

Johann Bernhard Basedow, *Method Book* (1770) and *Elementary Work* (1774)

Abstract

Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–1790) founded a school known as the Philanthropinum in Dessau in 1774. Basedow's educational philosophy was strongly influenced by Rousseau's *Emile*. The school was intended for all classes and confessions and was based on pragmatic education in the vernacular. Although it was only open for a few decades, the Philanthropinum inspired similar schools and educational ideas across Germany. The first selection reprinted below comes from Basedow's *Method Book* [*Methodenbuch*] from 1770; the excerpts describe his educational philosophy and explain how images are to be used in instruction. The second selection comes from the first volume of Basedow's *Elementary Work* [*Elementarwerk*] from 1774. It includes a sample dialogue between a mother and her children which serves simultaneously as a lesson in vocabulary, fashion, and morality. The text dates from 1774 but was reprinted in 1909. The publication of this new turn-of-the-century edition testifies to the lasting influence of Basedow's work on German pedagogy, particularly within progressive circles.

Source

From J. B. Basedow, *Elementary Library: Method Book for Fathers and Mothers of Families and Nations* (1770)

[...]

The elementary book, however, shall begin with a child's very first knowledge. It will, to the best of my knowledge and that of my advisors, not contain an untrue statement or an exaggeration. Every subject will come up at the right time, not too early and not too late, to educate children's minds and hearts. In the book, I will not skip over a single stage of proper natural development. It will be so complete as the first textbook, extending up to the thirteenth or fifteenth year, that it will contain therein the fertile seed for all kinds of beneficial knowledge, with an economy appropriate to the nature of the subject. Real life and verbal knowledge should be included in proportion to their value and to the needs of the children. Children's memories should become accustomed to serving their growing intellect without arrogating to themselves the dignity of the same. The book is to be written in such practical terms that, in the absence of schools and tutors, any mother who is or can become knowledgeable will find the way entirely prepared for pleasant and useful instruction in the early childhood years. If my prescription is followed, the children themselves will love no game or entertainment as much as this book, which is designed to suit their nature and illustrated throughout with instructive engravings. It is meant to be the means, losing as little time as possible, to make children so skilled in comprehending the French and Latin languages (if spoken to them as appropriate for the level of practical insight achieved and using very simple vocabulary) that instruction in those languages can continue in the *Realschule*, that is, practical middle school, as my plan for improved schools requires. – Instruction in the art of reading and the first exercises in arithmetic will be linked in the elementary book in such a manner that it is clear in every case which individual modules of the verbal lessons and the associated tedious exercises can most advantageously follow the practical knowledge lessons, a section at a time; the objective is to foster all the more rapidly and surely the overall expansion of useful knowledge.

[...]

This elementary work for children of the cultured classes can be such a complete store even beyond the thirteenth year of age that no other kind of written material but this work is needed to impart the knowledge they require. Excepted are church religion, and perhaps calligraphy, music, and drawing; I have encountered insurmountable difficulties in attempting to connect their basic foundations with the elementary book, despite my best intentions. History, geography and knowledge regarding the world, moral and philosophical knowledge, especially regarding God and the soul, in addition to preparatory training in grammar, rhetoric, and taste in the fine arts and sciences (insofar as this is suitable for the stated age) are to be included in the elementary book. They shall be presented in an order such that parents and teachers will be able to choose without effort or hesitation. May God's blessing further facilitate this important endeavor!

[...]

I must say something in addition about the use of pictures and engravings in instructing children: 1) Experience shows how much children like anything that looks like a picture, even when only everyday things or things to which they are usually indifferent are portrayed. 2) The observations and moral doctrines that accompany such illustrations are more vivid than otherwise, last longer, and are passed from one child to another and repeated. 3) Many things of a sensory nature cannot be conceptualized in teaching sessions without illustrations, because they are foreign or at least absent at the moment. 4) The teacher is more easily understood with the help of pictures when he repeats known things in a foreign or dead language; children become skilled in such things most quickly and easily through this natural teaching method.

[...]

Source: Johann Bernhard Basedow, *Zur elementarischen Bibliothek: Das Methodenbuch für Väter und Mütter der Familien und Völker*. Altona: Cramer, 1770, pp. 13–16, 234. Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10764779-7>

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

From J. B. Basedow, *Elementary Work*, Volume I (1774)

[...]

i) No. 2, Table III. On the Use of Clothing.^[1]

[...]

Names of clothing articles, as well as some moral doctrines

Carol[inchen]: On wooden knobs on the wall [there are] a sleeveless camisole with holes for lacings, long stays, a contouche^[2] decorated with ribbons, a skirt, an overdress with a train, a fur for winter, a robe volante, a crinoline, and a chemise dress or house dress. I do not like the stays, trains, or crinolines at all. The first pinch; the second are an encumbrance and are only good for bringing dirt home. Crinolines are very uncomfortable, and I am happy that we don't need any.

M[other]: I agree with you. But people often like something that they are not supposed to like. That way of dressing is the most usual in our class, or it is fashion for us adults. A person who goes against fashion is

displeasing. And we must bear a few burdens rather than displeasing many good people. But go on describing the picture.

Carol[inchen]: On the table is a sculptured head form on which we will sort out headwear. The fans which we use to cool ourselves down in summer and hold before our faces when we sneeze, cough, or expectorate are also there. I also see arm bands and a string of pearls, scissors, and a small case in which there are probably rings and such. I notice that the pin cushion, combs, and other objects that belong on such a bedside table are missing. A mirror is there; I can make out a piece of reflecting glass and a frame. But what do I see! Slippers and shoes in the middle of the floor? Surely the artist drew it that way to remind us that we must put everything away properly.[3]

M[other]: It is a great failing of people that they seek to have an excess of clothing and that they spend so much money on finery when better and more necessary things could be purchased with it. This failing is more common among women than men. When you are grown up, my dear daughters, save on clothing and all finery so that you can have the much greater pleasure of doing a great deal of good and spending that money on better things. Friedrich, name the men's clothing shown for your little brothers.

Friedrich: A hat, a dickey with buttons and button holes, breeches, two waistcoats, a justacorps on which I see the front pieces, the back piece, the sleeves, the lapels, and the pockets with their flaps and pleats, a shirt with cuffs, a casaquin jacket (or house jacket), a long, wide dressing gown [banyan] (both of bright-colored fabric), a fur with its collar and lapels, and a coat primarily used in rain and other inclement weather.[4] On the wig stand I see a tie-wig, a round wig, and a bag wig. On the table are stockings with gussets and garters, a muff, a night cap, under that a neck scarf, next to that knee buckles, shoe buckles, and a necktie. Leaning against the table are a walking stick with its head and a sword, consisting of a hilt and a blade. The hilt has a pommel, a grip, a knuckle bow, and a guard. The blade is inserted in a scabbard. A sword hanger for girding the sword to one's side is attached to the scabbard. On the floor I see boots with heels, soles, and the leather upper. The upper piece is folded over to show the straps with which the boots are pulled up. Next to them are slippers and shoes with their straps, as well as half-boots that are laced closed at the side. It seems to me that the things on the table and the floor should be stored more properly. One side of the table is turned away from the light and is therefore dark. The black streak next to the sword is its shadow.

M[other]: Emilie, tell me what is shown in the bottom picture.

Emilie: I see children who are spoiling their good clothes in various ways; we are not yet given such good clothes. They must not have had as good parents and leaders as we do. They must not know that such good clothes cost a lot of money and that they can be ruined by fire, water, powder, and other dust, as well as by yanking and tussling. The boy there, who is dressed very elegantly, is kneeling in front of a bench on which there is a bowl of water; he is splashing in it and floating his wooden fish and little boat there. He will be in trouble if he shows up with his wet clothes. You there, cleaned-up, careless girl at the open fire! Your beautiful dress has already caught fire! If you are not helped soon, you will be really unhappy! You could have warmed yourself, played with the doll that is lying on the floor. But children must carefully guard against fire. With sympathy, I see the fear on your face. You two tusslers there! What are you doing? It is serious; you are boys who deserve punishment. If it is just in fun, you should not yank each other around so much and pull each other's hair or throw each other on the hard floor where you could break your arms and legs. Papa says that the soft green meadow is suited for such boyish joking around. Then you should also take off your jackets, have no curled hair, and not be wearing clothes that tear easily and cannot be easily fixed and cleaned.[5] In front of the mirror there is a powdered boy who wants to powder himself even more. But his clothes are getting powdered more than his hair. If he had only put on a powder cape. His hat

lying on the table is also getting powdered. He should be prepared for serious reprimands, and if he has already been warned [against such behavior], for punishment. But I am talking as if I see people and not pictures. My siblings will probably understand me well.

[...]

NOTES

[1] Note by Basedow. If children can already read and the objective is to stimulate in them the first correct conception of certain things they encounter through experience, storytelling, fiction, and events, the contents of such discussions is unintelligible to them to the point of uselessness.

[2] A short, full outer garment for women, and also a short casual jacket for men.

[3] Note by Basedow. It is clearly evident that not everything is for very young children. In such cases, appeal is made to older children or the section is passed over.

[4] Note by Basedow. The purpose of such passages is only to teach vocabulary in foreign languages and to clarify certain incomplete distinctions between perceived things. When only practical knowledge is being considered, the passages are unnecessary.

[5] One of Basedow's indisputable achievements was to have liberated the young members of the upper classes from the unnatural clothing produced in the age of Louis XIV. Just look at most of the children in the pictures of the *Elementarwerk!* The galloon-laden jackets, the coiffures, the bagwigs—all eliminated in the Philanthropinum. "You can imagine how good the boys felt when they were released from the compulsory dress jackets, pants, and neckties, received very comfortable sailor jackets and pants of blue and white striped ticking, and kept their necks bare and their collars turned down; when the muck of powder and pomade was removed from their hair and the bagwigs undone." See Karl von Raumer, *Geschichte der Pädagogik [History of Pedagogy]*, Part 2 (Gütersloh, 1889), p. 242f.

Source: Johann Bernhard Basedow, Daniel Chodowiecki and Theodor Fritzscht, *J. B. Basedows Elementarwerk: Mit den Kupfertafeln Chodowieckis u.a. Kritische Bearbeitung in drei Bänden, mit Einleitungen, Anmerkungen und Anhängen*. Leipzig: E. Wiegandt, 1909, vol. I, pp. 80, 82–85.

Translation: Katleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: Johann Bernhard Basedow, *Method Book* (1770) and *Elementary Work* (1774), published in: *German History Intersections*, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/knowledge-and-education/ghis:document-104>> [April 19, 2024].