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The Story of Pestalozzi

I have been writing stories of various educational theorists, with the hope that the stories will help students remember the contributions of specific people. Perhaps one day these stories will morph into a book. I look forward to your responses.

The Story of Pestalozzi

I well remember the first time I ever read of Pestalozzi. I was an undergraduate student, and we were plowing our way through a book of educational philosophers. It is true, I was getting a bit testy after reading about man, after man, after man, who had contributed to educational thought. Remember, this was a long time ago, and I was well trained not to say anything, but I sure remember a bubbling frustration. This is why I particularly remember the men who rang true for me. Pestalozzi was one of them. I vividly recall that he did not believe in hitting students, or as it was stated in our required text: No flogging. In addition I was attracted to Pestalozzi because he built on the work of Rousseau, and at that time I was quite keen on Rousseau. Since then I have read more and am not quite as smitten with Rousseau.

Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was a Swiss educator who focused his energies on the reform of schools, the needs of students who are the most vulnerable within the community, and the pursuit of good teaching strategies. I clearly remember reading about his interest in the relationship between love and learning. It seemed like heresy. I remember reading the word, care, as in, teachers needed to care for students. I can summon the memory of his ideas about a safe and secure classroom. In addition to these memories, I remember having the sense of an educational curmudgeon, which may seem like a contradiction, but by this time in my life I had known a lot of people who maintained an image of being hard on the outside, but were really soft on the inside.

A Historical Snapshot of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

Pestalozzi was a short man with wild, bushy hair, which seemed to have a life of its own. He was a farmer, and sadly a failed farmer. However, while he lived in the country, he perfected the art of observation of natural phenomenon. In true curmudgeon style, he alienated himself from his neighbors by not letting them walk through his property. Instead of tending his farm, he spent his time roaming the countryside: thinking, observing, and recording. His fellow farmer neighbors found his behavior erratic. Pestalozzi was often poorly dressed and dirty, and his neighbors began referring to him as a "scarecrow." Not only was he unbecoming to the eye, but he also alienated himself from others. Even as a young man a friend said that Heinrich could not "address anyone or do anything without making an unfavorable impression through his hasty, uncouth, and thoughtless behavior" (p. 176)." In addition, when he became excited while talking to someone, he tended to get too close to the other's face and speak in a loud and shrill voice (Smith, G.).

Now, why in the world would I share such an unflattering portrait of Pestalozzi when he obviously contributed greatly to education? The reason is to demonstrate that sometimes what we see right in front of us, is not really all there is to it. Here was a man who was not appreciated by his contemporaries, but who has created a lasting legacy, which benefits

students. Life is complex; people are complex, and sometimes we can be wrong, even when it feels like we are right.

For every problem, there is a solution, which is simple, obvious, and wrong.

Pestalozzi conceptualized effective teaching in two different spheres. First, he felt teachers needed to care for students and create a safe classroom so that students could learn more effectively. A caring teacher and a safe, secure classroom were the first steps to alleviating psychological, emotional, and physical problems, which students bring to school. Second, Pestalozzi emphasized the importance of including the five senses in the learning process. For example, he believed that effective teaching strategies needed to begin with concrete objects and move to more abstract thinking.

The legacy of Pestalozzi lives on in schools today. It is made visible in the work of programs, which focus on the needs of disadvantaged students. The legacy is found in education, which strives to improve teaching strategies and enhance curriculum delivery. If you find a school where the children focus first on self; second on family; third on community, and on to state, nation, and finally the world, think of Pestalozzi. If you find students learning math, while counting beans, or rocks, or manipulatives, think of Pestalozzi. If you are in a science class and see the students observing and recording their observations, this, too, is a part of his legacy.

Principles of Pestalozzi

1. Personality is sacred.
2. Just as a tiny seed brings forth a tree, so, too, does each child have the promise of potential.
3. Love in learning is the bottom line.
4. In learning, we need to rid ourselves of verbosity. Anschauung is the concept, which reminds us that direct concrete observation enhances learning from known to unknown; from simple to complex; from concrete to abstract.
5. Action has primacy over words.
6. First Anschauung, next action, followed by repetition, but never a blind repetition; rather he called us to a repetition of action. (adapted from Kilpatrick, 1951)

Now, here is the point.

- Learning needs to connect hand, heart, and head; learning is holistic.
- Learning is connected to social justice.
- Observation precedes action, and the cycle begins again.
- Learning, which is connected to the five senses, is effective.
- Experimentation and discovery are effective pedagogical tools.
- Students thrive in a classroom filled with love and care.
- Focus on the students with the greatest needs.
- Focus on effective teaching strategies.
- And, no flogging.

Quips and Quotes by Pestalozzi

On reform

I wish to wrest education from the outworn order of doddering old teaching hacks as well as

from the new-fangled order of cheap, artificial teaching tricks, and entrust it to the eternal powers of nature herself, to the light which God has kindled and kept alive in the hearts of fathers and mothers, to the interests of parents who desire their children grow up in favour with God and with men. (Pestalozzi quoted in Silber 1965: 134)

On families

There can be no doubt that within the living room of every household are united the basic elements of all true human education in its whole range' <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-pest.htm>

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For further reading of others who have built on the legacy of Pestalozzi, see Nel Noddings, *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*; Parker Palmer, *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*; Sam Intrator, *Stories of the courage to teach: Honoring the teacher's heart*, and Joan Wink and Dawn Wink, *Teaching passionately: What's love got to do with it?*

Resources

<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-pest.htm>

Informal Education

<http://www.pragmatism.org/shook/greatest.htm>

50 Greatest Philosophers

Kilpatrick, W. H., (1951). *The Education of Man - Aphorisms*. New York: Philosophical Library. Retrieved 1.22.04 from

<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-pest.htm>

Pestalozzi, J. H. (1894) *How Gertrude Teaches her Children* translated by Lucy, E. Holland and Frances C. Turner. Edited with an introduction by Ebenezer Cooke. London: Swan Sonnenschein.

Silber, K. (1965). *Pestalozzi: The man and his work*, 2/e, London: Routledge and Kegan, Paul. Retrieved January 21, 2004 from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-pest.htm>

Smith, L. Glen. (1984). *Lives in Education: People and ideas in the development of teaching*. Ames, IA: Educational Studies Press.

An on-going dialogue with Lisa Westbrook has informed the Pestalozzi story.