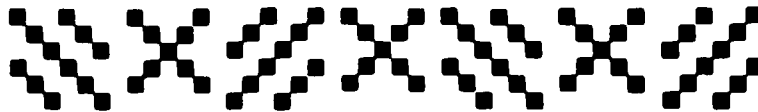


## Joseph Neef: Innovator or Imitator?

*Dieter Jedan\**



Like much of early American culture, this nation's nineteenth-century educational writings, theories, and practices borrowed heavily from their European counterparts. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Swiss writer, teacher, and educational philosopher, exerted a particularly strong influence on American educators.<sup>1</sup> Above all others Pestalozzi's student, Francis Joseph Nicholas Neef, who served as principal of Robert Owen's schools in New Harmony, Indiana, played a major role in introducing Pestalozzian teaching methods in the United States. Possibly because most American educational historians have interpreted Neef's methods as imitations of those developed by Pestalozzi, scholars have labelled him the earliest American practitioner of Pestalozzian pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Neef's role as an innovator in the fields of American educational theory and practice long has been overlooked.

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<sup>1</sup> William Maclure (1763-1840), geologist and philanthropist, learned of Pestalozzian teaching methods from his French friends, who also introduced him to Neef in 1806. Through private philanthropy he hoped to meet the urgent need for improvement in American education by bringing Pestalozzian teachers, books, and teaching materials into this country; until his death, Maclure championed Pestalozzian doctrines. See Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Education and Reform at New Harmony: Correspondence of William Maclure and Marie Duclos Fretageot* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, vol. XV, no. 3; Indianapolis, 1948) for additional information about Maclure. Lowell Mason reintroduced Pestalozzian teaching principles in the so-called second wave, beginning about 1830, by advocating the Swiss teacher's principles of music education in his various books and manuals. For more details on Mason and his method of music education, consult Howard E. Ellis, *The Influence of Pestalozzianism on Instruction in Music* (Ann Arbor, 1957), and Lowell Mason, *A Glance at Pestalozzianism* (New York, 1863).

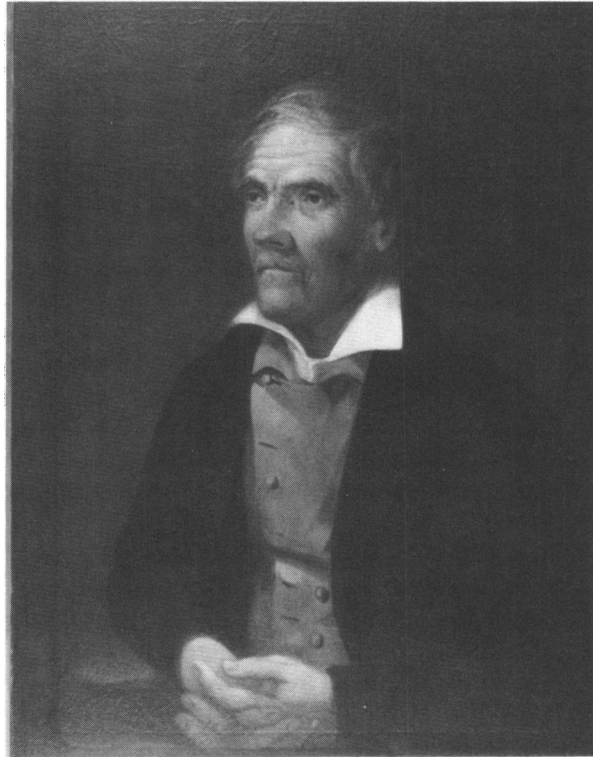
<sup>2</sup> A number of books and articles have appeared on Joseph Neef's contribution to the spread of Pestalozzianism in America. Chief among them are William Maclure, "An Epitome of the Improved Pestalozzian System of Education,"

The oft-stated but misleading conclusion that Neef merely emulated the Pestalozzian method without adding significantly to its theory or practice is based on several considerations. Neef was, first, trained by Pestalozzi, taught under his guidance for about three years at the Burgdorf school, and directed the Pestalozzian school in Paris for an additional three years. Neef also was brought to the United States specifically to introduce the Pestalozzian teaching method. Publicly and privately, Neef gave frequent testimony of his admiration of Pestalozzi, and he was never reluctant to acknowledge his indebtedness to him. And finally, Neef's *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education* (1808) and *Method of Instructing Children Rationally* (1813) include many direct references to his indebtedness to Pestalozzi, such as: "There is nothing new under the sun. Do not expect, therefore, that I am going to initiate my pupils in new arts, in unheard-of sciences. . . . They will learn no new things, but they will learn the old things in a new way. This is Pestalozzi's method."<sup>3</sup> This misinterpretation of Neef's role has rested on an unquestioning acceptance of the educator's claims that he was simply following Pestalozzi's philosophy and on a failure to look beyond these claims by actually comparing the

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*American Journal of Science and Arts*, X (no. 1, 1826), 145-51; Samuel George Morton, "A Memoir of William Maclure," *American Journal of Science and Arts*, XLVII (October, 1844), 1-17; A. Carman, "Joseph Neef: A Pestalozzian Pioneer," *Popular Science Monthly*, XLV (July, 1894), 373-75; C.H. Wood, "The First Disciple of Pestalozzi in America," *Indiana School Journal*, XXVII (November, 1892), 660-65; Henry Barnard, "Pestalozzianism in the United States," *Barnard's Journal of Education*, XXX (March, 1880), 561-72; Will S. Monroe, "Pestalozzi Literature in America," *Kindergarten Magazine*, VI (May, 1894), 673-76; C.D. Gardette, "Pestalozzi [sic] in America," *The Galaxy*, IV (August, 1867), 432-39; Will S. Monroe, "Joseph Neef and Pestalozzianism in America," *Education*, XIV (April, 1894), 449-61; N.A. Calkins, "The History of Object Teaching," in Barnard's *The American Journal of Education*, XXIX (December, 1863), 633-45; Arthur Eugene Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America: 1663-1829* (Philadelphia, 1950), 147; "Pestalozzianism in Britain and the United States," in Kate Silber, *Pestalozzi, The Man and His Work* (New York, 1973), 278-315; Gerald L. Gutek, *Joseph Neef: The Americanization of Pestalozzianism* (University, Ala., 1978); Charles W. Hackensmith, *Biography of Joseph Neef: Educator in the Ohio Valley, 1808-1854* (New York, 1973); Gerald Lee Gutek, "An Examination of Joseph Neef's Theory of Ethical Education," *History of Education Quarterly*, IX (Summer, 1969), 187-201; Theodor Schreiber, "The First Pestalozzian in the New World," *The German-American Review*, IX (October, 1942), 25-27; Ralph E. Billett, "Evidence of Play and Exercise in Early Pestalozzian and Lancasterian Elementary Schools in the United States, 1809-1845," *Research Quarterly*, XXIII (May, 1952), 127-35.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Neef, *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education, Founded on an Analysis of the Human Faculties, and Natural Reason, Suitable for the Offspring of a Free People, and for all Rational Beings* (Philadelphia, 1808), 6.



JOSEPH NEEF

Courtesy New Harmony Workingmen's Institute, New Harmony, Indiana.

two men's methods and theories. Not until Gerald L. Gutek's *Joseph Neef: The Americanization of Pestalozzianism* (1978) appeared, acknowledging that Neef's theory of education has been treated only superficially, did any scholar express discomfort with this view. Even Gutek maintained only that disciples once "trained by Pestalozzi could rightfully claim to be his heir, even though each one gave a unique interpretation of his method."<sup>4</sup>

Any discussion of Neef's educational thought should be two dimensional. It must, on the one hand, define his Swiss

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<sup>4</sup> Gutek, *Joseph Neef*, 10. This is still the best scholarly source for a close examination of Neef's teaching methods. Unfortunately, Gutek does not compare Neef's method of education to that of Pestalozzi by giving specific details and differences, possibly because he did not have access to some Neef manuscripts which were only recently made available to this author. Neef's innovations were, however, mentioned as early as 1884. In a letter to Professor Eli F.

teacher's educational theories, which unquestionably played a fundamental role in molding Neef's thought. At the same time, it must move beyond this to analyze the distinctive features of American culture and especially of the American frontier that led Neef to modify these theories. Neef's role as an educational innovator becomes particularly clear in considering three areas in which his methods differed sharply from those of Pestalozzi. First, Pestalozzi's objective was to teach the lower social orders to help themselves; for Neef, however, the goal was to show everyone, not only the poor, how to acquire the skills of analyzing, examining, and investigating. Second, Pestalozzi's educational methods reflected his belief that a person's place in the class structure was fixed and that there was little likelihood of social mobility; Neef's methods incorporated the American belief that success and improvement were open to all those willing to work hard enough. And finally, Pestalozzi viewed education not as a "head-in-the-clouds" affair, but as a practical one; Neef left the content of education to the individual, thus separating content and method and leaving each person to decide for himself his future station in life. The writings from Neef's Philadelphia period and from his later terms of service at Village Green, Louisville, and New Harmony show the gradual shift of his educational methods and thought from mere imitation of Pestalozzianism to the incorporation of significant innovations. These writings also reveal those aspects of Neef's American experience which caused him to develop these innovations.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's fame was first established with the publication of *The Evening Hour of a Hermit* (1780), a romantic novel in the tradition of Rousseau's *Emile* (1757-1760). But it is his work at his experimental schools at the Neu Hof and in Burgdorf, Switzerland, upon which his reputation now rests. The Burgdorf school is famous for the development of the "ABC of Anschauung," the reduction of instruction into its simplest components, and for the teaching of writing,

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Tappan of Kenyon College, Richard Owen pointed out various innovations. "Pestalozzi's system," he wrote, "in some detail modified and improved by Mr. Neef, was truly admirable and a means of drawing out of the child's powers and cultivating habits of observations. . . . As Pestalozzi had been less successful in applying his own principles practically to Geography than most other branches . . . Neef proposes a great improvement, namely the construction by his pupils of maps or plans after actual measurements." See Richard Owen to Eli F. Tappan, 1884, Richard Owen Collection (William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indianapolis).



JOHANN HEINRICH PESTALOZZI

Reproduced from W. Kayser, *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: Nach seinem Leben, Wirken und seiner Bedeutung* (Zürich, 1895), frontispiece.

drawing, and counting. Of greater concern here are the educational theories Pestalozzi experimented with at this institute. These theories can be summarized briefly. Pestalozzi believed that a teacher must not only know the child as a living and growing organism but also must acquire the art of understanding children so that he may influence them; thus education must be child-centered. He showed other teachers how to do research and experimental work in the field of education. He introduced psychology, child-study, and *Anschauung*<sup>5</sup> into edu-

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<sup>5</sup> Largely due to Neef, Pestalozzi's notion of *Anschauung*—i.e., "observation"—is referred to as "object teaching" or "object lessons" in America. Other possible equivalents are "direct experience," "intuition," "sense perception," "view," and "sense impression." *Anschauung* was the keystone of the Pestalozzian theory of education. For Neef the term meant that all knowledge should derive from the pupil's immediate experience, rest on prior analysis, and involve the ability to predict results of actions; this represents a definite innovation over Pestalozzi's original meaning of the term. Pestalozzi's concept of

cation and adapted the individual subjects to the needs of the child. Pestalozzi's teaching methods attempted to prepare the child emotionally and intellectually for life as an adult. He forced education to be democratic by devising teaching methods that were to inspire children from different social backgrounds. He put forward the view that instruction should always begin with the simple before moving to the complex and with the physically near before moving to the more distant objects. And lastly, Pestalozzi used simultaneous group instruction on an experimental basis, a method which proved especially successful in the teaching of spelling, arithmetic, and writing, as well as in play activities and gymnastics.

This system of education was thus designed to take fully into account the pupil and what he was able to achieve emotionally, intellectually, physically, and mentally. It was based on the principle of "beginning with the easiest and making this complete before going further, then gradually adding, little by little, to that already perfectly learned,"<sup>6</sup> to produce in the pupil a feeling of achievement. To this end education had to provide the pupil with experiences, stimuli, and exercises which only gradually became more difficult and complex. The basis of Pestalozzi's methods was best expressed in his *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801), where he set forth that education should always aim at the harmonious development of the child's personality, a concept borrowed from Rousseau, with whom he agreed that education must harmonize with the laws of nature. Above all, he was one of the first educators to attempt to analyze the elements of the science of education by proposing that "the carriage of European public education must not simply be better horsed; what it needs most of all is that it should be turned right around and taken on to an entirely new road."<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Neef, while recuperating in a French military hospital from a head wound which he had received in 1796 in the Battle of Arcole (Italy), read Pestalozzi's early writings, among them *The Evening Hour of A Hermit* and *Leonard and Ger-*

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*Anschauung* was based on the idea that all knowledge enters the mind through the portals of the senses and, according to him, forms the "absolute foundation of all knowledge." See "The Method, A Report by Pestalozzi," in Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, ed. Ebenezer Cooke, trans. Lucy E. Holland and Frances C. Turner (London, 1894), 316.

<sup>6</sup> Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Artur Buchenau, Eduard Spranger, and Hans Stettbacher (30 vols., Berlin, 1927-1980), XIII, 319.

*trude*. Possibly due to his own need to find a new profession, Neef identified with Pestalozzi's philosophical search for the means by which a person might achieve fulfillment in life, personal satisfaction through one's vocation, and peace with oneself. Thus it is not surprising that upon his recovery he ventured to Burgdorf, Switzerland, to apply for a teaching position.<sup>8</sup> In 1800 he joined Pestalozzi's Burgdorf school faculty to teach foreign languages and gymnastics, almost immediately developing close personal ties and a good professional relationship with Pestalozzi.

At the end of 1803 Pestalozzi requested Neef to open a Pestalozzian school in Paris, since he had become a skilled practitioner of the natural method and had mastered the French language. As a loyal disciple Neef introduced Pestalozzi's method to France. Unfortunately little is known about the Paris school except for one letter from Neef to Pestalozzi; in this the former expressed his dissatisfaction with his assignment, complaining that the French did not really understand the method that Pestalozzi advocated and that most of the pupils at the school were weak and ill-prepared.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, when William Maclure, the American geologist and philanthropist, visited Neef's Pestalozzian school in Paris in 1806 and offered to pay for the latter's expenses to emigrate to the United States to open a similar school in Philadelphia, he accepted joyfully. He wrote of this decision: "I was not only glad to quit Europe, but I burnt with desire to see that country, to live in, and to be useful to it, which can boast of such citizens."<sup>10</sup>

In 1806 Neef and his family emigrated to the United States of America. Under the terms of the agreement with Maclure, Neef was required by his sponsor to "teach children after the method of Pestalozzi for three years from the date of arrival, in

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<sup>8</sup> Gutek, *Neef*, 6. Cf. Caroline Dale Snedeker, *The Town of the Fearless* (Garden City, N.Y., 1931), 56-59.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Neef to Johann H. Pestalozzi, n.d. (ca. 1803-1804); the original manuscript is kept in the Kenneth Dale Owen residence at New Harmony, Indiana. The author is indebted to Mr. Owen for his kind permission to examine the Neef-Owen family papers at his residence and for granting permission to quote from the materials. The author also is indebted to Josephine M. Elliott, Archivist Emeritus, Indiana State University Evansville, who is cataloguing the Neef-Owen family papers, for her invaluable help in locating various Neef letters and manuscripts, many of which have not been available to scholars before. The author is also grateful to Aline Cook and the staff of the Workingmen's Institute and Library at New Harmony for their assistance in facilitating this research.

<sup>10</sup> Neef, *Sketch of a Plan*, 5.



WILLIAM MACLURE

Reproduced from Will S. Monroe, *History of the Pestalozzian Movement in the United States* (Syracuse, 1907), frontispiece.

consequence of which William Maclure agrees to pay Professor Neef's expenses from Paris to the United States of America."<sup>11</sup> Since Neef was not familiar with English, he was allowed at least two years to acquire a sufficient knowledge of the language.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Contract between Joseph Neef and William Maclure, March 19, 1806, Joseph Neef Collection (Workingmen's Institute and Library, New Harmony, Indiana). On the back of the contract Neef states that he "received from William Maclure three thousand two hundred livres tournois in full payment for expenses to the United States of America." This contract is one of the reasons scholars have never seriously questioned Neef's devotion to Pestalozzian teaching methods. Rather, they have attempted to evaluate the impact of the system, the fame of the various schools, and such topics. Calkins, for instance, concluded that "the cause of Neef's apparent inability to markedly influence the educational activities was because he failed to Americanize the Pestalozzian system instead of merely transplanting it"; see Calkins, "History of Object Teaching," 673. Another scholar saw Neef's influence in a similar light: "Neef's work lacked permanency. Had he remained in Philadelphia and organized a normal school for the preparation of teachers in the Pestalozzian method, he would have been an important figure in American education." See Will S. Monroe, *History of the Pestalozzian Movement in the United States* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1907), 85. And another states that "Through William Maclure, Robert Owen and Joseph Neef . . . the Pestalozzian system of education . . . was first successfully transplanted to this country"; George Browning Lockwood, *New Harmony Communities* (Marion, Ind., 1902), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Neef, *Sketch of a Plan*, 5.

Immediately upon his arrival in Philadelphia, Neef began to study English by himself. As soon as he felt confident that he had a sufficient knowledge of the syntax, grammar, and vocabulary he began to write *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education*, which he published privately in 1808.<sup>13</sup> Neef's writings in this Philadelphia period (1806-1813) were dominated by the educational thinking of his Swiss teacher. However, with his moves to Village Green, Pennsylvania, and later to Louisville, Kentucky, and New Harmony, Indiana, Neef began to devise his own educational theories, possibly as a result of his lack of communication with Pestalozzi and due also to the influences and harsh requirements of the frontier. A comparison of Pestalozzi's and Neef's views on the nature of education, the possibility of social mobility, and the content of education makes clear the ways in which Neef developed into an innovative educational theorist.

Throughout his life Pestalozzi was concerned with the plight of the poor. In 1774, after opening his first school at the Neuhof, he recognized that his natural method of education increased the chances of pauper children to become self-reliant by taking into account the type of life that each pupil would have to lead after leaving school. "Education of the poor," wrote Pestalozzi, "demands a deep and accurate knowledge of the real needs, limitations, and environment of poverty, and detailed knowledge of the probable situation in which they will spend their life."<sup>14</sup> As a result, he encouraged his teachers to experience their way of life to be better able to educate the poor. Moreover, a teacher "must descend into the lowest hovel of misery and must see the poor man in his gloomy room, his wife in a kitchen full of smoke, and his child, all going about their almost unendurable daily duties. For this is the hovel in which a publicly educated child will some day have to live."<sup>15</sup>

At the Neuhof and the Burgdorf schools it was Pestalozzi's main goal to help the poor by devoting himself almost exclu-

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to his *Sketch*, he also published privately J. Neef, *The Method of Instructing Children Rationally in the Arts of Writing and Reading* (Philadelphia, 1813). Furthermore, he translated Etienne Bonnet Condillac's *The Logic of Condillac* (Philadelphia, 1809). Neef's *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education* is the first American work to treat the Pestalozzian teaching methods as Neef conceived of them as well as the first strictly pedagogical treatise written and printed in the United States in the English language.

<sup>14</sup> "Herrn Pestalotz Briefe an Herrn N.E.T. über die Erziehung der armen Landjugend," in Pestalozzi, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 143.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

sively to their economic rehabilitation. He hoped that a person's education, however, would be considered outside its social context, thus implying that one remains in one's social class regardless of schooling. Education of the lower social orders should not lead these children outside the boundaries of their social position and condition; on the contrary, it should help them not only to become conscious of their situation but also to accept the limitations peculiar to their social class.<sup>16</sup> In his "Mémoire über Armenversorgung" Pestalozzi explains further that:

Far from believing that one should lead the children of an institute for the poor outside the boundaries of their social class and conditions, I believe it an essential requirement that in it they be made continually conscious of their poverty and their real situation and that they be forced to accept all the exertions and efforts peculiar to class and situation.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Pestalozzi became convinced that much of Switzerland's political and social instability was caused by the lack of education. The poor, being society's least-educated class, were dissatisfied with their social position; proper education would lead them to understand and accept their place in the class structure. The Swiss aristocracy, however, viewed any type of general education as a threat to their own place in society. As a result, they did not even attempt to understand Pestalozzi's "doctrine of appropriateness of condition," with which he tried to change the attitudes of the aristocracy and poor alike by arguing that a person's socioeconomic position should be based on his occupation alone. Education should be provided for everyone without regard to a pupil's class background.<sup>18</sup> A solid general education would not only provide the poor child with a higher degree of flexibility in his trade, allow him to adapt to various jobs, and give him a feeling of satisfaction, but would also teach him to appreciate his manual skills.<sup>19</sup> Most important, a proper general education for all would provide the whole population, but especially the poor, with a better understanding of themselves, allow them to plan more effectively for their own

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<sup>16</sup> "Ein Gespräch über Volksaufklärung und Volksbildung," in Pestalozzi, *Sämtliche Werke*, XVIII, 189-90.

<sup>17</sup> "Mémoire über Armenversorgung mit spezieller Rücksicht auf Neuenberg (Armenerziehungs-Anstalten)," in Pestalozzi, *Sämtliche Werke*, XX, 100-101.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of Pestalozzi's "doctrine of appropriateness of condition," see Gerald L. Gutek, *Pestalozzi and Education* (New York, 1968), 73-79.

<sup>19</sup> "Industrial Education," in Michael Heafford, *Pestalozzi: His Thought and Its Relevance Today* (London, 1967), 79-83.

future, and improve communication among different social classes.

While Pestalozzi's system of education was intended primarily to prepare the poor to accept their lot—i.e., to change their attitudes toward their social status rather than that status itself, to provide them with more flexibility in their trade, and to allow them to plan ahead—Neef's motive for insisting that everyone has a right to a proper education was quite different. Due to the vastness of America, its scarce population, and its abundance of natural resources, social and class boundaries were hardly visible on the frontier. Here education was important, Neef believed, "because I know it to be the only source of our acting well and consequently of our happiness."<sup>20</sup>

Neef's frontier experiences showed him that the survival of the individual often depended on his ability to stand on his own two feet and to use whatever knowledge and skill he had in the struggle with the harsh conditions of the frontier. In the life of each pioneer and "back-woodsman," as Neef liked to refer to himself, ideas were often the only instrument of adjustment and the results of their application were usually immediate. Under frontier conditions control of the environment was an absolute necessity for survival. Indeed, knowledge was prized as a person's most dependable means of extending his control over the environment. Knowledge, furthermore, strengthened the pioneer's faith that he should not be afraid of change but rather should welcome it as a sign of social improvement and proof that he was able to master the circumstances of life on the frontier.

These frontier conditions were incorporated into Neef's method of education. In an undated and hitherto unpublished manuscript Neef wrote:

Fellow Citizens! To educate children is generally understood to mean teaching them all sorts of arts & sciences, as well as dead & living languages. This view of the matter, however, does not seem to be quite correct. If education consisted in the imparting of knowledge of our arts & sciences; then no person could be called completely educated, unless thoroughly acquainted with languages, arts & sciences too numerous & too difficult of acquisition that ten ordinary lives would not suffice to receive such an education. The obvious impossibility of the scheme proves that such a comprehensive instruction cannot be the real scope of education. Nor would the matter be mended by saying that a judicious selection should be made of such languages, arts & sciences as would really be useful & necessary to the welfare of the future man. For to make such a selection, it would be necessary to have a foreknowledge of the

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Neef to William Maclure, December 6, 1834; property of Kenneth D. Owen.

parts that every child has to play in the drama of life; but no human sagacity ever possessed such a gift of prophecy. Our arts, sciences, languages are therefore but the instruments or means, through which the powers of the human mind are developed, whereas evolving of these powers is the real object of education or rather education itself. If you consider with me this view of the matter as being correct, you will certainly not wonder at my declaring that the matters of instruction are but of a secondary importance; whereas the method, by which any species of knowledge is imparted to the human mind, becomes a matter of the most serious, the most momentous consideration. That the reverse of this creed is firmly established in ninety-nine out of a hundred heads I know, nor do I doubt but many a wise man will sneer at my preposterous notions. This difference of opinion, however, only proves that my notion is different from that of others; but for or against its correctness it proves nothing. This latter point is, however, the only one that deserves our attention. Let us, therefore, examine whether I am right or whether I am wrong.

It is evident, methinks, that with all our real or imaginary sagacity, we cannot possibly foresee the future situation of our children, what art or what science will be necessary & useful to their future welfare. This position I think to be obvious & incontrovertible; and this being the case, how can we determine before hand what arts, languages, sciences will be required to insure their future happiness, their future usefulness? Suppose, for instance, I require a son of mine to learn the Greek language. Well; chance & choice combine, and the young fellow becomes a merchant. Do you think that his knowledge of Greek will be of great service to him in his commercial speculations? Do you, can you approve that the time, he employed in studying the language of ancient Greece, has been very usefully spent? Your smile convinces me that you suppose no such thing. From this short exposition of the matter we are therefore forcibly led to the conclusion that languages, arts, sciences must be considered only as the instruments by which education is to be effected, that they are not of primary importance & that in their selection we can only be guided by the probabilities more or less obvious. But the mode of acquiring knowledge is all-important, indeed. As soon as a child knows how to acquire any species of knowledge, as soon as it has acquired the habit & skill of analyzing, examining, investigating every thing, it deems necessary to become acquainted with; its education may be considered as accomplished.<sup>21</sup>

It is, therefore, not surprising that Neef did not agree with Pestalozzi concerning the doctrine of appropriateness of condition. He realized that pioneer America was attempting to lay the foundations of a new civilization and that these foundations could not be laid by simply transplanting European educational thought and practice, which judged human beings by their ancestry rather than by what they were able to achieve themselves. Here each family, whether rich or poor, encountered the

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Neef, "Education Nr. 8," n.d.; property of Kenneth D. Owen. This manuscript implies that Neef had written a series of short discussions on education. Its content suggests that it was written after the 1828 collapse of the Owen experiment in New Harmony, since Neef's views on education seem to have matured more fully. From 1828 to 1835 Neef devoted much attention to theoretical concerns; see Neef's correspondence with Maclure from this period.

same conditions on the frontier and what they were able to achieve there became the only valid test of their character, education, and status. Since each family had to grapple with the same crude frontier conditions, Neef was not interested only in the education of certain social classes. Moreover, he did not intend to prepare his pupils for a specific station in life because on the frontier it was impossible for the teacher to know what place in society his pupils eventually would hold.

This view also revealed a second area of difference between Neef and Pestalozzi: the former's belief in the democratic ideals which America symbolized and particularly in the American commitment to nearly unlimited social mobility. This mobility was possible, in part, because the European feudal system with its fixed class structure had not been established in the thinly populated regions of the western frontier. Here the vastness of the country meant that the pioneer, and with him American civilization, was continually on the march.

Pestalozzi, who was culturally, socially, and educationally bound to the European tradition and knew of prejudices and class distinctions from personal experience, believed that one important objective of education was to teach the pupil to be



THE NEW HARMONY HOME OF JOSEPH NEEF

Courtesy New Harmony Workingmen's Institute, New Harmony, Indiana.

"prudent, so that he may not be distrustful."<sup>22</sup> The rigid class system was well established in Switzerland and its stability depended to a large degree on the general acceptance of inherited social and economic status and unquestioning reliance on the justice of the system. Here, indeed, the pupils needed to be taught not to be mistrustful of the system itself, their role within the system, and their limited rights.

In America, on the other hand, social mobility was less dependent upon one's background than upon resourcefulness, hard work, courage, and ingenuity. With the westward movement and the opening of new frontiers, the emergence of a new social order gave the American a sense of individualism, necessitating a reliance on one's own judgment. "To educate children," concluded Neef, "is to prepare them for their future standing in life. We ought, therefore to acquaint them with the dangers which will surround them in life; we ought to do more; we ought to teach them to avoid those dangers. We know that there are cheats, deceivers, and imposters [sic] of every kind and description. . . . Now sir, I would accustom my pupils never blindly to believe what they hear, but always to investigate first whether what they hear to be true."<sup>23</sup>

As a pioneer and teacher on the American frontier, Neef did not believe that his pupils should accept his word as unquestionable truth; rather, he hoped to be challenged. In this manner his pupils would grow up as rationalists who would muster evidence based on their own observations and who would not believe anything on the basis of someone else's word:

It is this original habit of always acting in conformity to our own knowledge that originates [sic] all our good and useful habits which constitute a really happy existence. Man well educated according to my plan, would not only ascertain with precision and accuracy the properties of external nature but also the consequences of human actions, the effect of different agencies on our sensibility, the relation of man to man and to other beings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Pestalozzi was well aware of the unjust and often unfair practices. See Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. Pestalozzianum Zürich and the Zentralbibliothek in Zürich (13 vols., Zürich, 1946-1971), IV, 298; Heinrich Pestalozzi, *Lienhard und Gertrud [Leonard and Gertrude]* (1781-1787). Quoted in A. Pinloche, *Pestalozzi and the Foundation of the Modern Elementary School* (New York, 1901), 123.

<sup>23</sup>Neef, *Sketch of a Plan*, 28. On page 27 of the same source Neef wrote, "My pupils shall never believe what I tell them because I tell it [to] them, but because their own senses and understandings convince them that it is true." Since Neef claimed that his teaching methods were designed for life in the real world, he encouraged critical thinking and independent thought. This is a difference which deserves further investigation and research.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Neef to William Maclure, December 6, 1834; property of Kenneth D. Owen.

Neef attempted to realize the pioneer's desire to use the resources of science and technology by strengthening each pupil's faith that he could effectively master frontier life. His view of the well-educated man thus embodied the following:

A well educated man means a man who looks before he leaps, who examines everything and believes nothing; who in every instance takes his own experience for his guides in acting, who habitually and invariably refuses to act in obedience to his fancy or imagination or any other suggestion of external testimony, who has acquired the habit of analysing every subject that may interest him, who has acquired the habit of using his senses with certainty and effect.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, for Neef education involved more than the mere assimilation of information: it denoted the ability to make dependable decisions based on personal experience, to make rational inferences which would make life richer and more secure, and to base actions on prior analysis. Education conceived in this way had moral as well as intellectual implications: because it fostered the ability to predict an act's results and to weigh one's actions against their anticipated consequences, a good general education of this type necessarily taught pupils to be more free and self-reliant. Neef's curriculum was devised to enable his pupils to partake of the kind of experiences that foster the growth of intelligent behavior. He provided ample opportunity for responses to actual life situations, for planning to deal with these situations in the light of different consequences, for the observations to study outcomes, and for various types of evaluations of results.

The third area of striking differences in their respective methods of education, closely allied to the two already mentioned, was that Pestalozzi's was vocational: he tried to prepare the pupil to find happiness, fulfillment, and flexibility in the trade of his parents or family.

Neef did not share this view because the pioneers were oriented toward the future, not the past. This outlook was the result of the young Republic's lack of any authoritarian system of civil or religious institutions. Thus, the American pioneer's life was not constrained by precedents of the past. Therefore, Neef preferred the following method: "As soon as a child knows how to acquire any species of knowledge, as soon as it has acquired the habit & skill of analyzing, examining, investigating everything, it deems necessary to become acquainted with;

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



HARMONIST DORMITORY NO. 2, THE BUILDING IN WHICH JOSEPH NEEF CONDUCTED HIS SCHOOL AT NEW HARMONY

Courtesy New Harmony Workingmen's Institute, New Harmony, Indiana.

its education may be considered as accomplished."<sup>26</sup> For Neef it was the duty of the teacher to provide each child with an education that was less oriented toward subject matter or the learning of a trade than toward good habits in the acquisition of correct knowledge.

The frontier experience, the mobility of American social life, and the American people's orientation toward the future rather than the past opened Neef's eyes to the real content of education. In the following quote Neef went one step further by epitomizing the educational system of his contemporaries:

Schooling goes on pretty well; that is schoolhouses are erecting, children are sent there, schoolmasters appointed, primers, spelling books are as plenty as blackberries, pious tracts and holy bibles are studied most devoutly. The consequence of all this ado will be as it always has been, a plentiful crop of credulity; and therefore the next generation of men and women, to a dead certainty, [will] be as credulous, fantastic, fanatic, foolish, and wretched as the drones, who live on the credulity and folly of the miserable drudging bees, can desire.

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<sup>26</sup> Neef, "Education Nr. 8"; property of Kenneth D. Owen.

This is a sad prospect, you will say, and I agree with you if this is any consolation to you. As to universal equal education of which the workers talk, this will take place as soon as the bees shall unite their efforts to have themselves represented by honest bees of their own class; but I do not see how such an event can take place as long as they persist in electing drones to make the laws. . . . I think about this important matter as I have been thinking for more than thirty years past, I mean, since I became acquainted with my old master Pestalozzi.<sup>27</sup>

The excerpt, although it avows to follow in the footsteps of the "old master Pestalozzi," reveals Neef's innovative spirit, critical mind, and rational views. While bearing in mind that schooling was not for schooling's sake, but for the acquisition of knowledge to support freedom, Neef also hinted at the fact that his teaching methods had not been accepted by most of the schools of his day and age.

While Pestalozzi placed primary emphasis on the factor of social heritage when educating his pupils for a specific trade, Neef seized on another concept—universal equal education of all children, which to him meant that each pupil must be taught the skills of analyzing, examining, and investigating, not specific subject matter. Thus Neef could oppose book-centered educators, who often employed undemocratic, harsh methods. He realized that whenever education is restricted to the study of books the work of the school usually becomes an end in itself: in classrooms thus cut off from frontier life, the learning process inevitably must become as mechanical as the construction of schoolhouses.

Joseph Neef's rightful place as an innovative educator and educational philosopher should be acknowledged. While he grounded his system of education in the ideas developed by Pestalozzi, Neef went on to adapt these ideas to the society he found in the New World. His belief in the democratic ideals of the young Republic and his experience on the frontier, where the key to success was hard work rather than ethnic, social, or economic background, led him to advocate an equal education for all. This education was to impart the skills necessary for investigation, examination, and analysis, the processes which would enable pupils to base their decisions on personal experience and knowledge rather than unquestioning acceptance of the teachings of others. Because he found a society which lacked Europe's fixed class structure and thus provided seemingly unlimited opportunities for personal advancement, Neef

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Neef to William Maclure, December 6, 1834; property of Kenneth D. Owen.

argued against his mentor's doctrine of the appropriateness of condition. In America, such factors as personal choice and ability, rather than social background, determined the trade one should enter. And finally, Neef believed that in a society free of the intellectual constraints of the type imposed by the Old World's archaic religious and civil institutions education should aim at more than the mere imparting of specific information. Rather, it should stress the process by which information was acquired, for by mastering this process each person could gain an equal chance to participate in the exploitation of vast natural resources, the exploration of new territory, and the foundation of a new civilization in America.