

The Playground in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Theory and Practice

Bruce Curtis

Résumé/Abstract

Cet article examine les principes pédagogiques présentés dans les ouvrages que lisaient les dirigeants de l'enseignement ontarien au XIX^e siècle, principes auxquels ceux-ci souscrivaient. Il fait ressortir les rôles dévolus au terrain de jeu dans le processus de scolarisation et précise l'usage auquel étaient destinés certains équipements de terrain de jeu. L'étude est nécessairement partielle, parce qu'elle n'examine aucun terrain de jeu en particulier, ni les activités des élèves, ni leurs réactions face aux plans des réformateurs de l'éducation. Toutefois, la compréhension du rôle que ces réformateurs réservaient au terrain de jeu peut nous aider à comprendre les forces qui ont modelé les terrains de jeu dans la réalité et les réactions des participants. L'article situe le terrain de jeu, les activités qui s'y déroulaient et les décorations qu'on y trouvait dans le cadre des objectifs pédagogiques contradictoires de plaisir et de subordination poursuivis par les réformateurs de l'enseignement ontarien.

This article examines the pedagogical theory read and subscribed to by Ontario school authorities in the nineteenth century. It points to the functions the playground was intended to perform in the process of schooling and indicates the role some of the playground's accoutrements were intended to serve. Because it does not discuss actual playgrounds, or the activities of and reactions of students to the plans of educational reformers, it is necessarily partial. However, an understanding of what school reformers intended the playground to be may tell us something of the forces shaping real playgrounds and the reactions of participants to them. The article situates the playground and playground activities and decorations in the contradictory pedagogical objectives of pleasure and subordination pursued by school reformers in Ontario.

Leading mid-nineteenth-century public educational reformers paid careful attention to the educational productivity of all aspects of school organization.¹ "The method of education embraces the arrangement of desks, suitable school apparatus, and all those external appliances [including toilets]...without some proper arrangement of which little good can be accomplished," wrote A.R. Craig.² Method embraced the physical and material organization of the schoolroom and grounds and went much further as well. "It also regards the attitude and gait of the master, the command of his features, and the very tones of his voice."³ Educational theorists and experimenters attended to the organization and behaviour of all aspects of the human bodies of both teachers and students: the location of the eyes during pedagogical activity, the awareness of the ears, the manner of holding educational implements such as the pen and book, the "gait" and "carriage," and others.

School organization and management were political sciences in that they were centrally concerned with the organization, development and interrelation of human forces. Public education aimed to form the bodies, the ideas, and the selves of the masses, through a set of educational practices and with the aid of a number of material devices. The school came to be seen as a "vast moral engine," and school reformers anticipated that with the spread of public schooling, "a moral revolution would be produced among the masses."⁴

This article attends to one of the devices promoted by educational reformers and experimenters in the first half of the nineteenth century: the playground. By 1850 at least, most reformers and pedagogues had come to regard the "open," "uncovered" schoolroom or playground as an indispensable element of successful instruction. This article locates the playground in the educational theories championing it. It points to the functions playgrounds were intended to serve in educational theory generally and to the roles of playground accoutrements as well. I discuss playgrounds in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario to illustrate these features, but also to point to the gap between educational theory and practice. Still, however imperfectly real playgrounds in mid-nineteenth century Ontario actually approximated the ideals of educational reformers, they were nonetheless shaped by those ideals. A study of the place of the playground in theory may then be instructive for understanding the forces shaping real playgrounds, and the reactions of teachers and students to them.

This article draws upon a body of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pedagogical theory and upon the correspondence of the Education Office for Ontario. The theory expressed here comes largely from British and American sources, but it is directly relevant to the experience of nineteenth-century Ontario. Many of the works cited are drawn from what was the library of the Education Department. Some of them were the personal copies of the

Deputy Superintendent of Education, and in at least one case they bear both dedications from their authors and editorial marks revealing them as the source for extracts published in the official *Journal of Education*. Many of the works cited were written by the managers of model schools visited by Egerton Ryerson, then the Assistant Superintendent of Common Schools for Canada West (Ontario), during his European tour of 1844-45. Their influence on the planning and practice of educational institutions in Ontario was direct.

Especially to those nineteenth-century reformers acquainted with the industrial city, existing popular culture appeared as a matter for disdain, if not disgust. The school and the experience of schooling was intended to “elevate” the working-class child and to combat the education provided by household and community. The school was to be a morally “improving” terrain. To this end, it was to be architecturally distinct and located in “an airy and pleasant situation, detached from other buildings, also a few feet back from the street or road.” The school was to be “one bright spot in the surrounding moral wilderness” of working-class life.⁵ The school and its playground were a means of “separating the children from the vicious companions and evil example of the street or lane,”⁶ and the pleasure working-class students experienced there was a way of “prolonging the moral influence of the master over the habits and thoughts of his scholars.”⁷ The working-class community as a whole was to be excluded from “interfering” in pedagogical practices. To this end school yards were to be designed to ensure that teachers could exclude those not in regular attendance at the school. “The playground should always be at the rear of the premises,” wrote Samuel Wilderspin, the English infant educator, “and as private as possible,

that both teachers and pupils be secure from annoyance of any kind.”⁸ Nineteenth-century educators generally argued that the masses could be brought to share in the “benefits of civilization” only by receiving a process of “training” in schools. The “uncivil” portions of the community were to be excluded to ensure the success of “civilization.”

Indeed, where school managers paid insufficient attention to this process of exclusion, playground activities were undermined and ridiculed by community members. This happened repeatedly, for example, in the Model and Normal School yards in Toronto in the 1850s and 1860s. The headmaster of the Normal School complained repeatedly to his superiors of the fact of public access to the Normal School grounds. “On summer afternoons & evenings,” he wrote in 1864, “young persons of both sexes make the boys yard a playground, & in the Sabbath afternoons it is most unseemly – mischief of every sort is committed by boys off the street & any attempt to drive them out only calls forth the grossest abuse – they have recourse to the Normal School waterclosets, which, under the circumstances, cannot be kept in proper condition, & lately on the occasion of evening drill, they assembled on the roof of the shed & conducted themselves in the most unseemly manner....”⁹ The gymnastic exercises of pubescent girls provided such a popular spectacle for the young men of Toronto that in March of 1859 the Headmaster of the Normal School urged the construction of a more effective playground fence. The fence was needed “to protect the pupils from the rude & annoying conduct of strangers, young lads & others, who, when they do not actually come in and play on the swings, climb on the fence or remain staring through the rails.” This was particularly offensive given that “many of the girls of the

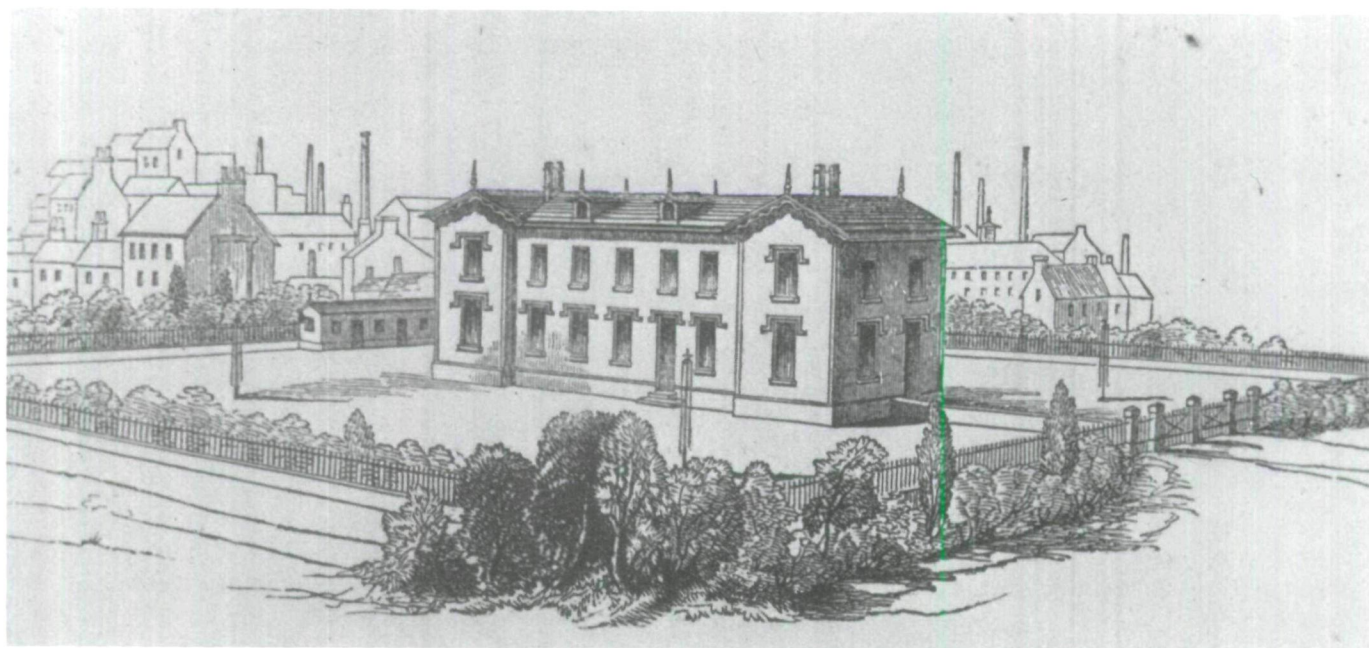


Fig. 1. In the eyes of the Scottish educational reformer, David Stow, the school was to be a “bright spot” in the moral wilderness of the industrial city. This illustration shows the cleanliness and spacious location of the school, as well as its separation from its surroundings. Circular swings are the only playground equipment, and the privies are to the left of the school. David Stow, *The Training System* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1845), p. 201.

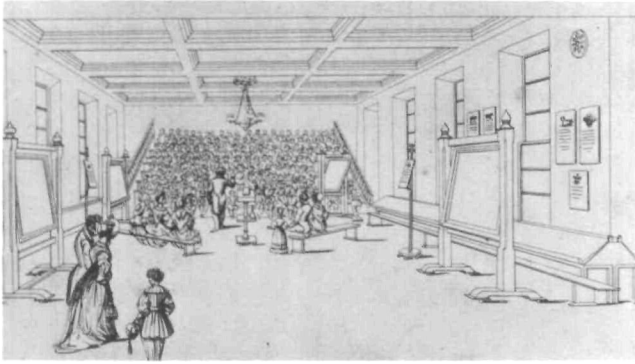


Fig. 2. In the "covered schoolroom," lessons frequently took place in an inclined gallery. Here, before the interested gaze of respectable visitors, the master questions the children. Gallery lessons were said to generate enormous amounts of energy which was to be dispensed in the playground. The schoolroom also includes lesson posts and blackboards around which smaller groups of students might gather. David Stow, *The Training System* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1845), p. 216.

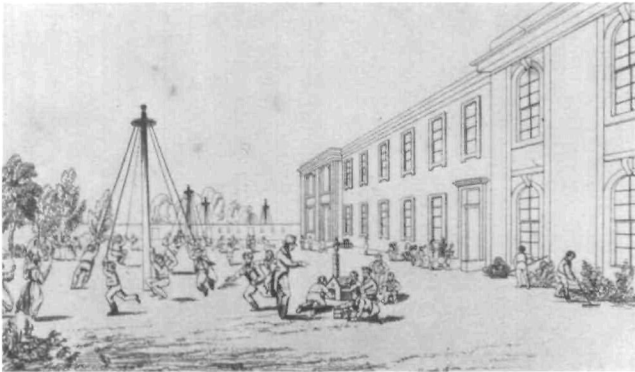


Fig. 3. Sound playground design and activity. The master supervises students playing with blocks, while others take turns on the circular swings. Some boys care for the fruit bushes that "decorate" the playground. Two violations of the "best" kind of playground are evident: girls and boys are present in the same yard, and the girls in the left foreground have somehow managed to find skipping ropes. David Stow, *The Training System* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1845), p. 217.

Model School are grown up, being from 15 to 20 years of age, & these complain bitterly of the annoyance to which they are subjected."¹⁰

The latter state of affairs was particularly obnoxious to school managers given that the moral character of the playground was in part its asexuality. The Paris prefect of police, indeed, made the encouragement of chastity the basis of an argument for the generalization of playgrounds. In the absence of playgrounds in girls' schools, "les jeunes filles sont renvoyées chez elles à l'issue de la classe du matin." While it was necessary for day students to be in the streets on their way to and from school, "le danger de ces déplacements," particularly where middle-class girls might encounter working-class men, was readily apparent to "toute personne peu expérimentée."¹¹

As a morally purified space, the playground was to accustom the working-class child to a vision of conduct and social organization different from that presented by its household. Reformers urged that yards and grounds be kept scrupulously clean. The child accustomed to cleanliness and good order at school would demand these things at home, and hence the school might diffuse sound moral habits throughout the community.¹²

To a certain extent, school reformers regarded the playground as the "safety valve" of the moral engine of schooling. A key part of the school reforms of the first half of the nineteenth century was the creation of systems of collective instruction.¹³ Reformers in several countries attempted to devise ways to instruct large groups of students at once and to tap into the collective energies of students – a process known as using "sympathy of numbers." Such systems were held to be doubly efficient in comparison with the individual methods of instruction formerly prevailing. Larger numbers of students could be instructed by a single teacher, and the effectiveness of instruction was said to be augmented through collective activity. Although ongoing research continues to stress the fact that many working-class and rural parents and students preferred individual instruction, which allowed the student to learn at his or her own speed and which facilitated the participation of students in the domestic economy,¹⁴ many model pedagogies – including those used in schools in Toronto and Hamilton in the 1850s and 1860s – developed collective instructional techniques. A common practice was instruction and interrogation in the gallery.

Here, students classified according to achievement were placed in inclined banks of seats and questioned by the teacher about their lessons. The method of questioning was "elliptical." "The ways of whom are just?" the teacher might ask. In principle and vigorously "of God" the students would reply. This simultaneous questioning was supposed to exercise the minds of all students at once. It encouraged sound character and facilitated schoolroom governance by implanting in pupils the pleasure of knowing the right answer.¹⁵

At the same time, interrogation in the gallery generated enormous amounts of pedagogical energy in the hands of a skilled instructor. School reformers argued that this energy should be periodically released in playground activity, if the health of the student was to be protected. The enormously influential Glaswegian reformer David Stow argued that students should spend at least half their time in the open schoolroom. With a proper balance of activity between the open and closed schoolrooms, the master could secure "contentment with lessons in-doors, without the usual coercion which is necessary where there is no play-ground."¹⁶

However, as the term "open schoolroom" implies, time spent in the playground was not to be "down-time" for the engine of schooling. On the contrary, playground activity was highly organized, and while (as we shall see) some free

time was necessarily allowed to children, most playground activity was structured as drill. Indeed, gymnastics, especially for boys, in most mid-nineteenth-century schools and later consisted of drill-like activity with a heavily militaristic character. School reformers tended in part to regard the schools as capable of producing an intelligent and loyal soldiery, and drill contributed to this end. In the militaristic fervour of the American Civil War, Egerton Ryerson, then Chief Superintendent of Education for Canada West (Ontario), actively encouraged common school drills. The Normal School students formed their own drill association, and although some people complained that the practice of drill in the schools was anti-Christian, it became quite widespread.¹⁷ School reformers repeatedly stressed the importance of the schools as agents of physical health, but health was sought in practice through drill.

"By giving the child an erect and manly gait, a firm and regular step, precision and rapidity in his movements, promptitude in obedience to commands, and particularly neatness in his apparel and person," drill was held to lay the foundation of moral habits that would encourage domestic comfort, frugality and political quiescence in the working class.¹⁸ For school reformers, the capacity for such moral actions as respect for private property, honesty, and loyalty depended as much upon the disciplined body as upon the enlightened mind. The dirty body, for instance, was incapable of sustaining a rational will. A weak body could not sustain a vigorous will.¹⁹ An essential part of the public educational project was disciplining the body, and drill was the preferred method in the playground as, often, in the schoolroom itself.

Elizabeth Mayo, the English Pestalozzian educator, argued that students took particular pleasure in being able to respond to physical commands. Since "prompt and full obedience can be more easily obtained to a physical than to a moral act," she argued that drill was "the best plan that can be adopted for producing order and promoting discipline."²⁰ In the internal economy of the school, drill was useful both because it allowed the teacher to "detect at a glance the cause of any disorder" and because it facilitated the organization of student movement around the school.²¹ Samuel Wilderspin argued that drill-like activity must begin at once. "As soon as the child enters the school he is under command. He is required to go through various motions, and to attend to diversified instruction, at the sound of a foot, or the raising of a hand."²²

We need not be surprised by this overwhelming concern with order and obedience. The successful promoters of educational institutions for the masses were not, for the most part, democrats. For most of them the subordination of the masses was both good and necessary. Many of them found sanction for subordinating the masses in scripture and in economic necessity. Still, state school reformers did not seek a simply repressive educational discipline. Educational reform was intended to win the hearts and minds of the masses for the rising industrial order. It was intended to produce obedience, but an

obedience both freely given and experienced as pleasurable by the masses. Successful educational practice touched the heart: it formed the body and self as well as the beliefs. It attempted to make certain political relationships part of the individual self. "Teach them that the different grades of rank are established by the Lord, and that each has its appointed work," urged Elizabeth Mayo. "By leading them to look to God as the disposer of their lot, and to themselves as unworthy recipients of His mercies, you will promote a spirit of cheerfulness and contentment, and a desire of rendering to all their due."²³ Again and again school reformers pointed out that simple obedience alone was something which "the police and penitentiaries may fully accomplish."²⁴ Playground activities were to contribute to the experience of pleasure in following school activities. This is well illustrated by the matter of singing, another playground activity.

Educators argued that singing was intrinsically pleasurable. The capacity to sing was widely distributed in the population. Teaching people to sing at school would increase their powers of self-expression and provide them with a durable source of pleasure which might help them overcome the trials of hardship and misery in this

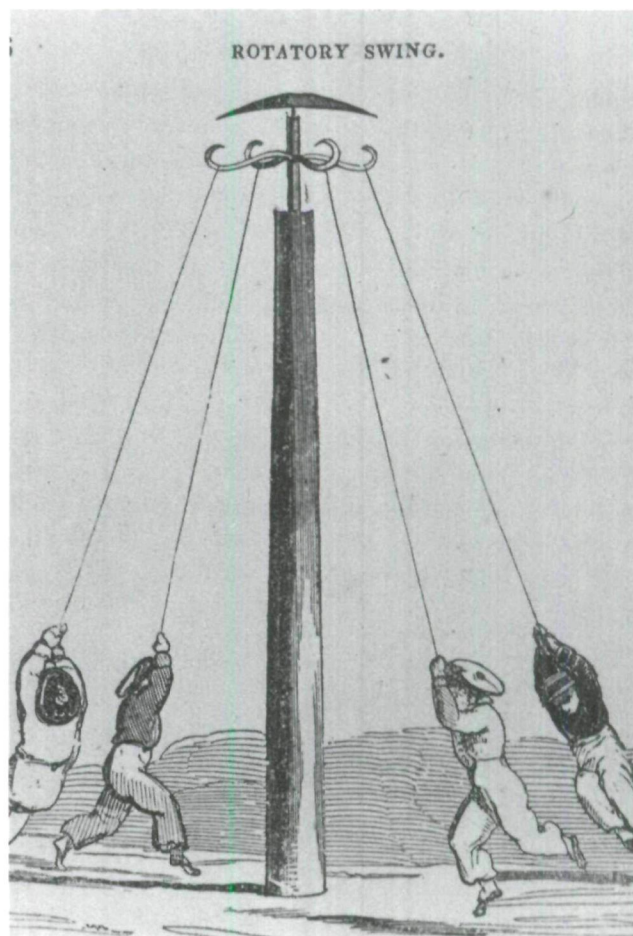


Fig. 4. The circular swing was the main item of playground activity. Hanging from it straightened the frame and strengthened the arms without undue physical stress or danger. Children could easily learn the virtue of taking turns through its use. Samuel Wilderspin, *The Infant System* (London: J.S. Hodson, 1852), p. 86.

world. At the same time, however, singing was a "great moral engine" whose powers should be used to elevate the masses. If correct moral songs could be taught in the pleasant circumstances of the playground and school-room, then the pleasure of song and the force of good sentiments might be joined. "The main object in its use should be to excite religious and moral sentiments," wrote Elizabeth Hamilton. At the same time, singing could be made "very useful in promoting patriotic and loyal sentiments" in place of the "murmuring spirit" too often found in the working-class districts.²⁵ If students could be taught to enjoy singing morally improving songs, they would do so on their own, and leisure time might be transformed into a period of instruction.²⁶

While gymnastic exercises, especially for girls, involved movement, stretching and calisthenics, and some activity with Indian clubs, most playground equipment was severely limited. Samuel Wilderspin, the infant educator, indicated that in his experience a direct limitation of playground activity had proven necessary to preserve the health and morality of students. In his first attempts at playground organization, he had thought that given "a great variety of lessons and objects [were] necessary to arrest the attention of children, diversified as they are in disposition and taste... an equal variety of toys was required for the playground."²⁷ He thus supplied his first playgrounds with a large collection of "balls, battledores, shuttlecocks, tops, whips, skipping-ropes, hoops, sticks and wheelbarrows."²⁸ However, he quickly discovered that students injured each other with some of these toys, that they fought over others, and that parts of many were continually being lost. In what became a standard pattern, Wilderspin argued that playgrounds only needed two kinds of equipment: wooden blocks for building and a circular swing. The latter instrument was to be made from a pole, eighteen to twenty feet (5.5-6.1 m) high, from which metal handles were to be suspended. The handles would rotate around the top of the pole. Students were to grasp the handles and swing with their feet off the ground. The muscular activity of hanging was said to develop strong bodies, and the easily controlled taking of turns was to contribute to morality.

In his very influential *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), John Locke included in his discussion of the physical education of the child a detailed discussion of methods of causing the child to "go to stool" regularly.²⁹ Nineteenth-century educators had acquired a certain reticence in regard to this matter, but urination and defecation were organized playground activities. For instance, all the plans of playgrounds published in David Stow's widely read *The Training System* (1845) contained places for waterclosets for boys and girls, and in some cases, urinals for boys. Stow presented the cross-section of an efficient watercloset, consisting of a wooden trough lined with lead in which lay three or four inches (7.6 or 10.2 cm) of water. The trough was to be flushed out at regular intervals.³⁰ Samuel Wilderspin argued that the child beginning school be sent with a monitor who "shews him a certain place." A lack of attention to these matters might

No. 9.—CIRCULAR SWING TOP.

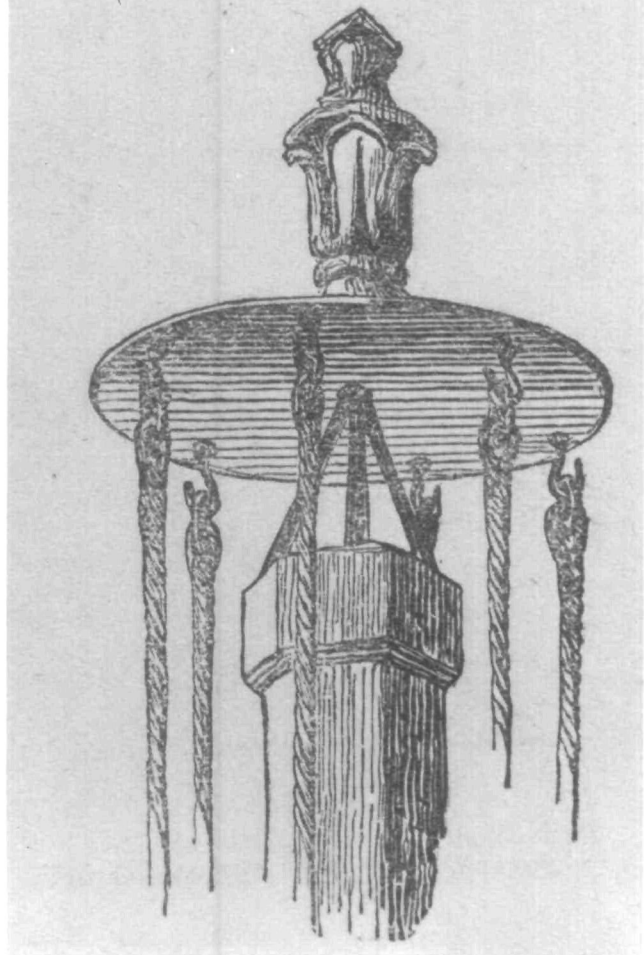


Fig. 5. Several possible designs of circular swing were published. This one (top only), favoured by David Stow, accommodated six students at once. David Stow, *The Training System* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1845), p. 207.

"demoralize every child that enters the school." In many schools, Wilderspin maintained, the toilet seats "were too high, the circular holes too large, causing fear on the part of the infants and also bad habits." Toilet seats should be the same height as school seats generally, "six inches, and nine inches high, and the diameter of the holes seven inches and nine inches." Segregation of the sexes was essential, and "teachers should constantly visit these places, inculcate habits of delicacy and cleanliness." Wilderspin warned school managers against hiring "superfine dressy teachers" who would be "too proud and too high, to attend to these things."³¹ The "bad habits" developed in improperly designed toilets were not specified. However, at a later period in Ontario, the Deputy-Minister of Education counselled school managers to ensure that sloping ceilings in boys' privies existed to prevent the boys from standing on the seat.³²

In Canada West, at least in the 1840s, privies and other buildings designed to accommodate the processes of human elimination seem to have been largely absent,

especially in the countryside. Most country schools enforced rules with respect to separate recesses for boys and girls to "attend to the calls of nature," and "squat" culture seems general. The increasing spread of "free" (i.e., tax-supported) schools after 1850, however, created problems in this regard. School populations doubled, on the average, between 1850 and 1870, and pressure for the centralization and regulation of eliminatory functions mounted. "The most of our school houses," wrote William Jones to the Education Office in 1852, "are miserable constructed things without proper conveniences." This, he noted, "causes great inconvenience in large schools & all free schools are large."³³ The trustees of school section 4, McKillop Township, were saddled with a school site only one-sixteenth of an acre (253 m²) "without any necessary buildings attached to the school house." Such buildings were "absolutely necessary on account of the increase of the pupils."³⁴ Yet farmhouses of this period often did not contain privies, and school trustees encountered resistance in their attempts to construct school privies out of tax revenue. For instance, the trustees of section 6 in Kingston Township called a meeting in 1855 to vote money for the erection of a school privy and woodshed. Although there "never was a privy, or shed for the wood at the school house at all," the ratepayers opposed any such expenditure.³⁵ In some town schools, the provisions for elimination were said to contradict the lessons in morality transmitted in the schoolroom. *The Woodstock Times* noted in its review of the annual report of the town school trustees for 1860 that in the schools as a whole "the conveniences and a part of the yard are in a most disgraceful condition – disgustingly filthy; so much so that while the rules of cleanliness and morality are enforced within the schools, their immediate precincts are entirely subversive of all such rules and of common decency."³⁶

Student teachers at the Normal School in Toronto during the 1860s were instructed as to the correct organization of school sites and grounds, including privies in the playground. Teachers were urged to pay careful attention to the segregation of the sexes both in the playground and in the "lobbies." Indeed, they were urged not to take the model schools as models in this regard, for here boys and girls could encounter each other entering or leaving the lobbies.³⁷

In fact, the Normal and Model School privies and arrangements for sewage disposals were the topics of concern and controversy to authorities inside and outside the schools during the 1850s and 1860s. S.P. May, the Educational Depository Clerk, presented a lengthy report on sewage disposal to the Chief Superintendent in March of 1860. From this report it is clear that sewage was allowed to accumulate in the privies for a week before these were flushed out. The flushing process itself was only moderately successful, and in the girls' privies, "after removing the filth the water oozes up through the wood yard." May commented, however, that "there is no offensive smell except when in the act of cleaning." In the boys' privies, "the floor & seats ...are very dirty, the men have

not been able to scrub them regularly in consequence of the severe weather, the water freezing so quick that it would be dangerous to the children." May concluded that "all the privies are as clean as they can possibly be kept where there are so many to visit them."³⁸

In a communication to the provincial Secretary General in 1863 the Chief Superintendent revealed that only one half of the sewage from the Normal School grounds went into the city sewage system, and even that connection had only existed since 1856. "On the Church street side of the Normal School property," he wrote, "no use whatever is made of the public sewer, the draining being carried into a natural stream running through the grounds on that side of the buildings, and which flows into the bay."³⁹ This state of affairs generated complaints, and in 1869 the Toronto Officer of Health sought to rectify the situation. "The water closets at the east side of the Normal School" attracted that officer's attention early in 1869, and the Normal School officials were invited to "direct that proper steps be taken to cleanse them." In addition, the medical Health Officer pointed out that "complaints are often received here of the sewage in the vicinity of the corner of Church and Gould Streets."⁴⁰ This was probably where the "natural stream" exited from the Normal School grounds. In this matter, as in many other aspects of the project of public education, the gap between theory and practice was large.

In addition to its functions of balancing physical and moral development, of strengthening the body, of making obedience visible and pleasant to students, of protecting students from their families and friends, and of providing for defecation and urination, the playground was also extremely important in nineteenth-century educational theory as a terrain of scrutiny and examination. As we have seen, educators sought genuine and freely given obedience from students. They sought to anchor obedience deep in the characters of students, in conscience, in feelings of pleasure, in the conviction "thou God seest me." If the process of education succeeded, obedience was to stem from self-government. However, educators were also particularly concerned that the process of education might unintentionally create distorted individuals. Education sought to increase the forces of the individual. Intelligence, rational capacity, the ability to be self-expressive through such arts as writing and singing, the powers of perception and discernment, the force of the body, all were potentially increased by education. If these were not inseparably attached to sound morality, educators were very much afraid that they might be used for immoral or politically dangerous activities. If children were not taught the "precepts and practice of morality," wrote one of the Masters of the Dublin Normal School, "it is better for themselves, and safer for society, to leave them entirely uneducated; for bad as ignorance is, education without *morality* is a thousand times worse."⁴¹ The sly dissembler, the clever rogue, the able seducer and the incipient revolutionary all lurked in mis-education. Such individuals might learn to conceal their ugly passions and corrupt hearts in the face of fear of punishment, but what



Fig. 6. Drill at the public school in Plevna, Ontario, c. 1920. (Courtesy: Beryl Curtis McCuen.)

would "prevent their influence, where neither disgrace nor punishment is apprehended?"⁴² "We are often deceived in this respect," warned Mme Necker. "The pleasure which the child seems to experience in obeying encourages us; he appears free because he is happy, and we take his zeal for energy."⁴³ But happiness could conceal a disaffected heart.

Educators had long dealt with this problem of certifying the effectiveness of education through scrutiny. One sees Charles Hoole already suggesting in 1650 that "the master may sometimes see into the various dispositions of the children, which doth freely discover itself by their company and behaviour at play." On play days, the master should "stand out of their sight, so as he may behold them in the throng of their recreations, and observe their gestures and words, which if in any thing they be not as becometh them, he may afterwards admonish them."⁴⁴ John Locke counselled parents who questioned the success of their instruction to "begin therefore betimes nicely to observe your son's *Temper*, and that when he is under least restraint."⁴⁵ Early nineteenth-century educators took these suggestions and practices further, and systematized them through developing the playground as a terrain for scrutiny and observation. The playground, like interrogation in the gallery, like written answers to test questions, was an examination device.

"In the work of moral culture," wrote Samuel Wilderspin, "it will be necessary not only to observe the child's conduct under the restraint of school discipline; but at those times when it thinks itself at perfect liberty to indulge its feelings unnoticed."⁴⁶ In the playground, the children were seen to have "freedom of action," and were exposed to "all varieties of disposition" as they would be in later life. "The powerful are tempted to tyrannise, the weak to gain their point by slyness, there in fact, is in miniature, the world in which they are to live and in

which they are to carry out their principles."⁴⁷ The teacher was to be present in the playground at all times and should be constantly observing the students in order to verify the impact of instruction. Playground faults were to be observed, but corrected only after the school had reconvened in the schoolroom. Here the fault should be discussed before all the students. David Stow advocated trying playground offences before student juries. This was to ensure that "sympathy of numbers" be brought against the offender.⁴⁸

Observation of playground activity allowed other essential interventions. For instance, "school management" held that if teachers were to govern successfully in the schoolroom, it would be necessary for them to enlist the "natural leaders" among the student body on the side of school order. The teacher, with these individuals, must "find a way into their hearts," as the Master of the Borough Road Model School put it, and "he should know how to turn all this activity into a channel of his own digging."⁴⁹ The playground gave the teacher occasions for "ingratiating himself" with these characters and for "winning their love, by promoting their little pleasures and sympathising in their little troubles."⁵⁰

Even school decorations were implicated in this complex concern with pleasure, subordination and certification. School yards were to be planted with flowers, fruit bushes or gardens. Natural beauty was pleasant in its own right, and acquainting students with natural beauty might encourage a taste for it among them. Flowers also had the advantage of "counteract[ing] any disagreeable smell that may proceed from the children."⁵¹ At the same time, educators stressed teaching students "to pay a scrupulous regard to property. Teach them to take nothing but what is positively their own...when there is a garden attached to the school, the children may be trained scrupulously to abstain from touching or taking the fruit

or flowers."⁵² David Stow argued that the best measure of the success of his "training system" was the fact that "in the poorest districts of Glasgow, and other large towns, from 100 to 160 children have freely enjoyed themselves from day to day and yet currants and strawberries have been permitted to ripen, although both have been within reach of the youngest child."⁵³ School-yard decorations were instructional and examination devices. Teaching people to respect private property to the point of disregarding their own physical needs was an important lesson to convey to a working class to which the property of the wealthy looked increasingly "like the fair plains of Italy to the destroying Vandal."⁵⁴

Although the Education Office in Canada West collected no systematic information about playgrounds before 1871 at least, it is probable that real school playgrounds imperfectly approximated official ideals. For instance, the Superintendent of Schools for the Townships of Chatham, Harwick, Howard and Oxford claimed in early 1855 that in his jurisdiction "not a single school house is enclosed, or furnished with anything for the amusement or comfort of the children." In most schools "the time allotted for recreation must be spent on the highway." For most children, this official claimed, these and other shortcomings in educational organization made "the school a dreary prison."⁵⁵ At best, the empty field and student ingenuity probably constituted most playgrounds.

However, simply to regard this fact as evidence of the inadequacy of the schools is to accept the view of educational reformers as to the nature and validity of the educational project. A "safe" playground might prevent students from being killed on the public highway, but it defined "play" as a special social activity that should be segregated from the life of the community. At the same time, it might exclude the community as a whole from participation in the educational process. While this was an advantage to those concerned to "improve" the masses, it is certainly not the only view of popular culture and popular recreation possible. Especially to those of us concerned with fidelity in the display of the past it would seem our efforts might best centre on disinterring the "lost culture" of schooling. By this I mean the practices we know largely through attempts at their suppression: the "immoral habits," the "filthy songs," the kinds of play not approved of by school managers; relations between the sexes that broke the bonds of sex-role segregation; and more generally those practices that predate the attempt to make "play" a didactic experience conducted under the supervision of the school.

We must not confuse what middle-class reformers sought from the playground with what teachers and students did in particular playgrounds. The place of the playground in educational theory provides us with a set of larger social and political parameters from within which we may approach particular playgrounds and playground activities. However, I think it is also important to stress that nineteenth-century middle-class educators had a

keenly developed sense of the educational productivity of all aspects of school organization. The particular arrangements and practices they introduced – however apparently trivial – were usually part of a conscious plan. These reformers, furthermore, had political and social interests which determined how they defined such things as "the good of the child," "beauty," "taste," "pleasure," and of course, good "play." It is these interests that enable us to understand when a flower garden is simply a caress to the senses, when it is a deodorant, and when it is an examination device.

NOTES

1. Research for this paper was supported in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. An earlier draft of the paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, Guelph, Ontario, 1984.
2. A. R. Craig, *The Philosophy of Training* (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1847), p. 139.
3. Craig, *Philosophy of Training*, p. 139.
4. David Stow, *The Training System* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1845), p. 102.
5. Stow, *Training System*, pp. 189-90.
6. Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education* [1862] (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1972), p. 318.
7. Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education*, p. 318.
8. Samuel Wilderspin, *The Infant System* (London: J.S. Hodson, 1852), p. 105.
9. Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), Record Group 2 (RG2), Incoming General Correspondence (C-6-C), T.J. Robertson, Normal School, 9 May 1864.
10. PAO RG2, C-6-C, T.J. Robertson, Normal School, 23 March 1859.
11. H.-A. Fregier, *Des classes dangereuses...et des moyens de les rendre meilleures* (Paris: J.B. Bailliere, 1840), II:95.
12. Stow, *Training System*, p. 192.
13. In this regard see David Hamilton's very instructive article "Adam Smith and the Moral Economy of the Classroom System," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 12:281-91.
14. For example, Philip McCann, ed., *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1977).
15. Stow, *Training System*, p. 116.
16. Stow, *Training System*, p. 56.
17. Widely scattered material on this subject is in PAO RG2. For instance, C-6-C, M. Boys, Secretary, Board of Public Instruction, Simcoe County, 9 January 1867. Boys says the CBPI has decided to train all county teachers in drill.
18. Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education*, p. 317.
19. Craig, *Philosophy of Training*, pp. 211-15.
20. Charles and Elizabeth Mayo, *Practical Remarks on Infant Education* (London: Colonial and Infant School Society, 1841), p. 82.
21. Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education*, p. 318.
22. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, p. 87.
23. Mayo, *Remarks on Infant Education*, p. 38.
24. Stow, *Training System*, p. 91.
25. Mayo, *Remarks on Infant Education*, pp. 85-86.
26. I have also discussed this matter in "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846," *Studies in Political Economy*, 1983, 10:99-121.
27. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, p. 104.
28. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, p. 104.
29. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* [1693] (Menston: Scholar Press, 1973), pp. 25-30.
30. Stow, *Training System*, Appendix 1.
31. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, pp. 149-149n.

32. John George Hodgins, ed., *School Architecture and Hygiene* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1885).
33. PAO RG2, C-6-C, William Jones, Rainham, 13 February 1852.
34. PAO RG2, C-6-C, Trustees, No. 4 McKillop, 16 July 1861.
35. PAO RG2, C-6-C, Trustees, No. 6 Kingston, 4 April 1855.
36. PAO RG2, C-6-C, "Our Common Schools," *Woodstock Times*, 8 March 1860.
37. PAO MU975, Education Papers, 1860-69, Maria Payne Notebooks.
38. PAO RG2, C-6-C, S.P. May, Education Office, 12 March 1861.
39. PAO RG2, C-6-C, Ryerson to Secretary General, 3 July 1863.
40. PAO RG2, C-6-C, N. Tempest, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto, 9 March 1869.
41. Robert Sullivan, *Letters and Lectures on Popular Education* (Dublin: Curry, 1842), p. 32.
42. Elizabeth Hamilton, *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* (London: n.p., 1810), p. 126.
43. A. A. de Saussure Necker, *Progressive Education* (Boston: Ticknor, 1835), p. 87.
44. Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole* [1650] (Liverpool: University Press, 1913), p. 245.
45. Locke, *Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 115.
46. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, p. 105.
47. Mayo, *Remarks on Infant Education*, p. 53.
48. Stow, *Training System*, pp. 192-93.
49. Henry Dunn, *Principles of Teaching* (London: British and Foreign School Society, 1847), p. 131.
50. Mayo, *Remarks on Infant Education*, p. 53.
51. Wilderspin, *Infant System*, p. 105.
52. Mayo, *Remarks on Infant Education*, p. 43.
53. Stow, *Training System*, pp. 192-93.
54. Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education*, p. 62.
55. PAO RG2, C-6-C, A. Campbell, Local Superintendent, Chatham, Harwick, Howard and Oxford, 7 February 1855.