Froebel, Friedrich Wilhelm August (1782 - 1852)

Summary Article: Froebel, Friedrich Wilhelm August from The Columbia Encyclopedia

(Frä'bəl, Frö'–, Ger. frē'drīkh vil'hēlm ou'gūst Frö'ba'l), 1782–1852, German educator and founder of the kindergarten system. He had an unhappy childhood and very little formal schooling, learning what he could from wide reading and close observation of nature; he studied for a short time at the Univ. of Jena. He was studying architecture at Frankfurt (1805) when he was persuaded by the master of the model school at Frankfurt to become a teacher. He visited Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi at Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, and then returned to Germany to study at the universities of Göttingen and Berlin. In 1813 he joined Lützow's free corps and saw active service in the Napoleonic Wars. While serving in the army he met Heinrich Langenthal and Wilhelm Middendorff, with whom he was associated throughout the rest of his career. He returned to the Univ. of Berlin in 1814 and was given a position in the school's mineralogical museum. In 1816 he founded at Griesheim a school (later moved to Keilhau) called the Universal German Educational Institute where other teachers came to study his methods. Early in 1837 he went to Bad Blankenburg (near Keilhau), where he opened the first kindergarten. In 1849 he founded a kindergarten training school at Liebenstein. However, Froebel was unable to control constant disputes among his subordinates, and after a group of former associates accused him of propagating treason, the government issued an edict (1851) forbidding the establishment of kindergartens. The measure was repealed in 1860. Froebel was influenced greatly by the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling. His theories of education are based on a belief in the divine unity of nature, so that spiritual training is a fundamental principle. Froebel stressed the importance of pleasant surroundings, self-activity, and physical training in the development of the child. His most important work is Menschenerziehung (1826; tr. The Education of Man, 1877). The translation by Susan Blow of his Mutter-und Kose-Lieder (1844) is called Mother Play (1895). Other works translated into English are Letters on the Kindergarten (1891), Froebel's Chief Writings on Education (1912), and his fragmentary autobiography. His name is also written Fröbel.

See biographies by A. B. Hanschmann (tr. 1897) and H. C. Bowen (1903, repr. 1970);
Kilpatrick, W. H., Froebel's Kindergarten Principles (1916);