

a tribute to
A. S. Neill (1883-1973)

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*On A.S. Neill:
A Man
of Conviction*

Time will assess the contribution of A. S. Neill to education in the twentieth century. But regardless of the ultimate appraisal, his was a name which polarized thought and Summerhill was a dramatic model which compelled teachers to re-examine their values and their methods.

His greatest contribution was in his unflinching faith in pupils as people, each an individual of worth and capabilities, who would find a pattern of development if left free to explore. At a time when standards and courses were relatively rigid, his advocacy of confidence in the real potential of young people and his concept of the pupil-teacher team was refreshing. Granted that A. S. Neill built on ideas which can be traced back to Comenius, Rousseau, Montessori, or Freud, he was virtually alone in his earlier years in his courage to make a break from conventional patterns. He staked his career on his conviction that freedom and confidence rather than pressure and restraint are the prescription for true growth. Right or wrong, his stimulation of searching thought among a generation of teachers must be revered as a major contribution to genuine concern for the being which is buried in the human.