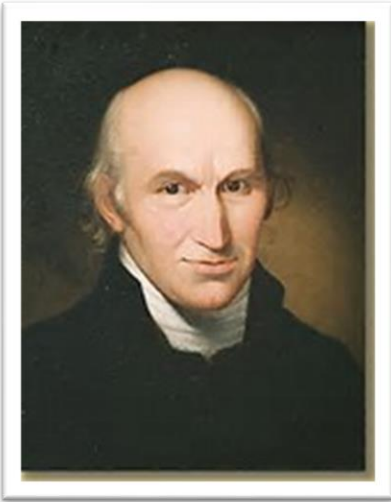


The Educational Legacy of Father Bernard Overberg



A priest of the Diocese of Munster, Germany, Father Bernard Overberg undertook the daunting task of reforming of the diocese's elementary schools and teacher-training program in 1783, when he was just 29 years old. His work would come to have a profound impact on the development of the educational vision and practices of the Sisters of Notre Dame, who were founded in the Munster Diocese in 1850. Because of this lasting influence, Father Overberg, the "Teacher of Teachers," has been called the father of the SND educational tradition.

Father Overberg believed that a true education helped children develop their God-given gifts, especially the capacity to understand their world, to live responsibly in it, and, most importantly, to open their hearts to God's love.

He urged teachers to ignite the spark of learning in their students through engaging, conversational lessons that inspired them to think for themselves, to share ideas in their own words, to ask questions, to make observations, and to solve real-world problems. In so doing, he anticipated dimensions of many educational developments that would follow, including constructivist learning, active learning, multiple intelligences, 21st century skills, and even the Common Core State Standards.

"Seek before anything else to gain the love, respect and trust of your students. This is an important duty for you," Father Overberg advised the students in his teacher-training program. This student-centered approach contrasted starkly with the tedious learning by rote that he experienced as a child and that was common at the time. "On the whole," he reminisced, "I found school very boring and would rather go out the school door than come into it."

SND connections to Father Overberg's life-giving educational vision were both philosophical and personal. Although he never taught any Sister of Notre Dame personally - he died 24 years before the congregation began - the foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Hilligonde Wolbring (Sister Mary Aloysia), her friend Elisabeth Kühling (Sister Maria Ignatia), and many of the early Sisters of Notre Dame were formed as students and teachers in the spirit and tradition of Father Overberg. In 1852 - just two years after the Sisters of Notre Dame began - they founded their own teacher-training school, which educated sisters and laywomen in Overberg's spirituality and pedagogy. Through their ongoing commitment to professional teacher formation, the Sisters of Notre Dame eventually shared Overberg's educational legacy across five continents and three centuries.

I am a teacher. That means, therefore, that I have an office that is one of the most esteemed and important tasks on earth.

Father Bernard Overberg

**Excerpts from the Directives for Purposeful School-teaching by
Bernard Overberg
Münster, 1793**



- 1). The children of the poor just as much as the rich have God for their Father. Jesus Christ is their brother. God loves them all ... Yet in their social position, the poor children have a greater likeness to our Savior than do the rich.
- 2). In order to use a good method to advantage, a teacher must also know his students; not only their names, but also their abilities, dispositions, and external circumstances, for example, whether the parents are poor or rich, if they lead their children with good example, bring them up well, etc.
- 3). Unnecessary constraint creates resistance.
- 4). A worthy teacher looks on all of his students as his own children, among whom none has assured privileges in preference to the others.
- 5). Seek before anything else to gain the respect, love, and trust of your students. This is an important duty for you.
- 6). You must always come into the school with a happy and bright face. Let the children read on your face that you are happy to see and to teach them.
- 7). Seek to make your students eager to learn.
- 8). The children believe they know very much if they can babble out a lot by heart, but their knowledge is then like the knowledge of a chattering magpie. The memorization of the not-understood catechism is one of the foremost sources of the deplorable ignorance in matters of faith among the common people and certainly not seldom among the nobility.
- 9). The awakening of attentiveness and reflection must become an integral part of all lessons.
- 10). The example of adults is indeed always the first master teacher of children in the art of lying and hypocrisy.
- 11). Children must never be punished for faults that are not at all subject to human free will.
- 12). It is not possible for children to improve everything at once that still needs improvement. Therefore you must patiently put up with many of their faults for a while and thus also in this imitate the wise goodness of God, who with forbearance endures so many flaws in us, and lets us take exact note of them only little by little, as we become more able to put them aside.
- 13). Never punish in anger.
- 14). The reason why some children learn so well and others so poorly, often lies simply in this, that some parents make a lot of fuss, and others so little, over whether their children learn or not.