

HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY: FROM THE PESTALOZZIAN EDUCATIONAL MODEL TO CONTEMPORARY INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

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Abstract: The article addresses a central problem in pedagogy, namely how learning can be understood beyond the external acquisition of curricular content. The study proceeds from the assumption that the difficulties of contemporary education arise from the selection of methods and from a weakened connection between pedagogical action and the process through which the learner forms understanding. This leads to a focus on Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, whose place in the history of pedagogical thought is revealed not through general assessments of his influence, but through a careful consideration of how he conceptualises the emergence of knowledge. The text advances the position that Pestalozzi's significance derives from a particular shift in pedagogical perspective. Rather than treating instructional content as a finished given, he directs attention to the gradual formation of understanding in the learner. In this way, learning appears not as the acceptance of ready-made meanings, but as a process of meaning formation in which perception, action, language, and mental structuring are inseparably connected. It is precisely at this point that the article identifies a line of continuity which allows classical pedagogical thought to enter into dialogue with contemporary approaches related to learning through experience, the learner's active participation in the educational process, and intellectual autonomy. Particular attention is given to presenting these relations in a form that allows them to be both theoretically understood and practically applied. The study introduces a visual scheme that organises the transition from an initial encounter with a situation to the formation of meaningful understanding. The scheme does not aim to replace Pestalozzi's original text, nor to reduce it to a simplified procedure. Its purpose is to show the conditions under which teaching retains its internal coherence, and those under which it begins to dissolve into repetition that creates the illusion of mastery. In this sense, the article affirms the need for pedagogy to return to its own foundations, not out of reverence for the past, but out of professional necessity. In this way, it becomes possible to distinguish between teaching that produces verbal reproduction and teaching that transforms the learner's way of thinking and understanding.

Keywords: *History of pedagogy; Pestalozzi; learning process; experiential learning; knowledge construction; educational model; conceptual framework; deep learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary pedagogical theory and practice, there is a growing need to reconsider how learning is understood as a process. The increasing number of educational approaches and models has expanded the teacher's repertoire, yet it raises the question of how these approaches relate to one another. Within this plurality, there is a risk that teaching may be reduced to the application of techniques lacking a clear conceptual foundation. This makes it necessary to return to the fundamental questions of pedagogy, focusing on how understanding is formed in the learner rather than on what is taught. The history of pedagogy shows that enduring ideas do not emerge from the pursuit of efficiency, but from engagement with questions of human development and cognition. For this reason, classical pedagogical concepts retain their relevance through their capacity to reveal underlying regularities that remain valid within contemporary educational contexts. It is within such a perspective that the place of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in the history of pedagogy should be considered. The present educational environment is often characterised by an emphasis on learner activity, experiential learning, and the development of the individual as a whole [1].

These tendencies are often presented as the result of contemporary theoretical inquiry; however, a more careful analysis reveals that they rest upon deeper foundations. In this sense, contemporary pedagogy should not be considered independently of its theoretical tradition, as many of its central principles may be better understood when examined in relation to earlier pedagogical thought. A key problem in this regard is the lack of clear models that represent the internal logic of learning in a form that is both theoretically grounded and applicable in practice. In many instances, pedagogical concepts remain at the level of general principles, without being translated into structured frameworks through which actual educational practice may be examined. This, in turn, hinders both the interpretation of classical theories and the evaluation of contemporary educational approaches. This article addresses this discrepancy between theory and its representation by articulating and visualising an internal logic of learning that may be traced both in classical pedagogy and in contemporary educational models. Its aim is to propose an analytical framework through which the structure of the process of understanding can be revealed and a criterion for assessing its effectiveness can be delineated. In this sense, the model functions as a tool for analysing how knowledge

is formed and when it becomes meaningful for the learner. At this point, a clarification of the anthropological premises underlying Pestalozzi's thought becomes necessary. His pedagogical position cannot be reduced to a theory of cognition alone, as it rests upon a specific understanding of human nature. The human being is conceived as possessing an inherent potential for development, structured by a tension between natural inclinations and the striving towards moral self-realisation. Education, therefore, is not merely a process of intellectual formation, but a guided movement towards the harmonisation of these inner forces. Without acknowledging this anthropological foundation, the logic of learning risks being interpreted in purely cognitive terms, thereby obscuring the broader scope of Pestalozzi's educational project. This makes it possible to determine whether a given educational practice leads to genuine cognitive development or remains at the level of formal acquisition. The article makes explicit the internal logic of learning in Pestalozzi's work and demonstrates its relevance for contemporary pedagogy.

EXPOSITION

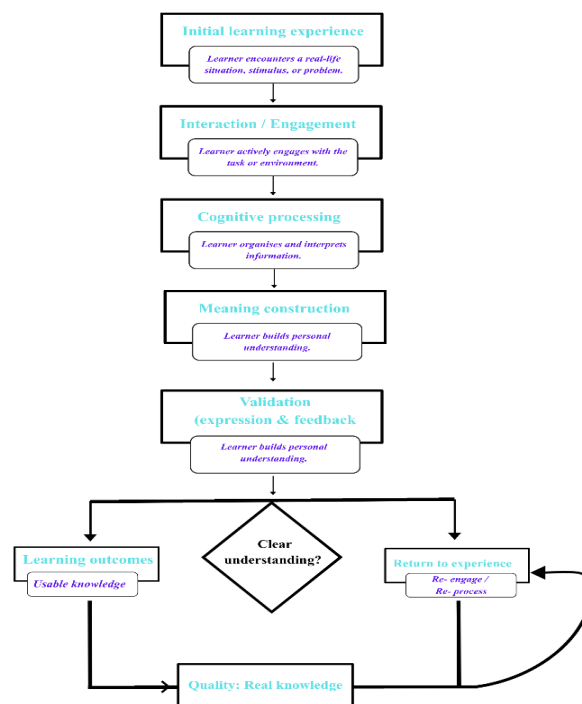
The history of pedagogy contains numerous attempts to reform schooling; however, in the work of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the issue is not a further modification of curricular content or lesson organisation. His concern is of a deeper order and addresses the very nature of the cognitive process, namely how the learner arrives at genuine understanding. This position finds its fullest expression in *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, where the author derives his pedagogical principles not from abstract theoretical constructions, but from observation of education as it unfolds within the family environment. In this context, the figure of the mother assumes particular significance. She does not "teach" in the institutional sense of the term, but directs the child's attention towards reality. Through this process, an initial cognitive orientation to the world is formed, grounded in observation, differentiation, and the gradual clarification of perceptions. Pestalozzi proceeds from the assumption that the learner does not begin with clear concepts, but with unformed and scattered impressions. In this sense, any premature transition to abstract explanation leads to the formation of apparent knowledge lacking a genuine cognitive foundation. A central element of this conception is the relationship between perception, thinking, and language. A comparable relation between language and thought is later developed in the work of Lev Vygotsky, where language is understood as a mediating structure of cognition. Pestalozzi regards language as a measure of the degree of understanding. Unclear perception results in unclear expression, and such expression indicates that thinking remains insufficiently developed. Language therefore does not function as an external means of communication, but as an internal mechanism for structuring knowledge. However, such a relation between perception, thinking, and language remains incomplete if considered in isolation from the moral dimension that occupies a central place in Pestalozzi's pedagogy. The development of understanding is not conceived as an autonomous intellectual process, but as one guided by what he designates as the "heart". This notion does not refer to emotionality in a narrow sense, but to the formation of moral orientation, including trust, responsibility, and the disposition towards others. In this respect, cognition is subordinated to a broader educative aim: the formation of a person capable not only of knowing, but of acting rightly. Any interpretation of the learning process that neglects this dimension risks reducing Pestalozzi's position to a merely epistemological framework. Teaching must therefore

require the learner to express their understanding with clarity and precision. Of particular importance within Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's pedagogical system is the concept of *Anschauung*, which should be understood not merely as sensory perception, but as a structured unity of observation, action, and reflective engagement. As Nicholas Hans observes, it is precisely through this concept that Pestalozzi lays the foundations of a pedagogy oriented towards the learner's experience and activity [2]. Knowledge should be understood as the result of active cognitive engagement in which the learner participates as a subject. In this respect, particular importance is attached to the principle that knowledge arises through action. Pestalozzi emphasises that genuine understanding is achieved not through verbal explanation, but through practical interaction with the object of knowledge. A comparable orientation can be identified in the work of John Dewey, who relates learning to experience and to the learner's participation in social contexts [3]. Both authors share the view that learning has value only insofar as it emerges from experience. A comparable idea appears in constructivist theories, particularly in the work of Ernst von Glasersfeld, where knowledge is understood as actively constructed rather than passively received [4]. The difference lies in the fact that, in Pestalozzi's case, this idea is not formulated as a philosophical construct but is derived from pedagogical practice. A similar structural logic may be observed in David A. Kolb's model of experiential learning, where knowledge emerges through a cyclical process [5]. Although Pestalozzi does not formulate this process in a systematic manner, his pedagogical practice appears to follow this internal sequence. Many contemporary educational practices described as innovative can be interpreted as extensions of principles already present in earlier pedagogical traditions [6]. Unlike these later theoretical formulations, Pestalozzi does not arrive at this logic through abstract modelling, but through direct engagement with educational practice, which gives his position a distinctly pedagogical rather than purely epistemological character. Approaches such as project-based learning, integrated learning environments, and social-emotional learning may be understood as extensions and further elaborations of Pestalozzi's idea of the connection between education and real-life experience. As Herbert Spencer observes, the significance of Pestalozzi lies precisely in the fact that he lays the foundations of a pedagogy oriented towards the development of the individual [7]. It should be emphasised that Pestalozzi's contribution does not consist in the creation of a completed method that can be directly applied in contemporary educational practice. Its significance is of a conceptual nature. He formulates a criterion by which any educational activity may be assessed: whether it leads to clarity in the learner or merely produces an external ordering of knowledge. In this sense, the history of pedagogy should not be regarded as a chronological accumulation of ideas, but as a field in which the fundamental foundations of education may be discerned. The Pestalozzian model retains its relevance because of its capacity to distinguish the essential from the apparent in education. This distinction remains crucial within the contemporary pedagogical context, where the question of the quality of understanding continues to be central. From this perspective, one can identify the conditions under which understanding emerges and those under which it fails to develop. Where perception is not grounded in direct experience, knowledge tends to remain abstract and externally imposed. Where action is absent, cognitive engagement is reduced to passive reception. Where language does not reflect internally structured understanding, expression becomes formal and imitative. In such

cases, what appears as learning conceals a lack of genuine comprehension. This distinction corresponds to what contemporary research identifies as the difference between surface and deep learning. This distinction is of particular importance, as it allows for a critical evaluation of pedagogical practices that may produce correct responses without ensuring meaningful understanding. Following the preceding analysis, a practical question inevitably arises. If learning indeed unfolds in the manner understood by Pestalozzi, through perception, action, and gradual clarification, then how may this process be recognised within pedagogical practice itself. The problem does not lie in formulating a new method, but in discerning the internal order through which the learner arrives at understanding. In Pestalozzi's work, this order is not presented as a ready-made scheme, yet it can be clearly traced in the way he conceives education. The learner first encounters the

object, then begins to act upon it, attempts to name it, and only thereafter reaches clarity. If this sequence is disrupted, what emerges is precisely what he criticises: knowledge that appears correct but is not understood. This requires clarification. This is not a matter of stages in a strict didactic sense, but of an internal logic of learning that can be identified in any pedagogical situation. For this reason, it becomes necessary to present it in a form that renders it visible. In this context, a model is proposed below which does not alter the Pestalozzian idea, but organises it in such a way that it may be recognised and applied within contemporary educational practice. The model presented here does not claim to reconstruct a formal schema developed by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, but rather offers an analytical interpretation of the internal logic implicit in his pedagogical practice.

Conceptual flowchart of learning: From experience to understanding



Source: Conceptual model developed by Dr. Avi Abner. All rights reserved.

The model is not presented as a scheme explicitly formulated by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, but as an analytical reconstruction intended to make visible the internal logic implicit in his pedagogical thought. It should be emphasised that the coherence of this process depends not solely on its structural sequence, but on the extent to which each moment remains connected to the learner's lived experience, thereby preserving the unity between cognition, action, and moral orientation. The figure presents the learning process as a sequence of interrelated moments, beginning with initial experience and oriented towards the attainment of clearer understanding. The model should not be interpreted as a universal or exhaustive representation of all learning processes, but as a heuristic framework intended to support pedagogical analysis. Learning may be conceived as a process in which the learner actively engages with the environment, interprets experience, and articulates it through language. Particular importance is attached to the moment of verification, namely whether a sufficiently clear understanding has been achieved. If such understanding is not attained, the process

may return to an earlier point and be re-engaged until more meaningful knowledge is formed. In this sense, the model suggests that learning may be understood as a cyclical rather than a strictly linear process. It does not introduce a new theory, but seeks to present in a concentrated and explicit form what, in Pestalozzi's work, appears embedded within pedagogical practice. Its value lies in indicating the conditions under which education maintains its connection with understanding, as well as those under which it risks being reduced to formal reproduction.

CONCLUSION

The analysis leads to a broader conclusion about the nature of learning beyond a strictly historical framework. Despite the diversity of contemporary educational approaches, the cognitive process continues to rely on the learner's active participation in the construction of meaning. It is precisely this interrelation between action, interpretation, and expression that delineates the boundary between formal acquisition and profound understanding. Research in the learning sciences shows that knowledge cannot be securely

established unless it is connected to personal experience and internal processing. These findings confirm the continuity between classical pedagogical thought and contemporary learning theory. Research synthesised by John Hattie suggests that learning becomes more meaningful when learners are able to articulate, apply, and transfer what they have learned [8]. This corresponds to the understanding that the external correctness of an answer is not a sufficient indicator of genuine mastery of knowledge. Furthermore, the work of David Perkins shows that so-called “fragile knowledge” emerges precisely in situations where there is no deep connection between the content and the learner’s thinking activity [9]. This phenomenon may be interpreted as a contemporary confirmation of the distinction between surface-level acquisition and meaningful understanding. On the other hand, the conceptions of “deep learning” in contemporary pedagogy emphasise the importance of reflection and the active construction of knowledge as conditions for sustainable development [10]; [11]. These ideas do not introduce a radically new paradigm, but rather extend already established principles, adapting them to the conditions of contemporary education. In this sense, the proposed modelling of the learning process may be regarded as a means for the analytical interpretation of pedagogical practice. Its value does not lie merely in the visualisation of individual stages, but in its capacity to reveal whether an internal coherence exists between them. Where such coherence is absent, teaching is reduced to reproduction; where it is preserved, conditions are created for cognitive autonomy. For this reason, the question of educational quality cannot be resolved solely through the introduction of new methods or technologies. It requires a clear understanding of the structure of the cognitive process and of the learner’s role within it. It is within this perspective that the significance of pedagogical models becomes evident, as they make it possible to interpret educational activity rather than simply describe it.

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