

*The following text was originally published in
PROSPECTS: the quarterly review of comparative education
(Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. 23, no. 1/2, 1993, p. 221–33.
©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2001*

*This document may be reproduced free of charge as long as acknowledgement is made of the
source*

ROGER COUSINET

(1881–1973)

Louis Raillon¹

Education can no longer be an action exerted by a master on his pupils, for such action has proved futile; it is, in fact, an activity whereby the child works towards his own development, in a favourable environment and with the help of an educator who is now available for merely consultative capacity. It follows that *active methods are not teaching but learning tools*, that they must be placed in the hands of the pupils alone and that any teacher introducing them into his or her class will be prepared not to use them, and in so doing will refrain from teaching.

This was how Roger Cousinet briefly and somewhat bluntly conveyed the message that he had spent the second half of his long life trying to get across, after devoting many years to experimenting with the practical implications of the New Education. In Cousinet's mind, this substitution of learning by the pupil for teaching by the teacher brooked no compromise. In his view, the introduction of the New Education into schools implied first and foremost a radical change in the educational attitude of the teacher in his relationship with his pupils. Such a radical view was at the same time appealing and difficult to accept, but it was based on years of experimental work and this in itself brought out the scientific character of a teaching method rooted in a true knowledge of the child and of the laws governing the child's wryly: 'We are most difficult to please, for our attitude is not very consistent with our principles. We do development. The resistance that his theories brought was of little surprise to him, however. He remarked everything we can to make sure that children can survive without us, but are upset whenever they succeed in doing so' (Cousinet, 1954).

Who, then, was this man? What sort of experiments did he carry out? What conclusions did he come to? Are his work and ideas still of interest to educators today? These are the questions that this study will set out to briefly answer.

Roger Cousinet's career

Age: twenty-one; place: Paris. After his *baccalauréat*, Cousinet supplemented his solid grounding in the classics with three years of preparatory classes for admission to the *école normale supérieure* (higher teacher-training college). He did not enter the *école normale*, but enrolled at Sorbonne for an arts degree and, at the same time, for the diploma (*brevet élémentaire*) entitling him to teach in primary school for a minimum of five years. Cousinet, a cultivated young man from an artistic, middle-class background, then decided to work for the *concours de l'inspection primaire*, the examination for primary-school inspectors. These years spent among children were highly instructive ones, as he systematically observed their reactions both in the classroom and in the playground. What interested him was not so much the pupil as the children at liberty, at play, and in their complex relationships with other children. It was during this period that he started working with Durkheim on a doctoral thesis on *La vie sociale des enfants* (The Social Life of Children). Meanwhile, he worked together with Alfred Binet, who was devising his intelligence test and founding his theory of experimental teaching. He became editor of an educational journal entitled *L'éducateur moderne*, which gave him the opportunity to meet and publish the works of Decroly, Claparède and Ferrière, as well as to write on the work of Maria Montessori and to publish

abstracts in French of the works of Dewey and Stanley Hall. In 1910, he was appointed as the primary-school inspector, making him responsible for about 100 State schools, and continued to serve in this capacity until 1942, with his work taking him successively to the departments of Aube, Ardennes and Seine-et-Oise (near Paris).

In 1920, with a handful of voluntary primary-school teachers, Cousinet experimented with his method of free-group work. His basic assumption was simply that children are capable of organization, effort and perseverance while doing something they enjoy, like playing games, so why don't they display the same qualities when doing tasks they are able to choose and carry through on their own? Instead of teaching the children, the teacher prepares materials, objects, plants and minerals. It is not long before the children themselves bring along objects of interest to them. The teachers should suggest to the children that they should freely make up small working groups; we shall go into the details a little later.

Among the activities that the children could select, Cousinet, like Tolstoy, proposed the writing of compositions on subjects of their own choosing. For eight years from 1920 to 1928, he published a review of children's writings, *L'oiseau bleu* (The Blue Bird), which was to earn him a bad reputation with the Ministry of Education, under whose authority he worked.

Meanwhile, Cousinet was taking an active part in the congresses of the International League for New Education, which brought him into contact with educators from a wide range of countries. In France, he led the New Education movement, which from 1921 to 1939 issued a very informative bulletin, published several books written by children and organized annual congresses attended by all educational reformists.

In 1944, towards the end of the Second World War, Cousinet, had come to the end of his career as an inspector but was embarking on a second career as a lecturer on education at Sorbonne, where he remained until 1959. Together with F. Chatelain, he founded the *École nouvelle française* (the New French School), opened the experimental school of 'La Source' and devoted himself to his writings, into which he poured the rich fruits of his experience and enjoyed considerable international prestige.

In 1963 he founded, together with the present author, his fourth journal, *Éducation et développement*, and only stopped writing when he became blind shortly before his death in 1973.

Years of experimental work: free-group work method

Before becoming a teaching specialist, Roger Cousinet was interested in child psychology, especially social psychology. As early as 1907, he showed in his first major article that social intercourse plays a decisive part in matching a child's perception with reality (as we generally perceive it) and hence in the development of thought.² In the following year, he wrote one of the first studies to be devoted to children's society which inevitably becomes self-defense against the dictatorship of adults.³ He continued his observations and research along these lines while working on his thesis, which was cut short by the First World War and Durkheim's death in 1917. While experimenting with group work among children, he continued to observe their reactions. By asking teachers to step down from the dais and adopt a different approach, he changed the atmosphere in the classroom and observed the effects of this on the children's behaviour. The method he developed constantly referred back to child psychology.

Psychological bases

'The child is a scientifically active being', wrote Cousinet in 1931. He arrived at this precise conclusion by adding his own observations to those of other researchers, particularly Charlotte Bühler.⁴ While they had no doubt meticulously observing children at play, (...) it is now difficult to go on asserting that play is the child's natural activity. However remote it may be from work, it is closer to our work than to our play, and in it are to be found application, a love of difficulty and

awareness of what is useful, along with joy. The child combines seriousness with gaiety, whereas for us these have become opposites. This is perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of a child's activity, on which all the rest depends. It is not specifically playing that he enjoys, but having fun at work, working for fun. This is what makes children so difficult to understand and so difficult to help through education, and yet so educable and so well prepared, when the time comes, for our form of work.

Meanwhile, there is something of the adult's propensity for play left in children:

Encourage them to engage in the activity which is closest to their natural activity, allow them *to do something* exactly in the way they like, in other words let them live naturally, and you will see that there are times when they will stop this activity to go off and play. There is no doubt an extremely simple explanation for this: play is a regression, a return to easier occupations.⁵

When children engage in their natural activity, when they make something, they will obviously end up discovering certain basic laws—those of physics, for example. They will discover the demands inherent in matter. A plasticine man is not made in the same way as a paper one, and a sandcastle is governed by different technical laws from one made of wood. From this and many other observations, Cousinet came to the conclusion that 'the child is a scientifically active being.'

Teaching, by its very nature, curbs a child's creative activity. First contact with teaching is inhibiting, both physically, because it means sitting still, and mentally, because the child is not allowed to ask the teacher questions and communicate with others. Teaching prevents the child from learning. And Cousinet notes with implacable logic: 'Child psychology now leads not to the transformation, but to the disappearance of teaching.'⁶

The fact is that it is no longer a question of teaching (children) but of cultivating a living environment, just as a scientist in a laboratory prepares the solution in which an organism can live and grow. The issue is no longer one of educational science but of psychology or even biology.

The working tool is method and the method must be passed on from the teacher to the pupil. No longer is it 'the ingenious technique discovered or used by the teacher for teaching. It is the tool which the child learns to use for working'.⁷

Roger Cousinet worked in primary schools, with children from 6 to 12 years. The acquisition of social maturity begins around 8 to 9 years of age, however. At that age—and this is the second basic psychological assumption—the child becomes aware of other children. 'This new awareness is reinforced by the new role played by language (...) whose true function apparently only emerges at this age, this being its social function, that of communication between individual ways of thinking.'⁸

The child gradually emerges from his global grasp of things. Thanks to language, which defines the successive stages in a process of evolution, analysis becomes possible.

In fact, we always see these first attempts at analytical explanation accompanied by words and gestures. The child mimes the supposed activity and designates names to its various components. But this is where the words and gestures of other children come in. (...) Each one introduces his own words, different words (which sometimes designate the same thing, but that does not matter) and as each one now perceives the full significance of the language he hears, the words which designate explanations clash and conflict with each other. (...) This means taking a closer look, re-examining one's own views, verifying them or incorporating into them the explanations given by others.⁹

This is the origin of those interminable discussions that take place between friends standing around an automobile or a power drill. First of all, they have to discover the initial cause of the movement; then, once that has been found or accepted by everyone, 'it is traced all through the works, from one part to another, until its whole itinerary can be tracked down from the initial cause to the final movement—a wheel gliding along a rail or a propeller turning, or an impression being produced on the paper—whereupon everyone is satisfied.'¹⁰

Continuing his discussion, Cousinet shows that the effects of socialization are beneficial, not only intellectually but also as regards the personality, since the child, who is always ready to put

forward and impose his/her own interpretation, learns not to trust his/her own judgement. Children learn to propose rather than to impose. They learn to express themselves clearly, to listen to and understand others. They learn to live socially, in other words, to enhance their own thinking with the thinking of others.

A study of psychology thus leads to group education. Disregarding psychology means imposing on children a way of life unsuitable for them. If a child is deprived at some stage in development of the sustenance needed for that stage, he/she will either waste away or compensate for that repressed activity, or again try to live on the fringe of the adult world.

This is the cause of the incidents that traditionally occur in a conventional type of class. The children stubbornly persists in this social development: they prompt or copy from one another and talk in class and the teacher spends almost as much time preventing the pupils from talking to each other as presenting the lesson. Despite appearances, factions are still formed with their ringleaders and scapegoats and, in an underhand manner, wage war on the teacher in all kinds of ways such as by creating a rumpus or getting up to various pranks. What is more, classes are built up on false values such as syllabuses (bearing no relationship to the children's interests), examinations and tests, with the teacher sitting in judgement, whereas group work will bring things back to normal.

Method

What has to be done is to give children back the freedom they enjoyed before entering school, so that when they begin school they will be confronted with the greatest possible number of activities to choose from.¹¹

In addition to being prepared psychologically (he/she has to make up his/her mind that to refrain from giving 'lessons'); the teacher must gather together the material needed for each activity and know how to use it. When everything is ready, the teacher asks the children to divide into groups, 'as they are used to doing in their games and according to their natural inclinations, absolutely at will'.

The forming of groups may take time. The children gain invaluable experience in learning how to recognize those they can work with. There are no rules as to the number of children in each group (in practice, an average of six) or as to the exact membership of the groups (there may always be changes). Each group has a part of the classroom to itself and this becomes, as it were, its own 'house', even if there is no actual physical barrier separating it from another group's 'house'. During their work, the groups soon sets out to collect plants and animals, and it is a good idea to let them have their own pigeon-holes along the walls.

The teacher tells the children that they can choose from the various activities prepared for them and indicates the method of work. The method, a very simple one, will differ somewhat according to whether the activities concerned are creative or cognitive ones.

Into the 'creative activity' category, Cousinet puts art, acting and handicrafts. In these areas, the children are given total freedom. The groups will often break up because writing a poem or painting a picture are matters of personal expression. The teacher should adopt an understanding and sympathetic attitude:

The teacher must show the same liking for this particular activity as for all the others; he must take pleasure in seeing his pupils creating something— even if the result is naïve and clumsy, he must not judge them. (...) He must encourage the children, talk to them about their work, ask them what they were setting out to do and whether they think they have expressed properly what they wanted to say.¹²

The 'cognitive activities' category comprises three kinds of intellectual work: science, history and geography. Here, the teacher tells the children some elementary guidelines that are 'the rules of the game'. These are as follows:

1. The work consists of looking at the objects and materials and writing out everyone's

- observations on the group's blackboard. The only practical requirement is for each group to have a blackboard so that its members can work together on the final version.
2. Once the work is finished, it is shown to the teacher who checks the spelling, proceeding as follows: (a) the teacher points out that there are some spelling mistakes; (b) if need be, he/she again draws attention to the mistakes this time underlining the misspelled words; finally (c) the teacher corrects them, without giving any explanation unless asked for one.
 3. The exercise is copied out into the group's exercise book, with illustrations if necessary, and shown to the teacher.
 4. The written exercise is summarized on index cards.

Gradually the same headings recur on the index cards and the children learn how to prepare them in advance. The preparation of the cards leads naturally on to the idea of a classification system, and then to the drawing up of synoptic charts.

But let us go back to the various types of work.

'Science' work consists of an introduction to the study of animals, plants, meteorological phenomena (rainfall, temperature, wind), minerals, simple machines and a wide variety of objects. Before long, the groups bring along items of interest to themselves.

'History' work is focused on the history of things. Cousinet gave particularly careful thought to the teaching of history.¹³ His theory was that political history, the history of governments and wars, is not only harmful but beyond the grasp of children, whereas they are familiar with the things they see around them and are likely to be interested in their history, that is to say, in studying the way in which they have evolved. Cousinet drew up a whole catalogue of the history of things, the main subject areas being types of dwelling, clothing, means of transport and communication, teaching, agriculture, industry, trade and so on. Naturally there is no order of preference. What is important is to start out from an observation of things as they are today. This means that if a group is interested in the history of types of dwelling, it will be advised to begin by looking at the various aspects of people's homes today. The children will then work from documents and pictures. During the preparatory phase, the teacher should take the trouble to collect a large number of postcards, pictures cut out of books, etc. The descriptive work is not confined to noting down observations, but involves producing a report from an observation of several documents. Learning history in this way is a wholly constructive exercise.

Here too, however, the method referred to previously is also used. The exercises are summarized on index cards that are then classified and, finally, synoptic charts are prepared describing, for instance, the history of costume through the ages with examples to illustrate the subject.

'Geography' work requires some observation material such as large-scale maps, railway, bus and flight timetables, but also street maps and local maps. Possible activities include describing imaginary journeys to a particular country, which may be of interest to one of the groups, using maps, timetables and other documentary material, or drawing a plan of the school or of an important building or making a map of the region.

The question of method calls for a number of comments.

Naturally, with the amount of latitude left to the groups there may be some interaction between the various activities just mentioned, especially between cognitive and artistic activities. For example, there may be drawings, paintings or models of various kinds to accompany the written texts. Handmade dolls' clothes or puppets may illustrate the history of costume.

It should be noted that no allowance is made for the teaching of grammar with this method. This is not an oversight. 'The teaching of grammar,' writes Cousinet, 'is of no interest to the child at this particular age.'¹⁴ If by some unlikely chance the children were to show an interest in it, they would proceed in the same way as for other types of work, that is, by observing and analyzing the words, classifying them and producing their own grammar primer. Out of forty experimental classes, this happened in only one.

It should also be pointed out that, apart from free texts (free not only in their form and

content, but also as regards their actual occurrence, unlike many classes in which the writing of 'free' texts is already provided for in the timetable!), there is no provision for composition as a literary exercise. 'French composition and the writing of essays are exercises for adolescents,' writes Cousinet. On the other hand, language is constantly developed and practised, both orally and in writing, since the children discuss things in their groups and work to produce written texts that are required to be as clear, as precise and even as subtle as possible. In a conventional French composition class, children are asked to write on a subject, which means that they are required to say something when they may have nothing to say, whereas when they study and describe a scientific, historical or geographical fact, they learn to express their thoughts clearly and put them down on paper equally clearly. As to spelling, Cousinet considers that at the 'pre-grammatical age, a mistake is merely a slip', and systematic correction is all that is needed to create lasting reflexes.

Another subject that is not included in cognitive activity is arithmetic. No explicit provision is made for it, but it emerges and develops along with the requirements of manual work, housework and housekeeping.

In many cases, a spontaneous interest has arisen in this type of work, quite independently of any practical application. Realizing that they were not very adept or quick enough at doing the arithmetical operations required for other kinds of work, some children decided of their own accord to do multiplications or divisions and, for *several months*, would apply themselves to increasingly difficult calculations, up to 15 or 20 a day. There are little girls who, having developed an inclination for the relatively easy operations involved in buying dress material and cutting out and making clothes, have invented and solved increasingly complicated problems of this kind.¹⁵

The results

This precise method, in which attention is paid to practical detail, was developed in urban and rural public schools where it was not possible to incur any extra expenditure. It was no idealistic dream, but a model devised and applied between 1920 and 1942 in some forty different classes. One example was a girls' primary school at Savigny-sur-Orge near Paris, where a teacher was able to keep her pupils and work with them along these lines for seven consecutive years.

Looking back over these many years of experimental work, Cousinet notes first of all that the children were never inactive and 'did not waste time having to listen to lessons which they never asked to be taught, and even less to sit listening to their classmates reciting lessons or answering questions'. On reading this unexpected observation, one can see through the wry humour and perceive the truth in it, a truth that adults would be little inclined to notice and admit. When one thinks of all the lectures to which pupils are subjected and which do not always capture their attention, all the time wasted in keeping order and in disciplinary action, not to mention the relatively or highly 'unprofitable' exercises like dictation, one has to admit that conventional, compulsory schooling is very often a waste of the children's time.

Looking at the results, Cousinet reports that each group produced an average of thirty written texts a month (i.e. more than one for each school day), not counting the drafting on the index cards and synoptic charts.

The results were also encouraging when it came to assessing the pupils' knowledge. When the method was introduced into the classes in which the pupils sat the *certificat d'études* examination (more than 50 per cent of pupils in State schools left school without obtaining this primary-school leaving certificate when it was in general use), the number of children who passed the examination was consistently greater, and their marks were always very high in science and French composition. The outcome with regard to composition is especially interesting when one considers Cousinet's particular attitude in this regard.

With no grammar teaching whatsoever, the children's spelling improved considerably. For example, in a *cours élémentaire* class (second or third year of primary education) the average rate of spelling mistakes dropped from 9.04 per cent in October to 3.8 per cent in the following July.¹⁶

While it is no doubt impossible to make any strict, year-by-year comparisons between children who have followed a syllabus and others who have not, broad comparisons show that those who have learned by the group work method come out best:

- analytical work (on flowers, insects, machines or geographical phenomena) fosters intellectual development;
- grouping helps to develop maturity but also cultivates perseverance; 'laziness' ceases to exist;
- moral attitudes are also enhanced: in a society of equals, a person will quite naturally learn to respect the work of others, not to hinder them, and to be helpful.

The greatest benefit that children derive from this type of schooling, in addition to learning a great deal, is above all to learn how to learn. It is no doubt true that during long university courses, the best students have always ended up devising a method of work, but they are often the privileged few, and Cousinet wished to give to all children what had previously been reserved for that small band.

An overview of the new education

At the beginning of the 1920s, when he began to experiment with his new methods, Inspector Cousinet was thought to be out of his mind. The prefect of the Aube department requested that he should be banned from teaching in the area, and the Ministry posted him to the Ardennes. He continued with his pioneering work, and that he was allowed to do so was no doubt because of the considerable prestige he had earned with the International League for New Education. His method was better known abroad than in France. A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country.

After the Second World War, as a professor at the Sorbonne, he taught what he thought to be truth, borne out by experience. The climate was in fact a much more favourable one, and, with fashion on its side, New Education had a large following.

Cousinet had no time for empty words, however. He condemned:

(...) the fair-weather friends of the New Education who, while keeping to the spirit of traditional education, have seized on a number of new techniques they have gleaned here and there and used them to uphold that spirit and help them in their work, without actually changing it in any way. So, for instance, there are teachers who will divide their pupils up into several 'teams' and give each team a grammar or history exercise to do and will then claim, and at times even convince themselves, that they have introduced group work into their classes. Others, interspersing their lessons with incessant questions, believe they are using active methods. Yet another will insert a 'free' expression exercise into his timetable, on a set day and at a set time, while another will organize a school outing based on a strictly pre-planned list of observations making this imposed exercise sound more impressive and more like the new education by calling it environmental studies. And so it goes on.¹⁷

Cousinet did not merely condemn the caricatures of the New Education, but, in his teaching and in his works, explained what its real purpose was. Retracing the history of this international movement, going back to those he regarded as having invented it (Rousseau and then Tolstoy) and to those who founded it (Dewey, Stanley Hall and their successors) he singled out the common, and therefore essential, features to be found in the various organizations and systems.

The New Education was first and foremost a 'spirit' recognizing in the child a person in the process of self-development. Such development needs a favourable environment, the primary condition being an atmosphere of freedom. Like all living beings, the child progresses through interaction with the environment in which he/she lives. Now the educator's role is to create for the child an environment that will be most consistent with his needs. Looking for a metaphor to express this idea, Cousinet rejected the conventional one of the gardener and opted for that of the health expert. Obviously, the role of the educator-health expert is totally different from that of the teacher, and the recruitment and training of such a person should be approached in a different way.

It is consequently the spirit of the thing that is important, the method being merely a working

instrument; a tool the child learns to use in order to work. The teacher's role is to prepare the ground for the young learners' encounters with the methods that will suit them best, and by observing the children ever more closely as time goes on, to discover or improve on the methods proposed to them.

Setting out resolutely in this direction, Cousinet studied the psychology of learning in his last book.¹⁸ Where learning and conditioning differ radically is in knowing what goal is to be reached. People are interested only in what they know, however dim this awareness may be (centre of interest). A child learns to walk because he/she has seen others walk, and its own efforts will be triggered off by the clear goal in view and will be stimulated by emulation.

This is not the way it happens at school, however. With the exception of arithmetic, children are totally unfamiliar with all the subjects taught at school and cannot therefore have any desire to learn them. To add to this, the teacher-who-teaches is not a model to be emulated. What is needed, therefore, is to find situations that will trigger knowledge of the goal in view and hence arouse interest. For example Cousinet writes that 'an awareness of spelling comes when the writer shows others what he has written'. From then on, especially if written communication is practised frequently, learning and research are set in motion. For instance, Cousinet continues, in group work 'I have in mind the countless discussions about spelling that I have witnessed, with recourse to the dictionary and finally, when necessary, having the matter settled by the teacher. Discussions of this kind are exercises in themselves.'¹⁹ Emulation is stimulated by the teacher saying: 'Let us try and find out', and getting the children to look with him/her in the dictionary and grammar book.

It is no doubt a relatively easy matter to stimulate the acquisition of functional skills like reading and writing, for the child can see their applications. The purpose of school, however, is also to transmit abstract knowledge in a number of subject areas (physics, chemistry, history, etc.). The only solution is to transform this abstract knowledge into practical skills, and this is what has been successfully achieved with the free-group work method that presents children with objects and materials as working tools. Cousinet is very clear about the way in which this transfer is effected:

The merit of this historic learning method by no means lies in gaining possession of *knowledge*—as in the conventional school sense of the word ‘learning’. It lies in the work done by the pupil in examining, comparing, classifying and compiling a quantity of material which is placed at his disposal or found by the pupil himself so that he will, in the end, be *building*, and not *acquiring*.²⁰

This is strictly true, but meanwhile, what is more, the pupils will be consolidating the knowledge acquired far better than if they had ingurgitated a set syllabus.

Cousinet’s message today

Cousinet was right in saying that the New Education had its ‘fair-weather friends’ in the post-war years. Nevertheless, fair-weather friends do not stay the course. In a country like France, the New Education still has its adepts among some militant educators, but they are necessarily in the minority.

To put it plainly, the New Education movement has not succeeded in persuading the education authorities of the need for a change in teaching methods. Anyone unfamiliar with customary practice in the education world can only think that this failure signifies that the new methods are unsuitable. If they had turned out to be effective, they would have been adopted. This, in fact, is the argument put forward by many educators in developing countries. In fact, it is not as simple as that. In my view, there are three reasons for the ‘failure’ of the New Education.

- Teachers, by definition, are recruited from those who were once ‘bright pupils’, in other words those who did well in the traditional system. Psychologically, it is very difficult for them not to reproduce the conventional model.
- Although they do not always admit it, parents and teachers are afraid of the ‘freedom’ of choice and pace left to children with the New Education methods. Allowing personalities to develop in an original way goes against the human and professional ideal that adults cannot help projecting on to the children, while modern nations, even democratic ones, expect the school to help produce citizens who will conform to a standard model.
- The university model impinges more than ever on the education provided in schools. Primary-school teachers mimic (albeit unwittingly) university professors transmitting highly specialized knowledge. This feeling of belonging to the same institution, possessing some profound unity²¹ is more solidly entrenched than ever today, as primary schools prepare a larger number of pupils for a long academic career than schools did in the past.

The wealthiest nations have, in fact, lengthened the period of compulsory schooling. Although there are advantages in this, it also has some very serious consequences since a large proportion of children and adolescents (up to 30 per cent) have to face the experience of failure at school.

In dealing with this situation, educational research has focused mainly on instructional techniques in the subjects taught. This narrow approach is based on the assumption that the system can be improved indefinitely. There may be some truth in this. However much you improve a car, you will never turn it into an aeroplane. It is a different system altogether. This is precisely what Cousinet was saying when he stated that ‘education can no longer be an act of teaching’, but is a different system. This message, thought by some to be paradoxical, should be heeded by us today.

Notes

1. *Louis Raillon (France)*. Director of the periodical *Education et développement* (1964–80) and former

- editor of the periodical *Educateurs* (1946-59). Among his main works, we may mention: *Education de plein vent* [Fully fledged Education]; *L'argent: probleme d'éducation* [Cash: an Educational Problem]; *Comment animer une association* [How to Lead an Association]; *L'enseignement ou la contre-éducation, essai de pédagogie fondamentale* [Teaching or Anti-education: an essay on Fundamental Pedagogy]; and *Roger Cousinet, une pédagogie de la liberté* [Roger Cousinet: a Pedagogy of Freedom].
2. Roger Cousinet, 'Le rôle de l'analogie dans la perception enfantine', *Revue philosophique* (Paris), 1907.
 3. Roger Cousinet, 'La solidarité enfantine', *Revue philosophique* (Paris), 1908.
 4. Charlotte Bühler, *Kindheit und Jugend*, Leipzig, 1930. The question of the child's activity was the main topic discussed at the New Education Congress held in Paris at the end of March 1931, with a statement by Elsa Kohler, who worked with Charlotte Bühler, on 'The Activity of the New Child' and one by Roger Cousinet on 'Play and Work'.
 5. Roger Cousinet, 'Le jeu et le travail', *La nouvelle éducation* (Paris), July 1931.
 6. Roger Cousinet, *Une méthode de travail libre par groupes*, 3rd ed., Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1967, p. 24.
 7. Ibid., p. 27.
 8. Ibid., p. 37.
 9. Ibid., p. 27-38.
 10. Ibid., p. 21. It may be noted that Jean Piaget, on the subject of group working methods, made some very similar comments in his 'réflexions psychologiques'. See: Bureau international d'éducation, *Le travail par équipes à l'école*, Geneva, 1935 (texts by Jakiel, Piaget, Petersen and Cousinet).
 11. This justifies the title of the study by Giustino Broccolini, *Roger Cousinet, pedagogista della libertà*, Rome, Armando Armando, 1968.
 12. Cousinet, *Une methode ...*, op. cit., p. 123.
 13. Between 1920 and 1922, Cousinet published a series of studies on the history of particular objects in the educational review *L'école et la vie*. He adopted a similar position at the International Congress on Moral Education (Geneva, 1922): 'The history of objects is necessarily international and, in that alone, it teaches solidarity just as political history teaches nationalism.' His statement was published in *L'esprit international et l'enseignement de l'histoire*, Neuchâtel, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1922. In 1950, he came back to these various themes in *L'enseignement de l'histoire et l'éducation nouvelle*.
 14. Cousinet, *Une methode...*, op. cit., p. 76.
 15. Ibid., p. 68.
 16. Ibid., p. 90.
 17. Roger Cousinet, *L'éducation nouvelle*, Paris; Neuchâtel, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950, p. 86.
 18. Roger Cousinet, *Pédagogie de l'apprentissage*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1959.
 19. Ibid., p. 45.
 20. Ibid., p. 100.
 21. This unity is conceivable, even if the age and status of the learners calls for the use of different teaching systems. On this notion of a teaching system, I refer the reader to my study: Louis Raillon, *L'enseignement ou la contre-éducation*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1984.

Selected works by Roger Cousinet

Une méthode de travail libre par groupes. Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1945. 3rd. ed., 1967.
La vie sociale des enfants : essai de sociologie enfantine. Paris, Éditions du Scarabée, 1950.
L'Éducation nouvelle. Neuchâtel; Paris, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950.
L'enseignement de la grammaire, Neuchâtel; Paris, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1952.
La formation de l'éducateur. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1952.
La culture intellectuelle. Paris, Presses d'Ile de France, 1954.
Pédagogie de l'apprentissage. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1959.
Fais ce que je te dis: conseils aux mères de famille. 2nd ed. Paris, Scarabée, 1961.

Several books by Roger Cousinet have been translated into Spanish (Buenos Aires, Losada Publications) and into Italian (Florence, La Nuova Italia).

Selected works about Roger Cousinet

Broccolini, G. *Cousinet pedagogista della libertà*. Rome, Armando Armando, 1968.
 Coen, R. *Cousinet e la scuola como tirocinio di vita*. Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1952.
 Ferraro, D. *Cousinet e l'educazione nuova*. Bologna, Leornardi, 1972.
 Raillon, L. *Roger Cousinet: une pédagogie de la liberté*. Paris, Armand Colin, 1991.