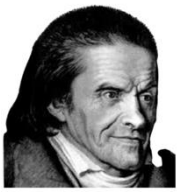

PestalozziWorld
Learning with head, heart and hands

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Education

(By Dr. Joanna Nair, based on information from 'Pestalozzi goes Internet', Brühlmeier (2) and Silber)

Introduction

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) is known as the Father of modern education. The modern era of education started with him and his spirit and ideas led to the great educational reforms in Europe in the nineteenth century.

Pestalozzi believed in the ability of every individual human being to learn and in the right of every individual to education. He believed that it was the duty of society to put this right into practice. His beliefs led to education becoming democratic; in Europe, education became available for everyone.

Pestalozzi was particularly concerned about the condition of the poor. Some of them did not go to school. If they did, the school education was often useless for their needs. He wanted to provide them with an education which would make them independent and able to improve their own lives.

Pestalozzi believed that education should develop the powers of 'Head', 'Heart' and 'Hands'. He believed that this would create moral individuals who are capable of knowing what is right and what is wrong and of acting according to this knowledge. Thus the well being of every individual could be improved and each individual could become a responsible citizen. He believed that

empowering and ennobling every individual in this way was the only way to improve society and bring peace and security to the world. He tried to create a complete theory of education that would lead to a practical way of bringing happiness to humankind.

Pestalozzi saw teaching as a subject worth studying in its own right and he is therefore known as the father of pedagogy (the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept). He caused education to become a separate branch of knowledge, alongside politics and other recognised areas of knowledge.

Education in Switzerland in Pestalozzi's Time

The Poor Condition of Schools and Education

In Switzerland, as elsewhere in Europe, a small rich aristocracy ruled the country and had all the privileges, while the majority of the people had no rights, had to pay heavy taxes, and were extremely poor, illiterate and degraded.

There were very few schools, often with no buildings, or with buildings that were in very bad condition. Teachers were untrained and paid badly. They usually had other jobs. In many of the village schools the teachers were old soldiers, cobblers or tailors. Usually they were very conservative, especially in their religion. Often children were crowded into a single damp room, usually in the house of the schoolmaster, who was given no money to buy any school furniture. Often the school facilities were as unhealthy as the buildings the children normally worked in.

Religion was often the only subject that was taught and it was often taught without being explained. Children were made to memorise words that they often did not understand. Children learnt to read and to say by heart the

church catechism (a summary of the principles of the Christian religion used for religious instruction), prayers and parts of the bible. One report states that children would read the bible aloud, beginning where they had stopped the day before. When they finished the whole Bible, they would simply start from the beginning again. The schoolmaster did not explain any of the passages and the children could not understand most of it. Writing was usually taught only if parents particularly asked for it to be and arithmetic was often not taught at all.

Since the teachers were ignorant themselves they usually knew no teaching methods. This meant that discipline was kept by corporal punishment and children hated school. They were frustrated and confused and often hated their teachers.

Some extracts from texts, showing the poor state of schools, of schoolmasters and of education in general

From Green (1)

'In Canton Zurich there were some 350 country schools of which less than a hundred had buildings of their own, and such buildings as there were could not have been more unfit for the purpose.

"As I opened the door [of the schoolroom], an oppressive feeling of dampness struck me. Packed in a dark corner our country's greatest treasure – its youth – were sitting, compelled to breathe the hot air reeking with thick foul mist. The windows are never cleaned, the room is never aired. The children are so closely heaped together that it is impossible to get out without climbing over seats and tables." Most of the schools were in private houses: "I keep school in my own house, and have only one room for both my household and the school. I receive no rent and no allowance for school furniture," writes one of the masters. Occasionally the schoolmaster had to hold school in different houses in turn. Schoolmasters were usually badly paid, and necessarily had to combine schoolkeeping with some other business.'

From Holman

'The instruction was generally given in the schoolmaster's only living room, while his family were carrying on their household avocations [occupations]. In places where there were schoolrooms, they were never large enough to provide sufficient space for all the children to sit down. The rooms were low and dark, and when the door was opened the oppressive fumes… met the visitor; closely crammed together sat the children, to the ruin of their health, breathing in the foul and heated vapours. The stoves, too, were generally overheated, and the closed windows were darkened by the steam from the breath of so many human beings… The noise was deafening; the schoolmaster had little authority over his pupils; there was no fixed age at which children were either sent or withdrawn; parents would frequently send them at four or five, and take them away again as soon as they could earn any money, generally in their eighth or ninth year. The instruction was bad and irregular.'

From Green (1)

'Of method in teaching, as we understand it, there was no thought. A child would come to school not knowing his alphabet. The teacher would show it to him in his book, say it to him once pointing to the letters and tell him to sit down and learn it. In an hour and a half he would come again to test him. This process would go on for many weeks, until finally the child could say it through and thus was ready to take the next step. Want of method and ignorance on the part of the teacher were made up for by an abundant use of the rod. The children hated the school, and learned nothing there that could possibly help them to lead self-respecting lives.'

From Green (1)

'An interesting story, which is told by the biographer of Oberlin, a clergyman who did heroic work for his people in the Alsatian parish of which he had charge, shows that… [the above descriptions] of Swiss schools applies with equal force to the schools of other lands. When his predecessor in the parish took up his charge he asked to be shown the principal schoolhouse. He was

taken to a miserable cottage where a number of children were crowded together without any occupation, and in so wild and noisy a state that he could with difficulty get a reply to his inquiries for the master.
"There he is," said one of them, pointing to a withered old man, who lay on a bed in one corner of the room. "Are you the schoolmaster, my good friend?" enquired Stouber.

"Yes, sir."

"And what do you teach the children?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Why, then, were you made schoolmaster?"

"Why, sir, I had been taking care of the pigs for the [people of the] countryside for many years, and when I got too old and feeble for that, they sent me here to take care of the children." (From Memoirs of Oberlin).'

From Holman

Another story about how a schoolmaster was employed concerns Krüsi. In 1800 Krüsi brought orphan children to be taught at Burgdorf and became Pestalozzi's first assistant. (Though uneducated he was open minded and understood children and proved to be a good practical schoolmaster, who was willing to learn from Pestalozzi. Krüsi stayed with Pestalozzi until 1815.)

The following is the account of how Krüsi became a teacher. Holman writes that,

'Krüsi, as a lad and when a young man, earned his living by travelling about the country buying and selling small wares. One summer day as he was crossing a mountain, carrying a heavy load of thread, he met M. Gruber, the State Treasurer, and this conversation took place:

“It’s very hot, Hermann,” said Krüsi.

“Yes, very hot. As Hoerlin the schoolmaster is leaving Gais you might perhaps earn your living less laboriously. Would you not like to try for this post?”

“It is not simply a question of what I would like: a schoolmaster ought to have knowledge of matters of which I am wholly ignorant,” [replied Krusi].

“You could easily learn, at your age, all that a schoolmaster there ought to know.”

“But where and how? I do not see any possibility of this.”

“If you have any inclination for it, the way can easily be found. Think about it, and do not delay.”

Upon this he left me.

I considered and reflected, but no light seemed to come to me. However I rapidly descended the mountain hardly feeling the weight of my load.

My friend Sonderegger procured a single specimen of writing, done by a skilful penman of Altstätten, and I copied it over a hundred times. This was my only preparation. Nevertheless, I sent in my name, but with little hope of success.

There were only two candidates. The chief test consisted in writing out the Lord’s Prayer, which I did with all the care of which I was capable.

I had carefully noticed that capitals were used here and there, but as I was ignorant of the rule I had taken them for ornament. Accordingly I distributed mine in a symmetrical manner, with the result that some came in the very middle of words. As a matter of fact neither of us knew anything.

When the examination was over, I was sent for and Captain Schæpfer announced to me that the examiners had found us both very weak; that my competitor could read the better, but that I was the better writer; that as I was only eighteen years old, while the other was forty, I should be better able to acquire the necessary knowledge; that, moreover, my room being bigger than that of the other applicant, was more suitable for a schoolroom; and, in short, I was nominated to the vacant post.

So, Krüsi's room was cleared of some old furniture, and a hundred children were put into it. This was in 1793'.

The description gives a typical example of the way in which schoolmasters were appointed.

Pestalozzi's Criticism of the Condition of Education in His Day
Pestalozzi was very critical of the education of his times. Indeed, he spent his whole life protesting against the schools and the condition of education.

'…in most schools… the schoolmaster seems as if he were made on purpose to shut up children's mouths and hearts, and to bury their good understandings ever so deep underground. That is the reason why healthy and cheerful children, whose hearts are full of joy and gladness, hardly ever like school.' (From Pestalozzi's book 'Christopher and Elizabeth')

In another of his books, 'How Gertrude Teaches her Children' Pestalozzi writes,

'…the great number of schoolmasters, of whom there are thousands today who have – solely on account of their unfitness to earn a respectable living in any other way – subjected themselves to the laboriousness of this occupation; and they, in accordance with their unsuitability for anything better, look upon

their work as leading to nothing further, but sufficient to keep them from starvation.'

Turning again to 'How Gertrude Teaches her Children', Pestalozzi writes,

'Our unpsychological schools are in essence merely artificial sterilising machines, for destroying all the results of the power and experience that nature herself calls to life in children…

We leave children, up to their fifth year, in the full enjoyment of nature; we allow every impression of nature to influence them: they feel the power of these: they learn to know full well the joy of unhampered freedom and all its delights. The free natural bent, which the happy, untamed, sensuous being derives from his development, has already taken in them its most definite direction.

And, after they have enjoyed this happiness of sensuous life for five full years, we cut them off from all their unhampered freedom: pen them up like sheep, whole herds huddled together in stifling rooms: pitilessly chain them for hours, days, weeks, months, years, to the study of unattractive and wearisome letters: and, compared with their former condition, tie them to a maddening course of life.'

Pestalozzi criticised the schools because they were out of harmony with nature. He hated the way that the natural powers of a child were killed by a poor home environment and by too much school discipline, which made them sit unnaturally still for hours at a time and often involved flogging children. He believed that rigid discipline and mechanical teaching methods, such as rote learning, stop the natural free development of the minds of children. He did not like the way religion was taught with no proper explanation and the fact that often religion was the only subject taught.

Pestalozzi believed that the teaching methods and the content of the classes were not relevant to the needs of the people and society. Classroom teaching was rigid and took no notice of the ability of individual children to learn, nor of the purpose of their learning. He believed that the schools destroyed imagination and originality, relying too much on learning from books. Students memorized printed words without understanding them. The schools separated theory and thinking from action or doing, relying only on the former and providing no opportunity for the latter. The children had no direct experience and so were not able to learn through their senses. Pestalozzi believed that theoretical knowledge is useless unless it can be used practically, and that schools did not teach what the children really needed for their future lives.

Pestalozzi believed that the wrong type of 'education' is the reason for things going wrong with society. Meanwhile he believed that a good education is the only cure for the ills found in society.

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