

**'The schoolmaster based his teaching, designed to inculcate love in the children, not on making them listen to sayings about love and its blessings, and learning them by heart, but by putting love itself into practice.'**

## 8 Preaching Morality?

‘The school should be responsible for a child’s *education*, that is the transfer of knowledge that is important for society, and the corresponding skills, the parents for their children’s *upbringing*, that is seeing that they behave in a manner that is both moral and socially acceptable.’ This is a frequently heard demand. From Pestalozzi’s point of view that would mean the school is responsible for head and hand, the parents for the heart. This is impossible.

Every experienced teacher knows you cannot educate children properly without at the same time contributing to their upbringing; a lack of good upbringing hinders education. What we are aiming for is always what Pestalozzi calls the *forming of whole human beings*. Good teaching always includes manners and morals.

Thus contributing to *upbringing* — or, if you prefer, *moral education* — is one of our tasks as teachers. For we encounter morally deficient behaviour among the children on a daily basis: they reject a classmate, mock others unrestrainedly, trip them up, bully them during break or on the way home, steal, hit and kick out, lie without blushing, swear and use obscenities that would disgust any decent person. We cannot simply look away and calmly drink our coffee during break.

But what should we do? Tell them off? Encourage them to improve? The effects quickly wear off. Or punish them? That might make them behave, but it won’t make them better people. Hardly have we turned our backs then they will be at it again. And a telling-off or a punishment is always a *reaction* to misbehaviour that has already taken place. It

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is — as Schleiermacher puts it — *counteractive* rather than *supportive*.

Now it is true that both counteraction and support are needed in moral education, but the second is the decisive factor. Our priority should not be to *suppress* morally deficient behaviour, but to *develop* moral behaviour. The more successful we are in this, the less we will need to take counteractive measures. It is not enough just to get the children not to hit each other, they should like each other, help each other, show commitment to the community and a love of truth. To achieve this we must — as Pestalozzi puts it — *develop their heart's faculties*. But the heart's faculties only develop through being used.

That brings us to the question of how, as teachers, we can activate these faculties in the children so that they will put their trust in others, show understanding, curb their selfishness and try to do good.

This cannot be done by pressure, coercion, force. I can shout as loud as I like at a pupil, telling him he can trust me, the more I do so the more he will shut himself off. However strong the threats with which I try to get him to love his classmates — he will do the opposite out of contrariness. Goodness cannot be brought about by force. Morality is always founded on a free decision of the individual.

The first effective means of moral education is the *example* set by the teacher. If I want my pupils to behave in a certain way, I must behave in that way myself. It starts with politeness in dealing with other people and continues from keeping your person, clothes and desk neat and tidy to being conscientious and thorough in doing your work and fulfilling your obligations. A teacher who has a wide range of interests, always insists on getting to the bottom of things, goes about his work cheerfully and takes care over it, will inspire his pupils to approach things in the same manner. But the decisive factor in all this is the relationship between a teacher and his pupils. If they have a good relationship emotionally, the pupils will be much readier to copy their teacher's behaviour. If not, they will not give a damn what he does.

Behaviour that can be observed can also be copied. But moral education goes deeper. We want to encourage our pupils to develop the *ethical foundations of their own morality*. As we have already indicated, that can only be achieved by stimulating the heart's faculties and that takes place according to the law of *resonance*. Living morality can only be

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aroused and encouraged in a person through seeing morality lived out in others — especially those involved in their upbringing. That is more than copying a model, it is being opened up by the teacher's essential nature.

This idea is so important to me that I would like to illustrate it by a comparison with the viola d'amore. This baroque instrument usually has seven main strings and seven 'sympathetic' strings below them. These are not played by the bow but start to sound when a note is played on the corresponding main string. This happens according to the law of *resonance* and gives the instrument its individual, sweet sound.

The opportunities open to those involved in a child's upbringing can be viewed in the light of this law. The strings that are bowed can symbolise the moral aspects of the teacher's life, the sympathetic strings those of the children. Just as the main string can only make the sympathetic string resonate by vibrating *itself*, we can only awaken a child's 'heart' through our *own* inner life.

In other words, love arouses love, respect fosters respect, trust creates a willingness to trust others, one's own openness opens up the children's hearts and minds, one's own sense of responsibility motivates the children to behave responsibly, one's own commitment to values encourages them to base their actions on values. Enthusiasm for work done in the normal course of teaching can arouse similar feelings in the pupils.

Resonance can also not occur, even though the string is played. That happens either when the corresponding sympathetic string is missing, or when it is blocked or when the medium by which the vibration is transmitted is missing; resonance does not occur in a vacuum.

This is also true in the metaphorical sense. It is possible that the teacher's efforts will set off little or no resonance in some pupils for the simple reason that the corresponding disposition is not there in the pupils or is not sufficiently developed. It is a mistake to assume that every person can be everything and that everyone can do everything whatever their age. To return to our image: just as a blocked sympathetic string remains mute, blockages in a pupil can prevent resonance: tiredness, lack of concentration, conflicts with classmates, unrequited love, problems at home, failures he has not yet come to terms with.

Finally, resonance can only arise when the two strings can vibrate in a medium surrounding both. In our context this medium is a positive,

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living *teacher-pupil relationship*. We could call it the fertile soil which is essential if education and development in the widest sense are to flourish. If this relationship is seriously disturbed, then the teacher's efforts, the methods he resorts to, will mostly be counterproductive. The more enthusiastic he is about his subject, the easier it is for hostile pupils to hurt him — they simply need to do nothing and describe the subject as sh... And all his moral exhortations will go in one ear and out the other.

It was Pestalozzi's conviction that living morality develops solely within interpersonal relationships. Thus he writes, '*Basically our species only develops true humanity face to face, heart to heart.*' It is, therefore, of decisive importance for a child's moral development for him to be part of a community which is marked by love, trust, consideration and understanding.

But despite this fundamental insight of Pestalozzi's, it is clear that resonance can also be created by the products of our culture such as books, music, songs, videos and computer games. They all bear the stamp of the human spirit, which works indirectly through the things it creates. Therefore we teachers must not only bear the significance of the teacher-pupil relationship and the class community in mind and make them a positive environment, but we must also consider the resonance that can be produced by those cultural products that fascinate our pupils. Of course, we have to recognise that unfortunately this includes much rubbish as well as much that is beneficial.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, each of the three groups of faculties, head, heart and hand, develops according to its own laws. In the heart - that is in the area of moral education - Pestalozzi sees three stages.

The *first* stage is the awakening of a *sense of morality* within the child's inner being. This comes about according to the law of resonance, which we have been talking about. Pestalozzi often refers to this sympathetic vibration, this integration in the life of a community marked by love, as 'inner perception'.

In the *second* stage Pestalozzi demands *doing good* on the basis of *obedience*. Thus he himself encouraged the children in the orphanage in Stans to share their bread with starving children from Altdorf, letting them feel the consequences of a moral act by going short themselves.

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Even today, a teacher can incorporate Pestalozzi's principles in his teaching by combining school learning with moral action. As an example I would like to mention a teacher who, together with his pupils, composes a message for each of the fortnightly pages of a calendar. The educational aspect of this is an intensive investigation into a topic that is of great importance for human life and in the children's own experience: water, wood and forests, houses, bridges, crossing frontiers. At the end of the year the pages are photocopied, made into wall calendars and sold. Part of the money made is always used for a project in one of the developing countries, for example digging a well. Thus the pupils not only learn about the importance of water, they are also involved in the production of the calendar with the sense that they are helping people in need.

Naturally not every topic studied at school can be combined with this kind of moral action. But anyone who is teaching in the spirit of Pestalozzi will constantly find ways of satisfying this requirement. There is one thing we must be clear about though: a teacher can only do this if his work with the class rests on genuine *authority*. Then the pupils' response will be obedience in the sense Pestalozzi means it: willing acceptance of what is good.

The *third* stage of moral education for Pestalozzi is *thinking and talking about what is good*. The idea is that pupils should not discuss moral laws until they have a feeling of what is good and have experienced what it means to do good. Otherwise, he says, all their talk would be nothing but empty prattle.

In class there will always be opportunities to discuss people's motives with the pupils, to examine them and decide to what extent they should be seen as morally estimable or reprehensible. This is particularly the case with *history* lessons, in which the pupils are constantly confronted with the actions of exceptional people who behaved in either an unscrupulous or a morally outstanding manner. The same is true of *reading*. Many stories show people having to decide between good and evil. Finally, *actual conflicts* within the class can provide scope for reflecting on the nature of moral action.

And now I must ask your forgiveness. I wanted to show that one could not get very far with ethical education by 'preaching morality'.

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And now I have done it myself — and not only here! But since I have started, I might as well go on. In fact the whole vision of the school that I am presenting here is really about morality. To have young people in our care for most of their childhood and youth and not to give them pleasure and help them find their true goal in life is lacking in morality. Perhaps the problems we have in education today are the same as those in the economy: it is all about efficiency, a quick profit, rationalised organisation and actual human beings, with their human needs, are often overlooked. In our hectic determination to reform education have we not lost sight of the basic truth, namely that education should not be designed first and foremost according to the needs of society, the economy and the state, but should aid children and young people to achieve full humanity?