

Friedrich Diesterweg, “An Educator’s Little Book of Crabs” (1856)

Abstract

Friedrich Adolf Diesterweg (1790–1866), a schoolteacher and prominent proponent of progressive pedagogy, used the title of his essay to criticize the reactionary nature of advocates of traditional teaching methods. For Diesterweg, the backward-moving crab symbolized reactionary elements. This vitriolic satirical piece introduces the “best” methods by which budding teachers could be brainwashed into backward, dependent, unqualified pawns of ultraconservatism.

Source

An Educator’s Little Book of Crabs, in Prescriptions for Old and Young Crabs in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

1. Rules for Educating Towards Dependence

1. Always insist on unconditional, silent obedience to your orders, even when the pupil has grown up!
2. Teach him the rule of arbitrariness: *tel est mon bon plaisir* [“that’s how I like it”].
3. Never give him a reason for your wishes! Always treat him like a “dumb kid”!
4. Accustom him to superficial, mechanical learning and exercises!
5. Let his higher faculties—understanding, judgment, reason—lay dormant! But burden his memory with difficult, incomprehensible material and dead subject matter to be mechanically repeated!
6. Attach no value to the development of fluency in speech!
7. Through frequent repetition, convince him to believe in his own stupidity and in the correctness of the principle “based on the limited understanding of a subordinate”!
8. Impress upon him the lowest regard for himself and the highest regard for others, namely for so-called superiors!
9. Restrict his social contact to narrow-minded, slavish, and servile people. Otherwise, isolate him and forbid him to mix with circles in which opinions are freely expressed!
10. Only permit him those books in which absolute authority is portrayed as appropriate and reassuring for weak people!

Should these rules prove insufficient for the goal, I recommend two more:

11. Fill his imagination with superstitious notions about witches, goblins, devils, and demons.
12. In case it should ever occur that the noble principles according to which he has been raised are forgotten, make him dreadfully afraid of hell. Even better, make his heart tremble and fill with self-recriminations every time he doubts or attempts to veer from the straight and secure path upon which you have led him!

2. Rules for the Education of Mechanical (Mechanically Operative) Humans

We understand “mechanism” as an arrangement through which activities follow external stimuli. The power that sets everything in motion is outside of the machine. If that power is located within the inner essence of the material, then the whole is not a mechanism, but an organism. Clocks, mills, locomotives, etc. are machines; the human body, the universe, etc. are organisms.

A single, universally valid rule for the formation of mechanically active (mechanically thinking, mechanically feeling, mechanically behaving) human beings follows from this: Set them in motion through external stimuli! More specifically for the three directions of human activity: Withhold from them all insight into the essence of things! Train them to measure their *sentiments* according to external standards (customs, fashion, church regulations, family and regional origins, etc.)! Teach them to determine their *actions* according to directions given by others!

After the above remarks, which should be sufficient for our purposes, we need to mention which are the most favorable sorts of mechanical behaviors and activities in school, with special reference to lessons.

1. Writing letters merely according to the given rules (especially in the old manner of writing with a lead pencil, with or without connecting it to the proper positioning of the hand) is mechanism.
2. Reading according to the spelling method is mechanism.
3. The repetition of melodies sung aloud is mechanism.
4. Adding and measuring according to rules which are not understood is mechanism.
5. Drawing sketches of the human body based on printed reproductions is mechanism.
6. Memorization according to sound and rhyme is mechanism. (Judicious memorization is not something for children; their memorization is more or less mechanical; even the correctly stressed repetition of the catechism is done mechanically, as a rule.)
7. When children behave properly as a result of obedience to external commands, it is mechanism.
8. The habitual repetition of memorized prayers is mechanism. (Practicing prayers is mechanism several times over.)
9. A confession of faith in the presence of parents and teachers is mechanism.
10. The performance of "pious deeds and customs" as ordered by the church is mechanism.
11. Abandoning forbidden behaviors out of fear of punishment (hell) and performing good deeds in the hope of a reward (heaven) is mechanism.
12. *Belief in authority* is mechanism.

From that mentioned above and these twelve specific points follow the rules for making mechanical people, and training them for *mechanical thinking*, *mechanical sentiment*, and *mechanical activity*.

3. Schoolhouse Rules for the Upholding, Reconstitution, and Security of Superstition

1. Teach everything according to the fundamental principle that the content of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament must be taken literally and that every deviation from the letter of the Bible will provoke God's anger!
2. Discuss the tales of miracles in both testaments—all the way down to the witch of Endor, Jonah in the belly of the whale, and Balaam's ass—in the most exacting detail and treat them as if they are to be strictly believed!
3. Entertain the pupils with readings and tales from the world of spirits and ghosts of all sorts, including the newest revelations from this world through séances and spirit-magnetism!
4. Fill them with belief in the devil and hell and in the trickery of all the evil demons that float through the air! (As Wangemann does in Pomerania.)
5. Keep the pupils away from all knowledge of the natural sciences and raise children on the sort of readings that present nature only in the form of "pious chatter."
6. This, however, is not enough. You must also revive the belief that the earth is the center of the universe and that the stars are not heavenly bodies but heavenly lights. The laws of nature do not exist. So-called knowledge must be corrected by faith. (See *Die Prä tensionen der exakten Naturwissenschaften, usw.* By Dr. Frantz, Oberpfarrer, Superintendent in Sangerhausen; Nordhausen, 1857.)
7. Show them that the fear of comets and flibbertigibbets and the teachings of the old astrologists were not entirely unfounded!
8. Tell the students stories which "factually" demonstrate that the prayers of the faithful can end

damaging rains or drought and can bring about other effects “outside the order of nature,” that is to say, miracles.

9. Guard yourself from the mad notion that the so-called Enlightenment—this poison of the enlightened eighteenth century—is the duty of your office! Your job is not to enlighten but to raise obedient, believing subjects for the church and the state!

10. Do not fall prey to the illusion that it is the goal of grade school to shape the understanding of the youth. This was a trick played by last century’s revolutionaries. For peasants and common citizens, a pious cast of mind is sufficient. In general, a human being cannot comprehend very much. Therefore, it is not his duty to unmask the secrets of nature which contain more than even our philosophers could dream of.

11. Practice certain skills with your pupils according to *rules*, without ever giving them the reasons for these, which you don’t need to know yourself. Thinking according to reason promotes bumptiousness and is certainly one of the sad symptoms of the eccentricity of our younger school teachers. A pious generation grew up in the days of the old-style teachers. We must return to their wise, modest, but sufficient measure of education. (Wolfgang Menzel, *Geschichte der letzten 40 Jahre*; Nathusius, *Volksblatt für Stadt und Land*; also Riehl, *Naturgeschichte des Volkes*, Band II: *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft, der Schullehrer als Geistesproletarier*.)

12. If you would like to achieve exceptional results, impart to your students a special love for everything supernatural, unnatural, and incomprehensible, in that you always behave according to the maxim *credo, quia absurdum est* [“believe what is absurd”], a maxim which has been recently revived in the valley of the idiots and then warmly recommended to teachers by the *Brandenburg Schulblatte* (a publication almost privileged by the regime in Potsdam)! —

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4. Twelve Practical Rules to Teach Belief in Authority

1. As early as possible—according to *Carl von Raumer*, beginning when they are three years old—recite to minors the articles of faith and have them repeat them!

2. Make this repetition into a formal exercise, practiced daily. Let the children *pray*^[1] the catechism and connect its imprinting on the mind with the feelings of piety that are to be awakened through liturgical devotions and children’s prayer services!

3. Impress upon them the belief that the catechism was conferred upon the human race from above, without any help from them, and must be accepted without any proof. Indeed, human powers are insufficient to grasp or comprehend it.

4. Teach them a fundamental mistrust of human nature, that a person can only be blissful through the acceptance of the articles of faith, that every doubt about their truth is the result of evil desire and is a sin which will be punished for all of eternity!

5. Tell them that their catechism alone contains the truths leading to salvation and that all others contain merely false teachings!

6. Describe every deviation from the “sole doctrine leading to salvation” as a step towards heresy, the greatest of sins!

7. Warn them against contact with those who hold different beliefs and carefully keep them isolated from the children of these people!

8. Disabuse yourself of the notion that the articles of faith can be made understandable for children and that they can develop their reason to grasp them!

9. Show them instead that they must be believed because they are incomprehensible (*Brandenburg Schulblatt*, 1857, No.1) and that this has its reward.

10. Let them memorize as much as possible, especially things that exceed their capacity for understanding. Even better if they are composed in an antiquated language!

11. Take pains to always employ a dogmatic, lecturing style of instruction!

12. Never attempt to awaken children's power to understand. Limit them to the learning of phrases without perception. Accustom them to accept everything you say because of your authority. Consider attempts by newer teachers to develop children's abilities and faculties and to encourage them to work independently as the root of all decline!

It is not necessary to enumerate any more of the rules for achieving "pious goals," although there are many others, as it is well known.

5. How to Spoil Religion for Children

1. Have them repeat (or babble) the catechism from the earliest possible age (according to Professor Carl von Raumer, from the time they are three)![\[2\]](#)
 2. Have their mothers force them to recite long prayers every morning, afternoon, and evening!
 3. Require them to recite the catechism daily in school from the very beginning!
 4. Make them learn long and difficult hymns.
 5. They must memorize, word for word, hundreds and thousands of biblical passages, sayings, and psalms (especially the seven psalms of penitence)!
 6. They must learn and repeat Bible stories word for word!
 7. The memorized passages should be "prayed" daily on an individual and choral basis (with use of the repetition circle invented in Mecklenburg).
 8. In religion class, a teacher should use unctuous language in extended prologues and epilogues!
 9. Introduce special liturgies for schools (as in Brandenburg)!
 10. Force the children to attend excessively long children's services (like Herr Sluymmer)!
 11. Introduce prayer practice (as is Brandenburg).
 12. Force upon them the sort of songs and beliefs whose content is as strongly opposed to the beliefs of their parents as is possible!
 13. Make confirmation lessons as boring as possible, so that the pupils can hardly wait for the moment they are confirmed!
 14. It never does any harm to scare and intimidate by making them afraid of hell.
 16. [sic] It is a proven strategy to slander and repress reason, especially with intelligent children!
 17. An imposing priestly appearance and the claim of unconditional authority do their part to secure lasting effects.
- And so forth.

6. Rules That Can Stunt the Development of Healthy Human Understanding in Children

1. Isolate them from nature and from free play with other children!
2. Neglect the development of the senses and the exercise of the body!
3. Ignite their fantasies from a very early age through monstrous fairy tales and fantastic legends!
4. Make them retain and repeat incomprehensible words!
5. Burden their memory with as much obscure material as possible!
6. Avoid any stimulation of their capacity for reasoned judgment!
7. Make them accustomed to never having an opinion, teach them to mistrust themselves and to seek the all-powerful judgment of the adults around them and to blindly repeat it!
8. Teach them only mechanically and make them imitate senseless customs.
9. Put a special emphasis on the repetition of religious rules!
10. Infuse them with a belief in the high value of religious ceremonies and external actions.
11. Teach them to assess the value of other people according to external conditions, such as birth, class, money, or church affiliation. Teach them to believe in the exclusive truth of *their* faith and to believe that all other religions are heretical.
12. Prevent them from learning how to understand natural phenomena and instead fill them with a belief in miracles, demons, devils, and *prejudices of all sorts*!

7. How to Raise an Illiberal Child

1. Immediately after birth, swaddle him so tightly that he cannot move his arms and hands.
2. Do not pay attention to the drives and wishes of the infant, expressed by his crying.
3. In the years that follow, force the child to eat the foods most repulsive to him.
4. Free play and movement should be prohibited in the house and yard alike.
5. Inhibit the desire and ability to do anything of one's own choice by habituating children to ask permission for *everything* from their parents and teachers.
6. Make no distinction between what you call "stubbornness" and the free expression of a child's own opinion. Everything a child wants that is against the will of the one who takes responsibility for his education is stubbornness.
7. This "stubbornness" is to be "broken."
8. A child's aptitude for one or another area of study is never paid attention to.
9. Using one's own judgment is presumptuous.
10. By means of capricious, moody, or even despotic behavior, one tries to achieve the complete intimidation of the child.
11. In the presence of strangers or adults, a child is never to be permitted free movement—even when it is proper—or to speak a single word. A subservient posture towards one's "betters" is to be cultivated.
12. It is the parents who choose a child's profession, without regards to aptitude or natural gifts or other external considerations.

8. How to Destroy Children's Spiritual Lives

1. Make them repeat sayings and phrases that they do not understand.
2. Before they are mature, make them recite confessions of faith as their own conviction.
3. Instruct them to participate in ceremonies and symbolic rituals that are impossible for children to understand.
4. Teach them that the religion in which they were brought up is the sole true religion and teach them that those who think or believe differently are in grave error, are ossified, or are even condemned to eternal damnation.
5. Implant in them a belief in things which will desert them when they grow up and come into contact with educated people, for example, a belief in miracles or other kinds of superstitions that do not harmonize with progressive culture.
6. Teach them to judge the value of people by their birth, rank, wealth, and other superficial things.
7. Separate them from each other according to their parents' religion, send them to religious schools.
8. For reasons of faith, encourage them to have an inhuman *orientation*, to be intolerant and immoral, to separate the "true faith" from true love.
9. Convince them that the soul can be freed from sinful thoughts and punishment for sin by outward actions.
10. Through instruction, example, and a child's entire upbringing at home and in school, they should be taught never to free themselves from dependence upon others (authorities) in thought, belief, and action.
11. Condemn them to purely passive, receptive learning, without awakening their creative power. This robs them of all self-confidence to act independently.
12. Teach them to regard the pursuit of earthly happiness as the highest good and to abjure all idealistic goals.

9. How to Hold Teachers in Intellectual Captivity

1. Forbid apprentice teachers to attend institutions for general education.
2. Prepare them directly for the demands of the preparatory course for student teachers!
3. All lessons should relate directly to the duties of a school officer (ad hoc)!

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4. Banish all thoughts and things which at bottom serve no other purpose than the education of the human character as an end in itself!
 5. Keep them from reading and studying works of general education (by our national writers)!
 6. Dictate to teachers the books and periodicals that they should read! Inspect their book collections!
 7. Forbid them from joining independent book clubs, etc.!
 8. Have their assemblies and meetings supervised by persons ignorant of the subject matter (non-school personnel)!
 9. From time to time, impress upon them their lack of education and treat them as if they need guidance in every area!
 10. Deny them any voice in the school councils!
 11. Exclude them from holding any honorary position in the community!
 12. Make certain that the size of their income forces upon them the utmost limitations!

10. How to Transform Teachers into Trainers

1. Prepare them for the course for student teachers through the word-for-word memorization of books of biblical history (300 to 500 pages of Zahn, Preuß, Otto Schulz, and similarly detailed works), 30 to 50 or 80 church hymns, along with a corresponding dose of biblical sayings, psalms, excerpts, etc.!
2. In the course for student teachers, train them ad hoc!
3. Keep them away from all educational material (world history, natural sciences, German literature, etc.)!
4. Make practicing the catechism such a regular part of instruction at so early an age that it becomes an automatic behavior for them!
5. Demand from school children the complete word-for-word memorization of a great number of religious materials and judge the school and the teacher according to their performance!
6. Dictate to them the books and journals they should read!
7. Forbid them to make contact with intellectually awakened colleagues and free associations!
8. Do not merely place them under the supervision of strictly religious theologians (the so-called confessionalists), but also let these theologians direct the official teacher associations to ensure conformity!
9. Deny them the right to assume honorary positions in their communities and churches, and the right to participate in the deliberations of their school directorship.
10. Overburden the schools with too many students (80, 100, 150, 200, the more, the better!), and try to make the age range as great as possible!
11. Promote them to better positions not on the basis of their schoolwork, but according to their zeal for the goals of the church, missionary and tract societies, temperance societies.
12. Restrict their pay so that, if they live in town, they must support themselves as tutors or, if they live in the country, as farm laborers.

With these measures, a class of teachers can be formed which is able to *train* but not to educate, not to cultivate, and not to develop human nature.

11. How to Extinguish All Traces of Nature in a Young Teacher

1. Make him mistrustful of human nature in general.
2. Make him mistrustful of his own nature.
3. Make him especially mistrustful of children's nature.
4. Teach him that salvation comes from without, not within.
5. Teach him that salvation is contained in certain formulaic knowledge.
6. Cause him to blindly submit to the content of these formulae.
7. Convince him that doing so will bring salvation.
8. Tell him that spreading these ideas among humanity ("the kingdom of God") is a worthy service.

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9. Threaten him with limited and eternal punishments if he deviates from these principles.
 10. Reward and encourage him if he proves himself zealous in the promotion of the one true religion.
 11. Withhold from him knowledge of the laws of nature.
 12. Keep him ignorant of the nature and laws of intellectual life.
 13. Suspect him of reading the works of naturalists and idealists (the national classics) and forbid him to read these. Instead, immerse him in supernatural, positive systems and place him under the supervision of strictly believing theologians.

12. Which Elements Should Be Continued to Secure the Future of a Deficient Class of Teachers

1. Their origins in the lower classes.[\[3\]](#)
2. Deficient primary education.
3. One-sided education.
4. Premature independence.
5. Isolation.
6. Supervision by men who themselves do not have pedagogical ability (in the sense of the education of the human character) and who, because of their past and their education, can have only a very limited, at the very least one-sided interest in the effectiveness of a school teacher.
7. Lack of literary education.
8. Marriage with partners from the lower classes.
9. The extended families which come along with such marriages.
10. Increased worries and financial limitations which come with a growing number of children.
11. Worries about the fate of one's wife and children in the event of one's death.
12. Economic limitations.

13. How to Prevent the Development of a Person of Character

1. At the head of each branch of the community, install a man who has the final word over all disputes and who is not responsible to the community.
2. Give this person power over all of the officials in his division, all the way down to the head of each individual community. Give the officials absolutely no say in the selection of this person and subordinate them to the discipline of this minister.
3. Supervise the behavior of the citizenry through a corps of police, the head of which should be a police commissioner who is in no way responsible to his subordinates.
4. Refuse the establishment of a national militia and, instead, deploy a standing army throughout the country.
5. Make the employment and promotion of the clergy dependent upon the secular authorities, entrust to them the oversight of education and support them in their struggle against the power of conscience.
6. Put the power to hire all teachers, from the university down to the village school, in the hands of a government minister and keep teachers in economic and intellectual poverty.
7. Give government ministers the power to dictate the sort of public education and lessons.
8. Make the threat of loss of license into a Damocles' sword over the heads of all press organs and their distributors, as well as anyone in business.
9. Discourage the formation of free associations. At the very least, have them observed by the police and give the police the power to dissolve any such association immediately. Make every free movement of people dependent upon police permission in every situation.
10. Permit no association to discuss political and general social affairs. Suppress every idea that communities can govern themselves.
11. Make the recognition of civil rights dependent upon membership in a church community officially recognized by the secular powers.
12. Make every sort of reward for a man's efforts dependent less upon his abilities on the job or for the

sake of the general human condition than upon his participation in the promotion of the political direction of the moment.

With a combination of these and other elements one can prevent the formation of a person of strong character, or if one doesn't directly aim for this, then one can make sure that men of this sort are rare. History is proof of this.

NOTES

[1] In *Brandenb. Schullblatt*, Herr Bormann recommends "prayer practice," in Mecklenburg daily catechismal prayers have been introduced, and we recently reported (Rhein. Bl., most recent issue) how Friday is being observed in Braunschweig (in Luclum). In Mecklenburg, litanies are practiced according to the repetition circle. Such praiseworthy developments!

[2] It will surprise no one that the same medicine often recurs, given the relationship and similarity of their goals and intentions. The doctor who proceeds rationally prescribes the same medicine for different illnesses in different combinations; only the homeopath uses only one medicine for each illness. But our most modern pedagogical healers are no friends of the homeopathic apothecaries; they love the masses. The Herr Pastor and the Herr Teacher in Schönebeck prescribe schoolchildren 120 church hymns to enhance their memory and they characterize the results as "very pleasing." The healing methods of the world famous Dr. Eisenbart have been responsible for even greater miracles.

[3] I know very well and thank God that future talents tend not to sleep in golden cradles, but that next to the loom or the anvil is the bed of a future Luther or Kant. I also know that honor and piety are still found in many modest cottages. But, as a rule, those who live there do not acquire tact or refined feelings, which are not inherited but acquired. This is the quality without which a deep and effective pedagogical ability is impossible. No preparatory course for teachers can overcome this. An upbringing deficient in this area is overcome only in rare cases.

Source: *Pädagogisches Jahrbuch* (1859); reprinted in Friedrich Diesterweg, *Wegweiser zur Bildung für deutsche Lehrer und andere didaktische Schriften*, edited by Franz Hofmann. East Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1962, pp. 314–23.

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