

# Pestalozzi International

*To nurture and develop*

**Johann Heinrich  
Pestalozzi**

An Outline of his Life and Work

## 1746

Pestalozzi was born in Zurich, Switzerland. (His ancestor, Johann Anton Pestalozzi, had immigrated to Zurich from Chiavenna in Italy, in the mid sixteenth century.)

## 1751

Pestalozzi's father died. He started school in Zurich.

## 1754-1767

Education studying Philosophy Pestalozzi went to the Latin Schools 'Collegium Humanitatis' and 'Collegium Carolinum' – the latter from 1763 – in Zurich. At the Carolinum Pestalozzi studied philology (the branch of knowledge that deals with the structure, historical development and relationships of a language or languages) and philosophy (the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence). The college had some distinguished professors at the time, including Johann Jacob Bodmer who taught Swiss history and politics. He made his students feel great love for Switzerland.

Pestalozzi joined a group called the Patriots. The Patriots, with Bodmer's support, founded the Helvetic Society. This was a youth movement, which wanted to improve the country's morals. They wanted political and social reform. Their ideals were 'perfection' and 'virtue'. They put their country before everything else. At the time there was political unrest in Switzerland; the struggle was between the ruling families and the people.

## 1762

Jean Jacques Rousseau's 'Emile' was published. Rousseau, whose ideas were of great importance to the French Revolution, was a major influence on Pestalozzi

## 1765

Pestalozzi's first published work 'Agis' appeared in the Lindauer Journal. In 'Agis' Pestalozzi writes about ancient history and the loss of 'liberty and equality' in those ancient days. He is actually criticising the political situation of his own times.

## 1765-1767

**'Aspirations' or 'Wishes'.** These were published in the weekly journal of the Helvetic Society, 'The Monitor', which explored social and literary subjects. Under the strict Zurich censorship of the time, it was only possible to make any kind of public criticism by expressing views as 'wishes'. **The periodical was suppressed by the authorities in 1767 because the articles in it fearlessly attacked any persons or practices the Patriots thought needed reform. It was therefore seen as revolutionary.**

## 1768-1770

Pestalozzi's home, the Neuhof, was built near Birr.

## 1769

Pestalozzi learnt **modern agricultural methods** from the farmer Tschiffeli. Tschiffeli was very successful in his experimental farm, cultivating clover for stock feeding, madder for the red dye used in the newly

developed cotton industry, and potatoes, which had only recently been introduced into Switzerland.

1769

Pestalozzi married Anna Schulthess and settled at **the Neuhof where he experimented in modern farming techniques.** His project failed, partly because he did not have the support of his neighbours.

1770

Pestalozzi's only son was born. He was named Jean Jacques, after Rousseau.

1773-1779

**The Industrial School for poor children at the Neuhof.** Pestalozzi's purpose was to help children overcome their poverty with their own strengths. Poor, neglected, sometimes physically unfit boys and girls were taught to earn their own living by their own work as cotton spinners or weavers. Pestalozzi did not like the fact that these children were often exploited because they had no education, and they were not able to get an education because they had to work to earn a living. So he also taught them reading, writing and arithmetic, and other skills like gardening, cooking and sewing. The Neuhof experiment taught Pestalozzi that successful education depends on providing children with security and on giving them true affection.

1774

Pestalozzi kept a diary called '**How Father Pestalozzi Instructed His Three-and-a-Half Year Old Son**'. In this diary, Pestalozzi began to develop his theories of education based on the nature of the child and the natural world as well as on his principles of sense-impression as the basis of education. In putting theory into practice, Pestalozzi recognised that alongside freedom, obedience is also necessary in the education of a child. This was different from Rousseau's main stress on freedom in education.

1775-1778

**'Essays on the Education of the Children of the Poor'.** These three essays were published in a periodical (The 'Ephemerides').

**1779-1798**

Pestalozzi continued to live at the Neuhof, writing a great deal on social, political and educational matters.

1780

**'The Evening Hour of a Hermit'.** This series of 180 aphorisms (an aphorism is a short, to the point observation which contains a general truth) was published anonymously in the periodical, the 'Ephemerides', and contains the earliest outline statement of the whole range of Pestalozzi's principles. Pestalozzi believed that it was the starting point of all his future writings. In 'The Evening Hour of a Hermit', Pestalozzi explores what man could and should be. His belief is that 'the cultivation of the powers inherent in human nature towards pure wisdom is the ultimate aim of education' for all humankind. He argues that 'man must be brought to find inner peace', which can come about through the satisfaction of fundamental needs. To achieve this, practical wisdom, not theoretical knowledge, is needed.

**1781 'Leonard and Gertrude' (Volume 1)** was published. Volume 2 was published in 1783, Volume 3 in 1785 and Volume 4 in 1787. This popular novel explores social and moral evils of the day and shows how a good mother can set an example through the education of her children and how her morality can lead to the moral victory of good over bad for a whole community. The novel demonstrates Pestalozzi's belief that family life is the strongest of all forces for education and that the mother is the greatest teacher.

**1782 'Swiss News'.** This weekly newspaper was run by Pestalozzi. It contained articles on political, moral and educational questions in the form of essays, dialogues, moral tales, fables and verse. Pestalozzi was almost the only contributor. It stopped at the end of the same year since there were limited sales.

**1782 'Christopher and Elizabeth'.** This was written as a commentary on 'Leonard and Gertrude', to show how the 'living-room education' practised by Gertrude should be carried out. The moral of this book, as well as of 'Leonard and Gertrude', is that true reform relies on the proper education of the young. However 'Christopher and Elizabeth' was never popular.

**1783 'On Legislation and Infanticide'.** Basing his argument on criminal cases, Pestalozzi blames society and the economic problems of unmarried mothers for the frequency of infanticide (the murder of a very young child) and calls for better laws to help overcome the evil. Pestalozzi argues that laws should support unmarried mothers rather than disgrace them, otherwise such mothers may kill their children for fear of punishment and out of shame.

**1783-1793 'Memoranda on Civil Education'** was written for the Austrian princes. In the memoranda Pestalozzi explains that education for good citizenship must give the people a moral education as well as train them in practical skills; only then can they carry out their particular occupations to the best of their abilities and be useful members of their communities. The 'happiness of the people' can be achieved by filling them with 'the spirit of industry'. 'Industry', which includes putting effort into work as well as skill in a particular field, must be developed in children.

*1789 - 1799 The French Revolution – the storming of the Bastille prison and the Declaration of Human Rights, demanding liberty and equality for all citizens.*

**1792 Pestalozzi was made an honorary French Citizen.** In the same year he was offered good appointments in Austria, Tuscany and Italian Switzerland. He refused all of them.

**1793 'Yes or No?'** was published. In it, Pestalozzi asks what the real sources of popular discontent are. With particular reference to the French Revolution, he accuses and warns both political sides. He argues that any kind of despotism would ruin Europe and that the only way to survive is for governments to listen and agree to do what is 'reasonable in the demand of the people for liberty'.

**1797 'Fables'.** Pestalozzi wrote 239 'fables'. Nearly all of them are very short and contain a striking or original truth about morality, education, society or politics. Many of them are animal fables and contain a clear moral message concerning the harm done by a human's 'animal nature' to his or her 'spiritual or moral nature'.

**1797 'Enquiries Concerning the Course of Nature in the Development of the Human Race'.** In this book, Pestalozzi explores the basic motives for human behaviour and the ways in which education can be harmonized with the natural instincts and desires of men. The book describes Pestalozzi's fundamental point of view on human nature and states that the shortcomings of the state and of the social order can be overcome by the morality of the individual. An individual's nature has three aspects: 1) as a product of Nature – primitive man; 2) as a product of living in a human society – social man; 3) as a product of the individual's own efforts – moral man. This way of looking at things explains all the contradictions of human nature, because either the primitive or the moral side of human nature dominates in a person. Humans generally live as social beings, and because many of us feel that we only need to follow social rules and not rules of a higher moral or spiritual level, the happiness of the human race is destroyed.

1797 French troops invaded Switzerland and promoted the revolutionary movement.

1798 Napoleon and his French troops conquered Switzerland. The Swiss Republic - 'The One and Indivisible Helvetian Republic' - replaced the Swiss Confederation. A Central Government came into power and many privileges of the upper classes were taken away, meaning that there was greater equality for the citizens of Switzerland. The upper classes also had to agree to a democratic constitution. Although Pestalozzi had dreaded French interference in Switzerland, he saw in the Republic possibilities for progress and social reform.

**1798 'On The Tithe'.** These pamphlets are among many other revolutionary works by Pestalozzi, and call attention to the injustice of the tithe system. In this system, only the farmers had to pay taxes. The first of the pamphlets called for equal taxation of all citizens and led to the abolition of the tithe system in Switzerland. In a second pamphlet Pestalozzi called for 'just' burdens, whereby each citizen would be taxed according to his means. This never came about and the Swiss Republic reintroduced the tithe system to solve its financial troubles. The people therefore lost confidence in the Republic and stopped supporting it. As a result, in 1803, the Swiss Republic collapsed.

**1798 Orphanage at Stans.** At the request of the Swiss Government, Pestalozzi set up and took charge of this newly formed orphanage, which has been called 'the cradle of the modern elementary school.' (From Schenkel, quoted in Green (1)) Following Pestalozzi's plan, which had already been approved by the government, orphaned boys and girls were brought to this school and home for poor children. The children had been made homeless and orphaned as a result of the harsh punishment given by the French to the local Roman Catholics, who fought against the democratic constitution of the Swiss Republic. The plan was that the children should be brought up 'to earn their living themselves by gaining the independence necessary for their moral welfare and in keeping with their dignity as human beings'.

Pestalozzi was able to rehabilitate these victims of poverty and war by creating a homelike atmosphere of love and security, by being like a father to all the children and by cultivating their abilities and good tendencies. He taught by sense-impression, using the child's environment and spontaneous activities; there were no books and no school materials. Despite its immediate success and Pestalozzi's sense of fulfilment while working at the orphanage, it was stopped after only five months because the building became a military hospital.

1799-1800 Pestalozzi worked in various schools in Burgdorf. The success of Pestalozzi's teaching methods led to his promotion to the Second Boys' School. Pestalozzi's method was based on the following ideas: Nature teaches the child and the teacher's role is to assist nature; teaching and the objects used in teaching should correspond to the child's natural stage of development at any given time; at any stage in the child's education, the child should be allowed to learn everything that he or she is capable of understanding, but should not be expected to learn anything beyond his or her ability; and knowledge should always come through sense-impression and only after thorough understanding has been reached should this knowledge be expressed in words.

1800-1804 The Institute at Burgdorf. Pestalozzi applied for the use of the whole of Burgdorf Castle and was granted it. This meant that he had his own school, which provided education for both fee-paying children and for those with scholarships. This school also offered a short teacher training course, was a centre for educational research and prepared instructional materials (various textbooks by Pestalozzi and his assistants were produced here). The aim of the teaching was to develop the children's own abilities rather than to fill their heads with facts. How to learn was considered more important than what was learnt; the process of learning was considered the most important factor. Visitors came to the Burgdorf Institute and Pestalozzi's teaching methods began to gain international repute.

1801 'How Gertrude Teaches her Children – An attempt to Give Directions to Mothers How to Instruct Their Own Children'. The fame Pestalozzi experienced during his lifetime was largely owing to this book; it resulted in a steady stream of visitors coming to see him in action. The book puts forward Pestalozzi's pedagogic principles based on his work at Stans and Burgdorf. He states an idea that was new to popular education: the principle of self-activity in getting and using knowledge. Everything a person does is self-generated. Everything a person is, wants and should do comes from within, as a result of the powers we are all born with. This includes knowledge and understanding. The aim of education must therefore be the harmonious development of these innate natural powers. These ideas brought about a massive revolution in the method of teaching.

1802 Napoleon decided to revise the Swiss constitution and Pestalozzi was part of a national deputation sent to Paris to advise on the new constitution. This deputation was unsuccessful due to Napoleon's inflexible attitude, which took no advice from the deputation

1803 The Helvetian Republic came to an end with 'The Act of Mediation', by which Napoleon dissolved central government and returned all administrative power to the cantons. The aristocratic conservatives again became dominant. The new government in Berne did not approve of Pestalozzi, considering him a revolutionary. It took possession of Burgdorf Castle and Pestalozzi had to leave the premises in 1804.

1802-1803 '**Pestalozzi to His Age**', commonly called '**Epochs**'. The important message of this book is that man can restore himself to natural goodness through education. The book remained unfinished at Pestalozzi's death.

1804 **The Institute at Münchenbuchsee**. For a brief period the Burgdorf Institute was moved to nearby Münchenbuchsee, although some of the boys went immediately to Yverdon, which Pestalozzi had also been offered the use of when he had to leave Burgdorf.

**1804-1825 The Yverdon Institute.** Pestalozzi, his staff and students moved to Yverdon in 1804 and settled there. The Yverdon Institute became famous throughout Europe and attracted many visitors before it closed in 1825. The majority of boys were fee paying but there were a fair number of them (about one third) with scholarships. There were boys from many European countries and even from America. The boys were between seven and fifteen years old. Family background, circumstances and intellectual capacity made no difference to the treatment of the children. The children's health and happiness were considered important, as was the natural environment, fresh air, wholesome food and physical exercise. The natural gifts and powers of the children were encouraged; children were not given the products of learning (the answers) but were guided to find them for themselves through active learning and observation. Discipline was based on love rather than on fear. The local community, visitors and parents were all encouraged to take active part in the school community. Yverdon also provided teacher training; students who were training to become teachers came to learn teaching and Pestalozzi's assistants began to help with teaching while they were still pupils. Some of the teaching assistants would later have a major influence on education practice in Europe and America. Yverdon became a famous centre of modern instruction for middle class children and such a centre for educational experiment that it is probably true to say that almost every approach found in modern elementary education originated in Yverdon.

**1806 An Institute for Girls** was set up in the town of Yverdon since Pestalozzi always wanted to provide education for girls as well as for boys.

**1807 'Views and Experiences'**. In this work Pestalozzi explains that an education 'according to nature' should provide a balanced education of head, heart and hands, which develops all the child's faculties equally, leading to the child achieving full humanity as a result of having a sense of dignity. Pestalozzi believes that the home is the best place to carry out such an education.

1807-1810 'Wochenschrift für Menschenbildung', a weekly journal was issued from Yverdon. Amongst other works by Pestalozzi, his writing on his Work at Stans was published in it.

1813 Institute for children unable to hear or speak. Pestalozzi opened this institute in the town of Yverdon with one of his fellow-workers, Joseph Conrad Naef.

1815 The death of Pestalozzi's wife Anna.

1815 Pestalozzi spoke out for liberal government when, after Napoleon's downfall in 1814, Switzerland was able to throw off the Act of Mediation and draft its own Constitution.

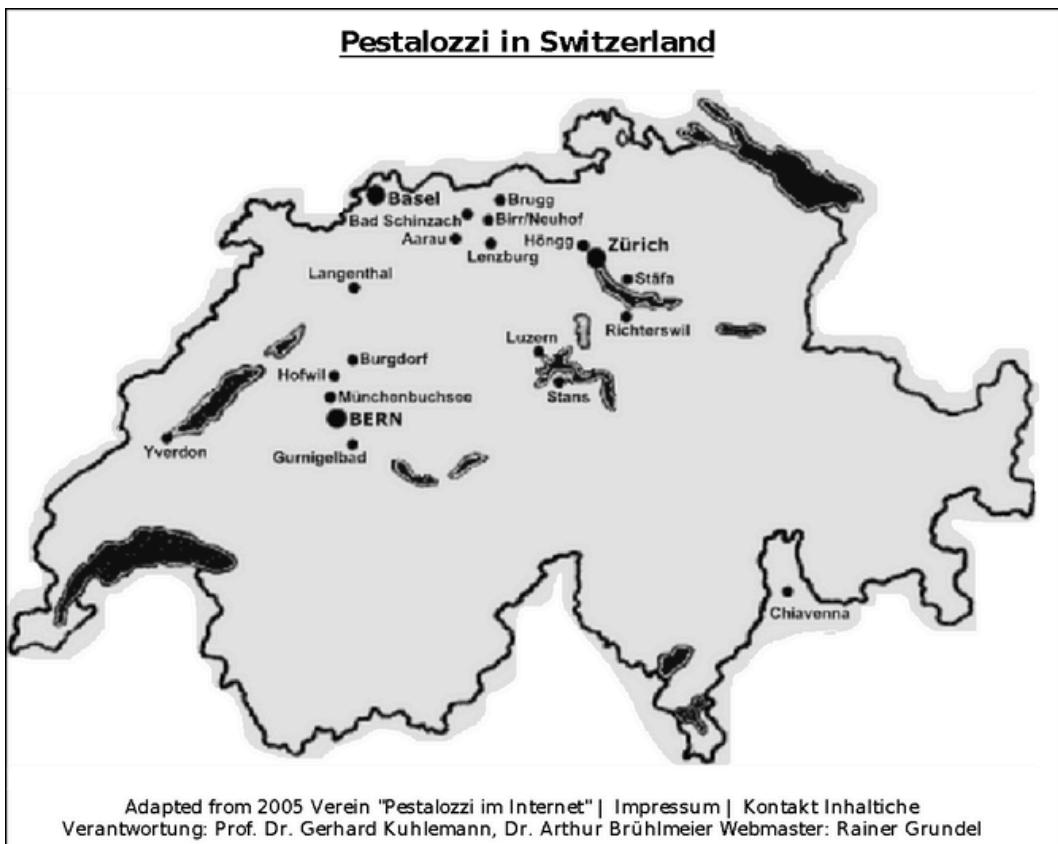
1818 School for poor children opened at Clindy. The school joined up with the school at Yverdon in 1820.

1818-1819 Letters on Early Education addressed to J. P. Greaves. In these letters Pestalozzi gives his ideas about the relationship between mother and child, especially emphasising the importance of the early years and of the formative influence on the child of the mother's love. The mother should show wisdom and firmness in her fulfilment of the child's primary needs, teaching the young child how to overcome its animal desires and become rational and moral, putting others first.

1825 Pestalozzi returned to the Neuhof where he intended to fulfil his life's dream of opening a school for poor children. However he died while the building for the children to live in was under construction.

1826 'Swansong'. This review of Pestalozzi's life and doctrine has two parts. The first part is a re-statement of Pestalozzi's ideas on elementary education. The aim of education is to achieve a 'harmony' or balance of powers by strengthening the 'general power' – the superior power - inherent in us all. This superior power (love) unites the separate powers of thought (head), will (heart) and 'being able to do' (hands). To achieve this, education must use the resources of real life, since 'life educates'. The second part of the book tells the story of Pestalozzi's life in terms of the success and failure of what he did.

1827 Pestalozzi died in Brugg, near his home, the Neuhof, and was buried next to the school in Birr. In 1846 a monument was built to him, which still exists today. The epitaph includes the words 'All for others, for himself nothing'.



**Summarised by Dr. Joanna Nair**

### **Sources**

Green, J.A. (1912) *Life and Work of Pestalozzi* London: W.B. Clive, University Tutorial Press

Pestalozzi im Internet / Pestalozzi goes internet <http://www.heinrich-pestalozzi.info>  
Authors Dr. Gerhard Kuhlemann and Dr. Arthur Brühlmeier

Silber, K. (1960) *Pestalozzi The Man and His Work* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul