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GEORG KERSCHENSTEINER

(1852–1932)
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An innovatory popular educator

Like Comenius, Pestalozzi and Grundtvig, Georg Kerschensteiner was a popular educator in the true sense of the term. Common to all his various activities as a teacher, director of public schools, politician and university professor was the consistent concern to put the theoretical persuasions he held into practice. For all his originality and even quirkiness as an individual and pedagogue, he was profoundly aware of the historical roots from which his thinking and his aspirations stemmed, his main touchstones being Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's educational philosophy, John Dewey's broad sociological view of education and Eduard Spranger's cultural-historical perspective. His achievement rests on three major—and interdependent—concerns: the establishment of vocational education and the inculcation of civic responsibility as the mainstays of general education; deriving from this, the development of a concept of education that stressed the links between education and life; and the attempt to anchor his system of education in the broader context of a philosophy of culture.

When we confer the status of the classical on the life's work of an individual, then surely it is because it succeeds in fashioning and cogently representing a body of ideas that are both a response to the pressing issues of the moment and, at the same time, a display of an unrelenting preoccupation with fundamental concerns not limited to that day and age. If this is so, then Kerschensteiner's works must definitely be reckoned as belonging to the classical canon of writings on education (Röhrs, 1991).

Succeeding generations may subscribe to different educational values, but Kerschensteiner's works remain unchallenged in their claim to be regarded as a significant new departure in educational thinking. This applies as much to his reformatory zeal in connection with the principle of popular education as to his ideas on vocational schooling, instruction in manual skills and the role of education in instilling civic awareness. Kerschensteiner's writings are a source of inspiration for each new generation facing the perennial task of accompanying young untutored minds on the path towards intellectual maturity and moral integrity.

As with all great popular educators, Kerschensteiner's ideas are not the property of one nation but have attained universal currency in the educational world. His main works have been translated into nearly all the major languages and continue to inspire lively debate in educational circles. Even in the difficult post-Second World War years and with the atmosphere of anti-German resentment prevailing at that time, the validity and significance of Kerschensteiner's achievement was never the object of serious detracting, as the present author was able to witness on a number of study tours outside Germany. Kerschensteiner's writings are generally regarded as a shining example of the pedagogic will to renew the German education system from a practical vantage.

In the course of his career, Kerschensteiner traversed all the various levels of educational activity. After starting out as an elementary school-teacher, he studied

mathematics and physics, thus advancing to the position of teacher at a *Gymnasium* (selective secondary school). From 1895 to 1919, he was director of public schools in Munich, and it was in this capacity that he attained worldwide renown. Here he developed the existing *Fortbildungsschule* (literally: further education school) into a fully-fledged vocational school and encouraged practical work in schools, in the spirit of his espousal of the idea of the *Arbeitsschule* (literally: work school). From 1919 onwards, he held a professorship at the University of Munich.

It was against this practical background that the body of his writings took shape. In his first publication, *Betrachtungen zur Theorie des Lehrplans* (Thoughts on a theory of curriculum, 1899), he criticises Herbart's education system for what he calls its 'formalism'. It is Kerschensteiner's unswerving conviction that schools must see themselves as productive elements of society. He substantiated this view in his disquisition *Die staatsbürgerliche Erziehung der deutschen Jugend* (The civic education of Germany's youth, 1901), an entry for a competition organized by the Academy of Sciences in Erfurt. This key concept in his understanding of the role of education was later enlarged upon in his treatise on *Der Begriff der staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung* (The Concept of civic education, 1907). That year also saw the publication of his closely argued discussion of the organizational problems involved in ensuring that, for young people, attending school means entering an environment reflecting the necessities and realities of life. It was entitled *Grundfragen der Schulorganisation* (Basic issues in school organization). Five years later, in 1912, his study *Der Begriff der Arbeitsschule* (The Concept of the Work School) reviewed the tasks involved in the internal organization of schools and the methodological and didactic reforms required for this to be done properly.

The objectives and methods of teaching scientific subjects, an issue particularly dear to his heart, were analyzed in his *Wesen und Wert des naturwissenschaftlichen Unterrichts* (Nature and value of instruction in the sciences, 1914). Fundamental questions of internal and external school organization and adolescent education were dealt with in his book *Die Seele des Erziehers und das Problem der Lehrerbildung* (The soul of the educator and the problem of teacher training, 1921), at a time when the great post-First World War debate about the reform of teacher training was gathering momentum.

Kerschensteiner's later writings, representing a contribution to the philosophy of education, were also invariably the product of reflection on his own pedagogic activity and its pragmatic implications. First among these was *Das Grundaxiom des Bildungsprozesses* (The basic axiom of the educational process, 1917). Kerschensteiner systematized his thinking more fully in his major work *Theorie der Bildung* (Theory of education, 1926), the fruit of profound immersion in works and ideas representing major milestones in educational theory and philosophy, notably those of Pestalozzi, neo-Kantianism, Spranger and Dewey. In its entirety, Kerschensteiner's *oeuvre* is the expression of an approach to education which, after proving its potential through the author's own educational activity, then attained a supreme degree of critical and self-critical cogency by dint of profound reflection on the philosophy of education. The measure of international influence that it has achieved is closely bound up with its roots in Kerschensteiner's own highly successful practical experience as an educator.

Herder's suggestive image of a tree's branches providing more generous shade the more deeply rooted it is in its native soil is an eloquent illustration of an essential aspect of Kerschensteiner's nature and work. Kerschensteiner was a Bavarian, and Bavarians are endowed by nature with a species of earthy humour and an affirmative attitude towards life that helped Kerschensteiner to weather the by-no-means-infrequent storms and contretemps that beset him in the course of his career. One (unfortunately very rare) ability that he had was that of resolving an apparently hopeless deadlock with a humorous remark that in its straightforward commonsense and irrefutability reconciled the embattled adversaries on the

spot. This was an attribute of particular value in negotiating ticklish situations in which the likelihood of umbrage being taken was large. When Kerschensteiner's nephew, Nico Wallner, approached him with the, perhaps, premature resolve to organize a *Festschrift* (a commemorative publication) to mark Eduard Spranger's fiftieth birthday, the correspondence between the latter and Kerschensteiner is remarkable in precisely this respect. After a humorous description of Wallner's intentions, Kerschensteiner writes:

Now I don't know what you think of all this, but I don't mind telling you that I'm dead against this new trend. In the old days you had to be 70 to qualify for homages like this, then they dropped it to 60 and these days you only have to hold out till you're 50! If you ask me it's arrant tomfoolery, and you know this has nothing to do with my admiration and affection for you. We all expect you to soldier on in the best of health to celebrate your sixtieth and seventieth birthdays to the greater glory of our beloved fatherland. And what are we supposed to do then? Organize two more festschriften; Heaven preserve us.

Spranger reaction, who was sensitive, not to say touchy, by nature, was one of surprising equanimity:

With regard to the planned festschrift, your sentiments are entirely my own. Indeed, it would be a source of very real displeasure to me if this enterprise could not be nipped in the bud. My fiftieth birthday isn't worth so much as a supper-party to me, at the most an outing in the country with friends, if the weather's fine. So please tell them that, if you're any judge of my feelings on the matter, it's a case of 'motion dismissed before the first reading'! (Englert, 1966).

The friendship between these two renowned educationalists and the expression it finds in their extensive correspondence is an unusually fortunate instance of the way in which educational theory can mature and achieve a truly human dimension in the course of a personal relationship of this nature. From this point of view, the correspondence is in fact more enlightening than some of the educational theories themselves taken on purely abstract terms. It is indeed significant of Kerschensteiner's concept of education that for him the humanizing aspect of education is at least as important as the theory. He is quite adamant that it is by their contribution to human relations that such theories must stand or fall. The measure of all pedagogic thinking is the extent to which it furthers the development towards, and the consolidation of, true humanity. This development is reflected as much in the faculty of personal judgement as in vocational fulfilment or creative expression in the various fields of art and crafts.

With his artistic bent and cosmopolitan persuasions, Kerschensteiner took a keen interest in the intellectual life of the age. His aesthetic sensibility is impressively documented by the study *Die Entwicklung der zeichnerischen Begabung* (The development of drawing skill, 1905), which, although now methodologically outdated, contains such excellent comparisons and interpretations of several thousand children's drawings as to represent a mine of information and inspiration for art teachers to this day. At the same time, the study is a superb example of the practical orientation of Kerschensteiner's pedagogic approach.

Kerschensteiner gathered his pedagogic insights and experiences not only in the classroom but equally in exchange, debate and encounter away from the cloistered atmosphere of school: on his various extended study trips; in his discussions on philosophy and aesthetics with Adolf von Hildebrand in the latter's house in San Francisco on the slopes of the Apennines, with its uplifting view of Florence and Fiesole, where Kerschensteiner first met Aloys Fischer, later a colleague of his at Munich University; in earnest political debate with his fellow party members Theodor Barth and Friedrich Naumann, when he became a member of the *Reichstag* for Munich (1912–18); or on his journeys to the United States, where he met John Dewey, albeit only briefly.

In his capacity as director of public schools in Munich, Kerschensteiner embarked on a lecture tour across the United States at the invitation of Charles R. Richards, president of the International Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education. This was in the autumn of 1910. Kerschensteiner set out with the express intention of arranging an encounter with Dewey, to whom he owed much inspiration for his own work. It was on 29 November 1910 that the two prominent educationalists met for an exchange of views at the Faculty Club of Columbia University in New York (Knoll, 1993, p. 32).

It is thus a life rich in incident that presents itself to the biographer. Kerschensteiner was as much at home in the aesthetic sphere as in the less rarefied atmosphere of active politics, to mention only the most obvious contrast. Kerschensteiner's career is a rare example of the way in which experience in different walks of life can cohere to form an organic unity. His activities as elementary school-teacher, *Gymnasium* instructor in mathematics and physics, director of public schools in Munich, member of the *Reichstag* and, from 1919, professor of pedagogy at Munich University are all informed by the guiding principle of popular education, the determination to provide adequate educational care for those broad classes of the working population not fortunate enough to be guided through long years of secondary schooling to true assessment and discovery of the vocations they are best cut out for.

These activities were firmly anchored in an all-encompassing educational ethic that was central to Kerschensteiner's thinking and prompted him to place everything he did—organizationally or politically—in the service of educational objectives. In his 1921 analysis of what it is that characterizes the true educator (The soul of the educator and the problem of teacher training, 1949), Kerschensteiner sees the teacher as belonging to the category of the 'caring' vocations and in this it is surely legitimate to discern elements of a personal profession of faith.

The image of Kerschensteiner that most readily springs to mind is that of the director of public schools in Munich, a popular educator in the Pestalozzian mould, establishing vocational schools, setting up public libraries, championing an extension of minimum school attendance and commemorating Pestalozzi with an epoch-making address of 1908 on the methods of popular education: *Die Schule der Zukunft—eine Arbeitsschule* (The school of the future: a work school, 1912).

In the face of all this, the essentially academic criticisms levelled at Kerschensteiner by Gauding at the first Congress on Youth Research and Youth Education in 1911 in Dresden lose much of their impact, while the limitations of Kerschensteiner's own later theoretical writings also become more apparent. The works by Kerschensteiner that belong to the essential canon of educational thinking stem without exception from his own practical endeavours.

Renewing the education system

It is here that we must look for an answer to the question about the relationship between theory and practice in Kerschensteiner's works. Both are inextricably bound up together, with pedagogic activity invariably providing the material for theoretical reflection and dictating the course it took. It was only after Kerschensteiner had overhauled the elementary school system in Munich and created the vocational school that his first theoretical writings of genuine moment—the 'Thoughts on a Theory of Curriculum' (1899, 1931) and 'The civic education of Germany's youth' (1901)—were set down. If these writings have retained so much of their original vigour, both in the conduct of the debate and the continued relevance of the issues they address, then it is because they so eloquently reflect the author's immediate and committed engagement with the problems besetting universal and vocational education for the broad masses.

The reader is sensible throughout these works of the rich fund of experience in various kinds of educational practice that informs the reflections put forward by the author. These initial theoretical writings adumbrate the major concerns dealt with in greater detail in Kerschensteiner's later extensive *oeuvre*. All these later works are shot through by concern with the problem of organizing national education to centre around the ideal of civic responsibility and a genuine work ethic.

The second phase in Kerschensteiner's activities began with his professorship at Munich in 1919. Inspired by Spranger and the writings of Rickert and Windelband, he set out in search of a philosophical grounding for his pedagogic theories. This culminated in the 'Theory of Education' (1926). But even so outwardly theoretical a work as the 'Basic Axiom of the Educational Process', the first fruit of his concern with the philosophy of education written in 1921, is notable for the balance it seeks to achieve between theory and practice, and its advocacy of a species of education that is geared to the interests and gifts of the individual.

For an element of our cultural heritage to bear educational fruit for the individual, the intellectual make-up of that element must be totally or at least partly compatible with the intellectual make-up of the individual (Kerschensteiner, 1924, p. 9).

In addition, the distinction Kerschensteiner makes between the potential energy and the kinetic energy of educational materials shows that he retained his allegiance to the scientific bent in his thinking. At the same time it confirms his loyalty to a dynamic conception of education, seeing the value of knowledge exclusively in terms of the extent to which it is able to establish and activate the powers of argumentation and responsible action. Knowledge is only educational to the extent that it attains relevance and formative value in the life of the individual.

Kerschensteiner's central achievement in the eyes of the educational world is the foundation of the vocational school and the concomitant reorganization of the *Volksschule* (primary and junior secondary schooling). Civic instruction and schooling in practical skills are the complementary methodical principles, differing only in matters of accentuation at the two levels. A number of different approaches reflecting the spirit of the age are united in this conception, notably the concentration on psychological and sociological issues, and concern with the work ethic.

No other creative educationalist has turned the legacy of Pestalozzi to such productive account in his work as Kerschensteiner. And no other educator primarily concerned with the practicalities of education has given the ideas put forward by Pestalozzi such earnest consideration in terms of their relevance for a later age. Spranger was particularly aware of this aspect when writing to Kerschensteiner: '[...]after your address in Zurich I personally see in you the true inheritor of Pestalozzi's mantle' (Bähr, 1978, p. 55).

The same restless, questing spirit which, in the face of the onset of industrialization, drove Pestalozzi to seek a method of educating the broad mass of the population is present in Kerschensteiner's work. He too acknowledges that the absolute claims of a humanist concept of education must be tempered by a concern to relate educational endeavour to the situation of the individual. Taking a lead from developments in youth psychology in the 1890s, Kerschensteiner attempts to give greater psychological precision to the terms 'individual situation' and 'spontaneity' as they apply to children. His conclusions are that, by instinct, children are motorically inclined and their primary urge is towards the concrete – manual contact with concrete things.

This idea is expounded most cogently in the Zurich address. In the first years of life, the infant at play in its home environment finds there the first 'workshop of the mind'. A multiplicity of impressions and stimuli go together to make up the initial infant image of the world. Accordingly, Kerschensteiner contends that for the older child the schoolroom must become the 'central workshop of the mind'. Fundamental to any furthering of intellectual

development is due consideration of this cast of the infant mind and the way in which it progresses from practical interests to theoretical ones. In the ‘Pestalozzi Address’, Kerschensteiner puts it this way:

For all our concentration on book-learning in school, 90 per cent of all boys and girls far prefer any kind of practical activity to quiet, abstract thought and reflection. Put them in workshops and kitchens, gardens and fields, stables and fishing boats, and you will always find them willing to work (Kerschensteiner, 1912, p. 106).

His laconic conclusion is: ‘The book-learning school must be turned into a work school.’

This persuasion, of course, has a bearing on the principles of teacher training as Kerschensteiner sees them. With Spranger, and against Aloys Fischer and others, Kerschensteiner is vehemently against university study for *Volksschule* teachers (Englert, 1966, p. 268). This has nothing to do with issues of status or fears of a loss of academic quality in higher education. Both Spranger and Kerschensteiner are concerned with the specifics of teacher training and the necessity of anticipating at the training stage the nature of the teacher’s later work in school. Education by example is the watchword; and experience of an exemplary, organic blend of theory and practice in action is the only convincing basis for the successful conduct of everyday school life. Kerschensteiner writes: ‘The poorest village school run along Pestalozzian lines can be a more valuable educational institution than a superbly equipped, magnificently endowed city school, full of elementary school-teachers in the essentially social nature of their later task, his conclusion for the teacher training curriculum is: ‘The guiding light of the *Volksschule* is not Kant or Goethe, but Pestalozzi!’ (Kerschensteiner, 1949, p. 155).

Here Kerschensteiner is not advocating any restriction on individual intellectual development but rather a strongly social orientation on the part of the teacher that reveals itself more in his/her commitment to interpersonal care than on academic qualifications. Academic honours at the expense of a pedagogic ethic is an impoverishment of school life. This is Kerschensteiner’s conviction. While it is certainly not least a product of the intellectual climate of the age, it can with equal certainty claim due consideration in the interests of a balanced development both for the teacher and his charges.

The obvious pedagogic conclusion from this approach is the call for allegiance to the spirit of Pestalozzi as a concrete requirement for educational reform (as opposed to a mere chapter in educational history) with a view to anchoring educational theory more firmly in actual pedagogic practice. Here the three educationalists most notable for their concern with the true spirit of the *Volksschule*—Kerschensteiner, Spranger and Fischer—are unanimous, for all their differences about the issue of teacher training. And it is this that establishes them among the founders of modern popular education.

Methods of instruction in work skills

Ever since Kerschensteiner coined the term *Arbeitsschule*, it has been one of the most frequently quoted and frequently misunderstood elements in the vocabulary of the educational reform movement. As early as 1911 in Dresden, at the congress of the Federation for School Reform, Gaudig accused Kerschensteiner of having ‘handicrafted’ the intellectual factor out of school. His objections are however one-sided and neglect the specific pedagogic significance that Kerschensteiner attributes to (handi-) work in school, for example his claim that manual work enhances veracity and that there could be no deception in concrete work as there was nothing for it to conceal. Accordingly, he is not so much concerned with technical skills as a preliminary stage for later vocational training as with the inculcation of honest working

methods, care and circumspection, and the arousal of a spirit of responsibility via self-reliant activity.

The encounter with Gaudig, the influence of the German *Wertphilosophie* ('philosophy of values'), and the thinking of Spranger were not without effect on Kerschensteiner. More and more he sees in the 'work school' an instrument of independent and self-motivated acquisition of knowledge, in the properly educational sense of the term. The importance attributed to the 'manual' and the 'practical' later transcends the plane of pure skill and competence and is incorporated into the pedagogic principle of independent, responsible activity. Emphasis must, however, be placed on the fact that for all the respect Kerschensteiner had for practical work, his work-school idea had never in fact been centred exclusively around it. He was neither the one-sided 'champion of the practical', nor did he later advocate a one-sided 'spiritualization of the concept of work'. He was much too familiar with the actual requirements of practice, which are invariably both practical *and* theoretical. The spiritualization of his concept of work was a 'gradual' development, as Wilhelm convincingly shows (Wilhelm, 1957, p. 39).

The interesting question of the relationship between innovation and philosophical reflection has frequently been posed. Felix von Cube (1960, p. 18) was one of those to take it up. His theory that the clarity and elan of the early reformer Kerschensteiner was vitiated by his later philosophical phase is rejected by Wehle (1956, p. 178). While it is undeniable that the early reformatory concepts of vocational school, work school and civic education were not significantly enlarged upon in Kerschensteiner's later works, there can be no doubt that they form a very essential part of the practical substance underlying Kerschensteiner's philosophical thinking (Wilhelm, 1957, p. 161).

Ultimately, it is a fact of all human life and intellectual endeavour that in phases of profound reflection the urge for practical activity tends to be held in abeyance. In the case of Pestalozzi, the Neuhof estate and Stans also formed the background for his philosophical study *Meine Nachforschungen über den Gang der Natur in der Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (Inquiries into the course of nature in the development of humankind). As a thinker, Kerschensteiner was a true Pestalozzian and it was Pestalozzi who was most instrumental in providing him with an access to philosophy (Niklis, 1960).

These considerations retain their validity in connection with the idea of the 'work school'. Properly undertaken, manual work will develop a faculty for logical thought that is applicable to any other kind of activity and can be deepened at a later stage. There is such a thing as manual intelligence—this is Kerschensteiner's first major insight—and this needs to be nurtured in school as it is an integral part of every individual child's character. It represents an important aspect of what it means to be human and must not be allowed to wither and decay.

But in Kerschensteiner's view, manual work without intellectual effort will be mechanical, indeed 'it can only become work in the pedagogic sense of the term if it stems from intellectual effort that has been invested beforehand and is taken up anew throughout the course of its performance [...]' (Kerschensteiner, 1950, p. 55). Thus, the essential feature of manual work in the pedagogic sense is its planning and independent performance in accordance with the nature of the task, and the possibility of self-review. There is in Kerschensteiner's view only one thing that can make a school a work school in the proper sense of the term and this is 'the growing adequacy of the pupil's attitude to the task in hand, that growth being rooted in the possibility of self-review' (Kerschensteiner, 1950, p. 55). Of greater importance than the subject matter—be it practical or theoretical—is thus the way in which the work ethic determines the pupil's attitude. It is concern for the adequacy to the task in hand, coupled with the freedom to perform that task as the pupil sees fit.

Seen thus, the idea of the work school reveals itself as a methodological principle—and that is Kerschensteiner's second major insight, evident already in his earlier writings. It is

applicable at all levels, as in demonstrated in 'The Concept of the Work School' (1957) with reference to the birdhouse, the village fire-alarm and the Horatian ode as examples of manual, moral and academic subjects respectively.

What do these examples show? The essential thing is not the subject matter but the spirit and mentality of independent, responsible work, for 'adequacy to the task in hand is synonymous with morality'. The ultimate cementing of this ethical attitude towards work is the organization of independent individual work within a working community, where the teacher assists the pupils with advice and practical help, like a master craftsman supervising the work of his apprentices.

All the elements of Kerschensteiner's conception are attuned to one another. At the centre we have education seen both as a process and as an end in itself (albeit not a final end but a temporary conclusion of a given stage of development). 'Education is a sense of value, of individually determined breadth and depth, awakened by the subject matter and organized differently by each individual' (Kerschensteiner, 1926, p. 15). This is the broad definition provided in the 'Theory of Education' from an axiological point of view (and in analogy to Spranger's concept of the 'personal educative centre').

In this sense, education is both a reactivation of the cultural potential immanent in the subject matter and a function of the progressive culture of the individual's personality. And although this process is never-ending, it invariably displays a structure all of its own: 'Education is that functioning of the mind that remains when everything by which it was engendered has been forgotten', as Kerschensteiner states it later in the 'Theory of Education'.

Education is a dynamic process, which is dependent upon the procedures of work instruction capable of triggering most effectively the cultural reactivation referred to above. Self-reliant activity as an individual form of this 'acquisition principle' is the most effective way of ensuring that the 'potential educational energy' is transformed into 'kinetic educational energy'. In short, the educational potential undergoes a process of activation.

The proper social setting for the pedagogic implementation of these ideas is the working group, as here the basic rules of communal life and the central civic virtues can best be instilled and practised. It is this combination between inculcation of a genuine work ethic and of civic responsibility, with the attendant reciprocal influence between the individual and the collective in the interests of greater moral maturity, which justifies Kerschensteiner's proclamation that the ultimate objective of the educative process is to establish a State based on culture and the rule of law. Self-evaluation in the framework of work instruction culminates in a degree of personal integrity that helps to transform into true formative education the training of civic virtues in the work setting. This 'con-summation', as Kerschensteiner used to write the word, is somewhat reminiscent of the streak of asceticism characteristic of Aloys Fischer's approach, a point on which Kerschensteiner himself however had a number of reservations.

Civic education

Kerschensteiner's most genuinely original achievement is the establishment of the vocational school, a cross between apprenticeship and formal education. He advocated instruction in practical skills at the workplace itself, coupled with theoretical consolidation in the school environment, in conscious preference to the *écoles professionnelles d'apprentissage* to be found in France and elsewhere, where vocational education takes place exclusively in the schools. Here, Kerschensteiner was able to draw upon approaches developed in the nineteenth century, his objective being to achieve a symbiosis between the more general instruction provided by the Sunday schools—largely run by primary school teachers—and the more specialized instruction in specific skills.

The quest for the correct relationship between general knowledge and vocational education is central to this conception. Kerschensteiner saw this against the sociological background of the industrial society in which each individual's life centres around work, while meditation and contemplation only have their deeper significance as pointers through life within the framework of an existence largely determined by work. The 'ideal individual', Kerschensteiner insists, can only be formed by way of the 'useful individual'. It is only in the context of vocational activity that general knowledge can attain its true significance as formation of the personality, formation of the individual in the community. The objective was to ensure that the individual should achieve maturity by way of proving his/her worth in the area of activity that his/her personal fate had destined him/her for. Here and here alone is true humanity attainable.

This is the real reason for Kerschensteiner's scepticism about general knowledge for its own sake. Accordingly, his advocacy of a prolongation of instruction beyond the ninth year of schooling was conditional upon such instruction being vocationally oriented, ideally at a vocational school. Life in a working community oriented towards a constantly renewed striving for active fellowship and charity towards others, and the ability to subordinate oneself to the overall good, was more important to him than theoretical instruction. Thus, he regarded civic education less as an instrument of drumming knowledge about the workings of a democratic community into the heads of the pupils than as a vehicle for the inculcation of a political mentality that must first of all assert itself at the most basic level, in joint work within the group and through responsible participation in the communal life of the school.

According to Kerschensteiner's idea of civic education, instruction in the citizen's 'duties' takes precedence over instruction in the citizens' 'rights'. These duties need to be practised in everyday life. School must thus be a microcosm of the State and confront the pupils with an abundance of social tasks: 'The only way to prepare young people for life in the community is to have them participate fully in the life of a society from the outset [...]' (1950, p. 49). In complete accord with his mentor Dewey, he stresses the necessity of active, responsible work within a working community and voluntary self-subordination to the pupils' elected representatives in the school administration as a *conditio sine qua non* of civic education.

Kerschensteiner's one-sided interpretation of Dewey has frequently been criticized, most notably by Wilhelm. The latter objects that political maturity as an aim of education does not necessarily follow naturally out of social maturity. Tensions and conflicts may arise, originating from differences of social status and the consequent differences in political objectives. Seen thus, Kerschensteiner's rendering of Dewey's term 'embryonic community life' as *Staatsleben im Kleinen* (literally: 'the life of the State in microcosm') (1950, p. 18) is an over-simplification. He overlooks the fact that Dewey's perspective here extends from the pioneering spirit of the colonial epoch and the cohesive style of community life in that context to cover differences between rich and poor, and black and white. Even at this preliminary stage in school, civic instruction must reflect the political dimension in a way that becomes more systematic and more apparent the older the pupils are.

The major difference between Kerschensteiner and Dewey, despite their mutual admiration and the similarities of their views on the practicalities and the philosophy of education, is clearest in the controversy about vocational education. Kerschensteiner advocates a school of continuing education that provides theoretical knowledge alongside, and as a complement to, the practicalities of vocational education and apprenticeship. Dewey, by contrast, emphasizes the significance of school as the foundation of later vocational activity, forming the faculty of judgement in young people and thus equipping them for their vocational lives (Knoll, 1993). Kerschensteiner's perspective on education as an appeal to the natural egoism of young people and their desire for personal advancement and his insistence that

general education must continue in close combination with vocational instruction, albeit under conditions analogous to those of everyday life, represents an area of disagreement between the two educators. Dewey, however, failed to appreciate this point.

Kerschensteiner emphasizes what he calls the ‘law of the proliferation of interests’, that makes it possible for practical work to enhance an appreciation of theoretical concerns common to both the natural sciences and the humanities. He sees the advantage of this procedure in the fact that everything is located in a practical context, ensuring the full attention of the participants because their natural egoistic desire for vocational success is thus activated. From this he derives his 1911 statement that the ‘fundamental law of all mental development, which invariably moves from practical interests to the theoretical plane’ (1957, p. 28). Dewey on the other hand advocates vocational education in the school framework as one option among many to be provided by schools of an adequately flexible and differentiated nature. This stems from his experience of William Wirth’s Gary System, to which he devotes the chapter ‘The relation of the school to the community’, notable for its pedagogic verve, in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 167–206; Röhrs, 1977, p. 88–92).

There is little justification for the accusation of national one-sidedness frequently levelled at Kerschensteiner’s concept of civic education. For Kerschensteiner, a firm grounding in the national sphere is necessary for the transition to a more international attitude, again in line with Herder’s image of the way in which a tree firmly rooted in its native soil is better equipped to spread its branches across the fence and into neighbouring gardens. The firmer the foundation at the national level, the less likelihood there is that the cosmopolitan attitude will waver. Rickert’s dictum that ‘the path to things not subject to historical change’ will invariably lead ‘through things historical’ ([Rickert, 1910–11](#)) is to be found in various guises in the thinking of Kerschensteiner, who was familiar with Rickert’s works. In the context of civic education he writes: ‘The path to the stalwart cosmopolitan invariably leads via the stalwart citizen’ (1950, p. 34).

The life of the individual is marked by contest and conflict, and the same is true of the co-existence of nations. Entirely in line with Kant’s thinking in his ‘Concept of a Form of History Promoting a Cosmopolitan Attitude’ and ‘Of Eternal Peace’, Kerschensteiner sees in historical development a process of humanization that can lead to a genuinely cosmopolitan attitude:

If history taught us nothing else, there is one truth that we find on almost every page of it: human life is a constant sequence of conflicts and reconciliations. It is in these conflicts and reconciliations that culture, and above all political civilization is fashioned. Eternal peace can only supervene when there is only one human being left in the world. The objective of civic education is none other than to make conflict more humane and reconciliation more voluntary (1950, p. 42).

Kerschensteiner explicitly refutes the fallacy that his version of civic education is nothing more than instruction in political lore or the inculcation of civic duties (1950, p. 15). While it is true that his perspective is primarily oriented towards the obligations incumbent upon a responsible citizen, he in no way advocates a dogmatic or formalist approach, seeing an awareness of civic obligations as the result of a form of schooling that consciously instils both awareness of the necessity of a work ethic and the indispensability of genuine civic-mindedness.

Of course, the choice of a perspective concentrating on citizens’ duties is bound to appear formalistic if it fails to reflect the aspect of the immediate relevance of these duties to life in a community. But there can be no doubt that a democracy cannot function without a reasoned catalogue of civic duties and obligations, and the attendant social virtues that spring from them. The operative word here is ‘reasoned’. In order to be accepted and internalized, duties must be shown to be a living part of the functioning of a community. The same applies to the inculcation of the work ethic. In short, these methodic principles have lost none of their

relevance and are certainly anything but a remote chapter in the history of education. It is here that Kerschensteiner, with his sound, practical attitude, can serve today as an exemplary figure worthy of emulation.

Thus the close affinity between the idea of the work school and the idea of civic education becomes apparent. It is impossible to instil a sense of social responsibility if the ground has not been prepared in early infancy. Thus, the method of independent, responsible work is the very pre-condition of any kind of civic education, and this in its turn will derive its most fruitful educational impulses from action and reflection in the social context of everyday school life.

After a promising start in the 1920s, civic education in German schools was quickly declared 'bankrupt'. At the same time, critical voices were heard to suggest that the idea of work instruction only encouraged a species of activity that mirrored the restlessness of a hectic age and was entirely devoid of any truly educational import. Both these judgements only go to show how poorly Kerschensteiner was understood even in his own day.

Kerschensteiner was in fact at pains to demonstrate his critical attitude towards the 'apostles of spontaneity', as he called them disparagingly. This is borne out by his statement that 'the idea of the work school is to use a minimum of subject matter to spark off a maximum of skill, ability and enthusiasm for work, all in the service of civic-mindedness' (1959, p. 99). Here Kerschensteiner once again stresses the direct reciprocal links between the work school and civic education. Work performed independently and responsibly within a working community and representing the fruit of a concerted effort at the planning, execution and evaluation stage is inevitably civic in character. Organized in this way, it enhances the social aspect of the work being done and, as such, is an establishing and consolidating factor in the constitution of the community, enriching the concept of the State with a more profound moral dimension.

The formation of personality

Any analysis of Kerschensteiner's work will invariably lead to contemplation of the personality of this exemplary educator, for almost all his theoretical utterances are reflections of his own life-style. Kerschensteiner represents that rare species, the practically-minded, experienced, imaginative pedagogue. The two favourite mottos he regularly quoted as epitomizing his attitude to life are: 'For the diligent the world is not mute', and 'Despair is a lack of trust in God'.

This optimism is mirrored in the characteristics that he discusses at length as qualifying a good teacher, in his book 'The Soul of the Educator and the Problem of Teacher Training' (1949): an understanding nature; the ability to be emotionally stirred to the depths; sensitivity and tact as the precondition of empathy with others; in short, true humanity rather than encyclopedic knowledge. The parallels to Spranger's characterization of his friend Kerschensteiner in his preface to the latter's 'The Soul of the Educator and the Problem of Teacher Training' are striking:

Pessimism in whatever form was entirely alien to him, but certainly not because there was any dearth of profound sorrow in his own life. From the most mundane, everyday distresses to the depths of religious doubt and conflict, he ran the whole gamut of human suffering and pain. But this suffering was visited upon a man of a sound and robust constitution who had never set out with the intention of taking life away from its enjoyable and pleasurable side. He was one of the old generation, who knew that life means struggle and conflict, that life is harsh and unfeeling. If young people are to be guided towards a genuinely life-affirming attitude and the ability to cope with vicissitudes, then they must be shown that this can only be achieved by drawing upon a certain wealth of spirit. There is no easier alternative.

Knowledge for its own sake, isolated, undigested fact, will always remain an external additive. Only when it is placed in relation to the individual can it enrich the fund of acquired experience and thus become part of the central powerhouse of the personality.

This development of the personality is the central task of the educational process. In the last resort, Kerschensteiner is aiming at a pedagogic transformation of Goethe's axiom 'personality is the supreme human treasure', taking the term 'treasure' and translating it into the willingness and capacity to assume responsibility as the pillars of a truly human community.

In Kerschensteiner's view, three features determine personality: first, an 'especial oneness of the spiritual self' (1926, p. 84). For all its activity, the personality is not submerged by a multiplicity of unco-ordinated tasks and does not lose itself in the work it performs, but rather puts its unmistakable stamp on everything it does. Secondly, personality is expressed in a 'constant, independent response to its environment' (1926, p. 84). It represents a source of equanimity and order in its environment by virtue of the personal and political responsibility of its actions within that environment. The third feature is the 'conscious striving for inner self-improvement' (1926, p. 84). The will to self-perfection (though never at the expense of social and political responsibility) is the living centre of the personality. This alone is the true motor of development. Of fundamental significance for all three criteria is that they should be geared to the values ensuring the integrity of the moral profile of the personality, thus guaranteeing the continuity of the effect it has on the environment and also on its own internal development. Here the traditional virtues of strength of character, diligence and judgement play a fundamental role.

The ultimate objective is the 'moral improvement of the community' (1926, p. 189) via the effect of the personality. An important step towards this goal is 'vocational education', for the 'road to education leads through work' (1926, p. 189). Here we find two essential aspects united, first the fundamental significance that Kerschensteiner attributes to work in the educational process, and secondly the socio-political nature of the task facing the individual personality and awareness of this as a general aim of education, seeking to effect a viable foundation for human society via the improvement of the individual. The success (or otherwise) of this reciprocal process is a function of the wealth of personal spirit, which is why confrontation with established values, reliable value judgements and faith in a system of values play such an essential role. The aim is to achieve a 'value-oriented mentality' (1926, p. 80).

It is from this 'wealth of spirit' that Kerschensteiner's humour springs. As an example, we may recall the 'May sermons', delivered by Kerschensteiner in the guise of 'Pater Hilaricus' on the annual May outings of a club named the *Gesellschaft der Niederländer* to the residence of Count Pappenheim. The very titles convey Kerschensteiner's whimsicality, his readiness to treat earnest topics in a lighter vein: *de Stultitiae Beneficio* ('The blessings of stupidity'); *de Pulcibus Mentalibus* ('On mental fleas'); *de Nincompoopitate Generis Humani*. Kerschensteiner the mathematician characterizes mathematics as the 'science of the point', going on to define the standpoint as a 'perspective with a radius of zero' (M. Kerschensteiner, 1954, p. 220).

This form of humour permits a more detached perspective on everyday matters and also fuels Kerschensteiner's uninhibited verve in tackling the solution of important tasks. 'Humour as the very foundation of the spirit' (1949, p. 74) is an important element in pedagogic success. Weniger describes this feature as follows: 'The finest thing about Kerschensteiner is his humour, a productive combination of realist scepticism and idealist faith, the humour of true wisdom, without which the existence of an educator would be intolerable' (Weniger, 1979, p. 211).

Kerschensteiner could display his humour most freely at the social evenings at his house in the Bogenhausen district of Munich. On these occasions music also played an

important role. Kerschensteiner was an accomplished pianist and greatly loved making music with friends, notably Aloys Fischer's wife, the violinist Paula Fischer-Thalman, later to be murdered as a Jewess in Theresienstadt concentration camp. These gatherings frequently ended in lively discussions of philosophical and educational subjects with Kerschensteiner's 'neighbour and friend' Fischer (M. Kerschensteiner, 1954, p. 222).

Is this the attitude of a pedagogic grand-seigneur, divorced from the petty concerns of everyday life and hence at liberty to meditate on them from a 'higher' vantage? Not at all. Even in his theoretical work, Kerschensteiner remained a practitioner. All his life he strove to find the right answers to everyday problems, for these were the ones that beset him most obstinately even when he became director of public schools and later a university professor. Kerschensteiner regarded the challenges of teaching and education as a source of inspiration sparking off the inventiveness characteristic of any pedagogue worthy of the name. He was a personality who embodied in practical terms what he advocated in theory: strength of character in the pursuit of one's objectives, trenchancy in thought and action, and political responsibility. These features are to be found throughout his works. And it is here that Kerschensteiner's relevance for the future becomes most evident and makes the concern with his legacy an imperative for the present.

Note

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