

Johann Heinrich PESTALOZZI (1746 – 1827)

Educationalist and writer, Johann Heinrich PESTALOZZI, influenced by the thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, spent his whole life teaching children from poor families. The various schools he set up served as models throughout Europe. His practical and direct teaching methods, based on a gradual development of every faculty, are described in his writings, among them a novel entitled *Lienhard und Gertrud* (Leonard and Gertrude) (1781-1787) and the treatise *Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder lehrt* (How Gertrude Teaches Her Children) (1801).

Born into an Italian family in Zurich on 12 January 1746, he was a Swiss citizen. Shocked by poverty, he decided in 1773 to take in his farm some of the girls and boys he had found begging along the roads. Both during their free time and as they worked, the children were given the basic knowledge that they needed to escape from poverty. Every single child was observed, respected and encouraged to develop his or her qualities, character, open-mindedness, health, new-found physical strength, arithmetical ability, drawing talent, singing voice, etc.

Between 1781 and 1787, Pestalozzi published *Lienhard und Gertrud*, setting out his social and educational ideas in particular. His writings were extremely successful and were translated into several languages. In 1798, Philipp Albert Stapfer, Minister for Arts and Sciences of the new Helvetic Republic, persuaded him to take charge of the "house of poors" in Stans, which was to take in child victims of the war. In 1799 some 60 sick, wounded and starving children were taken in. They were cared for, fed, housed, educated and trained without any timetable, curriculum or classes. Education alternated with training in manual work. He writes his famous *Lettre de Stans*, describing his educational theories. Convinced that only through education could human beings improve their condition, Pestalozzi decided to become a schoolteacher.

In 1800, he opened an educational institute in Burgdorf castle which also had a teacher training department. Two years later, the institute had 80 pupils aged between five and 18. No marks were awarded, no corporal or other punishment was meted out, and there were no school reports. Pestalozzi's reputation began to spread. Parents came to see him and sent their children to his school. People read his writings, and young teachers came to join his new experiment. He finalised his "Method" of teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Children progressed at their own speed, thanks to differentiated teaching. The institute became a true centre of educational research. 1801 saw the publication of *Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder lehrt*, followed in 1803 by *Buch der Mütter* (The Book for Mothers). At Yverdon, in his new institute, he continued his educational work. He enjoyed great success and received numerous visitors and foreign trainees. The number of pupils rose to 150, with 30 or so teachers and around 40 trainee teachers. He organises educational seminars. Tsar Alexander Ist lent his support. In 1806, Pestalozzi opened a girls' school to train women teachers and to prepare girls properly for motherhood. He also founded a school for deaf and dumb children, the first of its kind in Switzerland. In 1818, he attempted to open a school for children from poor families, taking both girls and boys. In 1826, he published *Schwanengesang* (Swan song). Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was 81 when he died, in Brugg in 1827.

Pestalozzi was one of those "heart educationalists" for whom teaching children through the heart is as well a part of education as providing them with intellectual knowledge. By "the head, the heart and the hand", children are taken into consideration and regarded as parts of a whole being. The "Pestalozzi Method" centres on "freedom in independence", involving these 3 elements with a view to achieving the individual's freedom and independence, with the teacher's role being to ensure that the three remain in balance.

Often referred to as the "father of the poors" or as a "teacher of the people", Pestalozzi was first and foremost a thinker with a fervent belief in action. He was a practitioner in search of a theory that could be applied to his practice. In his view, the teacher had to use children's experience as the starting point, tailoring the teaching to each individual child's personality. It was ways of learning that he studied, rather than ways of teaching. He believed that children should use the knowledge they had acquired and absorb it more fully by passing it on to others younger than themselves or who were experiencing difficulties, since only one can explain something if one

truly understands it. He devoted his life to working out exactly what a child is. His teaching was based on the child and its true nature. Teaching, in his view, had to be a slow process geared to the child's own speed. He believed that taking it too quickly tires children out and takes away their appetite for finding out and learning. For him, textbooks were just an aid. What was important was the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship. Knowledge was built up internally, through human relations. His Method made the child responsible for his/her own education : child is the main player in his/her learning process. During his lifetime, the Method was already both admired or criticised. It was based on a very simple principle: a teacher has to love children. Pestalozzi was the father of modern educational theory and the instigator of numerous 19th-century educational reforms.