

# DORA AND BERTRAND RUSSELL AND BEACON HILL SCHOOL

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This essay examines Beacon Hill School, founded in 1927 by Bertrand and Dora Russell. I consider the roles of the school's two founders and the significance of the school as an educational and social experiment, situating its history in the context of the development of progressive education and of modernist ideas about marriage and childrearing in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Bertrand Russell played a crucial role in founding Beacon Hill, it was primarily Dora Russell's project, and it was exclusively hers from 1932 until the school ceased to exist in 1943.

## INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, progressive ideas about children, child-rearing and education have gone in and out of favour. In the 1960s a "free school" movement flourished in North America and in Britain, and in Britain progressive ideas had a significant effect on the State school system.<sup>1</sup> Today, in contrast, progressive ideas are largely out

<sup>1</sup> Luminaries of the Free School movement of the 1960s and 1970s included A. S. Neill, John Holt, Jonathan Kozol and Ivan Illich. On the movement in Britain, see David Gribble, *Real Education: Varieties of Freedom* (Bristol: Libertarian Education, 1998). For the U.S. see Ron Miller, *Free Schools, Free People: Education and Democracy After the 1960s* (Albany, N.Y.: State U. of New York P., 2002). Colin Ward, for many years editor of *Anarchy*, has written much insightful and inspiring work on freedom and education in a British context, and fostered discussion in the 1960s through *Anarchy*. His

of favour as school authorities and parents focus on achievement and worry about “attention deficit disorder” when little boys and girls cannot sit quietly in seats once again arranged in uniform rows.<sup>2</sup>

Interest in progressive education was at its zenith in the early twentieth century. It flourished in Britain in the inter-war period, which saw the founding of the New Education Fellowship and the establishment of several well-known progressive schools, including A. S. Neill’s Summerhill and the Elmhursts’ Dartington Hall. Beacon Hill School, the subject of this paper, founded in 1927 by the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell and his second wife Dora Black Russell, was one of the best known of the inter-war British progressive schools.

In this paper I examine the role of the school’s two founders and the significance of Beacon Hill School as an educational and social experiment. I explore progressive and libertarian ideas about children and education, and I focus on a number of overlapping social and moral questions that were of importance to the Russells and others. These include modernist views about marriage and monogamy, sexuality, parenthood and feminism.

Beacon Hill opened in September 1927 full of promise. Its first location was Telegraph House on the South Downs, Sussex, near Petersfield, Hampshire. The Russells’ daughter Katharine Tait recalls the “200 acres of woods and valleys, with deer and rabbits and stoats and weasels and huge yew trees we could jump into from higher trees and absolutely magnificent beech trees for climbing ... [t]he real freedom to learn, to roam, to experiment—it was incomparable.”<sup>3</sup>

When the school opened, the staff included the two Russells and a

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best-known work is *Anarchy in Action* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973). For a discussion of progressive ideas and state education in Britain, see Martin Small, “About Risinghill”, in “A Tale of Two Schools: Risinghill and Kilquhanity”, *Anarchy*, no. 92 (Oct. 1968): 289–306.

<sup>2</sup> Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: a Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) is a recent polemical attack on the progressive school movement. From another perspective, see Lisa Delpit, *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: New P, 1995). Delpit, an African-American scholar, is critical of the effects of progressive education on poor African-American children.

<sup>3</sup> Tait contributed a reminiscent piece to William Bruneau, “New Evidence on Life, Learning and Medical Care at Beacon Hill School”, *Russell*, n.s. 23 (2003): 130–52; see Document 1. Memoir, “Memories of Beacon Hill” by Katharine Tait, p. 142.

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number of other well-trained teachers. Initially, there were twelve pupils, ranging in age from two to eight. The school would expand during its first few years. However, as Bertrand and Dora's marriage began to disintegrate in 1930, Bertrand Russell's interest in the school dwindled, and Beacon Hill's circumstances changed. Beacon Hill was always more Dora's project than Bertrand's, and after 1932 it became exclusively and unequivocally hers. By the 1940s, the school was on its last legs financially, and Dora was forced to close it in 1943.

I argue in this paper that Beacon Hill does indeed deserve a place in the history of progressive education (a place it has always had) but not for reasons that have usually been given. As Harriet Ward, Dora Russell's younger daughter, has perceptively argued in her recent memoir of her father: "It is cruelly ironic that because of his fame, Beacon Hill was often referred to as 'the Bertrand Russell school', and widely believed to have closed when he left it. In fact he was only associated with the school for the first five of its 16-year life."<sup>4</sup> Throughout its history, Beacon Hill School was indeed, more often than not, referred to as "Bertrand Russell's school" and it has for the most part continued to be identified more with Bertrand than with Dora in reminiscences, favourable or hostile, in studies by historians of education and by Bertrand Russell scholars.<sup>5</sup> While it is the case that the school's fame and some of its initial energy came from Bertrand, there would have been no school without Dora.

Moreover, the school was a success even during its last few years, when financial pressures and the exigencies of wartime forced Dora Russell to move Beacon Hill to its fifth and final home, Carn Voel, her own relatively modest family house near the village of Porthcurno, a few miles from Land's End. One former pupil recently reminisced about his

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<sup>4</sup> Harriet Ward, *A Man of Small Importance: My Father Griffin Barry* (Debenham, Suffolk: Dormouse Books, 2003), p. 184. See my review in *Russell*, n.s. 23 (2003): 91–4.

<sup>5</sup> Ati Gropius Johansen, a pupil at the school, remembers Beacon Hill as the school "Bertrand Russell had founded". She kindly sent me a section of her unpublished memoir (correspondence dated Feb. 28, 2004, and typescript in my possession, hereinafter referred to as "Johansen typescript"). The standard sources on progressive schools in Britain, if they mention Dora Russell, see her as secondary. See R. J. W. Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives, 1914–1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), and W. A. C. Stewart, *The Educational Innovators*, Vol. 2: *Progressive Schools 1881–1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

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experiences at Beacon Hill in the 1940s:

One of my fondest memories is of the Natural History lessons with Dora, based on the study of that great tome 'The Science of Life' (by H. G. Wells, Julian Huxley & G. P. Wells). Dora encouraged us to question, to follow our curiosity ... into all sorts of highways & byeways of phenomena of life; to speculate; to wonder ... I remember sheer fascination and a sense of the infinity of the field of knowledge that was waiting to be explored.<sup>6</sup>

David Correa-Hunt wrote those words more than 60 years after he and his sister Susan had been day pupils at Beacon Hill, and they stand as a tribute to Dora Russell's success as an educator.

But the school was never a success as an educational venture with a carefully enunciated educational ideology. Neither of the school's founders was an original or powerful educational thinker. Bertrand Russell was a towering intellectual figure, but his writings on education, while they contain flashes of brilliance, were often superficial, and over the years he changed his point of view without analysis or self-examination.<sup>7</sup> Dora Russell, on the other hand, published less, but she was a genuine educational libertarian. Summing up her achievement she wrote:

[D]emocracy was the basic principle of my school ... Democracy defines each child as a unique individual who belongs, not to the State, or even to his parents, but first of all to himself... Beacon Hill School set out to educate boys and girls to grow up into harmonious adults at peace with themselves and others and so able to work creatively as individuals and, by mutual help, in the community at large.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE RUSSELLS' MARRIAGE

The history of the Russell marriage is integral to the history of Beacon Hill School. As a couple Bertrand and Dora saw themselves as offering avant-garde models for sexual liberation, for equality between the sexes

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Ward, *A Man of Small Importance*, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> On Russell's writings on education and other social and political matters, see Philip Ironside, *The Social and Political Thought of Bertrand Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, Vol. 2: *My School and the Years of War* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 211. Hereinafter cited as *Tamarisk* 2.

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and for parenthood. By the mid-1920s both became well known public advocates of a radical restructuring of marriage that would allow each partner to have sexual relationships with others while at the same time ensuring a firm and lasting bond in a relationship that involved children.<sup>9</sup> Each tried to live up to these precepts, but each found it impossible to do so. The marriage ended in an acrimonious divorce that affected not only the individuals involved, but also the history of Beacon Hill School, which had been founded as an expression of Bertrand and Dora's confident belief that they were exemplars of scientific, progressive childrearing.

The fact that Bertrand received the credit, at the time and afterward, for a project that was in truth primarily Dora's, was the inevitable result of the imbalance of power between them. Given the explicitly feminist, egalitarian public face of their marriage in the 1920s, Bertrand and Dora might have appeared to have shared the same status (Dora herself made the fatal mistake of believing this to be the case), but in fact Bertrand's fame, social position and gender always gave him far more weight than Dora would ever have. Gender, class and status inequalities meant that if the school was basically Dora's, it owed its importance to Bertrand: if Dora Black had never married Bertrand Russell but had opened a progressive school on her own, it is not likely it would have received more attention than any number of progressive schools that opened—and closed—their doors during these years.

Bertrand Russell was 44 years old, and well established both as a philosopher and as a social activist when he met the young Dora Black in 1916. He was also an aristocrat: a grandson of Lord John Russell, he would, after the death of his elder brother, Frank, in 1931, succeed to the earldom. Several aspects of his personal life are relevant to an analysis of his beliefs about education and childrearing, gender, sexuality and feminism, and to understanding his actions as a husband and parent. First it would appear—although Russell himself does not describe it in this

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<sup>9</sup> Today we would call this “open marriage”. For Dora Russell on these questions see her *Hypatia: or Woman and Knowledge* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1925). The book was published in C. K. Ogden's “To-Day and To-Morrow” series. For Bertrand Russell see *Marriage and Morals* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929). Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900–1939* (New York: William Morrow, 2002), is perceptive and amusing and has some specific references to the Russells and Beacon Hill.

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way—that he endured a joyless adolescence. Orphaned early, he was raised by his grandparents in a stifling, judgmental household. Because he was educated at home, he did not escape the gloom and confinement of this family setting until he went to Cambridge. Some of his biographers assert that his childhood experience left him unready to form adult relationships, most especially with women. Russell married four times, and in addition had other affairs, some significant, and many that were casual. Although he was a brilliant, courageous, principled man, a hero of the twentieth century, he could be harsh and unfeeling when he fell out with people.<sup>10</sup> Dora Russell believed that Bertrand Russell was less than fair to her when he ended their relationship.

Dora Winifred Black, twenty-two years younger, was born in 1894 to parents who rose into the upper middle class. Her father, Sir Frederick Black, a distinguished civil servant, was a Liberal with unusually radical views concerning women's education. Dora received an excellent education at Sutton High School, a Girls' Public Day School Trust school.<sup>11</sup> She then went, it seemed to her at the time almost as a matter of course (although in fact it was not), to Girton College, the first and arguably the most uncompromisingly feminist of the University of Cambridge women's colleges. Dora Black did well at Girton, earning a First in Modern Languages<sup>12</sup> although she did not receive an actual degree, because the university did not then award degrees to women. While at Girton, she became involved in the intense intellectual, political and social life of the wider university, most notably through her association with C. K. Ogden's Heretics society, a centre for radical thought at Cambridge in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> At Cambridge she lost her conventional Anglican faith, became a self-described femin-

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<sup>10</sup> His daughter Katharine has written: "He was a true hero in his public life ..." (*My Father, Bertrand Russell* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975], p. 48). The biographer most critical of Bertrand Russell's personal conduct is Ray Monk.

<sup>11</sup> On Sutton High School see Stephanie Spencer, "Advice and Ambition in a Girls' Public Day School: the Case of Sutton High School, 1884–1924", *Women's History Review*, 9 (2000): 75–94.

<sup>12</sup> On women at Cambridge, see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: a Men's University—Thought of a Mixed Type* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975).

<sup>13</sup> See W. Terrence Gordon, *C. K. Ogden: a Bio-bibliographic Study* (New Jersey and London: Scarecrow P., 1990). Dora Russell contributed an article to this collection: "My Friend Ogden".

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ist, and explored the issue of pacifism. After she completed her degree requirements, she continued her studies and came back to Girton with a fellowship.

Dora Russell was genuinely a feminist and a promising young scholar when she fell deeply in love with Russell in 1919. She had—she tells us later—no interest in marriage. It was Bertrand Russell who insisted that they get married when she became pregnant in 1921 because he wanted his children to be “legitimate”. Many years later, she wrote of her anguish over her decision to agree to marry:

I doubt if he ever realized just what he was asking of the person I then was ... I was a young woman of deeply-cherished modern views, just arrived at independence and now desirous of spreading her wings; afraid of entanglements, suspicious of the wiles of men who were forever scheming to drag women back into the legal, domestic and sexual bondage from which feminist pioneers were trying to escape and deliver their sisters.... Thus I might be absorbed, swallowed up entirely in his life and never be able to become what I aspired to in my own person.<sup>14</sup>

Undoubtedly such a fierce commitment to female autonomy does reflect part of what Dora Russell felt as a young woman. But it is not the whole of the matter. In truth, Dora Russell’s feminist convictions always contained unresolved ambiguities. She herself says, when explaining why she acquiesced to Russell’s demands: “My dilemma was not different from that which faces many women deeply in love, who none the less have aims, purposes, perhaps a career, of their own.”<sup>15</sup>

Historian Stephen Brooke has written cogently about Dora Russell’s feminism, seeing her as a new feminist of the 1920s,<sup>16</sup> an activist and writer who was important because she strove to reinstate the central importance of the body, sexuality and motherhood: she had, writes

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<sup>14</sup> *The Tamarisk Tree*, Vol. 1: *My Quest for Liberty and Love* (London: Elek/Pember-ton, 1975), p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> *Tamarisk* 1: 104. What Dora Russell never recognized was that contemporaries from similar backgrounds made notably different choices. Vera Brittain, for example, never sacrificed career for marriage. See my *Vera Brittain: a Feminist Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; Toronto: U. of Toronto P, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> On “New Feminism” see Harold L. Smith, “British Feminism in the 1920s”, in Smith, ed, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Southampton: Edward Elgar, 1990), pp. 47–65.

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Brooke, “a fervent interest in maternity and child-rearing, alongside a commitment to sexual emancipation”.<sup>17</sup>

Russell certainly thought she represented feminism’s new wave. In her first book, *Hypatia: or Women and Knowledge*, although she pays them tribute, she opposes the older generation of feminists, many of whom, she suggests, feared the body and sexuality. What Russell failed to see was how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminists were correct to claim that the valorization of motherhood in a patriarchal setting could trap women, and so could romantic love.

Although Bertrand Russell’s writings on the subject were more numerous and better known than Dora’s—*Marriage and Morals* created more of a stir than *Hypatia*—in truth, Dora’s investment in seeing their marriage as a bold experiment was always greater than Bertrand’s. But Bertrand’s commitment was not insignificant, nor was it purely self-serving. In recent years, Russell scholarship has taken Bertrand Russell to task for the incomplete nature of his commitment to women’s emancipation. As historian Brian Harrison put it, in a piece published in 1984, Russell suffered from “false consciousness” as a feminist.<sup>18</sup> While it is accurate to say that Bertrand Russell never thought deeply about what feminists now call sexual politics, this does not negate the fact that he supported women’s rights in practice as well as in principle and that he became involved in several feminist causes.

It is not surprising that his acceptance of feminism’s implications for his own behaviour with women was a different matter altogether. He was, after all, a man, a famous intellectual and upper class to boot, and this made it all too easy for him to revert, at times of personal conflict, to an easy acceptance of the privilege that went with his place in the world. If he had never espoused feminism, if he had led a conventional personal life and established a conventional patriarchal marriage, he would have escaped accusations of “false consciousness”.

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Brooke, “The Body, Sexuality and Socialism: Dora Russell in the 1920s”: paper read at NACBS Russell panel, Portland, 2003; revised, forthcoming as “The Body and Socialism: Dora Russell in the 1920s”, *Past and Present*, 189 (Nov. 2005): 179–209.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, “Bertrand Russell: the False Consciousness of a Feminist”, in Margaret Moran and Carl Spadoni, eds., *Intellect and Social Conscience: Essays on Bertrand Russell’s Early Work* (Hamilton, Ont.: McMaster U. Library P., 1984), pp. 157–205; same pages in *Russell*, n.s. 4 (1984). Harrison does acknowledge that Russell’s feminism was genuine although, he believes, not deeply held. See also Monk, *passim*.

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### THEIR CHILDREN AND THE SCHOOL

By 1926 the Russells had two children: John, born in 1921 and Katharine, born in 1923. They were already thinking about starting a school of their own as the best way to educate John and Kate. And indeed, although this does not tell the whole story about the Beacon Hill experiment, it was their shared belief that formal education could at its best become an instrument for social betterment, coupled with their desire to provide the best education possible for their own two children, that led them to open the school in 1927.<sup>19</sup>

Telegraph House, Beacon Hill's first location, was the property of Frank Russell, who, perpetually short of cash, reluctantly let it to his younger brother. "Telegraph House stands high on the South Downs, 620 feet above sea level, and within a few minutes walk of the top of Beacon Hill" the Russells explained in their 1927 Beacon Hill School prospectus. Their school, they said, is founded on three chief principles:

... That no knowledge of any sort or kind should be withheld from children and young people; Respect for the individual preferences and peculiarities of the child, both in work and in behaviour; Morality and reasoning to arise from the children's actual experience in a democratic group and never of necessity from the authority or convenience of adults.

The school was co-educational and under the heading "sex and anatomical teaching" the Principals promised "complete frankness on anatomical and physiological facts of sex, marriage, parenthood and the bodily functions".

Formal teaching was available, but much of it, especially for the younger children, involved blocks, clay, paint and "Montessori things". No child was to be forced to go to lessons, but for those seven years and older "certain work is set per week" and the child was expected to "make an effort to complete his week's work".

The Russells concluded their prospectus with the following ringing assertion: "We aim at producing, not listless intellectuals, but young

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<sup>19</sup> For Bertrand's side see *Auto.*, 2: 152. For Dora's, see *Tamarisk* 1: 19.

men and women filled with constructive hopefulness, conscious that there are great things to be done in the world, and possessed of the skill required for taking their part.”<sup>20</sup>

### PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

Beacon Hill School was not an isolated experiment. Rather, it was part of the international movement for progressive education, which began before the turn of the century. There were reformers in the United States, like the educational philosopher John Dewey.<sup>21</sup> In Germany, Paul Geheeb and Edith Cassirer-Geheeb founded the Odenwaldschule in 1910. In Italy Dr. Maria Montessori developed a way of teaching young children through structured lessons using attractive equipment that Montessori herself designed. (Dr. Montessori would not have approved of the Beacon Hill prospectus reference to “Montessori things”. For its founder, Montessori materials were tools to be used in a specific manner. The Russells’ use of the word “things” reveals both their theoretical eclecticism and, perhaps, Dora’s flexibility and practicality.) These and many other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive educators all acknowledged their debt to earlier figures, most notably to Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel.<sup>22</sup>

In Britain, the progressive education movement began before the turn

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<sup>20</sup> For versions of the prospectus, see *Tamarisk* 2: 9–12 and RA3 REC. ACQ. 1025 (Sylvia Pankhurst papers at IISH). I quote from the 1929 version in the latter.

<sup>21</sup> For the history of American progressive education, see the invaluable Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876–1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961). See also Susan F. Semel and Alan R. Sadovnik, eds., *Schools of Tomorrow, Schools of Today: What Happened to Progressive Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). The introduction to this fine book gives an excellent overview of the history of progressive education.

<sup>22</sup> On all of these, see the journal *The New Era*, *passim*. On Froebel in England see Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, *Friedrich Froebel and English Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952). On the Odenwaldschule, see <http://www.odenwaldschule.de>. The progressive education movement was widespread and diverse. But as William Reese, a historian of progressive education in the United States, asserts, there was one unifying principle: “Whether it meant freedom for the child, a more experimental curriculum, or more scientific methods, progressive education in its broadest sense came to mean the attempt to use the schools as a vehicle of social reform and individual improvement” (“American Education in the Twentieth Century: Progressive Legacies”, foreword to special issue with same title, *Paedagogica Historica*, 39 [Aug. 2003]: 416).

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of the century, with the founding of Abbotsholme, and a number of other experimental schools established before the First World War.<sup>23</sup> The movement grew rapidly in the 1920s, when many fee-paying progressive schools were founded, including Alexander Sutherland Neill's famous Summerhill. Other influential educators working in Britain included Homer Lane, whose "Little Commonwealth" provided a healing setting for troubled children; Susan Isaacs, educator and psychologist, and head of the Malting House School in Cambridge; and the nursery school pioneer Margaret McMillan.<sup>24</sup>

In 1920–21, Theosophist educator Beatrice de Norman Ensor founded a journal, *The New Era*, and an organization, the New Education Fellowship. Together they were "designed to promote International, and to record the growth of Experimental, Education". During the inter-war years the New Education Fellowship would become the main focus for communication for "New Educationists" in Britain.<sup>25</sup>

Progressive education, or "new" education as it was often called in Britain, defies precise definition. To be sure, those who identified themselves as "new educationists" universally condemned traditional learning by rote. New educationists were committed to transforming school classrooms from stark spaces inhabited by quiet rows of children whose obedience was often enforced by the threat of corporal punishment to places where children were free to move about and to "learn by doing".

But there were differing and indeed contradictory strands in the movement for progressive education. Tensions existed among advocates of the new science of child psychology, which played a major role in new educationist theory and practice in Britain as it did in North America and in Europe. It is true enough that most late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century child psychology represents a break with the past,

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<sup>23</sup> For progressive or "new" education in Britain see the work of Selleck, Stewart (both cited in n. 5), and William Boyd and Wyatt Rawson, *The Story of the New Education* (London: Heineman, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> On Isaacs see D. E. M. Gardner, *Susan Isaacs* (London: Methuen, 1969), and Lydia A. H. Smith, *To Understand and to Help: the Life and Work of Susan Isaacs* (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson U. P., 1985). Stewart discusses Lane and McMillan; see also Selleck. On Neill see Jonathan Croall, *Neill of Summerhill: the Permanent Rebel* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> The published literature on *The New Era* and the New Education Fellowship is not extensive. The official history is by Boyd and Rawson (cited in n. 23).

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both with the harsh “spare the rod and spoil the child” childrearing methods of Christian moralists, and with the even less child-centered view that childhood is an unimportant period in the life cycle. But while they rejected these older views, psychologists disagreed with one other. For example, Sigmund Freud and his followers differed sharply from behaviourists like John Watson and William Stern, both of whom Bertrand Russell at one time admired. The child psychologists who developed the “science” of intelligence testing and promoted the positive features of classification and quantification represent still another aspect of child psychology. In creating the notion of measurable intelligence, psychologists like Cyril Burt in England inevitably leant credence to the idea that “nature” is more important than “nurture”, a notion that is fundamentally at variance with the progressive vision that “child-centred” education would ensure the development and the well-being of the child. It is especially at variance with the views of educational reformers like A. S. Neill or Dora Russell who advocated freedom for children and who were both Freudians.<sup>26</sup>

With whose children were the new educationists concerned? The children of wealthy and well-established parents who could afford school fees, or the large majority of children who would of necessity attend State-supported schools? Here the nature of the school system in a particular country determined the shape of progressive education. In the United States, for example, there was a vision, however flawed it was in reality, of school systems that would serve children of all social classes and in doing so foster democracy.<sup>27</sup> In Britain, where there was no

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<sup>26</sup> Helpful information about Burt, intelligence testing and other related matters can be found in entries in the *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Macmillan Reference and Thomson Gale, 2004).

On intelligence testing at Beacon Hill School, my interviewees Ward, Tait and Pritchard (see note at end) revealed the following: Jonathan Pritchard does not remember ever having an intelligence test at Beacon Hill School, though his mother was involved in administering them through her medical practice, and she did test her own children. Katharine Tait remembers intelligence tests at Beacon Hill as well as at Dartington. Zora Schaupp’s memoir (discussed below) of her months at Beacon Hill (she did intelligence testing there) refers to Katharine Russell’s high I.Q. See Zora Schaupp Lasch, “Memoir” (RA3 REC. ACQ. 1070). Harriet Ward remembers intelligence testing at Dartington but not at Beacon Hill.

<sup>27</sup> See Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, and David A. Gamson, “District Progressivism: Rethinking Reform in Urban School Systems, 1900–1928”, *Paedagogica*

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widespread commitment to democratic education before the end of the Second World War, the majority of experimental schools were private and fee-paying and drew their support from middle- and upper middle-class parents.

#### THE RUSSELLS' BACKGROUND IN EDUCATION

When the Russells opened Beacon Hill they immediately became identified as leaders among British practitioners of experimental education. Educators visited the school; journalists wrote about it, and a number of prominent intellectuals enrolled their children. For example an important issue of *The New Era* containing a lengthy section on "Progressive Education in England" featured a number of schools, including Abbots-holme, Bedales, Summerhill, Frensham Heights, the Malting House School, and the recently founded Dartington Hall. Included are two large photographs of Beacon Hill with the caption "Beacon Hill is a nursery school, recently started by the Hon. and Mrs. Bertrand Russell in a beautiful part of Sussex."<sup>28</sup>

The instant attention that Beacon Hill received did not surprise the Russells, nor should it surprise us. Bertrand Russell's fame and high status ensured it. However, while Beacon Hill School immediately achieved prominence, it is noteworthy that before 1927, neither Bertrand nor Dora Russell knew much about the wider movement of which their experiment would become a part. In her account of "how Beacon Hill School Began", written more than 40 years later, Dora Russell outlines "the climate of opinion on education in the 1920s which led us to consider our venture" (*Tamarisk* 2: 6). There she discusses the importance of Summerhill and of the New Education Fellowship. But that account was written with the benefit of hindsight. In the mid-1920s neither Dora

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*Historica*, 39 (2003): 417-34.

<sup>28</sup> *The New Era*, 9 (Apr. 1928): 71. Writer Ethel Mannin discusses Beacon Hill in *Common-Sense and the Child: a Plea for Freedom* (London: Jarrolds, 1931), with an introduction by A. S. Neill: see pp. 184-5 and 192. Journalist James Wedgwood Drawbell wrote on Beacon Hill in "The School on the Hill", *Good Housekeeping*, London, Oct. 1933, p. 30; reprinted in his *A Gallery of Women* (London: Collins, 1933). When Bertrand made his American tour in the autumn of 1927, and Dora made hers in the winter of 1928, the School received extensive press coverage in U.S. newspapers. See clippings in the archives of both Bertrand and Dora Russell.

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nor Bertrand appears to have known about the New Education Fellowship, and although each would make significant connections with Neill after 1926, I have found no evidence that either of the Russells knew about Neill's work until then.<sup>29</sup> The power that fame and high social status carry is reflected both in the instant attention Beacon Hill garnered and in the Russells' distance from the New Education movement.

Although their practical knowledge was limited, Bertrand and Dora Russell were undoubtedly conversant with educational theory. Bertrand Russell's essay on education published in the volume *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916) contains an inspiring defence of education for freedom:

Education is, as a rule, the strongest force on the side of what exists and against fundamental change.... Education as a political weapon could not exist if we respected the rights of children. If we respected the rights of children, we should educate them so as to give them the knowledge and the mental habits required for forming independent opinions....<sup>30</sup>

But that essay was written when Russell's interest in education was political and theoretical. When he had children of his own, his perspective altered markedly. *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* (1926) is concerned not so much with schools as enemies of freedom as with childrearing, child psychology and the application of this new knowledge to schooling. In *On Education* he favours the behaviourists (later he would be less enthusiastic about behaviourism), emphasizes the impor-

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<sup>29</sup> My guess is that Neill initiated the connection with Bertrand. Neill wrote to Russell commenting on *On Education* on 23 March 1926 (RA1 710.053799; in *Auto.*, 2: 181–2). See Croall, *Neill of Summerhill*. For more information about Neill's connection with both Russells, see correspondence in RA, DRA and WEF archives. Note that Dora Russell mentions Neill in an article for *The New Leader*, 26 Nov. 1926, p. 10, "What to Do with a Naughty Child; Are There No Naughty Parents? Parents Ought to Read Mr. Neill's Book on the *Problem Child*" (DRA file 223). Boris Uvarov, who was the science master at Beacon Hill for two or three terms in the early 1930s (he then went to Dartington), told David Harley: "... I do not remember any mention whatever of Neill's Summerhill; in fact I don't think I even heard of it until I was at Dartington" (Uvarov to Harley, 5 March 1977, RA3 REC. ACQ. 465).

<sup>30</sup> *PSR*, pp. 144–5. Bertrand Russell made extensive contributions to educational thought; they have been appearing in the non-technical volumes of his *Collected Papers* with many more to come and with many being edited by William Bruneau.

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tance of “science” and has much to say about the dangers that “ignorant parents”, and especially “ignorant mothers”, pose to children.<sup>31</sup> “The right care of young children is highly skilled work, which parents cannot hope to do satisfactorily”, he asserts.<sup>32</sup>

In her memoir of her father, Katharine Tait corroborates the fact that Bertrand Russell adhered to behaviourist methods in his role as a father, and she is convinced that her father’s attempts to put behaviourism into practice did considerable harm to her and to her brother John.<sup>33</sup>

While Dora shared many of Bertrand’s beliefs about childrearing and education, her central concerns were in fact quite different from his. Two notions form the core of her theoretical writings on childrearing and education: a modernist view of motherhood and an uncompromising commitment to the rights of children.

Although Dora Russell would come to believe that urban industrial society could be soulless and destructive, in the 1920s and early 1930s her published work shows a confident optimism concerning the possibilities that modern society offered.<sup>34</sup> In *The Right to be Happy* and *In Defence of Children*, her argument rests on a belief that it is modern industrial society that has made widespread happiness possible, for the first time in human history. Specifically, with regard to motherhood, she believed

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<sup>31</sup> On the “instinctive incompetence” of American mothers: “Read John B. Watson on mothers. I used to think him mad; now I only think him American; that is to say, the mothers that he has known have been American mothers” (Russell to Rachel Gleason Brooks, 5 May 1930, *BRA*, 1: 115–16).

<sup>32</sup> *OE*, p. 182. Note that in his later book, *Education and the Social Order* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), he is more critical of the behaviourists: see p. 60. See also his “Behaviorism and Values” (in *Sceptical Essays*). In this essay he is critical of certain aspects of Watson’s thinking, but nonetheless says that his “views on education” are “excellent” (*SE*, p. 94).

Russell would later say: “In the circumstances [having the two children] it was natural that I should become interested in education. I had already written briefly on the subject in *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, but now it occupied a large part of my mind. I wrote a book, *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood*, which was published in 1926 and had a very large sale. It seems to me now somewhat unduly optimistic in its psychology, but as regards values I find nothing in it to recant, although I think now that the methods I proposed with very young children were unduly harsh” (*Auto.*, 2: 151).

<sup>33</sup> Tait, *My Father*, pp. 59ff.

<sup>34</sup> Dora Russell, *The Right to be Happy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), and *In Defence of Children* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1932).

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that the technology of modern birth control afforded opportunities for fundamental change.<sup>35</sup>

For women, especially, great changes came towards the end of the nineteenth century... Parenthood had, so far, always been a heavy and inescapable burden; few were really conscious of it as a definite need. Those who were conscious began to see it, when voluntary, as something fresh and new, a creative art and science worth undertaking, under good conditions, for its own sake. Those who were sensitive among parents and teachers began to realize the true psychological problems of the family. In school and in home the art and science of child-nurture began to be taken seriously. Idealists awoke to a new happiness for parents and teachers and, if this new attitude to children could become widespread, to brilliant hopes of racial and social improvement.

(*In Defence of Children*, pp. 33–4)

A new dawn for motherhood also meant a new dawn for children. Children, Dora Russell believed, had rights as human beings that were not recognized by traditional patriarchal society: “There is not a word in the whole Ten Commandments about the rights of children. But there are injunctions as to their duties. God, property and parents are the objects of prime concern” (p. 22). Children not only had human rights; they had “a right to be happy”.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, they had a right to self-affirmation, to be more than simply an extension of the wishes of their parents: “Shall we ever succeed in transforming the impulse that makes the child a vehicle of the parental ego?” Modern parents, Dora Russell asserts, must do just that. They must love their children not because they offer “racial immortality to compensate for individual frustration” but as unique, separate individuals (*In Defence of Children*, p. 40).

Dora Russell would say much later:

The impression too often given is that [Beacon Hill] was a wild place run by crazy amateurs. Not only were we both academically qualified, but we had been studying modern psychologists and theories of education: during 1926 Bertie had been writing his own book on the subject. We knew about Freud, Adler, Piaget, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Margaret McMillan. Once we took

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<sup>35</sup> In the 1920s Dora Russell was a passionate advocate for birth control and sex reform. See *Tamarisk* 1. See also Brooke, “The Body, Sexuality and Socialism” (n. 17).

<sup>36</sup> “What we have to remember first of all is the child’s right to be happy” (*The Right to Be Happy*, p. 210).

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John and Kate to spend half a day at the McMillan open-air nursery school, while we talked with her and studied her ideas in action. (*Tamarisk* 1: 199)

In fact the Russells were more confident than they should have been.<sup>37</sup> Dora, who took on the lion's share of the work, was overwhelmed by the practical knowledge, skill and sheer energy needed to run even a small school like Beacon Hill. In the summer preceding the opening of the school, Dora, who, like other progressive educators, believed that specially designed furniture would encourage children's creativity, threw herself into the work of transforming Telegraph House into a colourful, child-centred space:

We hoped to give the children the very best that we could manage for mind and body. All that summer I took steps to see to it that the roomy house on the downs should have bright paint and floor covering. I had special divan beds (made by the blind), many deliberately less than full length to give more space.... Various sizes of tables and chairs were all in bright colours, as were plates, cups and saucers in plastic ... chosen because they were said to be unbreakable, though, before long, this was disproved by vigorous use.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Bertrand was in Cornwall, with the children and a staff of servants. Rather than making things easier for Dora, Bertrand complicated matters by engaging in one of his more pointless affairs, this time with a young Swiss woman hired to teach French to John and Kate. As Nicholas Griffin puts it, this incident was "reminiscent of a French farce" (*SLBR*, 2: 265). Hannah, the indispensable cook, found out, and quit. Dora was furious with Bertie, not, she wrote, because he had an affair, but because he shouldn't have been having one within the household: "I knew quite well long ago that this was going to happen, it is liable to happen with any of our young staff & it will wreck the school. That is why I hinted it was best to go outside school."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bertrand Russell biographer Ray Monk is correct when he says: "On the face of it, this was a madly ambitious project: neither of them had any experience of schoolteaching ..." (Monk, 2: 78). Neither was trained as a teacher of young children.

<sup>38</sup> *Tamarisk* 2: 14. We know from the letters in RA2 710.103974 that Dora did this work. On the significance of furniture design for children, see "Furniture" in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood*, 2: 375-6.

<sup>39</sup> Dora Russell to Bertrand Russell, 29 Aug. [1927], RA2 710.103983. And on this affair see Monk, 2: 89.

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During 1927–28, its first year of operation, neither Bertrand nor Dora was present at Beacon Hill at the same time as the other. In the autumn, Bertrand made a North American tour, and during the winter Dora did. In both cases they went as emissaries for modern childrearing, progressive education and as publicists for Beacon Hill School itself. An indication of just how much Dora counted on Bertrand's commitment to and interest in the school is reflected in a letter she wrote him during her 1928 tour of America:

I am so glad you seem interested in the school. Darling, you don't know how important it is & what it stands for. I see it as a sort of oasis in a desert & I begin to understand why the more progressive Americans take a deep breath when they meet me & say "Just to know your school exists, gives me some hope..."  
(23 Feb. [1928], RA)

Sad to say, not long after she wrote that letter, her relationship with Bertrand would begin to disintegrate, and along with it their joint venture as educators. Although the Russells were publicly committed to allowing each other sexual freedom, in practice neither party was able to tolerate the other's relationships with other people. When Dora became pregnant late in 1929 (Griffin Barry was the father), Bertrand's initial attempts to accommodate this failed. By 8 July 1930, when Dora's daughter Harriet was born, Bertrand had already become involved with the woman who would be his third wife.<sup>40</sup> His involvement in Beacon Hill School began to dwindle, and came to a public end when his own circumstances impelled him to force Dora to move the school from its original location at Telegraph Hill to its second location at Boyles Court in Essex in 1934.

After his separation from Dora, Bertrand quickly turned against the school. He insisted that John and Kate go to Dartington Hall, a more financially stable progressive school, and in his autobiography he would later roundly repudiate the Beacon Hill experiment: "In retrospect, I feel that several things were mistaken in the principles upon which the school was conducted. Young children in a group cannot be happy without a certain amount of order and routine. Left to amuse them-

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<sup>40</sup> While Bertrand and Dora did not announce publicly that their marriage was dissolving in 1930, it was (see *SLBR*, 2: 295 and *passim*).

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selves, they are bored and turn to bullying or destruction” (*Auto.*, 2: 155).

But we should not assume from his later change of heart that Russell’s interest in the school was never sincere, or that he was never fully involved in it. For a time, at least, he was genuinely committed and thoroughly involved, enough so that he could write as follows to an American correspondent: “the school keeps me very busy, but I like the work” and in a later letter explain to her that “running a school is no sinecure & leaves no time for either work or emotions apart from it.”<sup>41</sup> True, there is the unpleasant fact that he was also carrying on a flirtation with this particular correspondent, a young single mother who sent her daughter to Beacon Hill. But we cannot assume with certainty that Russell’s sexual indiscretions on this and many other occasions reflect a lack of seriousness about his commitment to the reform of childrearing and education.

Moreover, we should also recognize just how unusual it was for an individual of his gender, class, social status and fame to engage in genuine “hands on” child care. An unfriendly newspaper article published in 1997, 70 years after the school opened, makes fun of Russell’s concern with the bowel movements of his Beacon Hill charges.<sup>42</sup> The article ignores two things: first, Beacon Hill was not unusual for the period in taking what we might now think to be an obsessive interest in the digestive functions of young children, and second, it was quite astonishing that a man whose main energies had been devoted for much of his life to arduous intellectual work became, for a time, directly concerned with the mental and physical health of a group of small children. His absorption in the care of young children began with his own John and Kate. Although Katharine Tait is not uncritical of her father or of Beacon Hill School, her memoir, *My Father, Bertrand Russell*, reveals Russell’s extraordinary level of involvement with his children and with other Beacon Hill pupils.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> These quotations are taken from Bertrand Russell’s correspondence with Barry Fox, later Barry Stevens, who sold the letters Russell sent her. See RA3 REC. ACQ. 439. These quotations are from letter 28, dated 7/3/30, and letter 29, dated 25.3.30.

<sup>42</sup> John Dodd, “The School That Made Bright Children Bad Dancers”, *The Observer Review*, May 1997, p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> Russell’s involvement with some of the children at Beacon Hill during the years when he was there is indisputable. Barry Fox’s daughter Judith Bickford, a Beacon Hill pupil, remembered him warmly (see Alisande Stevens to Harley, RA3 REC. ACQ. 462).

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While it lasted, Bertrand Russell's enthusiasm for Beacon Hill had less to do with education than it did with the views he held in the 1920s and early 1930s about child psychology and the nature of the modern family. Russell believed that the modern family was too small and that its small size encouraged parents, especially mothers, to become overly involved with their children. "Most love is a prison, mother love not the least so ..." he said in 1931. Maternal solicitude "is designed by nature to be adequate for a family of ten and becomes excessive when concentrated upon one or two, the usual number in a modern family."<sup>44</sup>

He expanded on this theme in private correspondence, justifying the fact that he and Dora were united in their belief that it was beneficial for children to come to Beacon Hill as early as the age of two or three, because they could be provided with a more healthy environment than that of the home:

I have no objections to children being with their parents if the parents are willing to take the trouble to provide the sort of environment the children ought to have; but an essential part of such an environment is a much larger number of children than are found in the modern family. If people were a little more co-operative than they are, the best plan would be for a number of middle class families to live together in a large house and let all the children have a common nursery. As things stand, however middle class people are too quarrelsome for arrangements of this sort.

(Russell to Fox, 5 Dec. 1928, RA3 REC. ACQ. 439)

A year after he wrote that letter, Bertrand embarked on the relationship that led to his third marriage, one that was as conventional as his second was unconventional. Whether his involvement with progressive marriage, childrearing and education was genuine, or whether it was in fact superficial, remains an open question. But there is no question that it was fleeting.

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<sup>44</sup> From a debate with American author Sherwood Anderson on "Shall the State Rear Our Children?", chaired by John B. Watson and held 1 November 1931 in New York City. The account from *The New York Times* is quoted in *BRA*, 2: 117–18.

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### DORA'S SCHOOL

For Dora, in contrast, not only did the school become her central project, she transformed herself into an educator. From 1927, she became each year more skilled, more knowledgeable and also more connected with other progressive educators. The school, in short, became her mission.<sup>45</sup>

From 1934, when Dora was first forced to relocate Beacon Hill, until 1943 when it finally closed, the school moved about from place to place. In addition it was always in financial trouble. After 1934 the financial difficulties of the school increased, not only because Bertrand was no longer involved but also because of the Depression, the threat of war and finally the war itself.

In some ways, the school benefited from the circumstances of the 1930s: Dora took in some refugee staff and children, most notably Grete Heller and Paul Gelb. Grete Heller was an art teacher with excellent training and considerable talent. Examples of the imaginative and beautiful linoleum cuts she encouraged the children to make exist in the Dora Russell archives, a testimony to the high quality of art teaching at Beacon Hill School during Heller's brief tenure towards the end of the school's history. (One earlier art teacher, Miss Bailey, known at the school as "Mouse", had also been a great success.<sup>46</sup>)

Given that the school was always on the brink of closing because of lack of funds, it never became an institution in the sense of being a settled place with a secure future, and it was never large. At no time were more than 25 children enrolled.<sup>47</sup> By the end, in Cornwall, it involved only a handful of children and a very small staff.

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen Brooke believes, quite rightly, that Beacon Hill School provided Dora Russell with a project that would allow her to couple her private and public interests: "She wanted her public work to reflect a private condition of femininity comprising both sexual activity and pleasure and maternity, both freedom and love. Her interest in children also extended to education. In 1927, she and Bertrand founded Beacon Hill, an alternative school. When their marriage and partnership ended, she struggled to keep the school going, while forging a reputation as a public expert on child education" (Brooke, "The Body, Sexuality and Socialism").

<sup>46</sup> See DRA files 602ff. For "Mouse" see *Tamarisk* 2: 39–40.

<sup>47</sup> Twenty-five is the number Dora gives in her essay, "Beacon Hill", in *The Modern Schools Handbook*, ed. Trevor Blewitt (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), p. 29.

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There is no complete record of the children who attended Beacon Hill School.<sup>48</sup> However, we do know a lot about some of them. First of all, there were John and Kate Russell. They attended until 1934. Harriet and Roddy, Dora's two younger children, were pupils at the school for a longer period than their half-sister and half-brother. In addition, in the later years, Dora's two nieces, Joan and Pamela Black, attended.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the years, children of various staff members were pupils. In consequence, Beacon Hill especially in its later years, had the character of an extended family rather than that of a formal school.

A number of notable British intellectuals sent their children to the school, especially in the early years when Bertrand Russell was involved. These included novelist David Garnett's son Richard who would later share his memories of Beacon Hill with David Harley. Sylvia Pankhurst's son also attended for a time as a day boy (*Tamarisk* 1: 199). The most faithful of the British intellectuals were Jack and Molly Pritchard. John Craven [Jack] Pritchard was a notable avant-garde British engineer and entrepreneur, with ties to the German Bauhaus School.<sup>50</sup> His wife, Molly, was a psychiatrist. Their sons Jeremy and Jonathan Pritchard attended the school for much of its history.

The American children included Joy Corbett, the daughter of Una Corbett, whose father was the American writer and sexual reformer V. F. Calverton, and Marcia Wolff, whose mother, poet Genevieve Taggart, taught at Bennington College, and was a friend of Griffin Barry.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dora Russell, in a letter written to Griselda Mair (matron at Beacon Hill for some years) on 5 April 1977 (DRA) mentions that she did not possess complete records. Files 622–35 on parents and children, closed until 2020, should reveal more. There is also information in the extraordinary records of Dr. Florence Smedley, published in Bruneau's "New Evidence ...", pp. 143–52. Also see information in Tait and Ward's books, in *Tamarisk* 1 and 2, and in open files relating to the school in RA and DRA. In RA these include the valuable David Harley collection.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., see *Everyone's Paper*, May and June 1936, edited by, among others, "Joan Black, age 14 and Pamela Black age 11", in DRA file 602.

<sup>50</sup> See *The Pritchard Papers: a Guide to the Papers of John Craven Pritchard (1899–1992)*, compiled by Bridget Gillies, Michael St. John and Deirdre Sharp (Norwich: U. of East Anglia, 1998). There is considerable material in the papers about Pritchard's interest in progressive education, and about the education of his two sons. See also Jack Pritchard's memoirs, *View from a Long Chair* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

<sup>51</sup> For Taggart see the interesting correspondence between Dora Russell and Genevieve [Jed] after Marcia was leaving the school in 1933. (DRA file 552).

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Finally there was Beate Frank (Ati Gropius Johansen), adopted niece of Walter Gropius, who came as a refugee, thanks to the good offices of Jack Pritchard.<sup>52</sup>

During its first years, when it was at its most prosperous, Beacon Hill's teaching staff included both Dora and Bertrand. They were joined by progressive educator Beatrix Tudor-Hart, whom the Russells hoped would become a partner in their enterprise but who stayed only a short time.<sup>53</sup> There was the science master, John Goody, a recent Oxford graduate, whose stay was, like that of Beatrix Tudor-Hart, brief.<sup>54</sup> There were also two "Froebel-trained" teachers, Betty Cross and "Jose", who in fact did most of the teaching. There was also the domestic staff, including the matrons. During the early years the Russells did not think of the staff as part of the school itself, but later, when Dora conducted the school alone, they became full members:

In the first years of the school I felt disturbed at the class divisions between teachers and the domestic staff, who were not part of the Council ... Later on, when we were poorer and did much of the domestic work ourselves, our Council took in the entire community, including the gardeners. (*Tamarisk* 2: 29)

During the first year of its operation, the staff also included Zora Schaupp, an American researcher with a Social Science Research Council grant who in 1929 came to Beacon Hill at the invitation of Bertrand Russell. Schaupp received the SSRC grant to "study experimental schools in England and Europe, with special attention to Bertrand Russell's

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<sup>52</sup> On Ati Gropius see the chapter on Beacon Hill in Ward, *A Man of Small Importance*. See also Gropius' unpublished memoir, cited in n. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Tamarisk* 1: 205. Beatrix Tudor-Hart "was an educational pioneer", says her granddaughter Katherine Jones. (Katherine is the daughter of Jennifer, the child of Beatrix Tudor-Hart and Jack Pritchard: the Pritchards, unlike the Russells, successfully navigated an unconventional, "open" marriage.) She completed her studies at Newnham with a First. Katherine Jones says: "Beatrix told me she was invited by the Russells to set up a school. At the time it only consisted of their kids. She set the school up, got no credit for it, did not respond to Bertie's advances and left to set up her own school in Fitzjohns Avenue Hampstead London" (email from Katherine Jones, 2 July 2004, to the author). When, in 1933, Tudor-Hart ran into difficulties with her St. John's Wood neighbours, who brought a nuisance suit against her, Dora Russell vigorously defended her. See correspondence in DRA.

<sup>54</sup> For Goody, see the Zora Schaupp memoir cited next.

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school at Petersfield, England”.<sup>55</sup> Schaupp would later write an acerbic but informative memoir of her six months at Beacon Hill. Schaupp disliked Dora Russell and had little respect for her, making fun of her “sophomoric Freudianism” and of her insistence that these supposedly “free” children not eat sweets and be forced to go for healthy walks. Schaupp, who says she gave dancing lessons and cooking classes at Dora’s behest, also administered intelligence tests to the Beacon Hill children. As she explains, Bertrand Russell “half facetiously ... dubbed me ‘visiting psychologist’”.

As owners of an independent school that operated outside the State system, the Russells were free to hire whom they wished. With the exception of a succession of science masters, the staff of the school was predominantly female. Some of those hired had teacher training. Others did not. Few if any teachers stayed throughout the entire sixteen-year period. In consequence, especially after 1934, the chief continuity was provided by Dora herself, and by Lily Howell who came initially as domestic staff, along with her husband Walter, but who in the later years of the school became Matron.<sup>56</sup>

The hiring of the science masters appears to have been conducted in a more organized and thorough manner than that of the other teachers. Writing in retrospect, Dora found it necessary to account for the fact that of all the teachers hired, only the science and mathematics teacher had to be male. At the time, she felt no need to apologize. In the spring of 1931, the school was in need of a new man (they had hired and lost or discharged at least two by this time). Dora placed advertisements in *Nature* and in the *Weekend Review* for a mathematics and science “Master”.<sup>57</sup> But she did not rely solely or even primarily on these advertisements. The main source she used was the University of London Appointments Board, and it was through it that Dora Russell hired the school’s most successful science master, Boris Uvarov.<sup>58</sup> Uvarov taught

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<sup>55</sup> See Zora Schaupp Lasch, “Unpublished Memoir” (RA3 REC. ACQ. 1070). Schaupp, a Bryn Mawr PH.D. in philosophy and logic, was, like writer Ethel Mannin, a Bertrand Russell rather than a Dora Russell partisan, and for similar reasons. See also the covering note from Schaupp’s husband, Robert Lasch, dated Aug. 1989, to K. Blackwell (RA3 REC. ACQ. 1070).

<sup>56</sup> For Lily’s importance see Ward, *A Man of Small Importance*.

<sup>57</sup> For *Nature*, 6 June 1931, and *Weekend Review*, see DRA file 590.

<sup>58</sup> See correspondence between Dora Russell and H. J. Crawford, “The Secretary,

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at the school in 1932 and 1933, leaving then because he had an offer of more money from Dartington Hall. Of Uvarov she says: “Boris ... was extremely well liked and had an enormous sense of fun; he devised experiments from which his pupils learned a great deal ... simple experiments like water finding its own level, the collapsing of a large tin by air pressure, dissolving things, crystallisation—this was a scientific beginning” (*Tamarisk* 2: 45).

In 1934, radical publisher Victor Gollancz brought out *The Modern Schools Handbook*.<sup>59</sup> The book, a collection of articles by the heads of twenty-one British progressive schools, was designed as a guide for prospective parents. Dora Russell contributed an article on Beacon Hill, which was included as one of seven schools listed under the heading “co-educational schools to university age”. This piece, written just at the moment when the school became definitively hers, offers the most complete contemporary account of what it was she thought her school ought to be. It, along with other articles Dora published in the 1930s, provides one kind of evidence about Beacon Hill. A different kind of evidence about what went on at the school is provided by surviving examples of the children’s work and minutes of the School Council.<sup>60</sup> The recollections of individuals who attended as pupils or who were staff members or parents offer yet another sort of testimony, although like Dora Russell’s account in *The Tamarisk Tree: My School and the Years of War*, they are retrospective in nature. Taken together, these sources provide information about the nature of Beacon Hill as both school and community. Focusing on the key aspects of self-government and learning-by-doing, I examine what this evidence reveals.

University of London Appointments Board”, 28 May 1931 and 10 June 1931 (DRA file 591). Dora Russell received a number of letters from prospective teachers in answer to the magazine advertisements. Some of these people were teachers in State elementary or secondary schools, and some did not have university degrees. While she answered these letters and others from similar sorts of people politely and indeed with sympathy, she did not hire such a person. See the letters in DRA files 523–38 from teachers looking for jobs and Russell’s answers: she usually refers them to the NEF.

<sup>59</sup> *The Modern Schools Handbook* was important at the time and later. For example, contemporary progressive educator David Gribble uses it as a benchmark in his *Considering Children*, cited in n. 69, and it is mentioned by Selleck, Stewart *et al.* But see also L. B. Pekin, *Progressive Schools: Their Principles and Practice* (London: Hogarth P., 1934), for a different view from the 1930s.

<sup>60</sup> These are available primarily in DRA.

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## SELF-GOVERNMENT: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL

All those who identified themselves as progressive educators claimed to be, in Homer Lane's phrase, "on the side of the child". But when did "freedom" become "licence"? And how much self-government was advisable? These were matters of intense controversy, and indeed of acrimony amongst British progressive educators in the inter-war period and beyond.<sup>61</sup>

Summerhill's Neill was the most influential voice for libertarian education in twentieth-century Britain.<sup>62</sup> As he wrote when he was co-editor of the New Education Fellowship's *The New Era*, well before he actually founded Summerhill—he was at the time teaching at King Alfred School, one of the seven schools that jostle together in Part I of *The Modern Schools Handbook*—"Self-government will never succeed unless the teacher believes that all authority is dangerous for the child."<sup>63</sup> At Summerhill, he put his principles into action, and, perhaps even more to the point in creating his fame, he wrote about his methods in books that have inspired generations of educational radicals.

In the 1920s and 1930s many disagreed with him. Conservatives, of course, could be expected to disagree, but so also did other progressive educators. For example, J. H. Badley, an active member of the New Education Fellowship and headmaster of Bedales School, another of the seven schools included in the first section of the *Modern Schools Handbook*, thought that Neill's ideas were dangerous. Badley, although he ran a progressive school, believed that balancing the demands of freedom with those of authority presented a challenge:<sup>64</sup> Bedales did not have a democratic school council, and pupils were required to attend les-

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<sup>61</sup> See the acrimony involved when the English Association of New Schools, an organization formed under the auspices of the NEF in 1932, was established. Correspondence between Neill and Dora Russell in DRA is revealing here.

<sup>62</sup> On Summerhill, see Croall. As the two first historians of the "new education" movement put it: "for many people in Great Britain, A. S. Neill and his school *were* the New Education" (Boyd and Rawson, p. 65). Selleck describes Neill as follows: "Dogmatic defender of freedom, provocative and sentimental ... he has become a symbol of English progressivism ..." (p. 37).

<sup>63</sup> *The New Era*, 1, no. 3 (July 1920): 64.

<sup>64</sup> See J. H. Badley, M.A., Head Master, *Bedales: a Pioneer School* (London: Methuen, 1923), p. 29.

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sons.<sup>65</sup> Badley's moderate compromises did not endear him to A. S. Neill, who was severely critical of him and of most other progressive educators, because in Neill's view they did not possess the courage to go far enough.

By early 1930s, Dora Russell was the New Educationist whose views were closest to those of Neill's—a fact that Neill himself acknowledged in public and in private, although in accounts of progressive education she gets very little attention.<sup>66</sup> In addition to running Beacon Hill, Dora Russell wrote and spoke on education as often as she could in the 1930s. For example, in "Let the Children Govern Themselves", published in 1933 in the short-lived but interesting periodical *School*, she proclaimed: "The advocate of the 'free' school ... must ask himself not 'What do I wish this child to learn or to become?' but 'What does this child wish to know or to make of himself?'"<sup>67</sup>

For Dora Russell—as for Neill—freedom meant allowing the children at her school to participate fully in governance. In the *Modern Schools Handbook*, she wrote: "The government of the school is in the hands of the School Council. Everybody belongs to this, from the Principal to the gardener, and every child who is 5 years old and over. Each person has one vote, and may attend and speak" (p. 36).

Was Dora Russell able to achieve self-government at Beacon Hill? It is clear that she believed that Beacon Hill's School Council was the activity that made the school a genuine democracy. This is reflected in the prominence she gave to self-government in her descriptions of the school and to her preoccupation with the issue in her correspondence. It is also reflected in the fact that among the records that survive from the day-to-day running of the school, the School Council minutes are the most extensive. Moreover, as archival documents, the minutes confirm the

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<sup>65</sup> "... it is not part of our system to remove all regulation and to leave all the lessons of life to be learnt by the slow and costly method of actual experience ..." (Badley, *The Modern Schools Handbook*, article on Bedales, p. 48).

<sup>66</sup> For Dora Russell and Neill see Croall, p. 160, and the Neill–Dora Russell correspondence in DRA file 552. Information in DRA and WEF reflects Dora Russell's connections, by the 1930s, with the NEF. See DRA file 548 for correspondence with Rawson of the NEF. She was upset when at first *The New Era* would not permit her to advertise (Sept. 1932); see DRA files 538–42. Later they did: see *The New Era*, Jan. 1936, p. iii, for an advertisement. The school was then at Boyles Court in Essex.

<sup>67</sup> "Let the Children Govern Themselves", *School*, 1, no. 2 (Oct. 1933).

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importance the Council had for Russell. The minutes were taken by hand (usually by Dora Russell herself), signed by the chairman, who was usually a child, and then typed and preserved. These were time-consuming tasks for an enterprise as understaffed as Beacon Hill School was.

The minutes indicate that the Council met regularly (although usually the gardener did not attend). But they also reveal that the adults, and in particular Dora, dominated. Bertrand Russell would later remark, unkindly but correctly: "... another thing that was wrong [with Beacon Hill] was that there was a pretence of more freedom than in fact existed" (*Auto.*, 2: 155). These minutes from 7 June 1937, I would suggest, illustrate Bertrand Russell's point:

Dora said that in spite of all the discussions we have had about it nearly everyone has been teasing. She said that it must be made quite clear that we disapprove of teasing even to the extent of seperating [*sic*] the people and finding them something else to do. She made the following proposal. That every member of the community undertakes not to tease others and to see that people are not teased. Pat seconded this and it was passed by the council.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, not only did the adults tend to dominate in spite of their best intentions, it is clear that Dora usually initiated the meetings and that while some of the children may have been genuinely involved with the School Council, many were bored by it. Some of the pupils were indeed committed. Katharine Tait and Harriet Ward both remember the importance of the School Council. Tait commented that "council meetings were quite serious business and we could make serious decisions...." Ward, like her older sister, vividly remembers the children's "strikes" for more and better food, as does Ati Gropius Johansen. All three believe that the Council, like the strikes undertaken by the students, provided valuable lessons in the practice of democracy. Jonathan Pritchard, on the other hand, has little recollection of the school council: "... I don't have a recollection or an impression that I thought that they were terribly important to the way the school went."

The functioning of self-government at Beacon Hill would have been difficult because the children were very young. When the school was

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<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the School Council, 7 June 1937, DRA file 602 ff. "Pat" was Pat Grace, Dora's lover, secretary, and later her husband.

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established, the Russells intended to take children from early childhood to university entrance, but in fact throughout its history most of the children were under twelve, and the school never embarked on secondary education. Self-government has more chance of success with adolescents than it does with younger children, but even then it can be problematic. British progressive educator David Gribble (who taught for years at Dartington Hall) has written:

Self-government for children has always been an ideal of progressive educationists, but in practice it raises problems. The main problem is apathy on the part of the children themselves. Self-government seems like a panacea to children used to being ruled by unsympathetic adults, but to children used to a just and considerate society it seems like a chore.<sup>69</sup>

Thus while Beacon Hill did allow its children considerable freedom, that freedom was achieved not so much through the School Council but rather because of Dora Russell's genuine commitment to allowing her pupils as much free choice as possible. As an educator, she appears to have had an abiding trust in a child's ability to make sound choices, and to learn from experience—that is the real lesson of the children's "strike"—and she also had the knack of being able to deal successfully with "difficult" children.

Achieving freedom and self-government with a handful of children and a dedicated staff was one thing. Could these methods be extended to the State schools? Or must fee-paying experiments like Beacon Hill simply be dismissed as alternative education for members of the intellectual elite who did not wish to send their children to traditional "public" schools?<sup>70</sup> Dora Russell believed in Beacon Hill as a community that would equip children for democracy. However, she was under no illusion that her school in itself could transform what she knew was a funda-

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<sup>69</sup> Gribble, *Considering Children* (Frimley, Surrey: Dorling Kindersley, 1985), p. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Stewart offers information and comparison about fees at public schools and experimental schools. They were in the same range. Bedales in 1933 was £180 whereas Rugby was £201 (Stewart, p. 316). Neill told Bertrand Russell that he charged from £80–£150 for the older children in 1932 (18 Jan. 1932, RAI 710.053814). Fees at Beacon Hill were in this range: the problem was that the fees were not always paid. On social class, Stewart's figures reveal that the class status of families using public schools and those using progressive schools was similar: they were upper- and upper-middle class (Stewart, p. 323).

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mentally inegalitarian society. Dora Russell was fully cognizant of the contradictions involved in a “free” school that charged fees. Moreover she knew that even for children at a school like Beacon Hill, the possibilities for freedom were limited precisely because they were privileged children. The child of an architect, for example, would encounter barriers if he wanted to be a carpenter.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these limitations, Russell did believe that independent experimental schools like Beacon Hill were socially useful. In 1980 she wrote:

Such an experiment—a small self-contained and secluded group of fee-paying pupils can, I was often told, have nothing to offer large institutions, such as day schools run by the State.... In actual fact, the effects of our movement for freedom and democracy in school ... have not been negligible....

It remains my belief that these principles do have meaning both for the present and ... for the future. *(Tamarisk 2: 35)*

#### LEARNING BY DOING

In 1915, in *Schools of Tomorrow*, John and Evelyn Dewey wrote:

“Learning by doing” ... It is a commonplace that until a child goes to school he learns nothing that has not some direct bearing on his life. How he acquires this knowledge is the question that will furnish the clew for natural school method. And the answer is not by reading books or listening to explanations of the nature of fire or food, but by burning himself and feeding himself; that is, by doing things. Therefore, says the modern teacher, he ought to do things in school.<sup>72</sup>

Learning through direct experience, the key feature of the modernist education movement, was certainly part of educational theory and practice at Beacon Hill School. In her *Modern Schools Handbook* piece, Dora Russell wrote: “Five to 8 years is a very restless age, and the less the children are obliged to sit quietly at a task the better they seem to develop” (p. 32). Certainly the children learned by doing in nature study, as this

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<sup>71</sup> See her comments in *School*, Oct. 1933, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Dewey and Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1915), pp. 52 and 53.

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vivid and charming account of a nature lesson conducted in 1939 illustrates:

First of all we went down to the stream and clever Roddy spied the frogs' eggs, and Dora was tight-roping on a little log, trying to get them, and Harry said she might fall and Roddy picked them up and put them in a jar and they kept slippety slopping out, we showed them to Paul and said it was tapioca and he said "Erch, it's nasty." Then we got a big bowl ... from the lab and we filled it with water. We put earth in first and then gravel and stones and then water, and put the frog spawn in. And then we planted watercress. And we had some water cress for tea. (DRA file 602)

Like other progressive educators, Dora Russell was influenced by the project method, a holistic approach to teaching and curriculum planning that integrates the child's acquisition of specific knowledge with the development of skills in reading, composition, art and design. As she says in the *Modern Schools Handbook*,

We do not, of course, teach history and geography as distinct "subjects"; rather do we study the whole life of a people in relation to climate and soil, and the conditions of life obtaining for the people of that place or time. Much of the work is purely individual, each child choosing some place or period and making his own note-book on the subject, though some lectures are given by the teachers on periods or subjects chosen by the group after discussion at the beginning of term. (P. 33)

It was widely acknowledged in Britain that the origins of the project method were American, and one specific formulation, Helen Parkhurst's Dalton Plan, was particularly popular among British progressive educators.<sup>73</sup> Dora Russell insisted that Beacon Hill was "not run on Dalton lines, but in a much freer way".<sup>74</sup> One cannot clearly state what she meant by this, partly because there is no evidence that she was fully

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<sup>73</sup> For the Dalton plan, see Semel and Sadovnik, "Schools of Tomorrow", *Schools of Today*, especially Semel on the Dalton School. Semel and Sodvnik refer to these British sources from the 1920s: C. W. Kimmins and Belle Rennie, *The Triumph of the Dalton Plan* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1923); A. J. Lynch, *Individual Work and the Dalton Plan* (London: George Philip and Son, 1924) and *The Rise and Progress of the Dalton Plan* (London: George Philip and Son, 1926).

<sup>74</sup> See her letter to F. C. Needles, 7 Dec. 1933, DRA file 552.

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conversant with Parkhurst's work. Perhaps she meant that at Beacon Hill, in theory at least, it was the children who selected topics for themselves, rather than the staff. However, in fact it is evident that the projects undertaken by the children at the school were inevitably influenced by the knowledge and the political point of view of the school's staff, which meant primarily Dora Russell herself, or Bertrand and Dora during the early years of the school. For example, it was they, not the children, who decided that the children would be taught from H. G. Wells' *History of the World*.<sup>75</sup> It was the staff, not the children, who suggested projects on comparative religion, the origin of matter or the industrial revolution.

"Geography: By Lola, Age 11" will serve as an illustration of the best work produced at Beacon Hill. "Lola" was Lola Pilpel, whom Ati Gropius Johansen remembers vividly: "Lola the beautiful, with her pale, Pre-Raphaelite face, small pouting lips and cascades of auburn hair. Lola was silent as she gently walked about inside the frame of her own picturesqueness. An air of unperturbable peace followed her."<sup>76</sup>

Carefully bound into a notebook with a charming and colourful poster-paint picture of a woman in a sari on the cover, Lola's project was about India. Her focus was on the vastness and diversity of India, and on its disparities of wealth and poverty:

A land of fascinating [*sic*] and infinite [*sic*] variety is India, which thrusts 1,900 miles downwards from the Himalaya Mountains in to the Indian Ocean, and is inhabited by almost one-fifth of the human race.... They profess countless shades of religions or beliefs, they are split into more than 2,000 social castes.

She includes a newspaper clipping concerning "The Nizam of Hyderabad, the world's richest man ..." and comments: "Yet unbelievable poverty reigns for the most part. Thousands die of starvation every year."<sup>77</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Lola's project on India did not deal

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<sup>75</sup> *Tamarisk* 2: 15. Note that the children were still using this book in 1940.

<sup>76</sup> Johansen typescript, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> From DRA, Exercise Books, files 596-601 (at 596). Lola Pilpel is mentioned in *Tamarisk* 2: 65 and was a pupil at the school in the mid- to late 1930s.

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directly with the moral and political questions related to British imperialism. Indeed, eleven-year-old Lola's language suggests that she was taught to accept uncritically the fact that the sub-continent was still part of the British Empire and that trade benefitted Britain: "The Jute used in the factories at Dundee in Scotland comes from Calcutta.... The tea from the hill country of Assam is also sent to us from Calcutta.... Besides these things, India sends Britain large quantities of hides and skins, for she rears more cattle than any country in the world...."

Lola's "Geography" is only one project that survived out of many that were produced, and no generalizations should be drawn from it. We have no way of knowing which teacher supervised the project, for example. Still, it is interesting that in a political atmosphere that was emphatically left-wing—Dora Russell's sympathies were with the left in Britain, internationally she opposed fascism and supported the Soviet Union, and the school celebrated May Day as the workers' holiday (Ari Johansen remembers learning to sing the *Internationale*)—an intelligent pupil would accept India's subordinate connection with Britain as a matter of course.

Lola's "Geography" project illustrates several aspects of the teaching methods<sup>78</sup> used at Beacon Hill. First, the child has been encouraged to create a finished project, the booklet. Second, its form illustrates the way in which the integration of skills in reading, writing and painting was encouraged. (Note that at her age, Lola's fluency in composition is considered more important than perfect spelling.) Finally, its subject-matter reflects the fact that adults controlled the content of the curriculum. As Harriet Ward says: "From the start Bertie and Dora wanted the teaching at Beacon Hill to have a firm academic grounding, and Dora stuck to that practice" (*A Man of Small Importance*, p. 188).

Controlling the content of the curriculum and, moreover, including in it many traditional aspects of study, from Shakespeare to French and German, was indeed a feature of Beacon Hill School. Bertrand Russell had insisted upon academic rigor when he and Dora embarked on their venture. Both Bertrand and Dora assert that they parted company with

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<sup>78</sup> Dora Russell in *Modern Schools Handbook*: "We encourage the young ones to dictate stories, the older ones to write and dictate stories, poems, and plays. Practice in spelling, grammar, and writing comes about naturally in their original work, as in their making of notebooks" (p. 34).

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Neill on just these grounds. In fact, much of the traditional curriculum was available at Summerhill itself (as it was, of course, at Dartington Hall, or at Bedales or St. Christopher's, or other well-known "new" schools of the period). The differences on this score between Neill and other progressive educators may lie more in rhetoric than in actual practice. They are nonetheless important. Dora Russell, unlike Neill, did unequivocally believe that conventional lessons have a place in a free school.

She did not, however, believe that pupils should be required to attend classes: "There is a time-table, as it is recognized that the staff cannot otherwise arrange to get through their work, but children are free not to attend lessons if they do not wish to do so.... Very few children, if fact, stay out of class ..." (*Modern Schools Handbook*, pp. 36–7). In making lessons optional, Beacon Hill, like Summerhill, stood apart from the other new schools of the period. However, because Beacon Hill was never a secondary school, optional lessons did not pose any serious dilemmas. No university entrance examinations loomed for pupils or staff at Beacon Hill School, as they did, for example, at Summerhill.

#### THE PLAYS

On 20 June 1932, Wyatt Rawson of the New Education Fellowship wrote a thank-you letter to Dora Russell after a visit he had recently made to the school. In his letter he made special note of the plays he had seen: "May I say how fine I thought those plays were that I saw enacted? Quite the best I've ever seen of the creative kind. If you've done nothing else, you have set a standard there which it will be very hard to approach" (DRA file 548).

For Dora Russell, Beacon Hill's theatre programme, another aspect of learning by doing, was one of the school's finest achievements. "Without [the plays] my story of the school would not be complete. In no better way could I convey what the school was really about: the freedom and uninhibited expression of thought, the use of language, the awareness and close relation ... to the world in which they lived" (*Tamarisk* 2: 112).

During this period drama as a part of school activities was not unusual. Performing traditional plays (Shakespeare, for example) was part of the school curriculum at traditional fee-paying schools, and progressive schools in the early twentieth century were enthusiastic about the cre-

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ative possibilities of drama. Dora Russell believed that her dramatic productions introduced something new to this fairly commonplace school activity. The Beacon Hill innovation lay in the fact that the children wrote the plays themselves and, moreover, were unfettered in their choice of themes. Russell was in fact proud that a columnist writing in the *Manchester Guardian* was a censorious critic of the leeway the Beacon Hill pupils were allowed:

We believe that the average reader will be shocked that children whose ages range from five to twelve years should already be familiar with problems of breeding, of divorce, of social and economic distress and disorder, of the war supposed to be waged between "science" and religion; we believe that he will think that other things should occupy children's minds and not these.<sup>79</sup>

Russell's aim, of course, was to allow the children exactly the freedom to which the *Guardian* writer objected.

The creating and staging of plays at Beacon Hill appears to have been a high point in the school year, and it did, as Dora Russell believed, embody many of the positive values she fostered at her school. The plays were a success partly because of the commitments and talents of the teachers involved, and partly because the creativity of the children was supported in so many ways. In addition to the plays, the children were encouraged to write poetry, short stories and essays. Their topics, which ranged from the class struggle to women's rights, reflect the fact that Beacon Hill allowed its pupils to develop an unfettered ability to question and explore.

#### GENDER AND EDUCATION

One could make the assumption that experimental education should inevitably be sensitive to gender inequalities. This was not, however, the case. The inequalities with which girls and women were confronted are hardly mentioned in the sources relating to progressive education in Britain in the early twentieth century. In Britain, men dominated discourse about the New Education. The most powerful and best-known educators were men. Neill, for example, was a charismatic figure whose

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<sup>79</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Aug. 1934, quoted in *Tamarisk* 2: 113–14.

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charm and dominance depended in large part on his masculinity. The benefits of co-education are, to be sure, discussed, but frequently in a manner that ignores sexual stereotyping or in some cases reinforces it. It is almost never considered from a feminist perspective. The remarkable thing is that Dora Russell herself, who defined herself as a feminist and who has been seen as a pioneer British feminist since the 1970s, did not, as a feminist, think about the significance of the Beacon Hill experiment during the years that she was an educator. It will be remembered that she thought of science teaching as masculine, even when she was running the school without Bertrand. I am not suggesting that girls at Beacon Hill were treated as second-class citizens, or that she or the staff encouraged conscious anti-feminism. Still, the school was a part of its time: a period when the feminist movement had receded. Moreover, it was part of an educational movement that has not been sensitive to sexual oppression and discrimination.

When Russell came to write her autobiography in the 1970s, the second wave of feminism was flourishing. In *The Tamarisk Tree*, therefore, Russell for the first time wrote extensively about her own fortunate educational experiences, which included the Girls' Public Day School Trust's Sutton High School. The GPDST schools and other feminist ventures in education represented a different kind of New Education in the Victorian and Edwardian period, one that offered a pointed contrast to the work of the progressives. While Russell's analysis of her old school is not wholly favourable, she does acknowledge that it is to such schools that "many women owe a good education" (*Tamarisk* 1: 22).

#### CONCLUSION

During Beacon Hill School's early days, Bertrand Russell believed not only in the school, but in a new and improved form of childrearing. Bertrand, perhaps more than Dora herself, saw Beacon Hill as the beginning of an experiment with wider possibilities. It might, he hoped, grow into a community of families who together could rear children who were self-confident, self-controlled and intellectually fearless. Bertrand turned against these ideas when his marriage to Dora failed and asserted publicly that Beacon Hill School was an intrinsic failure. Not only did it fail to establish itself as an institution that would accommodate children from early childhood to university, it was based on unsound ideas.

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Dora Russell, in contrast, never lost her faith in progressive education. It is true that she had hoped to create a stable and lasting institution, and when she had to give up the school in 1943 she was weary of struggling for its survival. But she never doubted that, at Beacon Hill, she created an environment that offered children genuine freedom and a chance to develop in both mind and spirit. She also recognized that Beacon Hill had its limits as a social experiment. It, like all other fee-paying “free” schools, could be exemplars, but by themselves they could never transform an inegalitarian society.

For Ivan Illich, one of the great iconoclasts of the twentieth century, all schools were destructive. Instead of educating the young, they removed them from the rest of society, herding them into institutions whose “hidden curriculum ... serves as a ritual of initiation into a growth-oriented consumer society for rich and poor alike.”<sup>80</sup> For Illich, schools cannot be improved: they must be abolished.

Paradoxically, Dora Russell’s Beacon Hill, just because it was a “failure” as an institution—it was small, unstable, and precarious for much of its history—may have succeeded as a “deschooled” school. Although the founders’ original ambitions were grander, Beacon Hill even in its early days, and especially when Dora ran it on her own, was an *ad hoc* affair. It was about a particular group of children and a particular group of teachers during a limited period. As such, it was a genuine community of adults and children, dedicated to the children’s development, the kind of place where a child could keep a pet rabbit, or have memories, as David Correa-Hunt did, of learning biology by messing happily about in a stream.

Illich’s *Deschooling Society* was published in 1970. More than three decades later, debates about childrearing and education continue. My research, like other work on early twentieth-century progressive education, demonstrates that such debates were current thirty years before the appearance of *Deschooling Society*. The importance of revisiting the history of Beacon Hill School rests on the fact that these questions remain pressing. Simply put, in an affluent society where we have the luxury to

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<sup>80</sup> Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 28.

consider such matters,<sup>81</sup> do we train children to “fit into society”, or do we encourage them to become autonomous individuals?<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the place of children in affluent, urbanized societies, see Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: the Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

<sup>82</sup> The archival collections used for this paper include the Bertrand Russell Archives (RA), McMaster University Library; the Dora Winifred Russell Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, referred to as DRA; papers of the World Education Fellowship (formerly the New Education Fellowship), University of London, Institute of Education Library, referred to as WEF papers. Many thanks to Carl Spadoni, Sheila Turcon and other archivists at McMaster, to archivist Mieke Ijzermans and other staff at the IISH, and to Sarah Aitchison at the Institute of Education, University of London. Thanks to William Bruneau for sharing unpublished material with me. I also thank an anonymous reader of this paper for his or her thorough and helpful comments, and the Editor. Finally I thank SSHRC for funding this research.

In March 2004, through the good offices of Harriet Ward, I conducted interviews with Harriet and Colin Ward, Jonathan Pritchard, and Katharine Russell Tait. I thank all of them for their willingness to talk with me, and for their gracious hospitality. I also thank David Harley for his kind permission to read and cite from the correspondence in the Russell Archives that resulted from his research in the 1970s. The following theses on Beacon Hill School should be noted: David Harley, “Beacon Hill and the Constructive Uses of Freedom” (unpublished PH.D. thesis, Department of Educational Theory, U. of Toronto, 1980); and Michaela Henriques, “The Brave New World of Beacon Hill: Post-war Hopes for a Better World Translated into an Experimental Project by Bertrand and Dora Russell” (Tese de Mestrado em Cultura Inglesa, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa, 1999).

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