

THE EQUIPMENT OF THE GERMAN KINDERGARTEN IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY. A SKETCH ON THE STRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE KINDERGARTEN

by
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The Kindergarten is a planned area of education whose structuring and equipment is the expression of pedagogical theories - a stamp in one sense - and also a consequence of an unconscious and collective mentality on what is accepted as a childlike, child-adapted room. Specific pedagogical theories on child development lead to a specifically structured equipment, as can easily be seen by the special equipment of a Waldorf-Kindergarten or a Montessori - Kinderhaus (casa dei bambini). The following contribution deals with construction and equipment of a kindergarten in the first half of the 20th century, that normal kindergarten, which historically developed from the roots of day-nursery (Kleinkinderbewahranstalt), infant school (Kleinkinderschule) and Fröbel's Kindergarten.

I. Situation of Sources

To begin with the historical analysis is confronted with a diffuse situation concerning sources.

Primary sources are hardly available or, not yet worked up. Collections of historical toys and occupational material are almost not existing. Besides, photographs of kindergartens and their equipment, of the daily life in a kindergarten, have not been collected up to now. Oral-History Archives for the documentation of training and professional experience of nursery-school teachers at the university of Bamberg are only in its building-up phase: at the moment, interviews with about 70 year old former nursery-school teachers are being analysed, which promise a differentiated insight into the different equipment and its pedagogical exploitation.

In other words: If we were to build up a kindergarten museum, this would be a task not to be solved at the moment,

there is a shortage of material, of realia to fill it up.

Thus, we can only build an imaginary museum and, by doing so, make use of the abundance of secondary sources which present themselves in manuals and handbooks containing proposals about furniture and equipment.

When analysing these sources we must keep in mind that these handbooks and guides with their intention to set standards reflect the reality of the kindergarten only as the ideal type.

Since there were no binding legal regulations (in West Germany we have had kindergarten laws only for about 15 years) and organization and financing of the work of the kindergarten was left to private institutions (e.g. the churches and charitable organizations) deviation from the set standard was the rule due to different local conditions and financial possibilities.

II. Types of Kindergarten Equipment

1) In 1900, the so-called infant-school or day-nursery represented the type of equipment still prevailing.

A large number of children was accommodated in one room, being structured after the model of a school. In long rows of benches the children sat beside and behind one another looking at the teacher and the blackboard. The tables were used for their occupations, for eating, and sometimes even served as a support for their afternoon nap. The teaching and occupation material was kept in locked-up cupboards and was handed out according to the subject. A second room, in most cases free of furniture, was used for physical exercises, such as marching in columns and circle games. Other rooms served as toilets, kitchen or living quarters for the staff. In addition, an infant-school usually had a playground outdoors.

2) Since the eighties of the 19th century it was particularly the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus in Berlin, that developed another type of 'Volkskindergarten' (kindergarten for the lower classes), a model which, however, did not gain ground in general before the twenties of our century.

At first, room conditions remained the same, except one basic difference, the rigid organization of the room was given up in favour of mobile furniture. This furniture consists of se-

The prophylactic measures were completed by recommendations for healthy, not pampering children's clothes and by advice for the right diet, for which the kitchen nurses eagerly presented recipes of cheap and wholesome soups, the main food of the lower classes.

The hygiene of room and body as well as the prophylactic measures of light and air cures, the proposals concerning clothes and food, naturally exceeded the range of the kindergarten and included the parents, by advice and example, to whom the kindergarten and the measures taken there to keep the body healthy were recommended as an example.

IV. The Pedagogical Use of Room and Equipment - the Spiritual Hygiene

The attention of social medicine and paediatrics doubtlessly led to an improvement of the children's living conditions in the kindergarten and furthermore, promoted the spreading of basic knowledge about hygiene among the parents of the lower classes.

Socio-medical care, use of prophylactic measures and hygienic structuring of the kindergarten area, however, was not an additional programme, which existed beside the kindergarten pedagogy, being only concerned with the body of the child, but was in harmony with a spiritual hygiene reflected in the pedagogical use of rooms and equipment.

The handbooks for kindergarten equipment list the material necessary up to the smallest detail, starting with Fröbel's playing material, which, however, was only made use of as isolated elements, in the course of the decades, up to teaching material such as plates with pictures of secular or religious contents, furthermore, fairy tale and picture books, diverse small things like buttons and pearls, stones and shells, leaves and dried fruits and finally, some musical instruments, among them, the drum, in particular.

Although the equipment lists went into great detail, not to be repeated here, we are again and again surprised by only summary hints to toys as if they were something superfluous, not absolutely necessary: there is mention of dolls and doll-houses, toy-shops, farms, stones for building and sometimes even rocking-horses.

The thriftiness of the recommended toy equipment, however is not only financially conditioned, but is based on the traditional attitude of kindergarten pedagogy, to offer but a minimum of occupation material to the child, which it needs - according to the kind of development theory followed. Everything else that is not legitimated by the theory of the child's development, is superfluous and its consequence is spoiling and getting used to luxury - or, socio-politically expressed, an enstrangement to the circumstances of the lower classes, in which the child could be given only few and simple toys by the parents.

In accordance with the selection of teaching and occupation material after the criteria of the curriculum, the material was made use of after plan: timetables, exact to the quarter of an hour, regulated the activity of the children to whom the material was handed out and apportioned. The children's activity is limited to ordered occupations with apportioned material in a fixed unit of time. Thus the regular and easily to be controlled occupation of all children remains guaranteed in the kindergarten, which, otherwise, has broken away from the rigid pattern of school life.

As much as we think it a matter of course that teaching and occupation material was given to the children in a certain sequence dependant on the curriculum, in a spiritual order, we are surprised about how the toys were used. Toys, if there at all, were not available freely, but were allowed only at certain times, sometimes even to award good conduct. From interviews with former nursery-school teachers, having started their career about 1930, we know that e.g. doll-houses were only brought out during the Christmas season and could only be played with on one or two days!

The allotment of the material was in accordance with the use of the room of the kindergarten, in which the children were arranged on a "medium level": bench, chair, table, those are the places in the room, where the children do their work sitting or standing. As a rule, the children were not allowed to play on the floor, the floor is for the feet. The posture appropriate to the child's occupation is that of an adult at a table or on a chair.

In one case, surely extreme, the "medium level" can be

documented even for outdoor play in the sandpit: Boxes filled with sand are put up high as tables, so that the children are forced to play while standing.

V. Conclusion

The examples given shall be sufficient. They show that the equipment of the kindergarten together with the structures of its use can be looked upon as the outline of a house, a place for childhood where children are treated after the principles and theories of medical and spiritual hygiene.

Children are the largely passive objects of endeavours, by which grown-ups try to realize their picture of childhood. It would be exaggerated, to be sure, to criticize this picture of childhood and the room of education constructed correspondingly, as aseptic -the dominance of order and spotlessness, however, the cleanness of body and spirit is a constant feature of pedagogical utilisation and purpose.

The ideal place for children is clean, light and friendly. It is easily to be managed and controlled, in itself ordered and free of surprises, in one sentence: it is the ideal place for the diagnostic view of the grown-up and the utilisation ensuing. Hiding-places, cave, noise and rollic, also disobedience and insubordination are not admitted and remain outside the doors of the kindergarten.

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