

# Anthropocentric to Ecocentric: From object lesson to education for sustainability

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- Swiss born
- Influenced by Rousseau's Emile
- A vision to elevate the poor
- Learning in a loving environment – engage the senses with familiar concrete objects
- Experiences appropriate to their level of understanding
- Positive emotional bonds lead to love of mankind first and then God (Weber, 1984)

Johann Pestalozzi  
(1746-1827)



## Purpose of the object lesson

- Brings a reality to learning
- Engages senses in exploration of natural and manufactured objects
- Acquaints the child with basic form, language and number
- An opportunity for the child to learn through self discovery and to solve problems



## Object lessons in the New Zealand Context

If correctly used the object lesson involved:

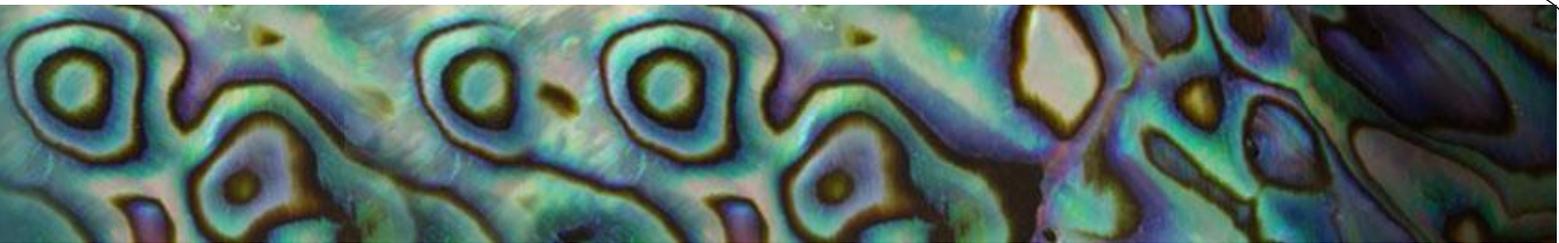
Hands-on, sensory experience such as handling a piece of coal or wood. Teachers guided and questioned children to describe & ascertain properties

Focus on origins of the object, use to humans and special properties or behaviour

Links usually made to God and Creation

Religious and moral lessons that the non-human world was for us to use and enjoy.

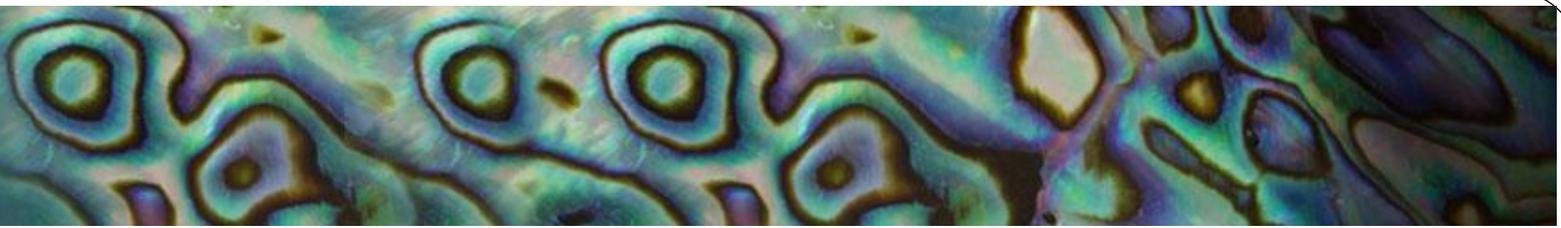
*McGeorge, 1994*



## Examples from Object Lessons

**The Sparrow** – Described as ‘a bold, courageous, quarrelsome bird’.

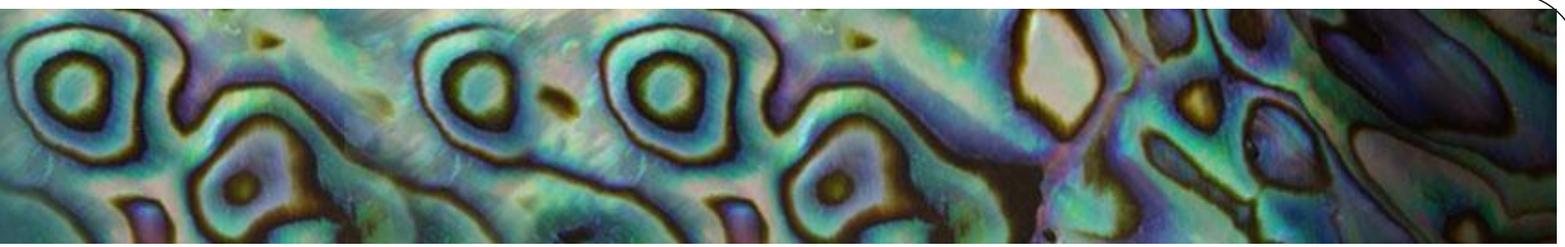
‘The sparrow is very plainly dressed bird, without any pretty-coloured feathers, and it cannot sing a sweet song to us – it only twitters. Yet it is a very **useful** bird, and does much more good than harm, for it eats grubs which destroy the plants and fruit in our gardens. We ought to care for the sparrows – give them crumbs and not throw stones at them’. *Chambers 1900*



The Bee - “the remarkable instinct of the bee ... the bee is industrious, loyal, a model of cleanliness, and an early riser’.

The Robin - “The Robin is a favourite with everyone. It sings sweetly and merrily nearly all the year round. Another reason why we like the robin is because it trusts us so much. It will come in at the open window, hop about on the table and even take crumbs from our hands. The robin is sometimes naughty—it quarrels and fights with other birds’.

*Chambers 1900*



## **The reality for Children and their learning**

Inspector reports told of cramped conditions; too much teacher talk; few hand-on opportunities.

Teacher led and mechanistic

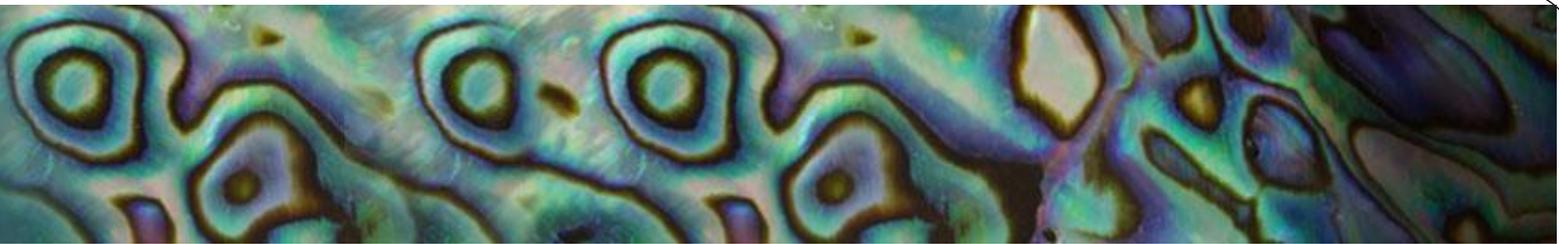
In many schools the object lesson became formalised, prescribed and little initiative left for teachers. Lessons became bookish and examination focused.

Ewing (1970) commented that the object lesson was about 'the Victorian desire to disseminate miscellaneous useful information' (p.81)

## Commonalities between object lesson and environmental education

- Experiences and understandings of the natural world
- Values & Attitudes
- Promotion of care and compassion





## Conclusion

- The object lesson seemed to teach about obedience, self control and how the natural world could serve mankind.
- Subsequent new syllabus changes have incorporated new ideas that reflect societal attitudes and values and emerging international issues.
- With new knowledge and a growing respect for Māori values and concepts children in Aotearoa New Zealand have environmental programmes that embrace a more ecocentric view of our relationship with the natural world.

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