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The Educational Philosophy of Tolstoy

ADIR COHEN

Tolstoy's educational philosophy and enterprises comprise only one of the interesting and complex aspects in his rich and multifaceted creative world. Few chapters of Tolstoy's life were devoted to problems in education; nevertheless he published a number of very significant educational writings, of which little mention is made in Tolstoyan or educational research. These writings precede and foretell his philosophical and teleological writings and are also related to his aesthetic philosophy, which was publicised in his book *What is Art?* However, their primary importance lies in their direct and indirect contribution to the ideas of progressive education, and in the fact that they predate the revolution in education by many years.

Many of the educators in Tolstoy's time regarded his educational activities and writings with hostility and disparagement. Only after his death did they begin to see him as a brilliant innovator and as one of the important reformers in education. Experimental schools in Europe and America enjoyed and learned a great deal from the full reports that Tolstoy wrote on his experiments in education. His methods of teaching reading and writing stressed the importance of creativity in education. His emphasis on education through practical work, his trust in the child, and his demand that the child must be granted full measure of freedom were to have great influence on progressive education in a later period. One of his basic theses is that a school must always remain an educational laboratory, open to changes and contributions, renewing itself and developing, in order to keep from retarding human advancement. This thesis was accepted as the basic tenet of modern education.

Some of the best educators in our generation, among the advocates of open education, such as Paul Goodman, John Holt, Edgar Freidenberg, George Dennison, and others, absorbed many of Tolstoy's ideas, and used them as a guideline in their own educational philosophy and practice.

Tolstoy's educational essays are largely arguments and appeals against the educational theory and practice of his time, criticism of the educational structure and policy both in Russia and in Western Europe, encompassing all levels of education and instruction from elementary school through university.

In the 1860s, Tolstoy decided to devote himself to farming and education, to busy himself with educational theories, and to establish a school at Yasnaya, Polyana. This appalled his friends in literary circles, and they implored him not to forsake his great literary responsibility. He replied that his activities were not in contradiction. As far as the wide masses of illiterate Russian farmers were concerned, his literature was worthless. Since they were unable to read his writings, he would teach them. His was the first and fundamental step on the road to creating a literature for the people.

In the fall of 1859, he opened his school in one of the rooms of his large estate at Yasnaya Polyana. After a half year of this educational experiment, he devised a plan for improving the national education, and suggested founding an educational

organisation that would be responsible for establishing public schools, planning courses, training teachers in worthwhile teaching methods, and publishing articles on problems in education which would clarify the way of education and its ultimate purpose. Although Tolstoy received no governmental encouragement for his suggestion, he did not cease his own work in education, and his search for improvements in methods of instruction.

He was aware that he was unprepared in his efforts to deal with abstract concepts of educational theory. The educational ideas dominant in Russia of those days came from Western influences, so in 1860 Tolstoy went to Europe to become acquainted with these matters at their source.

His full report on the journey reveals how seriously he had dedicated himself to the study of education. He visited schools, participated in lessons, and spoke with teachers and educational societies in Germany, France, and England. He also collected large quantities of books and articles on education for his research. His visits in the European schools gave Tolstoy a gloomy picture of the sterility of the subjects, and the lack of vitality or imagination in the teaching methods.

On the other hand, from conversations with labourers and children in the streets, Tolstoy found them to be intelligent and capable of free and lively thinking, no thanks at all to the schools. He summarised his impressions in his articles, entitled 'On National Education' and 'What I saw in Marseille and Other Countries', concluding that in each place the principal part of education was given not by the schools but by life.

His visits to the German schools depressed him. He closely observed the many pedagogic experiments being conducted in Germany and took special interest in the Weimer kindergartens, which were under the directorship of Minna Shelhorn, a pupil of Friedrich Froebel. In Berlin he met with Adolph Diesterweg, who administered the local teachers' seminary.

More than being original in his ideas, Diesterweg excelled in his activities and in his zeal in spreading the ideas of Pestalozzi and bringing them to realisation. Tolstoy saw how the theories of Froebel and Pestalozzi were put into practice in various schools, and he severely criticised both their theories and their application. Disgusted by the kindergartens, Tolstoy remarked "Kindergartens are one of the most terrible creations of modern pedagogy."

Tolstoy was a kindred spirit to Rousseau, whom he admired from an early age. He adopted Rousseau's ideas of individualism, which were expressed in *Emile*, and rejected the social philosophy outlined in *The Social Contract*. In Tolstoy's opinion, *The Social Contract* embodies a conception of social freedom founded upon a social principle, that is basically anti-individualistic. He therefore rejects this conception in favour of individualistic freedom. Similarly to Rousseau in *Emile*, he felt that his task was to stimulate a total change of values in the conception of education and to initiate a revolutionary re-evaluation of the educational process.

Tolstoy emphasised the right of the child to develop in total freedom in accordance with his own inherent personal characteristics. Tolstoy's disappointment with the educational system in Europe arose from his impression that the pupil, who ought to be the centre of educational intentions, its point of origin and its ultimate goal, was turned into the most neglected factor in educational thinking.

When Tolstoy returned to Russia in 1861, he set up a three-room school at Yasnaya-Polyana, and employed a few teachers to help him with instruction. For about two years, he worked in total dedication at his school, and also devoted time to reading about problems of educational theory. His experience and his thoughts are

discussed in twelve long articles and a number of essays, which were published in his educational journal *Yasnaya-Polyana*, between February 1862 and March 1863.

On the door of his school, Tolstoy hung a sign 'Enter and Leave Freely'. He demanded total freedom for the pupil, out of respect for the personhood of small children. In his words, there is no other way to influence children except through an understanding of their minds, their talents, their characteristics and personalities. Such an understanding can come about only when children are given freedom of movement and expression, so that they can explore their inner world in a spontaneous manner, through work and activity out of free choice and self-awareness. He considered the child to be the centre of educational planning. The direction of all educational activities comes from the personality and psychology of the child. He based his psychological viewpoint on his observations and educational experiments in his school, and on plain commonsense. He regarded children without preconceptions, and saw them as human beings who had worries, fears, needs, joys, intellectual curiosity, abundant imagination, and a longing to know. He assumed that man is born good, and so it is only natural that children are good, curious, desiring to grow, and abounding in the wish to be free. Tolstoy views education as an effort to bring forth and enrich the original spirit of the child.

Tolstoy developed a permissive pedagogy notable not only for its methods of instruction, but also for the organisation of the study plan, the teaching techniques and the principles of discipline. The pupils in his school were free to enter and leave as they wished, and the teachers were free to teach in a way and manner they saw fit. Noise and chaos are the natural order of things. The principal task of the teacher is to listen and clarify what he hears rather than to lecture to students who attend in silence. Tolstoy ignores 'coverage' of material or 'completion' of the study plan, and indicates no obligatory subjects. All educational work is directed toward the liberation of the pupil both during the course of studies and afterwards. He established clear relations between the purpose of education, the role of the teacher, the conception of the pupil, the methods of instruction, and the way that the students were expected to use their thinking.

Tolstoy believed that all education must be free and voluntary. He supported the request of the masses for education, but he was firmly opposed to the idea that the government or any other authority had the right to force education upon them. Pupils must come to school of their own free will. If education is good, they will be bound to see it as necessary as air. If the people are opposed to education, then the will of the people must be the guiding factor. Tolstoy's faith in the 'will of the people' even when the people were opposed to modern concepts, contained the seeds of his later anarchism.

Tolstoy's key concept is not *education* but *culture*. He views culture as a large, heterogeneous reserve of values, which co-exist because they suit the present needs of the people and provide points of departure to searches for new and better ways of doing things. Tolstoy's approach does not recognise an end goal for man, and does not accept any rigid or permanent criteria. Culture is multi-hued in its appearance, variegated and multi-faceted. Aside from several humanistic, liberal principles regarding the equality of man, the value of the individual, and the importance of self-fulfillment, there are no clear guides for the activities of man. Instead of turning to traditional external values, which are often indications of corruption, we should try to free the individualistic human spirit, which has its own independent sense of direction, and to help this spirit to develop itself.

He fought against the standard concept of education, where a man who wished

to acquire culture was considered totally dependent on the educator, as if this was the only way a man could acquire cultural impressions during the period of his cultural development. Educators allow the outside world to impinge upon the pupil only in so far as they judge a thing to be seemly and correct. The educator tries to surround the pupil within an impervious fortress against worldly influences and allows only what he sees as advantageous to penetrate. Everywhere the influence of life is removed from the affairs of pedagogy. Everywhere the school is surrounded by a stone wall of book knowledge, through which the vital influence of culture is allowed to penetrate only when it is likely to satisfy the educator. As a result of this attitude, there is a confusion between *education* and *culture*, arising from the false assumption that if there were no *education*, there would be no *culture* either.

He believed that culture in its broad sense gives form to the numerous influences that develop man, enlarging his world concept, and providing him with new knowledge. Culture is bestowed by children's games, suffering, punishment, books, work, instruction, arts, science, and life itself. Thus culture should be viewed as the combined total of influences that life exerts upon man; whereas education is the influence of one man on another in order to inculcate certain moral customs. Education is compulsory, an act of force of one man upon another to fashion him pleasingly in our eyes. On the other hand, culture is a product of the free relations between people, based on the need of one to acquire knowledge and of the other to share the knowledge he has acquired.

Tolstoy was opposed to using any coercion in education. In his opinion, force does not lead to tangible results, and it is based upon an arbitrary will. He completely rejected the view that education is a scientific matter, and expresses this in a caustic statement, "Education is the desire for moral despotism, raised to a rank of principle". True, education does not have to be an expression of the negative side of human nature, but is a phenomenon that proves the undeveloped state of humanistic thinking and therefore, we cannot see in it an intelligent humanistic activity, i.e. science. In Tolstoy's words, education is the inclination of one man to make another similar to himself. "I am convinced that the educator undertakes with such zeal the education of the child, because at the base of this tendency lies his envy of the child's purity, and his desire to make him like himself, that is, to spoil him". Using education to fashion man in accordance with certain principles and models is barren, illegal, and impossible.

Out of opposition to this conception of education, Tolstoy claimed that "There are no rights of education. I do not acknowledge such, nor have they been acknowledged nor will they ever be by the young generation under education, which always and everywhere is set against compulsion in education".

Despite the fact that Tolstoy does not recognise the right to educate, he suggests that we go to the heart of the matter and try to examine what is legitimate in education or in a certain conception of it, what is its origin, and its sustenance. He suggests that we can find the roots of education in four places: (1) the family, (2) religion, (3) government, and (4) society.

(1) Parents want to make their children be like themselves, or at least, to be like what they want them to be. This is a natural desire, and as long as the right of each individual to develop freely is not recognised by all parents, we cannot expect any other attitude. Furthermore, more than any other factor, the parents determine the future character of their children. Thus one can see that their desire to educate them in accordance with their own designs is natural, but it is not just.

(2) The second source of education is religion. As long as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all believe that a man who does not accept their faith has no right to redemption of his soul, and that his soul is doomed, it is no wonder that they want to save man even if it is by force and coercion.

(3) The third source of education is the government, which wants to educate people so that it can employ them and use them for certain purposes. Military schools, law schools, engineering schools, and so forth, were established on this basis.

(4) The fourth source of education is society, which wants to educate efficient people to conform to its character and ideals.

Tolstoy severely criticised all forms of public and governmental education. He rejected the idea that it was the duty of education to mould the character and improve the qualities of the pupils. For these matters properly belong to the family sphere of influence, and the teacher has no right to intrude his own personal moral standards or social point of view into the sanctity of the home. Commenting on the educational system of his time, he notes that throughout the system, beginning in elementary schools and including institutions of higher learning, educators try to educate the children in their charge not to be like their parents. Some educators even declare that they themselves serve as examples for the children's edification, as if their parents represent vulgarity, ignorance, and sin, and it is the educator's duty to make the children different from their parents. He says sarcastically,

The lady teacher, a freaky creature, contorted by life, who places the whole perfection of human nature in the art of bowing, putting on a collar, and in speaking French, will inform you confidentially that she is a martyr to her duties; that all her education efforts are lost in vain on account of the impossibility of completely removing the children from the influence of their parents.

He was prepared to see a legitimate side to education, only when it was entirely freed of coercion. He does not accept any transcendent goals of education, and removes the goals of education from the abstract level. The entire existence of education is seen as a real, empirical process, largely dependent on logic and commonsense.

The lack of obvious, clear, defined educational goals is evident throughout the educational process, the study plans, the teacher's work, the methodology, etc.

Tolstoy's concept of a curriculum has a different and unique character. The material to be learned is not prescribed on the basis of conventions or tradition. The curriculum need not be completed and is not comprehensive. There are no sacrosanct subjects that all pupils must learn. It is desirable to offer certain necessary skills and to open the door to science. For science is a part of culture. It is a refinement of culture and its expression in an orderly fashion. Any academic concept can be used as a means to understanding the central concepts of culture. Tolstoy considers instruction and learning as permissible means of moulding, if they are free; but they are spoiled if the learning is compulsory and the instruction one-sided. This coincides with his general viewpoint, that there is no one unique path to truth, beauty, or understanding. Therefore, individual desires and specific circumstances must dictate the subjects requiring attention. This approach emphasises the interests and needs of the pupil in determining the school curriculum. The individual's own motives must determine which subjects will be taught and how they will be taught.

Tolstoy believed that there is no one best method. There is no method of instruction that is good for all pupils. Each child requires a different method. In

general, there is no bad method and no good method; there is only a method that is appropriate or inappropriate to the character and mind of a particular child. Thus Tolstoy was one of the first educators to call for individualised instruction. A method must be free and natural. This approach places a heavy burden on the teacher. One of the teacher's principal tasks is to find a way to make the learning material meaningful to the pupil, to inspire his motivation, and to bring him satisfaction from his studies.

Tolstoy felt that personal choice at each level of studies serves as a healthy alternative to categorical, authoritarian instruction. The vital centre of the educational process lies in the dynamic involvement of the individual pupil with certain aspects of culture.

On the didactic side, Tolstoy notes that when the pupil is excited about some particular work, one is obliged to encourage and strengthen this excitement. It is forbidden to abandon him, for without encouragement his interest might falter and apathy and weariness prevail. Precisely here lies the 'behind the scenes' duty of the teacher. The child loves freedom, but does not want to be left on his own. He is investigative, curious, inquisitive, etc. but if the teacher does not encourage this through his participation, replies, and clarifications, the pupil's interest will weaken. One must fan this interest in order to turn it into dynamic involvement in culture.

Although child-centred education usually sees its basis in the philosophy of John Dewey and his followers, its primary foundations were evidenced in the philosophy of Tolstoy. Tolstoy moved the emphasis in education to the being and experiences of the child as a child. He objected to using education to make the child conform to the customs of life and society. He rejected the idea that the criteria for teaching could be found in temporal needs, and fought the educational ideology which advocated the continuance of historical heritage and passing down values and tradition through the generations by means of teaching. Tolstoy considered that there was no educational significance to continuing historical forms of life. Historical forms of life are not solid matter, but rather a fluid current. We cannot capture the flow of this current, which has no beginning and has no end. Thus, grasping on to a few points of the stream makes no difference. The single vital subject is man and living humankind. The law of progress and advancement is engraved on each man's soul and transplanting it to history is nothing but a mistake. As long as this law is individual, it is fruitful and self-explanatory. Once it is passed over to history, it becomes empty, idle chatter, which justifies nothing but nonsense.

Therefore, the only principle that gives value to inner life and a genuine means toward the revelation of such life is inner freedom. Because of this, Tolstoy does not wish to enslave education and teaching to general objective needs, to the need of some historic law of progress.

Tolstoy believed only in man and emphasised that man alone is responsible for his own life and permitted to mould his world according to his will. Furthermore, Tolstoy points out that man's activity does not stay the same in each phase of his life, because his needs and interests do not stay the same. A child has his own 'truth', and one should not attempt to force adult truths upon him.

The vast difference between the old standard school and Tolstoy's school stems from the above. The standard school centred around the teacher. The teacher was expected to be active, organising, initiating, and carrying out activities, whereas the child was treated as a passive object, a sort of container for his teacher's philosophy.

Tolstoy on the other hand rests everything on the child's initiative and responsibility. The text book and the curriculum were the heart of the traditional school.

The learning material was the important thing and the child was asked to absorb it and conform to it. There was no consideration of the child's nature and needs. The learning material was pre-determined on the basis of the valued criteria, dominant in adult society. School was not a place where a child could live as a child, but rather a place where he supposedly prepared himself for his future life as an adult. The child was required to surrender to a fixed regime and to take upon himself the burden of discipline. Contrary to all this, for Tolstoy the starting point is the child, whose needs, tastes, tendencies, and doubts are ever changing.

The single absolute value that can be determined is the process of life itself. The life process is not a means to something beyond itself: therefore, the life process is the single absolute value that Tolstoy was willing to recognise. Consequently, he does not obligate the child to conform to a predetermined, official study plan, but rather the study plan is obligated to be alive, flexible, open to changes and capable of developing with the child. It is not the teacher who selects the subjects, but the pupils who ask him to teach and they decide together what will be taught.

Tolstoy places experiment and the acquisition of experience at the focal point of the school. In this, Tolstoy was a forerunner of the experimentalism in modern education. In his words,

Only when experiment will be at the foundation of school, only then when every school will be, so to speak, a pedagogical laboratory, will the school not fall behind the universal progress and experiment will be able to lay firm foundations for the science of education.

Both in his articles and in his school at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy emphasised and carried out his idea that the school itself is a laboratory, and that all the lessons and work conducted in it are part of an experiment and a continuous search. When the school is a laboratory, the task of instruction is based entirely upon the experiences of the child. Instead of emphasising memorisation, repetition, and passive acceptance, instruction should emphasise the activities of the child. The business of school is the business of life, a place where the child's understanding, imagination, character and tendencies are revealed.

There are no good abstract goals to meet the need of these experimental laboratory activities, because abstract goals overlook current conditions and turn these activities into a meaningless exercise, i.e. hard labour. One cannot select the school's educational and learning activities according to the value of the purpose they propose to have, or according to the transcendent purpose that they serve; but rather by their inherent value, the pleasure that they give the pupils, and the spontaneous interest of the pupils in these activities. Such interest is personal, practical, and active in contrast to the purely speculative interest or attitude of an objective bystander. Children are incapable of having a solely speculative interest. Real interest is expressed by a person who actually participates in events or activities. The consciousness is activated only when the harmony between the human organism and his surroundings are upset, i.e. the organism feels a need when its equilibrium is disturbed. From this follows a clear pedagogic conclusion: it is impossible to coerce a person to learn subject matter that is irrelevant and unimportant to him. A meaningful activity must fulfill a pupil's inherent need or provide a solution to a pupil's own problem. Tolstoy emphasises that "Every instruction ought to be only an answer to the question put by life". The pupil needs a full measure of freedom so that he can find his own answers to his own questions. Tolstoy's basic opinion is that the only path to enlightenment is experience, and its only criterion is

freedom. Experiment, examination, search, creation, and spontaneous initiative sprout and bloom only in an atmosphere of freedom, where truly voluntary involvement in a subject is possible.

Tolstoy talks expansively about these principles of learning through doing, of personal involvement in learning as a precondition of genuine learning, and of continuous experimentation, and freedom. These ideas succeeded in being developed and in gaining a place of emphasis in the philosophy of modern education proposed by Dewey and his pupil Niell and other advocates of open education. To this very day, educational societies and researchers go back to these same points to emphasise their importance.

Tyler maintains that education is an active process, including the active efforts of the student himself. Furthermore, the student will learn only those things that he has made himself.

Similarly, B.S. Bloom notes that pupils learn as a result of their experiences in learning. Such experiences relate to the interactions between the pupil and his environment. Learning occurs through active interchange with the pupil; he learns what he actually does himself, not what his teacher does.

Many changes took place in the very structure and form of a school in Tolstoy's classrooms at Yasnaya Polyana. The podium, the symbol of teacher's authority, disappeared. Orderly arranged benches and tables disappeared. The children were free to come and go, and to participate. Tolstoy stresses that because of mutual freedom, teachers and pupils become closer and influence one another. It is possible for a school to be unlike the familiar classrooms with blackboards, benches podiums, etc. and instead to be a combination of a library, a museum, a theatre, a workshop, etc.

Tolstoy's school had no compulsory attendance, and the pupils were allowed to drop in as they wished. Studies were conducted from eight o'clock in the morning till noon, and from three to six o'clock in the afternoon. Often the studies continued for another hour by popular demand. In the morning, they had lessons in reading, composition, grammar, drawing, music, maths, history, science, and religion. In the afternoon, they conducted experiments in physics, and had lessons in singing, reading, and composition. There was no fixed time-table for lessons, which were extended, shortened, or cancelled according to the level of student interest. On Saturdays, the teachers would meet together to discuss their work and plan the programmes for the following week. There was no obligation to stick to any particular programme. Every teacher was free to do as he wished. For a while they kept a common diary in which they wrote with merciless sincerity of their failures and successes.

The guiding spirit at Yasnaya Polyana was originality; and freedom prevailed, but never to the degree of anarchy. Tolstoy maintained that only when there is no force or coercion can the natural relations between a teacher and his pupils come into being. The teacher sets the boundaries for freedom in his class by his ability to manage the students. When a teacher treats the students as thinking human beings, they understand that order is vital, and self-discipline worthwhile. Tolstoy emphasised that if the students are really interested in what is studied at school, cases of disorder will not arise or if disorder does happen to come about, the interested students will control the disorderly ones.

In this atmosphere, where the students could freely select what they would study, certain subjects were not accepted by the students and they rejected them. This led

Tolstoy to question the value and usefulness of teaching those subjects. He pondered this question and said:

It's nice and fine in China too. There everybody acknowledges that a Mandarin must know Confucius' proverbs by heart, so it is alright to cram this knowledge into a child's brain even with a stick. It was also fine during the Middle Ages, because then there was no doubt that Greek should be taught since Aristotle needed it. Or for example, it was clear to Luther that one must teach Hebrew, because he believed that God spoke to human beings in this language. It was also clear that in order to recognize the beauty in literature, one must read Virgil and Cicero, because at that time there was nothing more beautiful than those works. But what should we do now? What should we do in these days when there is no belief in anything, and everything is in doubt? Why should we teach one thing and not another? What advantage does one subject have over the other? And if we do not know what to teach or how to teach, what right do we have to force fathers to send their sons to school and to force the children to listen?

Tolstoy was totally against dividing studies into separate, disconnected subjects. He wanted to find a unified principle of learning, a principle of life. Even the scientific method in teaching did not seem right to him. He felt that the basic task of education and culture was by nature synthetic and united, whereas the scientific approach was analytic and dissecting with no intention of achieving a singular, encompassing synthesis. As a unifying principle, Tolstoy recommends a religious concept, a religious attitude towards life and being. In his words,

To make education fruitful, that is, to help mankind to advance further and further toward happiness, teaching and learning must be free for both teachers and pupils. Education must be more than a mere compilation of knowledge gathered from everywhere, knowledge that is unnecessary, taught untimely, and sometimes harmful. Both teachers and students need one common basis, according to which they may select what to each and what to learn. Such a basis is provided by understanding of the content and goals of our lives. It is a religious concept.

Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana had considerable influence. Farmers from the Tula region, where the school was located, asked Tolstoy to provide them with teachers and he recommended several. In 1863, there were about thirteen schools in the area, and the majority of their teachers were advocates of Tolstoy's approach. At first, these teachers had to overcome the suspicions of many of the farmers, who were unsure of the new methods and were shocked that the teachers were not hitting their children. But little by little, their suspicions and opposition vanished. The children's happiness and considerable progress in a short time led their parents to trust completely in the new method.

Although the parents accepted the new approach, the conservative educators and even their more progressive contemporaries rejected it. They called Tolstoy the 'educational nihilist' and nicknamed his method 'pedagogic anarchism'. The principle of freedom for both teachers and pupils seemed too radical and daring even to the progressive theoreticians of that time.

The professional educational theoreticians did not take seriously Tolstoy's educational writings, which called for a revolution against conformity. They did not like the literary style of his articles, which disdained professional scientific jargon. He

rejected the idea of writing articles on experimental pedagogy in learned language, full of quotations and footnotes and empty names. So his words did not look sufficiently 'scientific'.

The establishment regarded Tolstoy's educational activities with suspicion and hostility. His radical approach endangered the entire existing concept of education and even the authority of the state. The freedom, which he touted, bordered on insurrection. The spirit of 'Christian anarchism', which he later proclaimed openly, had already penetrated his educational thinking. In his articles, he opposed the false morality of government and society, tyranny, the use of force, and the legality of punishment.

In 1873, after nearly a decade of struggle during which time his method was ignored, Tolstoy was invited to Moscow to appear before a committee on education and to describe his system to them. As a result of this meeting, the committee requested to test his teaching methods versus the conventional methods used in conventional schools. For this purpose, they selected two groups of Moscow youngsters of equal age and similar social background to compete in a few subjects. One of the teachers from Tolstoy's experienced team at Yasnaya Polyana taught one group and a Moscow teacher, chosen by the committee taught the second group. After seven weeks of instruction, they examined both groups of students. Even though there was no consensus of opinion among the committee members, the majority decided that the pupils who had studied by Tolstoy's method excelled and surpassed the others. Tolstoy felt that the experiment proved nothing because it was not conducted under proper conditions and so was invalid. In his article, 'On the National Education', he reaffirmed his stance on education. This article, written by the same man who had written *War and Peace*, aroused the interest of many and had great influence on the public. Tolstoy's theories began to gain momentum in Russia and even abroad.

Tolstoy was interested not only in improving contemporary education, but also in creating a novel concept of society with emphasis on the individual's place and importance. He stressed that education should be defined in relation to this ideal and that this necessitates a total new conception of educational goals. He proposed a new educational theory founded not on logical, scientific precepts, but on observation, experiences, activities, and existentialistic sensitivity. He felt that scientific, formalistic, logical thinking in education neglects the heart of education, with no attention to the individual, to the 'I', to the pupil as a human being.

Tolstoy was not a systematic educational theoretician in the sense that we apply this term to other thinkers such as Dewey. He did not present a unified picture, and those who define his philosophy as anti-theory are correct. However, he seems to have given a new momentum to education. He led a fierce attack against society's reactionary tendencies, which seek to immortalise improper teaching methods, built upon artificial social differences; and he helped to break down the old, depressing wall of education. He stressed the importance of inner motivation, which stems from the child's needs and provides a basis for true discipline. Modern pedagogy accepted this idea as its main foundation. His efforts to meaningfully involve the pupil in the learning material, his stress on the experimental approach, the removal of any coercive elements and the promotion of the principle of freedom above all became central precepts of open education. His attack against historical Hegelian determinism, his stress on freedom and individual independence and his ability to change historical forces opened the door for creative pedagogic optimism, which became expressed in the individualistic viewpoint in education.

When we today read *Children's Lives* by George Dennison, *The Open Classroom* by Herbert Kohl, the books of John Holt, *Letter to a Teacher* by the Barbianna School, and other books advocating the radical approach to education in our generation, we are surprised to see how many of their basic principles were incorporated in Tolstoy's school, sometimes even in their most progressive and daring way.

More than a century ago Tolstoy was fighting the war of Herbert Cole and his colleagues for the open classroom. When we read Cole's attack on our establishment schools, where they teach factual knowledge, obedience to authority, avoidance of conflict, and surrender to tradition, we can see that many of these principles were already evident in the writings and educational struggle of Tolstoy. Modern education has adopted the book *Letter to a Teacher* from the Barbianna School and the practices of this school, which was established by Father Don Lorentzo Milani. Father Milani, who had witnessed the suffering of farmers' children in Tuscany gathered together twenty pupils and worked with them a full eight hours a day, six days a week. Many hours were spent on clarifying problems that directly affected their lives. Yet, we can recognise that Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana was a much more daring and profound experiment, and that most of what was said in Lorentzo's book was already written about and practised by Tolstoy. Even the problematics of social class, with regard to the children of farmers and the poor, was treated in greater depth by Tolstoy.

Our intention here is not to claim Tolstoy's right of primacy, but rather to comment sadly on how for over a hundred years we have repeatedly espoused the ideas of freedom and meaningful change in education, and yet to this very day these ideas are considered 'novel' and radical. Education fundamentally has not been changed; instead educational tradition and routine have become embedded. Even though many more experiments like Yasnaya Polyana have taken place at Barbianna, Summerhill, George Dennison's school, and dozens of open schools around the world, the deep expected change in education is far from being achieved.

Tolstoy's educational theories encourage the reader to investigate, to think, and to re-evaluate these matters. Tolstoy's examination of the principles of traditional education, his attempt to break their foundations, his objections to sacrosanct educational concepts, encourage us all to take a fresh look and make a daring examination of education in our generation. This is the reward of reading Tolstoy's writings on his educational philosophy and enterprises.