain task he is indicating that he is ready for it. Concomitantly, Montessori has developed a type of programmed learning to fulfill the criteria of the varying stages of development.⁵

Montessori's system concentrates on training the senses. She feels that this close relationship between the senses and the intellect must be explored if the learning is to be optimal. If senses are not trained to perceive the environment, then the intellect will not develop: hence, the individual will not mature. The senses are developed according to Montessori through repeated exercises. These exercises are self-educative and self-corrective; thus allowing the individual to proceed at his own rate of development.

The training proceeds from the sense experience to the abstract and finally to a value judgement. At an early stage of development the sense exercises are almost exclusively the focal point of

⁵Maria Montessori, The Montessori Method (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Robert Bentley, Inc., 1967), p.115.

the learning situation. The younger children attain a concept such as relative quantity by fitting objects of different sizes into a board containing holes of different diameters. As the children get older the exercises become more abstract and less sensual and this progression parallels the sequential stages of child development.

Methods Involved In The System

The school day in a Montessori system is essentially an elaboration of three organizational theories; namely, spontaneous action, sensitive periods, and order. Spontaneous action presupposes an inner drive on the part of the students to explore the world, to improve their coordination and to develop their senses and their intellect. Montessori believes that the spontaneous action is limited and therefore care must be exerted not to stifle it. This drive is nurtured by letting the students choose from a variety of learning experiences and concurrently to work at their own rate.

The sensitive periods are defined as periods when the children learn certain things better than other periods in their lives. These periods do not occur at the same time in all children. Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether a child is in a certain period or not. With regard to language, for example, some children will have a facility for speaking several languages at four and others will have it at five or later.

Montessori notes that the child's intellect makes order out of the sensual impressions and when the intellect does this, something new is learned. In other words, learning takes place when the intellect arranges certain facts in a certain order. Therefore, in the daily routine of the school a child does an exercise repeatedly and with each time builds a priority of order.

Discipline In A Montessori School

Montessori feels that the dawning of discipline comes through work. In a Montessori school there are about forty children in each room and each one does his own work. The teacher generally observes quietly and helps those that request her presence. Each student is doing a different exercise and some students are moving around the room in order to begin new exercises. Discipline is not initiated or accomplished by the teacher either through commands, sermons or any other tactics. Through a sense of achievement and self-worth the students exhibit self-discipline. It is important to point out that the achievement and self-worth stem from the nature of the "didactic materials" and from the interpersonal relations with the teacher.

Background of Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was born in Italy in 1870. Her education was more scientific than classical. After receiving a Doctor

of Medicine degree from the University of Rome, and much acclaim from her work with defective children, she toured the country from 1898 to 1900, lecturing on how to teach defective children. Then, she took courses in experimental psychology, philosophy and anthropology in preparation for the improvement of schools for normal children. From 1907 to 1911 through the support of a philanthropic organization, she organized and developed her plans for teaching normal, primary school children. Finally, children in schools in poorer sections of Italian cities were successfully exposed to her teaching methods. After 1911 most of her time was spent travelling, publishing articles and lecturing on her teaching methods and philosophy.

Background of the Maria Montessori's System

Maria Montessori first worked with defective children. She studied the writings of Itard and Edward Sequin. It was from these two authors that she derived most of her methods for educating children. Both of these men dealt with mentally defective children.

Montessori then transferred her methods from defective children to normal ones but she adapted her methods for primary school children only. She felt that her approach would be more effective at this age because the younger children were still in the early stages of development.

Her work was done in private schools in Italy supported by a philanthropic organization. However, she did influence the public schools in the Italian educational system, after she won the confidence of the government through her model schools. In these schools she showed that mentally defective children were doing almost as well as a normal child in an Italian public school.

CHAPTER III

Personal Observation

Author's Experience With a Monitor System In Wallace, Idaho

Teachers, using the more traditional approach to education, do not have time to help each child to develop in his own way. The variety of materials available also tends to limit the teacher in viewing each child as a unique person. One way in which increased individualization might better be implemented is to employ the tutorial system.

Teachers, using the more traditional approach to education, are also confronted with limitations with regard to freedom of expression. The students are expected to conform to the group norm; thus, individual freedom is not paramount. One way in which increased individual freedom might be implemented is to exert fewer extrinsic controls.

Using the above assumptions as a basic orientation the author initiated a monitor system in his classes in a public school in Wallace, Idaho. The conceptual framework, in which the monitor system was established, would limit the extent to which the basic philosophical assumptions could be realized.

The monitor system is simply a term used to designate a set-up, in which the classroom leadership and instruction, is extended

to include several students along with the teacher. The amount of student activity increases in the classroom because there is a team, of teachers and monitors, to orient and help the students. This type of situation lends itself to coordination of several activities at the same time. This facet of the monitor system coupled with a variety of curriculum materials enables the students to work at their own rate. To illustrate this point, a delineation of possible activities occurring at the same time would be helpful - grading their papers, working on programmed material or listening to a tape. Instead of all students doing one assignment in a classroom, each student could work on a project of interest to him at that moment.

By allowing the students to help each other, more help is actually extended to and experienced by both the assistant and the one being helped. This approach causes the student assistant to understand, perceptualize and verbalize, and thereby to organize the material. Since he is forced to organize the material to help the other student he is in the same process, organizing it better for his own personal understanding.

This individualized instruction has the added advantage of being given on the student's own level which will probably result in increased understanding. The student assistant's perspective is probably more closely aligned with that of the student

experiencing difficulty. Also, the measuring devices, commonly employed, indicate that the achievement levels of both the assistant and the assisted student improve.

There is also the advantage, that in a discussion type situation, the monitors are not solely concerned with subject matter. Using the monitor system, the students feel someone cares and they enjoy the additional praise on their progress. This is very important, it is felt, at the junior high level.

To appreciate the opportunities to dwindle extrinsic control, it is first necessary to take a closer look at the nature of extrinsic control. The implications of extrinsic control in this school are particularly important in order to show the contrast to Summerhill and the Montessori system. If extrinsic control is used then there is a hierarchy of authority structure. In the traditional classrooms there are only two levels - the teacher constituting one level and the student the other. The teacher, being the one in authority, has a sizeable portion of the power and responsibility. The student is expected to perform the task, that the teacher requires, and is punished or rewarded by the teacher accordingly. Using the monitor system does not rid the classroom of extrinsic controls, it divides the power structure into three slices.

The monitor system enables the students and the teacher to

experience open dialogue. The teacher and monitors act as peers and this statement implies that the teacher agrees to and supports the decisions of the monitors. The foregoing statement also implies that an allotment of time almost twenty minutes a period, taken collectively for the group of monitors, is spent talking about the problems and methods to be use with the other students.

The monitor system is not effective at all times but the time of maximum effectiveness is indicated by the appearance of the least number of extrinsic controls. In other words, when the monitors are successful in their interpersonal relations with the students, they do not use rewards or punishments. However, when the atmosphere of existential counseling does not permeate the classroom, the teacher and the monitors resort to extrinsic controls. The teacher and monitors act as authority figures and promote fear in the students. Through this fear the wishes of the teachers and monitors are realized. The monitors can no longer act as just helpers, they must take on the added responsibility of being disciplinarians.

The time that the monitor system functions at its best, the students have a sense of what is "good". The class as a whole exhibits a greater variety of activities and at the same time a corresponding increase in orderliness. While the students in this school are accustomed to the teacher as an authority figure and corporal punishment as a means of control, they could learn

without any adult supervision or extrinsic control. The students prefer the teacher as a guide rather than as a supervisor. To summarize, discipline becomes intrinsically rather than extrinsically controlled, when the classroom environment cultivates effective communication among the individuals present.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND PERSONAL OBSERVATION

Montessori emphasizes the normative aspects of child behavior and development, as opposed to the aspects of individual difference. Montessori is concerned with the needs and abilities that are common to all children, such as the "sensitive periods." This is not to say that Montessori in any way denies or minimizes the importance of individual difference; far from it. Her belief is that an understanding of normal development is a necessary starting point for a full understanding of differences between individuals.

Both Montessori and Neill are committed to a recognition of the importance of differences between individuals. They are primarily very concerned with putting this commitment into practice. They are dedicated to improving the lot of the child in very concrete ways. A divergent point between the two appears to be the vastness of the undertaking in terms of the number of people involved. Montessori intends to acquaint a larger number of educators with her philosophy and her methods. Neill, on the other hand, allows the experiment, Summerhill, to be viewed by a number of observers but does not directly concern himself with the training of others.

For some experimental psychologists, the child is generally viewed as a naive organism. That is to say, a child is one who is lacking in experience although his capacity to learn is no different from that of the adult. If differences between children and adults exist, then they reside in the fact that adults have had more opportunity and time to profit from experience than have children. For both Neill and Montessori, however, the child is a young organism which means that his needs and capacities are quite different from those of the adult. For this reason, their schools are not designed on adult concepts of what a child is. Their "didactic materials" reflect this premise as well as the organization of the learning environment.

The permissiveness of Summerhill and the Montessori school system promotes freedom of student expression. The type of freedom involved is individual not absolute. The student expresses himself as a child not an adult and as an individual not a group norm.

In terms of degree of permissiveness Summerhill ranks first, then the Montessori system and finally, the monitor system. The monitor system is viewed as a "grassroots" level of transition to permissiveness. Also, since the permissiveness is a vehicle through which individual freedom may be realized and developed, an understanding of individual freedom is essential to the understanding of the desired outcomes of permissiveness.

In conclusion, the recent, increasing acceptance of Neill's and Montessori's basic philosophy and methods in America is gratifying and long overdue. It would be a great loss if within a few years these ideas were once again shelved because they failed to accomplish that which they were never designed to achieve. To avoid that eventuality, Montessori and Neill must be accepted on their own terms. Their ideas cannot be forced into our existing conceptual framework, or distorted for pragmatic purposes. Only in this way can the American educational system gain lasting benefit from the outstanding contributions that Neill and Montessori have made to the study of the child.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The author examines the ideas of Montessori and Neill and notes the parallels and divergences in the ideas and background of these two researchers. Among the many parallels between the two innovators, one of the most pervasive is the predominantly permissive orientation which they take towards the thought and behavior of the child. One often has the uncanny feeling that both Neill and Montessori are somehow able to get inside the child and know what he is thinking and feeling and why he is doing what he is doing at a given moment. It is this genius of empathy with the child which, or so it seems to me, that gives their observations and insights - even without the buttressing systematic research - the solid ring of truth.

Through his own research the author illustrates several basic ideas of Neill and Montessori. The ideas may not be portrayed as clearly or as strikingly, as they are at Summerhill, however, this apparent limitation, it is felt, is the result of forcing the ideas into the conceptual framework of the system in which they were tried.

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