

Friedrich August Frobel – A Pioneer of Pre-School Education

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Abstract

Friedrich August, Frobel an eminent philosopher of south Germany had spent his childhood stage with lot of sufferings. Like other child he did not get chance of parental love and affection. Taking such bitter experiences of his life, he developed a keen kindness for children and committed to dedicate for promoting children's happiness. Due to his dedication and commitment, he had innovated world famous kindergarten system for pre-school children. He made renaissance in pre-primary education. He also published number of popular books in the arena of pre-school education. He conceptualized school in a different way i.e. School as a miniature society. He emphasized how pre-school education is very much important for a child, what should be the methodology, what should be the curriculum, and how teacher will play an important role to make preschool education successful. However his academic as well as professional life is unique so far as his contribution towards education is concerned. Hence the paper intends to discuss elaborately about his life sketch and his contributions in education.

KEYWORDS- Kindergarten, self-activity, sense-training

1. Introduction

Frobel (1782-1852) was a great educator of Germany. He had ushered a revolution in the education world through his world famous Kindergarten system for Pre-school children. With a bitter experience of life, he started his own schools in Switzerland and Germany which could not survive due to financial stringency and apathy of the government. However, he had produced popular books on education which include – “*Pedagogies of Kindergarten*”, “*Mothers Plays and Nursery Songs*” and “*Education by Development*” which were mostly concerned with education of children within 3+ to 5+ years.

2. Brief Life Sketch:-

Friedrich August, Frobel was born on April 21, 1782 in the village of Oberweisbach, a village in the South Germany. He lost his mother when he was only nine months old. His father got remarried and he was neglected. Deprived of parental affection, he became moody and subjective. He was taken by his maternal uncle who was clergy man. Frobel was influenced by him and developed spiritual aspirations. Having a lot of sufferings during childhood, Frobel developed a keen kindness for children and committed to dedicate for promoting children's happiness. Frobel did not receive much education and spent major time in the lap of nature. He had a multiple career since 15 years till the end of his life. At the beginning he was appointed as an apprentice to a forester, then served

as a Land survey accountant, Private Secretary, study architect, teacher, Military Soldier, Curator of a museum and finally an educator. Frobel had learnt a bundle of experiences from his zigzag career and his vision for education came true when he established a small school at Griesheim, where Frobel incorporated his principle of elementary education. It became a successful institution after 10 years. Play and the art of work was the chief concern of this place. Frobel shifted his work to Switzerland in 1830. The Swiss Government appreciated his work and sent their teachers for training. Then he shifted to Burgdorf to manage an orphanage. He continued his work of training teachers for three months duration. There he realized that due to non-availability of education in the Pre-school age, the school suffered and did not get good raw material-the educand. Frobel returned to Germany in 1836 and founded his first Kindergarten in 1849. He devoted all his time in pondering and devising his apparatus for kindergarteners. Later, he propagated the principles of kindergarten. The German Government did not accept his views and prohibited him from establishing any school. This was a great shock for the good teacher and he could not live long. He died on June 21, 1852 in poverty, misery and agony. His grave is marked by a slab with cube, a cylinder and a sphere on it.

3. Philosophy of Life:-

Frobel was an idealist and influenced by the great German philosophers like Fichte, Kant and Schelling. He chiefly emphasized on the principles of unity in diversity and theory of development in his philosophy. The main principles of his life were:-

3.1.The Law of Unity:- According to Frobel, there is one eternal law- the law of unity that governs the whole universe as a unity from God. All things come from the divine unity (God). All things come from the divine unity (God) and their origin in God. The divine unity existed in man, animal, plant, inanimate object or human society, All these individual units are entangled into one cosmic unity which may be called God. Frobel loved science and looked upon it as the expression of the mind of God. God is the cause of their existence, the root of all things. He drew the principle that there is a unity of men, nature and God. Hence, Frobel prescribed that man should become conscious of the Absolute unity of the universe. He should know the diversity of things unfolding within that unity. Like Rousseau, Frobel believed that nature is a great teacher. Psychologically he opined man as a plant developing as a unit according to a law of nature unfolding within him.

3.2. The Principle of Development:- Frobel said that all are growing towards the same unity. The movement is continuous and upward. Everything is therefore changing, growing and marching towards the same unity. Frobel maintained that mind evolves from within. Each individual must develop from within, self-active, free in accordance with eternal law. By development he meant that an increase in quantity, complexity, improvement in power, skill and variety in the performance of natural functions.

3.3.The Principle of Self-activity:- it is only through self-activity that the real growth and development is possible. Forced activity is artificial and unnatural. The true observer can know what the child is or what he is to become. All this lies in the child and can be attained through development from within.

3.4.Development through Social institutions:- Frobel said that school is a miniature society. He marked that “No community can progress while the individual remain behind”. He said that the individual is not apart from the life of the Society”.

4. Educational Philosophy: Frobel drew his concept of education from his general philosophy and thought that the child as an agency for the realization of God’s will in human nature. The spirit of the child is linked with the spiritual unity of God through education.

4.1.Concept of Education:- According to Frobel, education is the never-ending evolutionary process and active means by which man reach higher and higher stages of goodness and perfection. He believed that there is humanity in every human being; each one has to realize and express it in peculiar, personal and unique manner.

4.2.Aims of education: According to Frobel, education is growth from within. It is a development by which an individual realizes that he is a unit of the divine unity. Education is unfolding the child’s innate powers and awakens his spiritual nature to have a spiritual union with God. The aims of education were briefly as follows:-

- To manifest the spiritual development of the individual
- To awaken the innate spiritual nature through individual training
- To help the child to relate his experiences organically with one another
- To realize the divine character, senses, emotions and reasons to religious education.
- To take play as the most important phase in the spontaneous development of the child.
- To concentrate on the education of the Pre-School child.

4.3.Objectives of education:-

1. To enable the child to realize the unity in diversity
2. To make play as an essential factor for the free and natural development of the child.
3. To make education in conformity with Childs nature and needs
4. To educate the child in free atmosphere.
5. To assist the educand to develop in accordance with the law of nature
6. To realize the unity in diversity through all the social institutions.

4.4.Main features of Kindergarten

4.4.1. Self activity- According to Frobel self activity is a process by which the individual realizes his own nature and builds up his own world and then unites and harmonizes the two. In-fact self activity is self-realization through which the child comes to know of his own nature as well as the life around him. Thus self activity not only closes the gap between knowledge and action but also gives joy, freedom, contentment and peace of mind. Such training should be imparted through song, movement and construction from simple to complex, from the concrete to the abstract nature of the human mind. The self activity may either in the form of work or play

4.4.2. Play: According to Frobel “ Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage. It is through play that the child discloses his real self and shows his interest. Play gives joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer peace with the world. Frobel recognized that play needs to be recognized and controlled on definite materials so that it may not degenerate into aimless play. In order to give

rational and conscious guidance, Frobel has provided activities and devised materials known as gifts. These gifts have been carefully graded to give the child from activities and thought of one stage to another.

- 4.4.3. Gifts and occupations:-** The gifts and occupations were meant to stimulate activity. Gifts are the materials or simple educational toys presented to the child in a definite order. The child is given freedom to handle them in any way, he likes. The occupations represent are activities which include construction with paper, clay, wood and others. The first gift consists of six colored balls contained in a box of different colours. The child of three months is to roll them about in play. The occupation is rolling them. The balls are intended to give the students an idea of color, materials, motions and direction. The rhyme accompanying the rolling of the ball is

“ Oh, see the pretty ball
So round so soft and small
The ball is round and rolls each way
The ball is noce for baby’s play”

As the child grows older the motion of the ball becomes a symbol of life. The second gift consists of a sphere, a cube and cylinder made of hard wood contained in a box. The child plays with them and notices the difference between the stability of the cube with the mobility of the sphere. He learns that the cylinder is both movable and stable and it harmonizes the qualities of both. The third gift is a big wooden cube subdivided into eight wooden cubes. The child can have elementary idea of addition and subtraction through these. These gifts are to be effective basis of education.

- 4.4.4. Songs, gestures and constructions:-** Frobel saw an organic relationship between songs, gestures and construction. These are the three coordinated forms of expression in the child. Each object should be given it’s appropriate name, each word should be uttered clearly and distinctly. The training is provided through song, movement and construction from which the child learns automatically the use of language. For example, when the story is told first, it is expressed in song, then it is dramatized in movement and gesture and fully it is illustrated by constructive work from blocks, paper, clay and other materials. In this way, ideas are given through stimulated, the imagination vivified, the hands and eyes trained, the muscles coordinated and the moral nature strengthened.

- 4.4.5. Selection of songs-** Frobel has introduced the idea of song to enable the child to use his senses, limbs and muscles and to familiarize with the surroundings. Each song is accompanied by a game such as “Hide and seek”. The selection of the song is determined by the teacher in accordance with the development of the child. All songs are about common objects of life. They are intended to exercise the infant’s senses, limbs and muscles. Every song must relate the nursery game and must correspond to a special physical, mental and moral need of the child. The selection and order of the song is determined according to the development of the child.

Each song of Frobel contained three parts:-

- a) A motto for the guidance of the mother or teacher
- b) A verse accompanied by music to sing

c) A picture illustrating the song

The song for drill is:

Let us have a drill to-day,
March along grand array,
And whoever steps the best
Shall be captain over the rest,
And lead us on our way.

5) **The place of Teacher:** - Frobel has assigned teacher the responsibility to control the growth of the child into a man, just as a gardener controls the growth of a plant to its full flowering and fruition. The teacher has to suggest the idea of occupation when gifts are offered to children. He is also required to demonstrate certain activities to them. He also sings a song with a view to help the child to form appropriate ideas. Frobel stressed that women should be trained for training the children. He has to inculcate sympathetically the values like love, sympathy, humility, co-operation and obedience to elders.

6) **Discipline** – According to Frobel, discipline is not a set of rules and regulations imposed upon children. It is a way of living and doing which gives children strong will. In kindergarten, discipline is of protective and co-operative type. Spontaneous and play activities, games and stories, arts and crafts, gifts and occupations all provide sound physical and mental training to children and teach them discipline. He has to avoid external control and physical punishment for the children. He has to realize that discipline depends upon his love for order, good will and mutual understanding.

7) **Curriculum**- According to Frobel construction work should be the beginning and end of the educational process. The main division of curriculum are-

i) Manual work and industrial training

ii) Religion and religious instruction

iii) Natural Science and Mathematics,

iv) Language

v) Arts and objects of arts

vi) Frobel wished that the child should have moral improvement, religious upliftment and spiritual insight by coming in contact with nature. Nature study provides the child scope for varied activity. It suggests material for reading, writing, language work, constructive work and number work

8). **Critical Assessment of Friedrich Frobel:**

Froebel had immense interest for the education and happiness of human race. He believed that the child was inherently good and incessantly active in expression. He realized that the individual can be developed by means of initiative, execution and co-operation in educational process; he made life simpler, clear and more recognizable. He had introduced pre-school or nursery education through Kindergarten system and laid importance on play in the early education. He regarded school as a miniature society where children get training on important things. The gift and occupations of Kindergarten gave a new method of education. The inclusion of productive work in the school makes children productive workers. Various arts and crafts like clay modeling, paper cutting etc. provide sensory training. The inclusion of nature study in the curriculum helps the child

to develop love for nature and the world in the minds of the students. He advocated physical training and excursion as method

Despite the merits, Frobel was criticized on the following grounds:-

- The child could not understand the abstract ideas of organic unit while playing with gifts
- The importance of environment has not been emphasized
- Songs devised by Frobel are out of date
- The order of presentation of gifts do not serve the purpose of sense training,
- There is little co-relation in teaching of various subjects,
- It is not possible to accept play in education as it likely detract the child from serious learning.

9). Relevance of Frobel on Modern education

However, Frobel is well remembered because he taught us to live for our children and love them. He sensitized the society regarding the education for young children in the following fields:-

- Emphasis on Pre-primary education or Pre-basic education
- New conception of School- School as a miniature society
- Respect for the Child's individuality
- Emphasis on the study of the child
- Education through play (Songs, movements, gestures, dramatization , hardwork)
- Sense training with the help of gifts which audio-visual aids in modern times.
- Self activity as the basis of education which is known as learning by doing of the present education
- Nature of study in education
- Women teachers at the elementary level

Last but not the least, his emphasis on play, self-activity and creativeness show a new horizon in ameliorating the theoretical and practical concept of education. The modern educators have incorporated the concept "spontaneous activity", Co-operativeness" and manual labour in education of children because of Frobel's innovation.

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