

July 2008

Pestalozzianism

Samuel J. Smith

Liberty University, sjsmith3@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs

Recommended Citation

Smith, Samuel J., "Pestalozzianism" (2008). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 97.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs/97

This Miscellaneous is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

PESTALOZZIANISM

The Pestalozzian movement of the 19th century represented the ideas of Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and was based on the premise that learning occurs best in an emotionally-secure environment where knowledge is acquired by sense perception. Influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Pestalozzi introduced psychology into education and was the first to systematize the science of teaching. Though known for the object lesson, he also influenced the transformation of elementary schools and planted seeds for teacher licensure.

After the death of his father when Pestalozzi was only five years old, his mother brought him up in a loving but sheltered environment where outdoor excursions and interactions with other children were limited. His grandfather, a pastor, cultivated in him a concern for social justice, which was developed further in 1762 when he joined the Helvetic Society, a group of social activists. These early influences later impacted Pestalozzi's educational theory and practice.

Pestalozzi married a wealthy lady from Zurich in 1769. He considered following his grandfather into the ministry but chose to study law, only to decide later to toil the land as a farmer. He bought Neuhof, a large farmhouse, where he opened the first industrial school, which became home for more than 50 underprivileged boys. They were an undisciplined lot, many of whom took advantage of Pestalozzi's generosity by running off after receiving food and clothing. The first in a series of administrative bungles, Neuhof went bankrupt. Although reduced to poverty, he did not consider the six-year experiment a complete failure. Leaving the Neuhof experience with a stronger conviction than ever, Pestalozzi began writing.

From 1780 to 1798, he gained prominence as a novelist, positioning himself for future success to promulgate his educational agenda. A novel about the original goodness of human nature, his 1781 *Leonard and Gertrude* gained him the most notoriety. Emphasizing the role of mothers in education, this novel served a double purpose for Pestalozzi. It propagated his concept of the ideal educational system and also pointed out the need for social reforms. Although drawing heavily from Rousseauan principles regarding the inherent goodness of children and their need to develop freely, Pestalozzi's writings displayed three noteworthy differences. First, Pestalozzi did not support the glorification of nature as a utopia. He observed that nature can often be brutish, necessitating intentionality, especially in the moral instruction of children. Second, he was concerned about the education of the poor while Rousseau did not see such a need. Third, he applied theory to practice whereas Rousseau's ideology remained chiefly abstract. Unlike Rousseau, who relinquished his children to an orphanage, Pestalozzi educated his own son, implementing principles from *Emile*. Through application, Pestalozzi tempered Rousseau's ideas while refining his own praxis.

As he gained recognition for his writings, Pestalozzi also became identified as a sympathizer of the French Revolution. He became convinced that the French regime could bring about moral regeneration and social reform. Funded by the new government, an orphan asylum was opened in Stans with Pestalozzi as headmaster and sole teacher. Locals, who were predominantly Catholic, expressed hostility to the Protestant Pestalozzi and were resentful of his ties to the French government. Despite its difficulties, however, Stans earned a reputation as "The Cradle of the Modern Elementary School."

At Stans, the theories in Pestalozzi's writings were first implemented systematically. Even with 80 students and only one assistant, an atmosphere of familial love was cultivated. No

books were used, as instruction was based on sense impression. Rather than traditional recitation of meaningless words, Pestalozzi's goal was to develop the students' powers of attentiveness, carefulness, and reliability. He viewed the strengthening of these skills at a young age as much more significant for later learning than what typically occurred in traditional classrooms. He refused to operate Stans on the broadly held assumptions that the purpose of school was to teach the written word, that children were innately bad and should be punished for not meeting academic expectations, and that education was inessential for the poor. After only five months, this successful experiment ended abruptly when French soldiers retreating from Austria sequestered the facility to establish a hospital.

Shortly thereafter, Pestalozzi moved to the Burgdorf castle where he began to fuse psychology and education and where he developed the first teachers' college. Using the German word *anschauung* to refer to the acquisition of knowledge, he taught that no words should be used for instruction until after students had engaged in a process of sense impression. Inadequately translated as intuition, observation, sense experience, perception, or contemplation, *anschauung* was defined by Pestalozzi as "things before words, concrete before abstract." This concept served as the framework for what popularly became known as the object lesson.

Students at Burgdorf engaged in field trips to the countryside, woods, or seashore where they collected specimens for object lessons. They closely examined the items, drawing and talking about their observations. They were then instructed to write about their objects and to read to others what they had written. Only after a process involving such concrete observations were teachers permitted to introduce vocabulary or concepts previously unfamiliar to the students. In addition to advancing the object lesson at Burgdorf, Pestalozzi refined and promoted

such methods as movable letters, tactual arithmetic aids, slates, oral group answers, increased student-teacher interaction, and physical education.

Another psychological principle Pestalozzi advocated at Burgdorf was the need for balanced instruction in intellectual, moral, and physical development. Harmony among these powers was essential for proper growth and led Pestalozzi to include innovative activities such as drawing, singing, and physical exercise. Also radical for his time was the notion of the affective pedagogical element, that teachers should love their students. He identified the following dispositions as essential for effective teachers: fatherliness, cheerfulness, affection, and kindness.

Burgdorf closed due to a lack of funds in 1801. Though his ineptitude as an administrator led to several school failings, Pestalozzi continued to gain prominence as an innovative educator, especially during his 20-year tenure at Yverdon. Among international visitors to Yverdon were Friedrich Froebel, Johann Herbart, and William Maclure. Through these and many other visitors, Pestalozzianism spread to Germany, the United States, and other countries, impacting the following developments: kindergarten, scientific pedagogy, New Harmony experiment, common school movement, Oswego movement, and normal school training.

Critics indicate the enigmatic nature of Pestalozzi's method, arguing that it fragmented the sciences and neglected history and literature. Unfortunately, the object lesson was later so formalized that it became widely misunderstood, no longer representing the theoretical framework of its originator. Nevertheless, Pestalozzi's influence wrought considerable change in the emphasis given to student interest, the respect of the child's natural development, and the overall tone of the modern elementary school.

Samuel James Smith, Liberty University

See also: Herbartian Movement; Kindergarten; Normal Schools; Owen, Robert Dale; Oswego Movement.

FURTHER READINGS

Anderson, L. F. (1931). *Pestalozzi*. New York: AMS Press, Inc.

Gutek, G. L. (1968). *Pestalozzi and education*. New York: Random House.

Pestalozzi, J. H. (1898). *How Gertrude teaches her children*. (L. E. Holland & F. C. Turner, Trans.) Syracuse, NY: C. W. Bardeen (Original work published in 1801).

Silber, K. (1960). *Pestalozzi: The man and his work*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.