

Stories About New Avenues To Do Research, Part II

Jeroen Staring

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Abstract

This (second part of a three-part) case study loosely investigates results of several new avenues of doing research — via Abebooks.com, Bookfinder.com, Ebay.com, Fultonhistory.com and other websites.

Key Words: Copyrights transfer of F. M. Alexander’s books in 1923 to Miss Ethel M. Webb; new avenues of conducting research. Gladys (née Brown) Ficke; Elisabeth Antoinette Irwin; Agnes de Lima; Margaret Naumburg; Caroline Pratt; Claire (née Raphael) Reis; Leila Vanderbilt Stott; Irene Tasker; Ethel Mary Webb. Frederick Matthias Alexander; Robert Broom; Alvin Saunders Johnson; Ernst Kris; René Arpad Spitz; Sir Algernon Methuen Br.

Introduction

The first part of this three-part article (Staring, 2020) ended with a story of the purchase via Ebay.com of an autographed monograph by artist William Zorach to teacher of manual training, settlement worker, researcher of Philadelphia clothing industry, labour organizer, writer, charter member of the Bureau of Educational Experiments and pedagogue Caroline Pratt — in 1913 founding mother of Play School in New York City, renamed City and Country School in 1919. The author of this article bought the book, knowing that Zorach’s inscription is interesting for both the history of art and the history of progressive education.

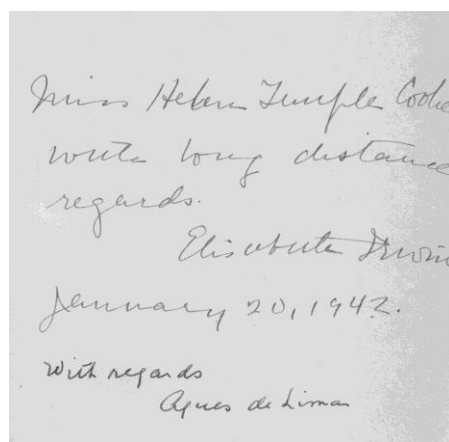
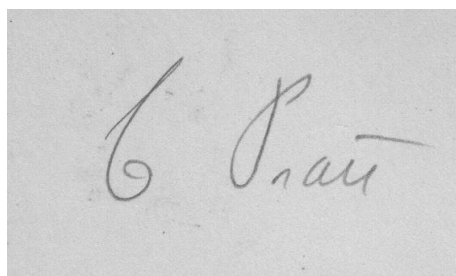


Figure 1: Caroline Pratt’s signature in *Eight Year Old Merchants* (Stott, 1928. Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 2: Leila Stott (*Knickerbocker Press*, 1916). Figure 3: “Long-distance regards” in a copy of the first edition of *The Little Red School House*, signed by both Agnes de Lima and Elisabeth Irwin (de Lima, 1942. Jeroen Staring Collection).

Note that such a purchase would not have been possible merely 30 or 25 years ago. You had to literally study thousands of kilos of auction catalogues to find such an item; you had to make a long distance bid via your telephone; you had to write a cheque and take it to the bank to pay, etc. Nowadays you can search, bid and pay online via your laptop — at your home, or anywhere with your personal hotspot on your smartphone. Of course you sometimes have disappointing online purchases. But there are also really great online purchasing experiences. For example, purchases with an unexpected, unintended bonus.

One of those bonus purchases by the author is the purchase of a rather worn, widely used, shabby copy of *Eight Year Old Merchants*, a book about the development of the curriculum of Group VIII at Caroline Pratt’s City and Country School, written by Leila V. Stott (1880-1969; see *Figure 2* and *Note 1*) — one of the first teachers at the school. At the time of purchase of Stott’s 1928 book it was the only copy on

sale, listed on Bookfinder.com. It turned out, after receiving the book by mail, that it has a signature of Caroline Pratt on the front end-paper (see *Figure 1*). This can only mean it comes from Pratt's personal library, so it had been Pratt's personal copy: a real bonus to an old looking book for any book collector.

Another of those bonus purchases is a purchase of a copy of the first edition of *The Little Red School House*, a book written by Agnes de Lima that describes the history and curriculum of The Little Red School House in New York City — a school founded by Elisabeth A. Irwin (1880-1942) in 1921. Like Pratt, Irwin was a charter member of the NYC Bureau of Educational Experiments, the later Bank Street College of Education, founded in 1916 (Staring, 2013). In 1924, Elisabeth Irwin and Louis Marks published *Fitting the School to the Child*. The book describes the history of an experiment in progressive education between 1916 and 1922 in Public School 64 of which Marks was Principal at the time (Irwin & Marks, 1924). The experiment led directly to the founding of The Little Red School House in 1921 (O'Han, 2009). The first edition copy of the book written by Agnes de Lima, simply titled *The Little Red School House*, advertised on Bookfinder.com as signed by de Lima, turned out to be signed by both de Lima and Elisabeth Irwin — the school's founder and director (see *Figure 3*). The book is a precious jewel in the history of progressive education.

F. M. Alexander, R. Broom, G. Ficke, A. Johnson, M. Naumburg and I. Tasker

In 1916 and 1917, the Bureau of Educational Experiments of which both Caroline Pratt and Elisabeth Irwin were charter members was deciding whether or not to research the educational methods of F. M. Alexander concerning breathing and motor-habit re-education. Alexander was originator of the so-called Alexander Technique (Staring, 2015). In 1913, before he lived part-time in London and part-time in New York City between 1914 and 1923, Alexander was living fulltime in London (Staring, 2005). During the first few months of 1913, Ethel M. Webb (1866-1955), a close associate of Alexander and then student of the First International Montessori Teacher Training Course in Rome, Italy became friends with Irene Tasker (1887-1977) from England and Margaret Naumburg (1890-1963) from the US — two fellow students in the first teacher training course of Dr. Maria Montessori. After graduating in May 1913, Naumburg and Tasker travelled with Webb to London and took lessons with Alexander.

Later that year, Naumburg returned to the US and began a Montessori Class at Henry Street Settlement together with Claire Raphael (1888-1978) for a year. In 1914, they started another Montessori Class, this time at Leete School. This second Montessori Class would become Children's School in 1917 — renamed Walden School in 1922. As early as 1915, Naumburg and Raphael merged Montessori, Froebel, Bentley Interpretative Dancing, Dalcroze Eurhythmics and Alexander's method of breathing and motor-habit re-education in the curriculum (Rodman, 1915). Later, in Children's School and then Walden School, Jungian psychoanalysis also started to play an important role (Naumburg, 1917, 1919; Staring, Aldridge, & McFadyen Christensen, 2018).

In 1914, Tasker began teaching Montessori at a primary school in Darlington, Durham, UK and at Darlington Training College. In 1916, she would travel to New York City to become a year-long associate of Naumburg at the Montessori Classes and Primary at the Lehman-Leete School — the renamed former Leete School (Staring, Bouchard, & Aldridge, 2014; see *Figure 6*).

As a historian of the Alexander Technique, the aim of the author is of course to investigate as many artifacts about Naumburg, Tasker and Webb as possible. Exploring different sites on the World Wide Web is one of the means to do research. This kind of research yields interesting finds. For example, when purchasing a rare copy of *The South African Journal of Science* containing Irene Tasker's text of a lecture titled "An Unrecognized Need in Education, an Introduction to the Study of the Technique of F. Matthias Alexander" (Tasker, 1942) the author discovered that the particular copy of the journal contains the signature of paleoanthropologist Robert Broom on the cover (see *Figure 4*). It clearly is Broom's copy. It is therefore very likely that he has read Tasker's article about Alexander's methods. Interesting in this regard is the fact that Raymond Dart, one of Broom's fellow paleoanthropologists in South Africa at the time, was an Alexander Technique adept and had Alexander Technique lessons with Irene Tasker in the 1940s. She taught Alexander's methods in South Africa between 1935 and 1949 (Wheelhouse & Smithford, 2001). In his writings of the time, Dart referred to Alexander's books (see Dart, 1946, 1947, 1950). It would be intriguing to know whether Broom and Dart exchanged views on the teachings of Alexander.

Note: there is no evidence in the literature that such a thing actually happened.

A few years ago the author won an Ebay.com auction of a letter written in 1938 by Aldous Huxley, addressed to F. Matthias Alexander in London. This not only led to research into Huxley’s teachers of the Bates Method for improving vision (Staring, 2018a), but also to the purchase of dozens of other letters addressed to F. Matthias Alexander and Ethel M. Webb, written by Alexander’s relatives, friends and others, including several letters from Irene Tasker from Johannesburg, South Africa (see Williamson, 2017). Those letters sent by her between 1938 and 1947 are now in the collection of an Alexander Technique teacher in Austria who prepares a biography of Tasker. So far for research related to Irene Tasker here.

In 2015, research via Abebooks.com yielded a signed copy of Margaret Naumburg’s 1950 book *Schizophrenic Art*. The inscription reads: “To Alvin Johnson with cordial greetings from Margaret Naumburg” (Naumburg, 1950; see Figure 5). In 1923, when he was director of The New School in New York City, economist Alvin S. Johnson (1874-1971) published a really positive and friendly article about Naumburg’s Walden School (Johnson, 1923). The inscription in Naumburg’s book indicates that she and Alvin Johnson were still friends in the 1950s.

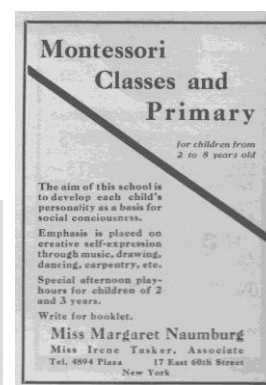
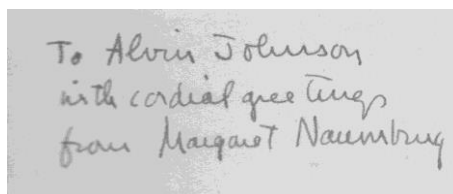
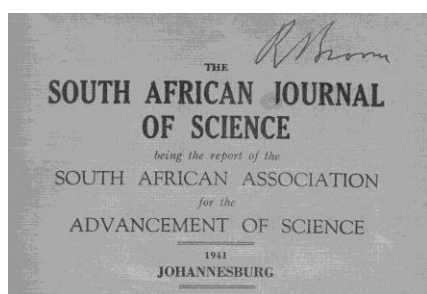


Figure 4: Robert Broom’s signature on the cover of *The South African Journal of Science* (Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 5: Inscription in Alvin Johnson’s copy of *Schizophrenic Art* (Naumburg, 1950. Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 6: Advertisement in December 1916 issue of *The Seven Arts* (Naumburg & Tasker, 1916).

Online research initiatives also provided other insights into the life of Margaret Naumburg, who was the director of Children’s School (later renamed Walden School) between 1917 and 1924, and who after the 1930s became a dynamically oriented art therapist. In 2018, the author was able to purchase a letter written by her — through Abebooks.com. In this letter sent in early July 1954 to illustrator and painter Gladys (*née* Brown) Ficke (1890-1973) from New Haven, Connecticut, Naumburg (1954, p. 2; see Figure 8) explains,

Of course, the study of the child by means of the psychoanalytic approach is of primary importance, and I have emphasized this in my educational work for forty years [...] many of the analysts do not realize that as early as 1914 I took my stand on the importance of psychoanalysis in relation to education. As far as I know, I was the first person in the U.S. to apply it to education in the development of the Walden School. But at that time it was like a voice crying in the wilderness.

I thought you might be interested in seeing a typed copy of the first article I published in 1917, in the very first years of the school, beginning with nursery age children from 2 and going up to 6 years [...]. Would you mind returning the enclosed copy of my paper when you’ve read it?

The article to which Naumburg refers was published in the fourth *Bulletin* issued by the Bureau of Educational Experiments and mainly discusses two topics: the application of psychoanalysis and F. Matthias Alexander’s methods in (progressive) education (Naumburg, 1917). Two years later the text of this article titled “A Direct Method of Education” was also published in *The Modern School* magazine of the libertarian (Ferrer) Modern School of Stelton, NJ, edited by art dealer Carl Zigrosser (Naumburg, 1919; see Figure 7).

Interestingly, the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania has an exact similar typescript of the text of the article, as stated in the above quotation from the letter sent to Gladys Ficke. In the finding aid to the Margaret Naumburg Papers in the Kislak Center, Amey Hutchins (2018) explains, “On a typescript of the article, [Naumburg] later wrote,

‘This publication in 1917 was as far as I know *the first application of the principles of psychoanalysis to Education*’” (p. 6; italics in Hutchins, 2018).

Two obvious conclusions can straightforwardly be drawn:

i), Gladys Ficke has indeed returned the typescript of the 1917 article — published by the Bureau of Educational Experiments — to Margaret Naumburg upon request; and,

ii), the typescript that Ficke returned to Naumburg is indeed one and the same as that in the Kislak Center (see also Hinitz, Staring, & Aldridge, 2020, *forthcoming*).

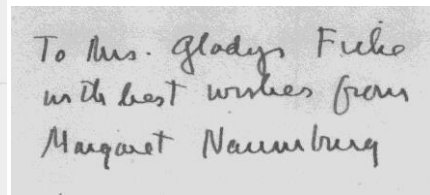
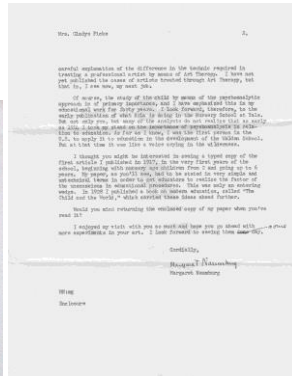
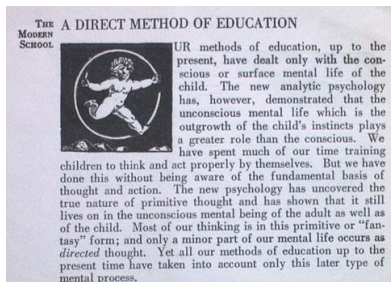


Figure 7: Excerpt from Margaret Naumburg’s “A Direct Method of Education” in *The Modern School* (Naumburg, 1919). Figure 8: Second page of Naumburg’s letter to Gladys Ficke (Naumburg, 1954. Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 9: Inscription in Gladys Ficke’s copy of *Psychoneurotic Art* (Naumburg, 1953. Jeroen Staring Collection).

Margaret Naumburg wrote her letter in response to a letter from Gladys Ficke about a review of Naumburg’s book *Psychoneurotic Art* by psychoanalyst René Arpad Spitz (1887-1974) — after she visited Ficke earlier in 1954. In the first page of her letter, she reacted to Spitz’s (1954) book review, published around the time of her visit to Gladys Ficke, as well as to Spitz’s criticism of her, delivered during a symposium on ‘The Use of Spontaneous Art in Psychotherapy,’ organized by Naumburg, held in New York City in March 1954 (Hutchins, 2018, pp. 12, 15; Naumburg, 1966, pp. 16-19). On the second page, she mentions art historian and psychoanalyst Ernst Kris (1900-1957) who had earlier published a review of her 1950 book *Schizophrenic Art* (Kris, 1953) and who had attended the aforementioned symposium.

While writing the section about Naumburg’s letter, above, the author spotted a signed copy of her book *Psychoneurotic Art* on Abebooks.com and bought the book on March 2, 2020. The inscription reads: “To Mrs. Gladys Ficke with best wishes from Margaret Naumburg” (in Naumburg, 1953; see *Figure 9*). Could the book be exactly the gift Margaret Naumburg gave to Gladys Ficke during her visit to Ficke in Connecticut in 1954?

Sir A. Methuen Br., Ethel M. Webb, Copyrights Transfer of Alexander’s Books in 1923

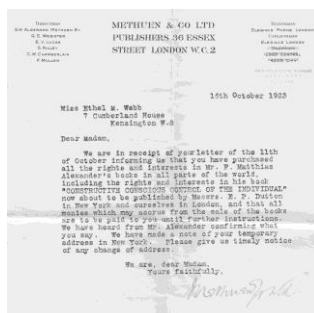


Figure 10: Typed letter, Sir Algernon Methuen Br., of Methuen & Co. LTD, to Miss Ethel M. Webb (Methuen Br., 1923; Jeroen Staring Collection). Figure 11: F. Matthias Alexander cheque, issued to Miss E. Webb (Alexander, 1923; Jeroen Staring Collection).

The number of letters addressed to F. M. Alexander and E. M. Webb, purchased by the author in 2016, contained a typed letter dated October 16, 1923, signed by Sir Algernon Methuen Br. (1856-1924), founder and owner of Methuen & Co. publishing house in London (see *Figure 10* and *Note 2*). Sir Algernon Methuen Br. (1923) stated in his letter to Miss Ethel M. Webb,

We are in receipt of your letter of the 11th of October informing us that you have purchased all the rights and interests in Mr. F. Matthias Alexander's books in all parts of the world, including the rights and interests in his book "CONSTRUCTIVE CONSCIOUS CONTROL OF THE INDIVIDUAL" now about to be published by Messrs. E. P. Dutton in New York and ourselves in London, and that all monies which may accrue from the sale of the books are to be paid to you until further instructions. We have heard from Mr. Alexander confirming what you say. We have made a note of your temporary address in New York. Please give us timely notice of any change of address.

Allegedly, a car dealer sued Alexander for a debt earlier in 1923. According to Alexander biographer Michael Bloch (2004, p. 127), Alexander then

[...] promptly transferred all his assets [...] into the names of trusted friends [...]; he then left for America in October [1923; J.S.] as planned. As a result, he was declared bankrupt in his absence. Subsequently, his friends 'bought' and cancelled the debt, whereupon the main legal restrictions attaching to [Alexander], such as an inability to pledge credit or run a bank account, were lifted.

Do the transferred copyrights of Alexander's books or a payment of US \$ 100 by Alexander to Webb (see *Figure 11*: a cheque issued by him to Webb on December 5, 1923, purchased by the author via Ebay.com) have to do with what Bloch describes? Have the copyrights ever been 'bought back' by Alexander? Or did Webb hold Alexander in a grip? There is nothing in the Alexander Technique literature that sheds a light on what happened.

Is not that striking?

Notes

1). Before she began work at Play School, Leila V. Stott studied music in Vienna, Austria after graduating from St. Agnes School in Albany, NY. Later she worked for NYC Hartley House settlement and was a visiting teacher in schools in New York City (*Times Union*, 1913). Stott was also a teacher in economics at St. Agnes School in Albany (*Times Union*, 1915), while before and during the time that she worked at Pratt's school in New York City since 1916 (*Schenectady Gazette*, 1917; Staring, 2013) she promoted numerous progressive causes. For example, she was President of the Albany Equal Suffrage Club, Chair of the 27th Congressional District of the New York State League of Women Voters, as well as Chair of the Woman Suffrage Party's third campaign district of Albany (*Canajoharie Courier*, 1916; *Columbia Republican*, 1914, 1918, 1919; *Hudson Register*, 1917; *Knickerbocker Press*, 1914, 1916). Note that much of this information comes from hits obtained while using search tools on the Fultonhistory.com website. Leila Stott published several books and at least one article on the curriculum of City and Country School (Stott, 1921, 1927a, 1928, 1941). She additionally published book reviews (e.g., Stott, 1927b, 1932).

2). Methuen & Co. LTD published the books of F. M. Alexander: *Man's Supreme Inheritance* in 1910, *Man's Supreme Inheritance (Addenda)* in 1911, *Conscious Control (Man's Supreme Inheritance) in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization* in 1912, *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (second edition) in 1918, and was about to publish Alexander's book *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* at the end of 1923 when evidently Ethel Webb bought the copyrights of Alexander's writings (see *Figure 10*).

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