

FRIEDRICH FROBEL (1782-1852)

Friedrich Wilhelm August Frobel was a German pedagogue, a student of Pestalozzi who laid foundation of modern education based on recognition that children have unique needs and capabilities. He was born on 21st April 1782 in Oberweissbach, Germany and died on 21st June 1852 (aged 70). He was a German educator who was founder of kindergarten and one of the most influential educational reformers of 19th century.

History

Frobel was fifth child in a clergyman's family. His mother died when he was only nine months old and he was neglected as a child until an uncle gave him a home and sent him to school. Frobel acquired a thorough knowledge of plants and natural phenomena while at the same time beginning the study of mathematics and languages. After apprenticeship to a forester, he pursued some informal university courses at JENA until he was jailed for an unpaid debt. He tried various kinds of employment until he impulsively took a teaching appointment at a progressive model school in Frankfurt run by Anton Gruner on lines advocated by the Swiss educator JOHANN HEINRICH PESTALOZZI. Frobel became convinced of his vocation as a teacher at the school.

After two years as assistant to Gruner, Froebel went to Yverdon, Switz., where he came into close contact with Pestalozzi. Though he learned much at Yverdon, he quickly discovered the weakness of organization that characterized Pestalozzi's work. In 1811 Frobel entered the University Of Gottingen, where military service in the Napoleonic wars soon interrupted his studies. During the campaign of 1813 he formed a lasting friendship with H.L Angenthal and W.Middendorff, who became his devoted followers and who joined him at a school he opened at Griesheim in Thuringia in 1816. Two years later the school moved to Keilhau, also in Thuringia, and it was there that Froebel put into practice his educational theories. He and his friends and their wives became a kind of educational community and the school expanded into a flourishing institution. During this time Froebel wrote numerous articles and in 1826 published his most important treatise, MENSCHENERZIEHUNG (the educator of man), a philosophical presentation of principles and methods pursued at Keilhau.

In 1831 Frobel left Keilhau to his partner and accepted the Swiss government's invitation to train elementary school teachers. His experiences at Keilhau and as a head of new orphan asylum at Bergdorf in Switzerland impressed him with the importance of early stages of education. On returning to Keilhau in 1837 he opened an infant school in Blankenburg. Prussia, that he originally called child nurture and activity institute, and which by happy inspiration he later renamed the kindergarten or 'GARDEN OF CHILDREN'. He also started publishing firm for play and other educational materials, including a collection of MOTHER-PLAY and NURSERY songs, with lengthy explanations of their meaning and use. This immensely popular book was translated into many foreign languages. Frobel insisted that improvement of infant education was a vital preliminary to comprehensive, educational and social reform. His experiments at the kindergarten attracted widespread interest, and other kindergartens were started. Unfortunately, because of a confusion with the socialist views of Froebel's nephew, the Prussian government proscribed the kindergarten movement in 1851. The ban was not removed until after 1860, several years after Frobel's death in 1852.

Frobel's Contribution

Froebel's most important work, *The Education of Man*, published in 1825, reflects Pestalozzi's impact on Froebel's views of educating children. His well-known motto was —Kommt lasst uns unsern Kindern leben!! which is literally translated as —Come, let us live with our children!! He proposed that play is a necessary element in educating the —whole| child allowing him to use all his imaginative powers and physical movements to explore his interests. Froebel stated, —Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul. He was convinced that the primary focus for teaching young children should be through play, which contrasted with the prevalent view at the time that play was a form of idleness and disorder. Kindergarten was the first organized early-childhood educational method. Friedrich Froebel believed that humans are essentially productive and creative – and fulfilment comes through developing these in

harmony with God and the world. Through engaging with the world, understanding unfolds. Hence the significance of play – it is both a creative activity and through it children become aware of their place in the world. His original concern was the teaching of young children through educational games in the family. In the later years of his life this became linked with a demand for the provision of special centres for the care and development of children outside home. He included multiple intelligences (different learning styles), play-based, child-centered, holistic education, parent involvement/training, paper folding, use of music, games, and movement activities for education.

Froebel gifts were not only clever inventions, but wonderfully appropriate in terms of the cognitive and developmental needs of children. Gifts were objects that were fixed in form such as blocks. The purpose was that in playing with the object the child would learn the underlying concept represented by the object. Occupations or activities consisted of material that children could shape and manipulate such as paper, clay, sand, beads, string etc. The first gift, for example, was a collection of six soft woolen balls, each one on a string. The three main balls are red, blue, and yellow (the primary colors). The remaining three balls were violet, orange, and green (the secondary colors), representing the combination or synthesis of the colors for each of the three main balls (red + blue = violet; red + yellow = orange; and blue + yellow = green). Froebel used the ball—a perfectly round shape or sphere—because it was an idealized form (equally proportioned on all sides, without end or beginning, in terms of its surface, and so on). From a practical point of view, the first gift was used to introduce children to basic concepts in the world around them. By grasping, swinging, rolling, dropping, hiding the ball, and so on, children learned about concepts such as here, there, over, right, left, larger, and smaller.

Philosophy of Education

Early educational vision laid the foundation for the framework of Froebel's philosophy of education which is encompassed by the four basic components of (a) free self-activity, (b) creativity, (c) social participation, and (d) motor expression.

As an educator, Froebel believed that stimulating voluntary self-activity in the young child was the necessary form of pre-school education (Watson, 1997a). Self-activity is defined as the development of qualities and skills that make it possible to take an invisible idea and make it a reality; self-activity involves formulating a purpose, planning out that purpose, and then acting on that plan until the purpose is realized (Corbett, 1998a). Corbett suggests that one of Froebel's significant contributions to early childhood education was his theory of introducing play as a means of engaging children in self-activity for the purpose of externalizing their inner natures. In summarizing Froebel's beliefs regarding play, Dewey concluded that through stimulating play that produces self-activity, the supreme goal of the child is the fullness of growth which brings about the realization of his budding powers and continually carries him from one plane of educational growth to another.

To assist children in their development of moving from one plane of educational growth to another, Froebel provided the children with many stimulating activities to enhance their creative powers and abilities. Froebel designed a series of instructional materials that he called "gifts and occupations", which demonstrated certain relationships and led children in comparison, testing, and creative exploration activities (Watson, 1997b). A gift which helped the child to understand and internalize the concepts of shape, dimension, size, and their relationships (Staff, 1998). The occupations were items which the children could use to make what they wished; through the occupations, children externalized the concepts existing within their creative minds (Staff, 1998). Therefore, through the child's own self-activity and creative imaginative play, the child would begin to understand both the inner and outer properties of things as he moves through the developmental stages of the educational process.

A third component of Froebel's educational plan involved working closely with the family unit. Froebel believed that parents provided the first as well as the most consistent educational influence in a child's life. Since a child's first educational experiences occur within the family unit, he is already familiar with the home environment as well as with the occupations carried on within this setting. Naturally, through creative self-activity, a child will imitate those things that are in a direct and real

relationship to him—things learned through observations of daily family life (Dewey, 1990). Froebel believed that providing a family setting within the school environment would provide children with opportunities for interacting socially within familiar territory in a non-threatening manner.

Focusing on the home environment occupations as the foundation for beginning subject-matter content allowed the child to develop social interaction skills that would prepare him for higher level subject-matter content in later educational developmental stages (Dewey, 1990).

Motor expression, which refers to learning by doing as opposed to following rote instructions, is a very important aspect of Froebel's educational principles. He was against memorization. Froebel did not believe that the child should be placed into society's mold, but should be allowed to shape his own mold and grow at his own pace through the developmental stages of the educational process. The child needs to be involved in all of the experiences each stage requires and helped to see the relationships of things and ideas to each other and to himself so that he can make sense out of both his subjective and objective world. Corbett further agrees that development is continuous, with one stage building upon another, so that nothing should be missed through haste or for any other reason as the child moves through the educational process. Responsible educators should strive to recognize each child's individual level of

development so that essential materials and activities to stimulate appropriate educational growth can be provided. Froebel believed that imitation and suggestion would inevitably occur, but should only be utilized by the teacher as instruments for assisting students in formulating their own instructional concepts (Dewey, 1990).

Froebelian Gifts

1. —This is the first and most important plaything of childhood. The child first seeks to contemplate, to grasp and to possess objects as a whole. —A ball supplies exactly what the child seeks, and so the child likes to play with the ball. The extraordinary charm of a ball exerts a constant attraction both in early childhood and later youth.¶

2. The second gift – the sphere and the cube. —This gives more pleasure than the ball during the second half of the first year, when children begin to employ themselves in more definite ways. —The sphere and cube belong together in play because they are opposite and alike.¶

3. The third gift – a wooden cube, divided once in each direction to create eight smaller cubes. —The cube of the second gift is the basis of the third gift. Eight cubes are presented to the child in the form of a single larger cube. —As each cube is removed, different shapes emerge.¶ The eight blocks can then be arranged to create forms of life, knowledge and beauty.

4. The fourth gift – is a cube of the same dimensions as the third gift. —It also consists of eight identical blocks, each of the same volume as the blocks of the third gift. —The blocks in this gift are each twice as long and half the thickness of the cubes of the third gift ... Together with the blocks of the third gift more complex Life Forms emerge.¶

5. The fifth gift – this gift expands on the cubes of the third gift. —Presented as a larger cube with three blocks along each edge, it would theoretically consist of twenty seven cubes. —The surprise in this gift is that three of the cubes are divided diagonally to form six triangular faced blocks and another three are divided twice to form twelve smaller triangular blocks. —The triangular shapes also enable the construction of more complex Beauty and Life Forms.¶ Froebel's innovative work attracted admirers and critics, the former helping him to take the next step.