

Readings from Daisaku Ikeda's Youth: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in the Early Development of Daisaku Ikeda's Educational Thought

Takao Ito

Main Themes

There are two main themes of my lecture.

First (1), the maiden work of Daisaku Ikeda, founder of Soka University of America and Soka University in Japan, is an essay about the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), titled "Pestalozzi—A Great Educator." It was a biographical sketch, written under Ikeda's pen-name, Shin'ichiro Yamamoto, for the magazine, *Boys' Japan*, and published by his mentor, Josei Toda's publishing company in October 1949. At that time, Ikeda was 21 years old and served as editor in chief of the magazine.

In my lecture, I would like to explore a few characteristics of the figure that Ikeda describes by comparing his essay with other evaluative biographies on Pestalozzi's life that were also published in Japan at that time.

Secondly (2), in 1947, two years before he wrote his essay on Pestalozzi, the 19-year-old Ikeda was compiling his own "reading notes." These notes are from the time when he was attending a reading circle for young people prior to meeting Toda. In these notes, there are citations from Pestalozzi's writings, and in reading them, the prototype of Ikeda's educational thought becomes evident.

In this lecture, I would like to consider how the young Ikeda developed through his reading activities by comparing the notes he kept at the age of 19 with the essay that he wrote when he was 21 years old. I also hope this examination of his writings will be helpful as we consider the concept of a liberal arts education.

1. About the "Reading Notes"

Before delving into Ikeda's essay, titled "Pestalozzi—A Great Educator," I would like to briefly analyze his "reading notes,"¹ which were recorded before Ikeda met Toda, and which are yet foundational

¹ Daisaku Ikeda, "Dokusho Note" ("Reading Notes"), *Daisanbunmei* (June 1964), Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha p. 2-5.

in the formation of Ikeda's educational thought.

In his private notes, Ikeda had already extracted five passages from Pestalozzi's writings, including *The Evening Hours of a Hermit* (Pestalozzi, 1780) and *Letter from Stans* (Pestalozzi, 1799) (the Japanese translation he used as his source was published by Iwanami Shoten Publishing, Ltd., 1943). According to his reflections in later years, Ikeda used his reading notes when he wrote his essay, titled "Pestalozzi—A Great Educator."²

Quotations from *Letter from Stans*

Letter from Stans is said to be an important representative work written by Pestalozzi during his middle years, in which he establishes his own educational methods. In *Letter from Stans*, Pestalozzi compares education at school with education at home and states that the former should be modeled on the latter. According to Pestalozzi, the characteristics of education at home include making use of "children's natural surroundings," "children's daily needs," and "children's spontaneous activities" as a means of cultivation. Pestalozzi believed that the best means of instilling high thinking in children was through the observation, description, naming and classification of objects in their natural environment, what he called "an object lesson," moving gradually from objects to ideas. About the focus on the child's daily life, Ikeda recorded in his notes the words of Pestalozzi, "it was exactly this thought, on which I based the whole realization of my plan."³

In the same text, Pestalozzi describes the ideal of human education, which states: "Every Good human education requires that the mother's eye in the living room observes every day and every hour changes of the spiritual condition of her child with certainty in it's eyes, mouth and forehead." "Good human education essentially requires that the power of the educator is also like that of a father, which is pure and generally gives life to the family's overall livelihood."⁴

Ikeda recorded following Pestalozzi's words: "True benefits of human knowledge exist for humankind in the assurance of the foundation, which they come from and are based on."⁵

Quotations from *The Evening Hours of a Hermit*

This book is an important representative work of Pestalozzi's formative years, in which he argues for the ideals of education for ordinary people. In his notes, Ikeda quotes portions of this book where Pestalozzi compares "artificial education" and "natural education," and discusses the importance of the

² Daisaku Ikeda, *Wakaki hi no Dokusho* (A Youthful Reading), Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha, 1978, pp. 115-116.

³ Translated from German: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Pestalozzi's Brief an einen Freund über seinen Aufenthalt in Stanz* (1799), in *Pestalozzi's Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 11, gesichtet, vervollständigt und mit erläuternden Einleitungen versehen von L. W. Seyffarth, Brandenburg a. H. : A. Müller, 1871, pp. 19-20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

latter. (This corresponds to the comparison between education at school versus education at home that was touched upon in *Letter from Stans*.)

“All pure powers of benediction,” records Ikeda, “brought forth by humanity are not gifts of skill or chance. They lie in the inner nature of all human beings, along with other inherent qualities. The development of these powers is the common necessity of all humankind.”⁶

Also, “The power of nature, the pure cultivation of humankind, where art thou?”⁷

It is also recorded in the notes: “In the depths of my inner self lies the solution of this truth.”⁸

When we re-formulate the basis of his “reading notes” to examine how Ikeda read Pestalozzi’s writings at the age of 19, three keywords come to mind. They are: “object lesson,” “human education,” and “benediction of humanity.”

Put simply, an “object lesson” is education that uses “children’s natural surroundings, daily needs, and spontaneous activities” as a means of cultivation. “Human education” is that which nurtures the basis of children’s intellect and sense of values in a home environment like the one in which “the mother’s eye in the living room observes every day and every hour changes of the spiritual condition of her child with certainty in it’s eyes, mouth and forehead.” Pestalozzi states that the purpose of education is to bring forth the powers that “lie in the inner nature of all human beings, along with other inherent qualities” through such natural methods aimed at realizing the power of humankind. For Ikeda, who experienced the tyranny of militaristic education during the most impressionable days of his youth, Pestalozzi’s democratic thoughts on education likely were a great impetus to thinking about the future of Japan and the world.

2 “Pestalozzi—A Great Educator”

Based on the above-mentioned comments about Ikeda’s reading notes, let us now look more in depth at the 21-year-old Ikeda’s essay, titled “Pestalozzi—A Great Educator.” Please refer to the handout of excerpts from Ikeda’s essay. I have underlined parts of his essay, which I thought may especially need annotation.

First, let’s start with the Quote number one on your handout. Ikeda started his essay by the following sentences.

⁶ Translated from German: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Die Abendstunde eines Einsiedlers* (1780), in the appendix of *Sekai Kyoikugaku Senshu* (A Collection of World Pedagogy), vol. 35, Tokyo: Meiji Tosho Shuppan, 1971, p. 178.

⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

a. A Noble Statue

A peaceful nation, Switzerland. Just by hearing the name 'Switzerland,' our hearts cannot help but recall a picturesque serene nation surrounded by those magnificent mountain ranges of the Alps. Approximately 150 years ago, Switzerland gave birth to that great and renowned educator Pestalozzi. Still today, a statue commemorating Pestalozzi stands in Yverdon of Switzerland.⁹

I would like to point out that the initial word “peaceful” was used to mean “renunciation of war.” From 1937 and on while Japan was at war, the word “peace” was used as a slogan to justify the war (“war for the sake of peace.”)¹⁰ The most significant moment when the word “peace” regained its meaning of “renunciation of war” was through the enforcement of the new constitution in 1947, two years after the end of the war. At that time, General Douglas MacArthur, commander-in-chief of the Occupation forces, coined the famous phrase: “Nihon yo Toyo no Suisu Tare (Japan, be the Switzerland of Asia).” Ikeda’s use of the word “peaceful” with the name of the country “Switzerland” and the adjective “picturesque serene” can be viewed as a reflection of this new spirit of the times.

Let’s move on to the second quote on your handout.

b. A Boy with No Prospect

.....Since his grades were so poor, his school teacher kept saying, “This child has absolutely no prospect for the future.” In this way, Pestalozzi was made fun of by his friends, treated as an eccentric person by people in general, and forsaken by his school teacher.However, despite his circumstances, Pestalozzi remained sincere and grew up rapidly. This was due to his mother, who had deep affection for him, and Babeli, an elderly maid, who was extremely warm-hearted. Pestalozzi lost his father at the age of six but what would have happened to Pestalozzi if his mother was not a person of good character? Herein, I keenly sense the great influence of a mother.¹¹

The first way in which Ikeda depicts Pestalozzi is by emphasizing the “influence of one’s mother” during childhood. This was because there were many interpretations of Pestalozzi in wartime Japan that emphasized the “influence of one’s father” due to the huge influence of patriarchal imperialism at that time. For example, in his commentaries of the books (written in 1943) *The Evening Hours of a Hermit* and *Letter from Stans*, Arata Osada, who translated the books and was one of the most conscientious educators of the

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, “Dai Kyoikusha Pestalozzi” (“Pestalozzi – A Great Educator”), *Shonen Nihon* (Boy’s Japan, October 1949), Tokyo : Nihon Shogakkan, p. 85.

¹⁰ Takao Ito, “What Japanese Government Policies did Makiguchi Resist Against?,” *Soka Kyoiku Kenkyu*, Vol. 3., pp. 115–136.

¹¹ Daisaku Ikeda, “Dai Kyoikusha Pestalozzi,” p. 86.

time, explained Pestalozzi's theory of education from the perspective of "the relationship between the emperor and the subjects" by stating that "affection between father and child is precisely the bond that ties both the emperor and our subjects together."¹² (Unfortunately, this was during wartime and it was impossible to publish a translation of such a book unless such comments were included.) Ikeda, on the other hand, having read the same book, rendered an interpretation that remained faithful to the original text and its elevation of the mother's role in education.

Now, let's look at the third quote.

c. Failure after Failure

……Experiencing this failure and giving up on a life as a minister, Pestalozzi decided to become a lawyer. However, he eventually failed in an exam to become one. In the end, he gave up on everything thinking "I cannot possibly make a career for myself in academics. That's right! I am going to be a farmer!" He decided to start farming in a place called Neuhof. Pestalozzi was 23 at the time. However, despite spending a great deal of money and making painstaking efforts, things didn't turn out as he wished and he did not make any income.¹³

Many biographies of Pestalozzi published before the war simply praised his accomplishments. Compared with these publications, it is of great significance that Ikeda's essay focused instead on the setbacks and struggles that Pestalozzi experienced during his youth. We can see Ikeda's affinity with Pestalozzi where he refers to Pestalozzi's failing at farming at the age of 23. Ikeda was 21 years old when he wrote this essay, and was making strenuous efforts working for Toda's publishing company which suffered from inflation. In his diary recorded on June 8th, he wrote "Society holds too many contradictions. Some people are poor though they live and work honestly. Others live by deceit and never lift a finger, but they lack for nothing. All kinds of people in the world."¹⁴

Now, we'll turn to Quote number four on your handout.

d. Discovering His Vocation

……At that time, Pestalozzi came to a realization: "That's right! There are so many children, who cannot attend school due to poverty. I am going to provide education for them!" …… Pestalozzi's efforts in education began among undernourished and lice-infected children who lived like beggars. He taught children through his behavior and actions by going out to the fields together with them and cultivating the fields, and on rainy days by letting the children spin

¹² Arata Osada, "Kaisetsu" ("Commentary"), in the appendix of *Inja no Yugure / Stans Dayori* (The Evening Hours of a Hermit / Letter from Stans), trans. Arata Osada, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1943, pp.173-180.

¹³ Daisaku Ikeda, "Dai Kyoikusha Pestalozzi," p.86.

¹⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary*, Santa Monica: World Tribune Press, 2000, p.8.

cotton in the house. Day and night, he exerted himself earnestly in order to help everyone become human. He devoted himself so that the children who were physically weak could become strong, children without manners could behave properly and those with twisted hearts could straighten out their hearts.¹⁵

Let's focus for a minute on the sentence from this excerpt beginning ... "He taught children through his behavior and actions by going out to the fields together with them and cultivating the fields." This is an example once again of an "object lesson," which in Pestalozzi's words "teaches by example the essential relationship between human beings and the environment," based on the demands of actual daily living (*Letter from Stans*). By doing this, "the man of simplicity and innocence, through training and using the pure compliant application of his knowledge and through silent diligence of all his strength and predispositions, is formed to true human wisdom of nature" (*The Evening Hours*). In this way, Pestalozzi "exerted himself earnestly in order to help everyone become human"; that is, he practiced the principles of "human education."

The second way in which Ikeda depicts Pestalozzi is by emphasizing that the ideal of education brings forth the humanity of all people, in other words, "human education." Interpretations of Pestalozzi during wartime Japan instead emphasized raising the "subjects" or "nation," tending to neglect the idea of nurturing "one's humanity." Arata Osada, a translator of Pestalozzi's work whom I mentioned before, stated in another book he published at that time that Pestalozzi's pedagogy, which "makes human beings more human," is "too abstract and general."¹⁶ Osada also noted that at present Japan should attach more importance to "national education" and "state education."

Finally, let's look at Quote number five on your handout.

e. Recognized at 53

Pestalozzi's daily life grew harder each day and he finally ended up living like a beggar. People in general began to distance themselves from Pestalozzi. However, without being bothered, he devoted himself more for the sake of children, upholding the value and importance of education.He therefore decided, in his poverty, to write a story and sell it to a magazine company.Finally, he was somehow able to sell this story script which helped his life become a little more comfortable. Using this income, he dedicated himself further to education, and when he reached the age of 53, he was at last recognized in society and gained respect in the field of education.Education is most important for humanity's progress. Without an outstanding education, what development can we expect in humanity?¹⁷

¹⁵ Daisaku Ikeda, "Dai Kyoikusha Pestalozzi," pp. 86-87.

¹⁶ Arata Osada, *Kokka Kyoiku Gaku* (National Pedagogy), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1944, pp. 81-82.

¹⁷ Daisaku Ikeda, "Dai Kyoikusha Pestalozzi," p. 87.

In describing Pestalozzi's hardships, it appeared that Ikeda was thinking of his mentor, Josei Toda, who was struggling with financial difficulties at his publishing company. (In his diary written on October 24th, it states: "We seem to be in severe straits, pressured by competition from larger companies."¹⁸ And on the next day, October 25th, it was announced that the company would stop publishing *Boys' Japan*.) Ikeda likely encouraged himself to exert his utmost as editor of the magazine in hopes that Toda, like Pestalozzi who was also in his fifties, might be "recognized in society and gained respect in the field of education." At the time that Ikeda wrote this essay, his mentor was 49 years old.

Lastly, the third way in which Ikeda depicts Pestalozzi in his essay is by emphasizing the Swiss educator's regard for "humanity's progress" and "humanity's development" as the purpose of education. In other biographies of Pestalozzi published during wartime Japan, the words "nation" or "fatherland" were frequently used rather than "humanity." In the case of Arata Osada, in a writing he published after the war, he stated "let us learn from Pestalozzi the secret technique that can save our fatherland in this time of crisis."¹⁹ But the terms "nation" and "fatherland" were absolute objects of loyalty in wartime Japan. It was a natural process that Ikeda, who suffered at the hands of Japanese militarism, should avoid using the term "nation" in his essay on Pestalozzi, which he wrote for children who also suffered from the same atrocities of war. Beginning with "peaceful" and ending with the phrase "Education is most important for humanity's progress," this essay is most fitting as Ikeda's maiden work, a work deeply rooted in Pestalozzi's conviction in the inherent power of humankind.

3 Succession of the University's Founding Idea

I believe Josei Toda must have been the one reader most delighted by Ikeda's essay on Pestalozzi. Ikeda heard about plans to establish a university from Toda on November 16, 1950, the year after his essay was written. On that day, Ikeda wrote in his diary: "Had lunch with Toda at the Nihon University cafeteria. He gave me guidance on ethnic issues, the Gakkai's future, economic trends, establishing a university someday and other matters. A memorable page in my life."²⁰ And, in his entry six weeks later on December 28th, he wrote: "Napoleon won in battle, and then, after a crushing defeat, won again. But in the end, he was a defeated hero. Pestalozzi's fifty-year struggle seemed a total defeat, yet in the end, he emerged victoriously as a great educator. The important issue for me now is how to strive, how to crown my life's finale with victory."²¹ As plans for the founding of a university began to blossom in Ikeda's heart based on his dialogues with Toda, he could also point to Pestalozzi as one of the great educators who inspired him.

¹⁸ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary*, p. 11.

¹⁹ Arata Osada, *Pestalozzi Den* (Biography of Pestalozzi), Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1950, p. 8.

²⁰ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary*, p. 62.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.