

Jean Henri Pestalozzi



Biography Workbook Series

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JEAN HENRI PESTALOZZI

a.k.a. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

(1746-1827)

Those of us who can look back approximately 200 years must well know the fancy that American society took, on a sudden, to interrogate, or question, children. It is an odd thing to recall now one of the strangest fashions of a period full of wild fashions. After a long term of insular seclusion, through the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, we welcomed all sorts of foreigners to our soil, and all manner of foreign notions to our minds.

The grand discovery of the benefit of questioning children made great way in the country, and among some of the best-hearted people in it. The educational theory of questioning children (devised by Jean Henri Pestalozzi of Europe), though it worked well for him, was torn asunder by those

teachers who had no gift for talking to children.

1. **Jean Henri Pestalozzi devised the educational theory of _____ children.**
 - a. banishing
 - b. beating
 - c. questioning
 - d. testing

Wherever one went, among the educated classes, one found the same thing going on. Children of all ages, but especially the younger, were undergoing cross-examination from morning till night. It was a terrible time for them. We saw some fall into a habit of tears when asked a question which they could not answer. We have seen more fall into a habit of glib lying, under the teasing constraint. We have seen tempers ruined for life by the

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constant irritation. Most old people can probably say that they have seen promising intellects frittered away; minds above the average at the outset of life rendered incurably desultory, shallow, and conceited.

2. What unfortunate habits developed among children who were overly questioned?

If there are readers of the poet Wordsworth who are puzzled at this day about the drift of his poem, called "Anecdote for Fathers, Showing how the Practice of Lying May be Taught," let them remember that it was written at a time when "the Pestalozzian system" was in vogue in England, and throughout Europe; and then they will see what a good lesson it yields. If, at this day, the image flits across our memories of some pale child, with a fretful brow, red eyes, and a constant disposition to

get out of the room, or to hide behind the window curtains, when spoken to, we may refer that image back to the days of the "Pestalozzian system," as it was fashionably understood in this country.

3. What famous poem describes the Pestalozzian system?

It was a cruel injustice to Pestalozzi to render him responsible for all this mischief. His mission was, not to craze children's brains and break their hearts, but the very contrary. We, in fact, gave his name to a mere reaction from a mistake of our own—to one kind of ignorance into which we fell in our escape from another.

In our desire for popular education, early in the 19th century, we had supposed the thing to be done was to put certain facts into the learner's mind—to lay them upon his memory, as it were. To quicken and spread the process, we set children who had learned a

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thing one minute to teach it to other children the next. This did not answer.

We called it "the Lancasterian system," and supposed the nation would be educated in a trice. When we found, at the end of ten or twenty years, that boys and girls left school after sitting nine years on the benches, unable to do any good with book or pen, while they had lost their home-training in the workshop, the field, or the dairy, we were ready for a reaction. It is to that reaction we most unjustly gave the name of "Pestalozzian system."

4. Under what educational system were children taught to memorize facts, then to teach these facts to younger students?

The notion was that we had been all wrong in putting knowledge into children's heads. Therefore, the right way was to get ideas out of them. Henceforth we were to develop faculties, and not

impose knowledge. It was a great day for us when the conception was formed, and began to spread. Without it, education would never have advanced even as far as it has. But we blundered over it sadly at first. Among our mistakes, it was not the least that we christened our follies after Pestalozzi.

Every great step in social progress is taken in the name of some representative man. It is the business of those who come after to absolve those representatives from the disrepute of mistakes which were none of theirs. We may hope that Pestalozzi's memory has long been clear from the charge of torturing on the rack of cross-examination the generation of children whom he loved so well.

What it was that he did propose is best seen by looking at his life; for, if he was not a very practical man in the sense of wisely conducted affairs, he was still less of a theorist. He knew very well what he meant and what he wanted. But he had no compact system to propose, grounded on any new theory of the human faculties. The foremost man in the

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educational revolution of the early 19th century, he obeyed his instincts, and left it for incompetent followers to make a scheme of doctrine out of what he said and did.

What were those instincts? And how did he use them?

We first see him as a very peculiar little boy, whose best friend was his mother's maid, Barbara. His name is Italian, but he was Swiss. His ancestors had been citizens of Milan. But one of them, becoming a Protestant at the time of the Reformation, had to seek a Protestant country to live in, and went to Zurich.

5. Pestalozzi's ancestors came from what Italian city?

- a. Florence
- b. Milan
- c. Rome
- d. Venice

The father of this little John Henry (or Jean Henri, or Johann Heinrich) was a physician. He died so early that he left a very bare provision for his widow and their only son. Aware of the prudence that their circumstances would

require, he recommended them, on his deathbed, to the care of the trusty maid Barbara, who fully justified the confidence.

6. Pestalozzi's father was a ____.

- a. dentist
- b. lawyer
- c. physician
- d. teacher

Barbara carried them through with an appearance of respectability on the smallest means, and nourished the pride of narrow circumstances in the boy, in striving to avoid the opposite fault of meanness. She told him that no Pestalozzi had ever eaten the bread of dependence, and that his mother's self-denial raised him above the degradation suffered by many another orphan in Zurich. These lessons, and Barbara's own character, account for much of the passionate advocacy of the claims and the independence of the poor, and of the respect for their virtue, which were the chief features of the whole life of the man.

7. Pestalozzi grew up in what Swiss city?

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From six years old, when his father died, Pestalozzi looked upon all orphans with an interest compounded of fellow-feeling and of lofty pity for their inferiority in independence. His great, but as yet unconscious, desire was to help the whole class to independence.

It does not appear why Pestalozzi devoted himself, as he grew up, to the study of languages. Probably he had no choice as to the course of his training. But we find him, so early as the age of eighteen, leaving that study and preparing himself with great zeal for the pulpit. His deeply religious nature might well indicate this career; but he early failed in it and gave it up. His first attempt to preach ended in mortification, and it is not difficult to perceive why.

8. What did Pestalozzi study while he was growing up?

His education must have been defective, for, to the end of his long life, he spoke a jargon of German or French, sometimes mixing the two; a kind of language which none but his intimates could comprehend. His articulation was defective. His countenance was so ugly as to be forbidding. During the latter part of his life at least, his personal habits were worse than slovenly. The failure in the pulpit is not wonderful; nor yet that in the law, which he tried next. He turned again to his first pursuit, and published some philological writings. While eager about a new method of teaching Latin, he one day took up Rousseau's *Émile*, and the book determined the whole course of his life.

Insisting that the pursuit of learning was the most unnatural of human occupations, Pestalozzi not only gave it up, but burned all his papers; not only his notes, but manuscripts on Swiss law and Swiss history. He would live henceforth as a son of the soil. He sold his small patrimony to buy a bit of land to farm, married the daughter of a merchant of Zurich,

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and began domestic life at two and twenty.

9. How old was Pestalozzi when he got married?

- a. 20
- b. 21
- c. 22
- d. 23

His wife's connection gave him an interest in a cotton manufactory. Pestalozzi became well acquainted with two classes of laborers at once. The discovery of their intellectual degradation shocked him. Both the farm-laborers and the spinners were so inferior to the poor of his imagination, that he was at once stimulated and dismayed.

Pestalozzi was thirty when he set about the sort of work which made him the world's benefactor. He collected about fifty poor and desolate children on his little estate, lived with them in a state of hardship, taught them to work, and to think, and to read, and made friends of them. In the absence of other assistants, he adopted the plan of setting them to teach one another; a feature of his method

which recommended it where the Lancasterian system existed. Having no skill, and no prudence in the management of affairs, he was soon ruined, and the establishment was broken up.

10. Why did Pestalozzi's first school end in financial ruin?

This was the occasion of Pestalozzi giving us the book which made his name famous all over Europe. To explain his views, and to get immediate means of support, he wrote *Leonard and Gertrude*, which might soon after be seen on the tables of all benevolent and literary persons in all countries. Its disclosure of continental peasant life was perhaps the first charm to us. But it also changed the character of educational effort in England as elsewhere. Perhaps this popularity gave the good man honor in his own country.

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11. What book did Pestalozzi write?

After the Revolutionary War in Switzerland, the Canton of Unterwalden was overrun with wretched children who seemed to belong to nobody. They prowled about the burned hamlets, and infested town and country like little wolves. The government asked Pestalozzi to take charge of some of them, and offered him some little aid. It was a singular spectacle when this uncouth man, then in the vigor of his years (it was in 1798), entered the ruins of a ravaged convent, with his mob of one hundred and fifty outcast children.

12. When did Pestalozzi open his second school?

Pestalozzi was all alone with these outcast children. Some of them were sickly and stunted; many were fretful; and not a few ferocious, or malicious, or impudent, or full of suspicion and

falsehood. Pestalozzi lived and labored among them, nursed them, taught them, and soon began to open their minds and gain their hearts. In a little while their avidity for knowledge astonished him.

The facts of the case indicate that Pestalozzi had an aptitude for communicating with children's minds that amounted to genius. Our mistake, after the fact, was in supposing that the virtue lay in that part of the method which could be imitated. Pestalozzi, conversing with young creatures who had never supposed that anybody cared for them, surprised them by his interest in what they felt and thought. His questions roused their faculties, and sent a glow through their feelings. Their improvement transcended all precedent. Reports of his conversation and his achievements set others to work; and there was such an interrogation of children as was never dreamed of before.

13. Pestalozzi, _____ with young creatures who had never supposed that anybody cared for them, surprised them by his

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interest in what they felt and thought.

- a. conversing
- b. interrogating
- c. talking
- d. walking

One question which Pestalozzi asked of this set of pupils is memorable. They had seen Altdorf in flames. About those blackened ruins there were again desolate children, living as they could. Pestalozzi sounded the minds of his pupils as to doing something in the case. When they eagerly desired to take in twenty among them, Pestalozzi asked them whether they could bear the consequences. They must work harder even than now; they must live yet more barely; they might have to share their dinners and their clothes with strangers whom they might not like. He would not allow a rash decision. He made them fully understand what they were undertaking, and put off the settlement of the question. Still, the pupils said, "Let them come!"

14. Why do you suppose that these children were eager to

share what they had with more homeless, orphaned children?

The ravage of the war swept away this institution. But Pestalozzi could never again be overlooked. His special function was recognized at home and abroad. His books were translated into many languages. The emperors and kings of Europe were eager to apply his wisdom to the education of their people. He was summoned to Paris to join a consultation on the interests of Switzerland, ordered by Napoleon. But he made his escape from Paris at the first possible moment. He did not want imperial patronage which interfered with his work at home. He would have nothing to do

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with politics. Pestalozzi desired to live with children and the poor, to open their minds, and make them good and happy.

15. What did Pestalozzi fear would interfere with his work at home?

It seemed as if Pestalozzi had attained his utmost wishes when the town of Yverdun offered him its castle and grounds for a school, with perfect freedom as to the management. For a few years, the promise of educational advancement was truly splendid. Some of Pestalozzi's own pupils became able and devoted assistants. Other young men of the highest qualifications devoted themselves as apostles of his mission.

16. What town offered Pestalozzi a castle to use as a school?

Here and there over Europe, establishments arose where boys, and sometimes girls, were trained at once in industry and intellectual progress. Those who were in the gardens, or the harvest field, or the dairy at one time of the day, were studying languages, mathematics, or music at other hours. And where this direct imitation of the Swiss establishments was not attempted, there was a visible improvement in methods of instruction. We learned to see that books and education, books and teaching, are not the same thing. Oral instruction came into use elsewhere than at mothers' knees. Amid some gross abuses, "the Pestalozzian system" began to work great good.

There is almost always some dreary chapter in the history of these representative men. In Pestalozzi's there were several. But the dreariest of all was the last.

There never was a movement which depended more entirely for success on the personal qualifications of its agents. We need not look further than the next street, or the next house, to see how

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one person differs from another in the faculty of genuine intercourse with children's minds. The smallness of the number of the well-endowed with this power, is the best reason for the large use of books in schools.

Pestalozzi's genius for companionship with inferior minds caused a too exclusive recourse to oral instruction. Thus, when assistants came upon the scene, there was diversity, disagreement, disappointment, and no little disorder. We need not go into the painful story of warring tempers

and incompatible interests. The institution declined for some years, and then was broken up—the government of the Canton warning the manager of the concern, who acted in Pestalozzi's name, to leave the country.

17. Pestalozzi's genius for companionship with inferior minds caused a too exclusive recourse to ____ instruction.
- a. despotic
 - b. oral
 - c. rote
 - d. written



Pestalozzi, the children's friend.

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Vocabulary Terms: Match each term (found in the text above) to its meaning.

18. _____ act or state of being debased or humiliated
19. _____ acted blindly or stupidly
20. _____ an instant
21. _____ awkward, clumsy, or without proper manners
22. _____ beginning or inception
23. _____ characteristic attitude
24. _____ characterized by goodwill
25. _____ detached and isolated
26. _____ disfavor or low regard
27. _____ kindly helper
28. _____ person who forms doctrines, laws, or principles
29. _____ playful conduct that causes minor annoyance
30. _____ quality of being circumspect, discreet, and sagacious
31. _____ readily and insincerely fluent
32. _____ related to the study of written documents and texts
33. _____ reverse action
34. _____ something fashionable
35. _____ squandered little by little
36. _____ the vocabulary belonging to a particular group or profession
37. _____ to question formally

- (a) benefactor
- (b) benevolent
- (c) blundered
- (d) conception
- (e) degradation
- (f) disposition
- (g) disrepute
- (h) frittered
- (i) glib
- (j) insular

- (k) interrogate
- (l) jargon
- (m) mischief
- (n) philological
- (o) prudence
- (p) reaction
- (q) theorist
- (r) trice
- (s) uncouth
- (t) vogue

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It needs no explanation that Pestalozzi was in some respects weak. The failure of all of his establishments and his inability to keep out of debt show this. His faculties of imagination and sympathy overpowered the rest of his mind. He early seized a great truth—that of the claim of every human being to the full development of his faculties, whatever they may be. The concentration of his strongest powers on this great truth made him a social reformer of a high order.

Pestalozzi was not a philosopher. He was not a man of good sense, or temper, or practical ability, generally speaking; though

sense, temper, and ability appeared to be all transcendent in the particular direction taken by his genius. Among his inferiors—and particularly friendless children—he was a prophet and apostle. Among other people, he was a child.

Pestalozzi died at the age of eighty-one, preserving, in the midst of great pain, his enthusiasm for justice, his special love for children and the poor, and his strong religious sentiment. Two days before his death, he spoke long and nobly, while taking leave of his family and his enterprises. His country, and we hope the world, has remembered his good offices to society, and forgiven his foibles.

38. What do you like about Pestalozzi's educational theory? What do you dislike? Explain your answer.

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Vocabulary Terms: Match each term (found in the text above) to its meaning.

40. _____ a person devoted to the improvement of what is unsatisfactory
41. _____ ability or capability
42. _____ access to someone or something that can help
43. _____ act of moving forward
44. _____ called upon to do something specified
45. _____ causing gloom or sadness
46. _____ characterized by effrontery
47. _____ communication or dealings
48. _____ conference
49. _____ decision that serves as a guide for future decisions
50. _____ discordant
51. _____ fellowship
52. _____ financial support of an establishment or person
53. _____ irritable or peevish
54. _____ lively interest
55. _____ malevolent or spiteful
56. _____ qualities that fit a person for some function
57. _____ questioning
58. _____ slight defects or flaws
59. _____ violently savage

(a) advancement

(b) aptitude

(c) companionship

(d) consultation

(e) dreary

(f) enthusiasm

(g) ferocious

(h) foibles

(i) fretful

(j) impudent

(k) incompatible

(l) intercourse

(m) interrogation

(n) malicious

(o) patronage

(p) precedent

(q) qualifications

(r) recourse

(s) reformer

(t) summoned

Word Search Puzzle

A	P	E	S	T	A	L	O	Z	Z	I	G
E	L	A	N	O	I	T	A	C	U	D	E
D	E	C	S	D	P	O	V	E	R	T	Y
U	O	T	H	M	N	P	D	K	I	H	E
R	N	B	C	I	Q	E	L	E	C	E	C
T	A	U	A	L	L	O	I	J	H	O	I
R	R	C	E	A	R	D	M	R	H	R	T
E	D	V	T	N	F	N	R	I	F	Y	S
G	N	I	N	O	I	T	S	E	U	Q	U
S	W	I	T	Z	E	R	L	A	N	D	J

children
educational
friend
Gertrude
justice
Leonard
Milan

Pestalozzi
poverty
questioning
Switzerland
teach
theory
Zurich