

The Importance of Reform Pedagogy

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Harald Eichelberger

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The era of educational renewal which began approximately at the end of the last century and seems to be complete as regards the emergence of its great personalities, is generally characterized by its search for more humane forms of teaching. This search, however, has still not ended even today. Nearly all models of reform pedagogy share a common educational aim: to integrate systematic learning and personal experience in an educational process that is free from fear. Studying the five successful models of reform pedagogy which are still widespread today – Montessori pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy, Jenaplan pedagogy, Freinet pedagogy and Rudolf Steiner pedagogy – should enable us to get closer to the above-mentioned aim of a less fearful educational process in Austrian schools, without losing sight of the need for a didactic-methodical base for school learning nor of the social context of schooling in Austria.

When we set out to compare the reform pedagogical concepts under discussion we will on the one hand discover some common characteristics which identify these concepts as a suitable base for permanent school development and on the other hand, we will find specifics which will make it easier for us to choose or lean towards one of the concepts. The main characteristic of all the concepts mentioned here is that they are child-oriented – a notion which above all signalizes the shift in thinking in the historic sense: it is no longer school and its demands on the child which are at the centre of educational thinking, but the individual child's optimum development and a school which facilitates this development. (Key, Ellen, Das Jahrhundert des Kindes, Autorisierte Übertragung, Weinheim 1992)

With regard to a possible opening up of school with the aim of a general school development and educational reform, the reform pedagogical concepts are a didactic-methodical base which serve the process of opening up. The concepts to be discussed are linked to educational principles such as independence, self-education, self-responsibility, self-activity, independent and autonomous learning, exploratory learning, encouraging the development of imaginative skills and social learning. The central aim is to aid the young person in his or her development into an autonomous human being and the development of his or her individuality.

Without laying claim to completeness, we find further constituting and descriptive characteristics of reform pedagogical concepts in the creation of a stimulating learning environment, interdisciplinary teaching, giving the child ample opportunities to have a say, offering so-called development materials, individual-related assessment of a pupil's work and in principally laying the emphasis on self-activity.

In spite of these common features the concepts of reform pedagogy have some interesting specific characteristics which provide a decisive opportunity for choosing one or the other. For example, in Montessori's Pedagogy the development materials are unique, thereby they are geared towards the concept of the child's self-determination., whereas with Helen Parkhurst, a temporary companion of Maria Montessori, the organization of the child's learning with the help of specific learning exercises is at the forefront of school work. If we take a closer look we will, for example, also find that Celestin Freinet puts discussion in a different context from Peter Petersen. The political-combative aspect of the word is completely lacking with Peter Petersen.

These few remarks indicate how important it is to take a closer look at the concepts of the mentioned educationalists. Only then is the ground prepared for further continual development. All those models are examples of an extremely strong will to shape education, they contain educational innovations for schools which are worth considering even today and they must be studied and explored in Austria, at last, with regard to the perspectives for future school development. In this context, I would like to predict that in Austria the different approaches offer educationally founded and effective concepts: the Jena Plan pedagogy in relation to a flexible school organization and an individually based introductory period at primary school; Montessori pedagogy offers concepts for inner differentiation, learning environment and self-determination; Freinet pedagogy in relation to the didactic framework for an open form of teaching and to the learning of democracy; finally the Dalton Plan pedagogy primarily offers concepts for the reform of school for the ten to fourteen year olds. It is not the notion of reform which is the main idea at the forefront of thinking and acting, but the notion of school development.

Development of school invariably includes the participation and full involvement of those concerned, of teachers, parents and pupils. It is they who can, and in the sense of self-determination must, develop their own school. If one accepts this prerequisite, it becomes clear that school development does not simply relate to the organization of a single school, but requires the structural change of the entire national school and educational system.

The here discussed reform concepts are fundamentally development concepts. Their educational intentions relate to the best possible development of the child. However, their principles can basically be applied as ideas initiating reform in school development, indeed they were in parts conceived and thought of as such. In the following, I will start from the theory that the educational principles of reform concepts must serve as guidelines for present-day school development, if the conditions for the child's optimum development within school – and therefore a child-oriented education – are to be established. That implies that any future school development would primarily be carried out on the basis of educational criteria, and we find development-based ideas in all the relevant reform-pedagogical

concepts.

Above all, in this context I would like to mention Peter Petersens Jena Plan and the educational concept he expressively called „Ausgangsform“ (starting form). We may take this notion quite literally and start from something in order to develop the school form that is right for us and the „educational situation“ within it. To stay within the image we will start from the four basic forms of education, celebration, conversation, work and play. Furthermore, we will start by rhythmizing them within the children's daily school routine. Instead of having a „rag time table“ which makes learning impossible, we will start by grouping the children in various heterogeneous age groups instead of putting them in „years“ or classes of the same age group, by learning and living in a school living room and we will start from the basic awareness that we will not mark the children's work any longer, but that we will observe and describe their development. Whereby we mean the child's development within the „educational situation“ that has been prepared by us and that does not only link the child's learning to life, but strives for the child's „inner encounter“ with the learning matter. Given these starting points, each Jena Plan-school will be able to follow its own development. Starting from the starting form it will meet the living and learning needs of the people that attend and develop it, and it can – as has been shown all over Europe – comply with national standards and curricula.

In comparison with Peter Petersen's pedagogy Maria Montessori's concept is primarily concerned with child development and is “*expressis verbis*” a so-called development concept. As a system which for the most part has been didactically conceived it offers precise ideas for designing an educational institution, such as the organization of the prepared environment, the forming of age heterogeneous groups, the idea of the child house replacing separate institutions which really belong together, for example kindergarden and school, as well as the principles of Montessori pedagogy. However, by its basic intention, it serves the aim of school development and not only that of school design: Montessori pedagogy is, by nature, a pedagogy of self-determination (and of discovering the ego state) A pedagogy of self-determination will aim at the self-determination of all persons within an educational institution if it is to keep its credibility. Consequently, it is not only intended to integrate Montessori pedagogy within an existing school system, but Montessori pedagogy is viewed as an appropriate system for school development and as an educational concept which itself is capable of development. The question arises: „Can Montessori pedagogy also become a starting form or can it be seen as one?“ The discussion which attempts to find an answer to this question can give incentives to school development as well as to the development of reform pedagogy.

Helen Parkhurst's concept of the Dalton Plan evolved from the development of a new school concept. The principle of development is inherent in this pedagogy. Helen Parkhurst stresses that she does not wish for the Dalton Plan to be called a system, but a „Way of Life“. This „Way of Life“ follows principles which give definite orientation and direction to the school development which has been suggested here: The principle of freedom, the principle of cooperation and the principle of the proportion between effort and achievement of a goal or Budgeting Time, which was added at a later stage. By completing individual learning tasks working independently on his own or in cooperation with others, the pupil learns and grows and becomes responsible for his own development process. The pedagogical principles of the Dalton plan are basic principles for developing an individual school and for developing the school and educational system. School development according to these principles means that the principles of freedom, cooperation and budgeting time are equally valid for the work of teachers, parents and pupils. This would include the freedom to organize school, to choose an educational concept, to cooperate with other institutions and so on. Furthermore, the Dalton Plan is open to change itself, as is shown by the introduction and development of sub-Dalton plans for primary schools in Holland.

Freinet pedagogy has never limited itself to school work alone. It has always been a pedagogy with a claim to social change. It is not only the task of teachers, parents and children to design school. Indeed, it was the very task of school design and development through which Celestin Freinet wanted to make his children realize that society, too, can be changed according to the needs of the child and of those concerned. He encouraged children to speak out so that they would learn to become articulate,, so that they would learn to live in a democracy, responsible for themselves and for other people, yet self-determined within a democratically structured social fabric. Where else can children learn democracy, if not at school. We must encourage not only children to speak out, but also teachers and parents so that they can design and develop their school.

At present, there are approximately 2000 schools in Europe which explicitly follow one of the named reform pedagogical lines of thought – that is equivalent to 7-8% of all primary schools and secondary schools up to O-levels. In Austria, we will probably count six Rudolf Steiner schools and some Montessori classes and even fewer Freinet classes. Peter Petersens Jenaplan pedagogy and Helen Parkhurst's Dalton plan may be talked about in teacher training seminars and at university, but they are not part of real-life school.

Looking at this we can see that the reform pedagogical movement did not stop at simply reversing criticism of the „old“ school, but that it created original „new“ educational models and „new“ schools. Apart from the already mentioned educational lines of thought we should also mention the Danish afterschools (efterskolen) and those schools that are often given the complex label of alternative schools. Most reform pedagogical schools can certainly be found in Northern and Central Europe. In Germany, Holland, Denmark, France, Sweden, to name but the most important countries, the reform pedagogical schools enjoyed great public recognition and their influence on the design of ordinary schools should not be underestimated. In Austria, the lines of thought mentioned above are underrepresented in ordinary schools, Montessori pedagogy and Freinet pedagogy are integrated only to an unsatisfactory extent.

From the scientific point of view of teaching it is not enough to declare teaching „open“ or „active“. Both expressions are meaningless with regard to the didactic and methodical basics of teaching. They do not give any indication of value orientation and the image of man in teaching, or of the educational concept. I believe that the concepts of reform pedagogy I have quoted are an important base of a careful and well thought- out renewal of the school and education system. Each renewal requires us to go back to the roots of a development or to put it another way: without reflecting on the educational

past it is difficult to create a solid educational future.

In her book „The Century of the Child“ Ellen Key dreams about a „school of the future“ in which the independent and self-determined work of the child who respects that others have the same right to self-determination and work, prevails. She hoped that her book would persuade teachers to grant their children the right to independent and self-determined work. And indeed, the book initiated an educational process which lasts to this day – European Reform Pedagogy. (Skiera, Ehrenhard/Klaßen, Theo/Wächter, Bernd, Handbuch der reformpädagogischen und alternativen Schulen in Europa, Baltmannsweiler 1990)

Reform Concepts of Education and Reform Educationalists

Freinet Pedagogy as a Concept of (political) Change

I would like to start this chapter with a quote from Celestin Freinet which characterizes this great French educationalist and internationally renowned reform pedagogue:

„Perhaps my single educational talent is that I have kept such a good memory of my younger years. I feel and understand, as a child, the children that I educate. I face the problems that arise and that are such a great mystery to all adults, and I recall the time when I was eight years old, and as an adult and at the same time as a child, I expose, despite the systems and methods which made me suffer so much, the errors of a science which forgot and failed to appreciate its origins.“ (Freinet, Celestin, Les Dits de Mathieu, p. 31. In: Freinet, Elise, Erziehung ohne Zwang, Stuttgart 1981, p.25)

About Celestin Freinet

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|------|---|
| 1896 | Celestin Freinet is born in Southern France, his parents were farmers |
| 1913 | Student at the teacher training college, the so-called Ecole Normale. |
| 1914 | Military service – badly wounded by shot in the lung |
| 1920 | first job as a teacher in Bar-sur-Loup. Gets to know the Belgian doctor and educator Ovide Decroly who had already started to print school essays. Is inspired by German reform pedagogy, above all Hermann Lietz and his |

regional school (Landerziehungsheim); visits him in Hamburg-Altona.

Introduced to Paul Geheeb, founder of the Odenwald school who works alongside Lietz. Introduced also to the Swiss Adolphe Ferriere, author of „L'Ecole active“. Ferriere showed how to put into practice Kerschensteiner's claim that the „the work school is the school of the future „. Freinet intensely studies reform movements in other countries.

In 1923 he encounters Peter Petersen in Hamburg.

Until his death Celestin Freinet maintains regular contact by letter and an animated exchange of ideas with Peter Petersen.

- 1928 Celestin Freinet is sent to a new post at St. Paul.
- 1934/35 the regional educative school in Vence near Cannes is founded. From that follows by the development of Freinet Pedagogy, a pedagogy for the people.
- 1941-44 Freinet joins the French Resistance.
- After 1945 the regional educative school in Vence reopens. Joint research and publication of works on pedagogy and educational Psychology with his wife Elise Freinet
- 1966 Celestin Freinet dies and leaves behind a educational movement that is very much alive all over the world.

Basic Concepts of Freinet Pedagogy

Like other reform educationalists Celestin Freinet recognized at an early stage that a new pedagogy does not centre around a new teaching and learning method, but that in the sense of a „Copernican revolution „in education the child and his or her individual development within a certain society must become the focus of the educator's thinking and actions. .From today's point of view it can be assumed that Freinet – like Maria Montessori – did not create a concept of support and learning, but a concept of child development. However, both educationalists do not stop at considering the child's interests and needs alone, their pedagogy manifests itself in their attempts to make available and give to the child what he needs at that particular age in order to develop.

Interestingly enough, both educationalists start with the notion of work. While Maria Montessori uses the term in the sense of the individual (that is the child – the author) working on himself and talks of „exercises of daily life“ and „educating the senses“, Celestin Freinet emphasizes that it is of great positive value to every human being, including children, to work on specific problems in a purposeful and systematic manner. Freinet is convinced that, from the very beginning, the child strives to work with and like his parents and to emulate them. Thus, Freinet's pedagogy for the masses is based on the introduction of a work school. He wants to make meaningful, creative work that develops the child's abilities the central point of school.

Let us allow ourselves, at this point, to digress a little to the true spiritual father of the so-called work school, Georg Kerschensteiner, who gave a specific educational meaning to the term work, which continued to be valid in Freinet's pedagogy. According to that, it is not enough to simply be busy in the classroom. (Kerschensteiner, Georg, Begriff der Arbeitsschule, 5.Aufl., Leipzig, Berlin 1922, p.65 f)

„At first, the word of a pedagogy of action was coined. But soon it had to make room for the new catchphrase, the catchphrase of work instruction as a principle, whereby one understood the linking of a number of manual activities with all sorts of conventional teaching subjects. This crude alienation of the term „work instruction“ as the mere teaching of manual activity shows how little was understood about the true meaning of the concept of the „work school“...

Because work is usually a manual activity, it was believed that the problem of the work school could be solved by linking every traditional school subject with a form of manual activity...but just as one cannot learn to understand about the categorical imperative by copying one of Kant's woodcuts, the manual tasks mentioned above do not capture the spirit of the principle of work. Manual work that is used during teaching is only „educative“, if concepts and knowledge grow out of the facts of daily experience and the imagination material is gained from sensual observation. All intellectual fields of work which have developed in the course of time have their own specific working methods. The work principle is only maintained if the work, when penetrating the imagination and ways of thinking of that particular field, is adjusted to the working methods which have developed within those intellectual fields with psychological necessity.“

In this context, I would like to stress that Celestin Freinet's concept of work is of a more political marxist nature: for Celestin Freinet, work in this sense is a basic human right and therefore it is a permanent principle of school, work is an essential part of human dignity.

Work in a Freinet-class is to a large extent activity- oriented and determined by the learner himself. Freinet also assumes that each child has to make his or her own experiences throughout life, and that each child has a basic right to discover truths himself. To Freinet, active learning means that the child, who is tied up in the emotional and social relationships within his group and closely tied to his environment, sets out to discover for himself the nature of his universe, its values and interrelations. But Freinet pedagogy also means to develop an awareness that this world can be changed through my (the pupil's – the author) „political“ work. If learning and work are to become meaningful for children in the sense of developing their individuality, they have to take place „here and now“ and must meet the needs and interests of the children. Freinet teaching is experience-oriented, pertinent and is experienced as meaningful by the child. For example, the cultural technique of writing is always directed towards another person with whom I can communicate, with whom I can exchange ideas. What is the point of writing in traditional school if nobody reads it but the teacher and the exercise book is thrown away at the end of the school year?

Freinet's pedagogy takes great care and uses a wide range of means in order to

- Initiate investigation
- Encourage curiosity and
- Support experience-based learning

The sophisticated learning aids that were developed for that purpose and the specific way in which the class is organized allow every child to proceed according to his interests, talents and individual learning rhythm.

For that purpose it is necessary to completely rearrange the classroom (see example below). The classroom is turned into an attractive learning space which resembles a workshop and facilitates exploratory learning, and in which a happy and relaxed atmosphere prevails.

In the Freinet class, knowledge does no longer come from the teacher alone. It is far more important for the children to be able to learn how to acquire knowledge with the help of different working materials, such as books, information brochures and reference books. It is not important that I am served „knowledge“ which I can then reproduce, but that I learn how to acquire that „knowledge“ independently and that I can control that „knowledge“ myself. Knowledge is essential to life, that is why learning how to learn purposefully and independently is at the forefront of Freinet pedagogy.

To Celestin Freinet school is not a place of protection, but a place for learning a lot for and about real life. While the individual has the freedom to develop, at the same time he learns to accept and deal with obligations. There is the obligation to attend school, to accept responsibility for one's own goals, to organize group life, to take decisions and so on... In this sense Freinet pedagogy is by no means a pedagogy that lets the pupil have his way, but it is an education that aims at the individual's self-determination and self-responsibility and in addressing that task it is highly modern.

Some Thoughts on the Teaching Concept

Celestin Freinet's fundamental educational ideas aim at an „open and liberating education“ In the classroom, they manifest themselves as follows. It has to be said expressively that Celestin Freinet intended his education as an education for the masses, and in that sense as an education which can be applied in state schools. Freinet pedagogy has never been an education only for those that could „afford“ it.

- The pupils do not remain seated passively in their benches waiting for the teacher to give them instructions which they then work on in their exercise books, but they work on their own, in twos or in groups, pursuing tasks which they have picked themselves. They print texts, prepare talks, carry out experiments, work on a course of mathematics or apply themselves to manual tasks. For the pupils, the work they do is by no means meaningless. They have chosen it themselves whereby they have taken an important step towards their own self-determined development and also, for the most part, towards cooperative work.
- The learning aids are no longer limited to school and exercise books, but in Freinet pedagogy they consist primarily of the printing press, the computer, a collection of documents, the work library, various tools and materials, courses and many similar things. In comparison with pure verbalistic teaching the children's work is the predominant element in the learning group. The

traditional division into teaching subjects has been abolished for the most part, instead, the pupils are put in heterogeneous age groups, which facilitates and simplifies a more intensive cooperation amongst the pupils. Whenever possible, the pupils' work will proceed in a balanced combination of manual, intellectual and artistic activities – as with Pestalozzi: learning with head, heart, and hand.

- Teacher and pupils prepare the lessons together in a joint effort. Weekly planning, daily planning, excursions, class council, morning circle, class diary and so on help to achieve that. The conventional division of teaching into subjects and lessons during which those subjects are then taught, is replaced in favour of the plans of the learning group.
- Lesson planning will principally be based on the pupils' interests and needs, however, the national curriculum has to be incorporated in that plan. Yet, the central elements of Freinet pedagogy are self-determination and self-responsibility. Children can only learn these if they are given the opportunity to do so on a daily basis within a serious framework. „To recognize what I want“ is the individual's most important development process, it must be embedded in a community where duties, rights and boundaries can be experienced. In this context, the „free expression“ of thoughts, experiences and feelings plays an important educational role in Freinet teaching.
- Continuing this line of thought, it becomes obvious that the pupils will organize their own work as much as they can; they will decide together what tasks and areas of knowledge they want to tackle. It is this process of self-determination which helps the children understand why they should and are going to study mathematics, language, natural sciences etc. It is the child's own interest which will guide him to mathematical thinking and problem solving in a much more intensive and interesting fashion than in traditional teacher-oriented teaching. The teacher has the difficult task of finding an appropriate didactic and methodical base to accompany the child as it follows the path of exploratory learning. Besides, we can always trust that children also want to learn what is in the curriculum...
- In cooperatively organized teaching, the teacher's role is, above all, that of a helper, coordinator and counsellor. But that will not suffice. He will have to correct mistakes, and he will have to see to it that the curriculum for the respective learning group is met. Any form of free work requires the teacher to make himself available to the children to a high degree, making sure they know that he is there for them all the time and how seriously he takes every child's activity. The success of any form of free work depends to a large extent on the intensity of accepting the child's activity and personality. The teacher's offers, esteem for the child and genuine emotional interest form the basis of a pedagogy of self-determination.
- Out-of-school contacts play a more important role than in traditional teaching. It is not about life being taken into school, but about the children leaving their school and stepping out into life. The intention is to have as many excursions and real-life experiences as possible.

Illustrations

(Freinet, Celestin, pädagogische texte, Hamburg 1980)

The Educator

„The educator had worked out his method to the very last detail; he had – so he said – quite scientifically built the staircase which would lead to the different levels of knowledge; with the help of

many experiments he had established the height of the steps so that they would match the standard ability of children's legs; here and there he had built in an extra landing for catching one's breath, and the beginners could hold on to comfortable banisters. And how he cursed, this educator! He did not curse the staircase which had obviously been built and invented with intelligence, but he cursed the children who did not seem to have any understanding of his thoughtfulness and consideration.

He cursed for the following reason: as long as he stood by watching over the methodical use of the staircase, as step by step was climbed, the landings were used for resting and the banisters were held on to, everything proceeded normally. But as soon as he turned away for a minute: at once, chaos and disaster struck! Only those who had been moulded sufficiently by the authoritarian ways of the school methodically climbed step by step, holding on to the banisters, resting on the landing, climbing the stairs further and further – like sheepdogs who had been trained all lifelong to passively obey their master and who had given up on following their natural dog rhythm which would enable them to break through the thicket and cross paths.

The horde of children remembered its instincts and refound its needs: one of them conquered the stairs ingeniously on all fours; another jumped two steps at a time leaving out the landings; there were even some who tried to climb the stairs backwards and who became quite masterful at it. Most of them, however, found – and that is a paradoxon which we do not understand – that the staircase offered them too little adventure and stimulation. They raced around the house, climbed up the drainpipe, climbed balustrades and reached the roof in record time, better and faster than if they had used the so-called methodical staircase; once they had reached the top, they slid down the banisters...“

Attempts at Learning

„Let us be honest: if it was left to the educators to teach the children how to ride a bicycle there would not be many cyclists. Before mounting a bicycle one has to get to know it, after all, that is fundamental, one has to examine the individual parts of which it is made up, top to bottom, and one has to successfully complete many experiments with the mechanical basics of gears and balance.

Then – but only then! – the child would be allowed to mount the bicycle... But surely, only when the pupil can mount the bicycle without making mistakes will he be allowed to freely expose himself to its mechanics. Luckily enough, the children thwart the educators' clever and far too methodical plans. In a barn, they discover an old stand with no tyres or breaks, and secretly they learn how to mount it at once, the way, incidentally, all children learn: without any knowledge, at all, of rules or principles, they grab the machine, make for the slope and ...land in the ditch. Persistently, they start again and – within record time – they can ride a bike. Exercise does the rest.

At the beginning of every conquest there is not abstract knowledge – that normally comes to the extent we need it in life – but there is experience, exercise and work.“

School

„Not long ago, medicine prided itself in the methodical treatment which it granted newly-born babies and toddlers in clinics and hospitals: daily routine, precisely measured nourishment, a completely sterile environment...However, the children did not develop normally. Something seemed to be missing in the medical machinery. This something was the affectionate presence of the mother, the voice of the

outside world, the first sun rays, the magic of animals and flowers. Science gave a significant name to this deficiency: „hospitalism“.

With the same measured precision and accuracy the educational science strives to regulate the children's intellectual nourishment. For that purpose, it isolates them in a special environment, in school. Silence, neutral coldness of the lessons and exercises, systematic suppression of all contacts with life on the outside or with family life, silence, cleanliness, order, mechanics.

The deficiency symptoms cannot be denied: badly digested food, a dislike of intellectual nourishment which can even lead to total refusal, crippling the individual, inability to cope with life, hostility towards a school culture that is wrong.

I call this deficiency „scolatism“. In its day, the term „hospitalism“ was a scientific blasphemy before its existence was recognized. Today the search is on for effective cures. The term „scolatism“ will become an educational blasphemy which we will introduce in the places where we educate, as we have introduced many other terms before.“

The Lessons

„The practical reason of Rabelais, Montaigne, Rousseau, Pestalozzi is slowly being given new recognition. In order to educate himself, it is not sufficient for the child to devour any sort of material or topic which he is served in a more or less interesting manner. He must act and perform himself, be creative. Above all, he must be able to live in an appropriate environment, he must not doze in one of our „dungeons for the imprisoned youth“. To live, to live as intensively as possible, is that not the ultimate aim of all our efforts? And is it not the essential task of school to develop as much as possible the ability to live?

The term „active school“ which was invented by Adolphe Ferriere does not satisfy us entirely...The notion of activity is a prerequisite for our techniques. But even in its widest sense it does not yet imply the fundamental change of school which we intend. Besides, the word education is enough for us. In traditional school, the teacher instructs the pupils, sometimes he even tries to educate them. We say: the child has to educate himself, to train himself, with the help of the adults. We shift the axis of education: it is the child, not the teacher, who is now at the centre of school. It is no longer about the teacher's likes and dislikes nor his comforts: the child's life, his needs and potential are the pivot of our education for the people.

That is supposed to be a method? That is simply an ideological school of thought!“

Elements of Teaching (and yet, no Principles)

Class Council

The class council is an important democratic forum in Freinet pedagogy. As a rule, all children take part in the meetings of the class council. It is chaired by one or several children. Decisions are made according to democratic rules. Issues raised during class council are, amongst others, joint lesson planning, drawing up the weekly plan, classroom decoration, the class' social life, discussing problems,

discussing and appointing pupils who will represent the class within the school,...The basic idea in setting up a class council is so that the children can learn democratic and social forms of behaviour, with responsibility and consequence. The teacher is a participating member of the class council; she or he helps with its organisation and chairing, but also has only one vote. As a rule, the class council meets once a week. The morning circle, on the other hand, is a daily occurrence in most Freinet classes.

Free Talk in the Morning – Morning Circle

Before the start of lessons, the children have a period of „free talk“ chaired by one child. These talks give the teacher an idea about the children’s interests and experiences and free oral expression can unfold. It follows that this „free talk“ is the essential basis for living together, for the organization of the class council and also for learning the rules of a democratic society. Out of this discussion arise the topics for the lessons and for the „free“ production of texts, for writing and printing. The teacher’s responsibility lies in the difficult task of coordinating the children’s interests with the requirements of an existing curriculum and of supporting the pupils’ work and learning. At the end of the morning circle the „individual work“ is planned. Conversation plays a central part in the daily routine.

Example of an Ordinary Day – the 6 to 9-year olds

- Morning circle app 45 minutes
 - chaired by a child
 - Minutes also taken by a child
 - Presentation of texts: self-made and
 - Free texts
 - Questions and answers
 - What do we think of the text?
 - Who has brought something along for today?
 - Current affairs: newspapers, television, personal items
 - Who has got something to say about this?
 - Chairperson calls up those who want to speak and structures the contributions
 -
-
- Planning the day:
 - With the help of the teacher’s
 - Minutes and
 - the children’s diary
 - the class plan for the week
 - the individual’s plan for that week
-

What else is there for me to do this week, what individual work do I have to finish...

Start of the individual work app 1.5 hours

Activities:

- Printing
- Free text, computer work
- Working on the „Herbarium“ project
- Arithmetics
- Reading

- Use of the blackboard:

For the purpose of discussion, children write on the board:

QUESTIONS – DISCUSSIONS – ASSESSMENTS – CONGRATULATIONS

BREAK

All children are taught

Together app 1 hour

- working on the text, style, grammar,
- spelling...
- one child's text is written on the blackboard:
 - reading it out
 - discussing it
 - correcting it
 - children work independently on tasks
 - silent work
 - the work is checked by the teacher

circle lunch reading

work in the class

app 1 hour

- a child presents his workpiece
- book on the rhino
- presentation
- questions

- hat do we think about it?
 - The child who has presented the work chairs the discussion and
 - Gets feedback
-
- Reading
 - Individual work
 - reflecting on the day
 - Looking ahead to the next day

Individual Learning and Self-Activity

The morning circle during which the children also give small talks or demonstrations is followed by a period of individual study with the children working on their own or in groups-Technical term „individual work“. During this period the texts that have been corrected in a joint effort are now printed, new texts are produced, the children learn maths with the help of work sheets and card indexes; they work in groups on special subjects or prepare the next excursion. The children acquire the knowledge dictated by the curriculum with the help of work sheets and special index cards, and they control their progress themselves. In this respect, the work sheets with self-control, the teacher's help and the children's individual work plans are all important learning aids.

Free Expression – Free Text

It is an essential element of teaching in Freinet pedagogy, one could almost say a guideline, that painting, writing, writing poetry, dancing, singing, maths and others are based on the principle of the child's „free expression“. The child learns to accept his way of expressing himself as the expression of his culture and at the same time he learns to understand the culture that surrounds him and to perhaps change it in a creative way. The pupils' texts and works form part of the work library of the class. The so-called „free“ text is the individual expression of the child and, above all, it is communication. By creating a „free“ text the children learn that they do not simply write words in an exercise book, but that the words they write can represent a meaningful communication for one or several people and that the texts they have created can bring about change. In this context the role printing plays in a Freinet class becomes evident.

Printing

The printing workshop does not only serve the purpose of duplicating the child's „free expression“, it is, above all, a means of communication and helps the child to improve his spelling. After thorough discussion and agreed correction the children's texts are printed and made available to the public. It may be that children print their poems, a story or a political leaflet to push their own interests through. Thus, the political dimension of Freinet pedagogy manifests itself in printing: to give the children the word, in order for them to experience that they can influence and change their lives through their own

initiative, and that they themselves are responsible. In the course of time, the printing press has become the symbol of the Freinet movement. In the senior classes, it is sometimes replaced by the writing computer. However, the printing workshop has a didactic-methodical role to play in learning to read and write. It enables the child to comprehend the letters, to sensually experience structure, to compose, connect and finally to create a visible text.

Initial Reading and Writing

The children's learning to read and write is closely linked to „free expression“, free text, the printing workshop and letter writing. In this context, writing always means communication; reading means that I can learn something new. It is not a senseless exercise. Children who first come to school want to learn to read and write, even more so if it makes sense. In Freinet pedagogy, initial reading and writing is not merely left to the children's exploratory learning. C. Freinet developed a method for first writing attempts, which bases itself on the child's free drawing. It goes from drawing to writing, from writing to printing. The printing workshop gives the children a direct opportunity to deal with letters and sentences that can be grasped in the truest sense of the word and that is, at the same time, synthetic-analytical which is something a computer cannot do.

Newspaper and Letter –Writing.

Newspapers and letters are designed on a regular basis with the help of a computer. This, too, is the result of the printing workshop and the free work. Here, the didactic opportunity arises to „give the children the word“. Many Freinet classes have a so-called correspondence class with whom they exchange their learning and life experiences or create a newspaper. In a unified Europe, correspondence becomes significant on an even wider scale. International exchanges are prepared in the classes. Through the publications the children can learn from one another and widely exchange their experiences and their work.

Class Diary

In a class in which the children can pursue their own learning interests, it makes sense to document the pupils' work. This documentation is done for each pupil, it is probably done by the teacher, too, or by a group of children who have taken on the task of documenting for a certain period of time. In the Freinet class, most of the time one or several pupils keep a class diary. It is a means of self-organizing the lessons and of keeping the continuity of events in the learners' group. The children's individual work is documented by sticking the finished and unfinished work products on a large piece of paper which is attached to the wall, and by noting them in a work book.

Exploratory Learning

Free expression also gives an impetus to work projects and experiments. Work card indexes, work books, a corner where experiments can take place or a workshop all help. Yet, in all areas of learning the principle prevails that it is not necessarily knowledge, but discovering and exploring that are crucial for the child's development. All forms of learning which are inquisitive, exploratory, independent and

self-active are the direct consequence of individual and self-responsible lesson planning and of the principle of the child's free expression. Exploratory learning also requires an adequately equipped and furnished classroom. For that reason, C. Freinet has divided the classroom into work areas or work spaces.

In order to facilitate learning that is exploratory and true to life, the lessons take place out of school in local institutions whenever possible. These excursions are then evaluated by everyone and their results made available to other classes through the school newspaper.

„Workshops“

In Freinet teaching, the practical work that takes place in group workshops plays an important role. The class discusses the setting up of different workshops and, true to the principle of self-determination, a vote is taken. The children are able to work on different issues and in different groups. The workshops are essential to the children's work, they are used for experimenting, reading, printing, but also for role play and individual work. The way the classroom is organized and furnished must meet the children's needs, and it must be possible to change and redesign the classroom.

One part of the classroom is turned into a reading corner which mostly consists of a document collection and a work library. Here, the children find all the relevant information they need for their work. The work library is designed to motivate the children to add their own works to it. Thus, the children of a Freinet class find their own work in their class work library. That lends great value to their work, at the same time the children can use this library to learn from one another. School books which have been written by grown-ups are often refused because they do not leave the child enough room for deciding on how he wants to structure his studies.

Learning Aids

The learning aids have to ensure that the pupils will reach the official learning objectives. Freinet pedagogy also provides some general teaching and learning materials, but they widely differ from class to class. The children will need numerous and varied learning aids and work tools, and it is important that they learn to look after them themselves – with the help of the teacher. Work materials such as brochures, reports or models are produced by children for the children of the class. However, there are also materials which have been produced by the cooperative of Freinet educators for the periods of „individual work“ (card indexes, training courses, books...). Both types of materials serve the children as so-called instruments of self-education.

Evaluation of the Work Results

At the end of work, the children take stock of the day. They present the results of their work to the group. Their works are discussed and, if necessary, criticized. These discussions form the basis for their future work.

At the end of a working week the children take stock of the week. Their work is documented and assessed publicly in the class (if possible, no marks are given) Gathering at the end of the week also serves the purpose of rounding off and presenting work results, of implementing necessary changes in

the class etc. It is also important that the children are given the opportunity to present themselves. That day, the schedule for the week ahead is also drawn up by the entire learners' group. This plan includes joint work projects, coordinates the individual works, and sets a date for excursions and so on. The work projects which are determined during daily or weekly planning are compulsory. In order to ensure that the work projects remain manageable and easy to control for both teachers and pupils, each pupil determines, at the end of stock taking, the tasks he intends to take on within the next days in his individual work plan.

The parents are informed on a regular basis of their child's work. The following example of a feedback sheet (example of assessment) was designed at a Dutch Freinet school. The feedback sheet presents an opportunity, albeit not a fully developed and ideal one, to give the parents feedback. In this case, teachers and parents have agreed on this form of periodical information.

Summing up (and Problems)

Celestin Freinet makes his political ideas and their integration in his educational concept very clear. The emphasis of school and educational work lies on raising people's awareness through

- Self-administration
- Self-organization
- Practising democratic ways of life
- Taking on responsibility and
- Personal expression in a critical community.

Consequently, in teacher training, too, the Freinet movement never allowed for an educational hierarchy to develop, which means that it realized its educational ideas not just in school, but also within the teaching profession. Freinet teachers meet amongst each other, exchange their experiences and support each other during further training as Freinet teachers. It can be assumed that a personal training course would contradict the political concept of Freinet pedagogy.

Most of the Freinet teachers are opposed to an apolitical education that fails to consider the social circumstances in which children grow up. Freinet pedagogy with its „free expression‘, intends to lead the individual to commit himself to a sociopolitical struggle against meaningless and alienated work and passive consumer behaviour, and for a self-determined life.

Teaching that is organized according to Celestin Freinet's intentions pays attention to the pupils being able to learn from one another, so that a climate of equality can develop. In this sense, Freinet pedagogy is a concept which expressively provides, and if possible realizes, democratic structures for its pupils. To learn how to live democratically also means to be prepared for conflicts and to have the courage to tackle disputes in a democratic society.

Freinet teachers may count on it that there will be conflicts in the classroom, but also conflicts with the parents who are not always able to cope with their child's self-determination, and finally with teaching colleagues who pursue different aims in their teaching or simply work according to traditional methods. Potential points of conflict are numerous.

In order for self-determined work to happen, the role of the teacher has to change fundamentally. It is his task to provide a prepared and relaxed environment, to stimulate and encourage, to organize, coordinate and help. He is also responsible for the curriculum, documentation and comparing the

children's progress.

Parent work is an essential part of the educational work of the Freinet teacher. The parents being able to identify with what happens in Freinet classes is of extreme importance to the children's development. For the children, there must be no educational contradictions between the parental home and their school. Therefore, the teachers will have to explain their work again and again. Parents are invited to work with their children in school. There are some areas where parents have more knowledge than teachers and can teach the children more. That is why Freinet pedagogy seeks effective cooperation between parents and school. Thus, parents become responsible for the education of their children in school, and they actually help to organize the Freinet class or the Freinet school.

One of the most difficult obstacles preventing liberated teaching is the traditional marking system and the related compulsive selection in schools. Freinet teachers always look for opportunities of individual assessment. However, at the end of primary and secondary school a national certificate is issued which translates the pupils' performance into a marking system.

School work which has to be done at a certain point in time presents a further problem. It causes pressure which in turn hampers the children's development. However, there is nothing to say that school work cannot be done at an individual point in time. Why should the children not be able to determine themselves when the time has come that they familiar enough with the subject matter to now do some school work on the subject?

Freinet pedagogy draws its conflict potential and its political strength and effectiveness from the fact that there aren't many Freinet schools, but there are many Freinet classes at national schools. Thus Freinet pedagogy is part of and influences public life. It does not cut itself off in a school of its own. That is precisely why Freinet pedagogy is not an alternative pedagogy, but an educational concept with a clear objective that can be applied within ordinary schools to whose development it has made valuable contributions and will continue to do so in the future.

„How must we organize the educational community so that a human being can receive the best possible education, an education that fulfils his innate and driving desire for education, an education he is given within that community and which sends him back to the larger community as an enriched, more valuable and active member? Or, in short, how should an educational community be designed in which and through which a human being can develop his individuality and grow into a personality.“⁴⁶

The Jena Plan Schools according to Peter Petersen Origins.

During the early twenties of our century, Peter Petersen was asked by the town of Jena to build up university training for elementary school teachers and to find a new basis for the relationship between educational theory and practice. At that time, Peter Petersen was headmaster at the Lichtwark school in Hamburg-Winterhude.

The school had been founded on the basis of the school reform movement with the aim of preparing young people to participate in a self-determined and responsible manner in the democratization of society, also, it is thought, with the aim of stripping the growing fascist movement of its intellectual

influence.

This school strove to take „all of life“ into the school, to find learning spaces outside school, to overcome the division of disciplines into school subjects and to cultivate a form of work instruction that would enable the young people to follow their interests and learn independently . There was no question that class and religious barriers would be overcome and one big „school community“ would be achieved where parents, teachers and pupils could work together to anticipate the intended new democratic society within their school.

Peter Petersen called his institution the „Institute of Educational Science“, a „training school“ was attached to it; this term created by Petersen was later used at our colleges of education, too.

With the Jena plan one is tempted to reform school from within, because Peter Petersen's underlying educational-anthropological themes provide specific opportunities for application in school practice. The basic concepts help to explain this more thoroughly.

In 1924, Peter Petersen turns Jena university school into a „living space for the child“. In 1937, a Froebel Kindergarten is attached to the school. The Jena Plan effectively becomes the starting form for the design of many schools, i.e. it is not a ready-made educational concept according to which a school has to function, but it is a „platform“ from which we can „start“.

At the end of the second World War only a few schools work according to the Jena plan. The sixties see the rising of a Jena plan movement in the Netherlands which today comprises 200 primary schools. Inspired by that movement, a school reform from within based on Petersen's principles has been developing in and around Cologne since 1974. There are approximately 20 schools in and around Cologne that claim to have adopted the Jena plan.

In the newly-formed German states, too, the Jena plan has been rediscovered⁴⁷

Peter Petersen – Life and Work

- 1884 born on 26th June in Großenwiehe near Flensburg
- 1904 German A-levels, studies at Leipzig, Kiel, Kopenhagen and Posen universities. Peter Petersen studies Protestant religious Education, English language and literature, history, Hebrew, philosophy and national economics.
- 1908 doctorate in Jena
- 1909 Petersen takes his degree in grammar school teaching. Assistant teacher in Leipzig, senior teacher at the Johanneum in Hamburg
- 1912 board member of the German Union for School Reform persistently bases his work on reform pedagogical principles
- 1920 habilitation at Hamburg university

Teacher and headmaster at the Lichtwark school,
a reform pedagogical grammar school in Hamburg

- 1923 Petersen is offered a chair in educational science at Jena university
- 1924 the university school is turned into a living place for the child
- 1927 conference in Locarno of the New Education Fellowship
- 1928 study and lecture tour in America
- 1937 honorary doctorate at Athens University
- 1945 dean at the faculty of social education at Jena University
- 1948 Petersen resigns as dean
- 1950 the university school is closed by the East German socialist party SED
- 1952 Petersen dies in Jena and is buried in Großenwiehe.⁴⁸

Basic Concepts

I can only vaguely illustrate the system of educational ideas. Peter Petersen's written work is compulsive reading, it is hoped that this illustration of the basic concepts will motivate the reader to do so.

The Jena Plan

„Peter Petersen, founder of the Jena Plan Pedagogy, was offered a chair at Jena University in 1923. In 1924, he began to change the existing university training school according to his findings and educational concepts... Following an extremely dynamic development of the Jena School Concept, including many forms of simultaneously run school development research projects at the university training school, Petersen presented his concept in 1927 – which was already widely known – to the educational world community on the occasion of the world congress of the New Education Fellowship in Locarno ⁴⁹ During this world congress the term „Jena Plan“ was found (following the already existing categorizations like „Winetka Plan“, „Dalton Plan“⁵⁰). Like other reform concepts the Jena Plan Pedagogy was successfully received all over the world. „The small Jena Plan“ was published in numerous countries and, if the number of editions is anything to go by, it is to this day the number one educational bestseller“⁵¹

The Jena Plan is not a teaching method! It is rather an educational concept for „a free general elementary school following the principles of New Education.“⁵² In this context, it is important to note that Petersen calls the Jena Plan a Ausgangsform (starting form).

The „Ausgangsform“ (Starting Form)

Understanding the term „Ausgangsform“ is essential to applying the Jena Plan. This starting form distinguishes the plan essentially from other school concepts or models. It becomes real and describable in the „Erziehungsidee“ (educational idea), in what is supposed to be an educational situation, in the basic educational forms and above all in the notion that the educational idea and the educational situation will take different shapes depending on the specific individual and social circumstances. Figuratively speaking, Peter Petersen provides the educators with a form from which they can „start“, and with a plan. However, within the context of that plan (the Jena Plan), it is they who are responsible for the way they choose to reach their goal. What was tried in Jena deliberately and consciously under the recognized conditions of the state school was never intended to be a model for a specific type of school (for example, the elementary school). Peter Petersen assumed that the Jena Plan „can be realized in any school on the condition that the educational idea guides all educational behaviour and can freely seek to find its true expression.“⁵³

„It was the object of this first experiment: to carry out work in a primary school class according to the principles of a work and community school in such a way that it would not fail anywhere due to financial restraints, in other words, that it should not fail due to anything outside the educational will. We have held on to this in yet another respect: no special learning aids, books, exercise books, writing instruments, illustration materials have been used...“⁵⁴

School that Serves the Idea of Education

What does the „educational idea“ consist of, by which all educational behaviour should be guided and that should lead to a basic understanding of the starting form?

Erziehungsidee (Educational Idea)

Peter Petersen starts to develop his educational idea by asking the following question:

How must we organize an educational community in which and through which a human being can develop his individuality and grow into a personality?⁵⁵

When discussing the educational idea it is important to know that the small school (in Jena) helped the children to respect and understand „the thinking and wishes of groups with different outlooks on life“ and to seriously learn „the art of cooperating with people who have different ways of thinking“. According to Peter Petersen's educational idea, education takes place in and through the community. Unintentionally, the individual contributes his skills and knowledge to the true community and by doing so, he finds meaning in life: the individual becomes a personality by living in the community.⁵⁶ When one looks at it from that point of view, the question of the optimum teaching method becomes secondary to the fundamental question how teaching can unrestrictedly serve the „two ideas of the respect for life and for education, that is the idea of setting free the human side in every child“⁵⁷

Only when a true and rich community life is achieved and functioning, didactic and methodical ideas and efforts, which are undoubtedly the „special tasks“ of school, can rightfully unfold and fulfil the

educational purpose for which they have been designed. By living in the community the human being experiences that there is a need for him, and that he has the ability, to develop and cultivate within himself something which only humans are capable of: kindness, sympathy, understanding, respect, faithfulness, consideration, forgiveness, joy (and so on)... however, one experiences just as much that a community will not even begin to exist or will be destroyed if only one of the mentioned actions is not carried out, if only a single human emotion is being refused...

„If we want to reach above the class, if we want more than a social group, we must organize our groups and let them live in such a way that there is room within them for human interaction and therefore for true community development.“⁵⁸

In a community that is organized along these educational lines education means the development, realization and shaping of the individual according to his potential and each individual develops following his own educational law.

For Peter Petersen did not believe that the school which so adequately represented the new democracy could merely be based on new school methods (let alone the „old“, tested ones). What is really needed for every form of community life that sets out to achieve the education of the young person, is the „educational situation“:

Peter Petersen describes this educational situation as a problematic life circle of children and adolescents cantering around a „Führer“ (leader)⁶⁰ who, with educational intentions in mind, arranges this circle in such a way that each member of the life circle is urged, (provoked, driven to come out of his shell) to act as a whole person.⁶¹

Nearly 60 years after this quote by Petersen (which is only a rough summary) was first mentioned – I have kept the term „Führer“ on purpose – and with the historical knowledge we now have, we may view such a quotation rather sceptically. Peter Petersen's pedagogy was and still is committed to educating the young person to become a democratic member of his community. The idea of the starting form is an indication of the freedom to shape educational life, not of an allegiance that has to be pledged. On the contrary, as I see it, Peter Petersen's pedagogy is designed to protect the educated person from the influences of a totalitarian policy.

The Jena Plan schools which are being founded today view Peter Petersen's Jena Plan as the starting form for working on the specific educational and social difficulties that are present in the respective specific situations. The freedom of development is the overriding principle of the Jena Plan. This constellation leads to different focuses and development processes depending on the situation. If one looks at it that way, there are no „ready-made“ Jena Plan schools anywhere in the world.

Wherever one finds Jena Plan schools, one finds schools on their way to their own educational form. The search for this form is always an attempt to find a reasonable and responsible solution to the specific problems of children, teachers and parents in a particular place. In their work,

teachers develop a consciousness, a concept which, in connection with Peter Petersen's idea of a having a plan, leads them in a developmental process to the realization of their ideas of what a „free, general elementary school“ of their time should look like.

Peter Petersen called his school a free, general elementary school because it takes on children of all classes irrespective of their religious, social and family backgrounds, and because it consciously unites special school children, boys and girls, who are amongst the „most talented“ of the town...

For Peter Petersen, school is a place for living and therefore it is necessary and crucial to facilitate community life in school and through school. Life has to be real in every respect so that a child can truly learn in school to become understanding and kind-hearted. As in real life (that is what the „leadership of teaching“ has to achieve) the child must be enabled to experience directly what it means for him and, of course, for the other children or for teachers and parents to be understanding and kind-hearted, what it means to refuse or deprive himself or others of that kindness. The learning space according to Peter Petersen should be organized in a stimulating and homely way. Its „preliminary arrangements“ are down to the teacher, whereas the children are responsible for organizing the details and looking after it. The teacher has to prearrange school life and the lessons in such a way (through a pedagogy of teaching) and to give such help during the lessons (through a pedagogy during teaching) that the children can succeed in finding, working on and solving problems, in finding the peace and quiet to think something through to the end or to complete a task. From that aspect, the Jena Plan School is always a school of silence and quiet. This basic attitude is reinforced by the conscious culture of the educational forms.

The Basic Forms of Education

Peter Petersen talks of four so-called basic forms of education which in turn represent an essential concretization of the starting form. Therefore they can be found in every Jena Plan school:

- Conversation,
- Work,
- Celebration and
- Play

Peter Petersen believes that out of the four activities of the basic educational forms talking with each other is, from the point of view of child development, the most important form of communication. Human speech encourages the child to become active. It includes all forms of conversation we are familiar with in teaching: the conversational circle, full class discussion, group discussion, reports, debate, training course, lecturing, breakfast...

:Play as a basic form of education means that at the Jena Plan school there must be sufficient opportunities for the children to play „freely“, with the teacher observing. Play is viewed as an entirely different area of human development than, for example, work⁶². Examples: free play, educational games, functional play during P.E. or at break time, drama, ...

In the work situation, Petersen distinguishes between „group work“ and „courses“. During group work the children are seated at tables in their regular groups. They are allowed to pick their seat and choose their working partner. In Dutch Jena Plan schools, this form of group work is called „blokperiode“. During these daily periods of more than 100 minutes the children work on tasks from the areas of mathematics, language, nature and cultural orientation, they plan the daily morning and end-of-the-week celebration, the reading circle, and so on. Often, the work is agreed on in a „work contract“; the child is responsible for keeping that contract (with the help of the teacher). By work we mean mostly the child's independent and educational work that can be carried out in the familiar forms of individual

work, partner work and group work or in a course. A learning aid for independent work⁶³ „...is an object that is loaded with unambiguous didactic intentions, it has been produced so that the child can use it to freely and independently educate himself.“⁶⁴

Celebration according to Peter Petersen is an activity which is essential to a school that sees itself as a living and working community. It is the essential element in creating a community. It is presented or led by the teacher and organized independently by the pupils; it takes place in the regular group, the grades or the entire school community. What is being celebrated is, for example, the beginning of the week in a school assembly, the start of a project with a theatre play or simply a pupil's birthday...

Weekly rhythm and rhythmic weekly work schedule

The teaching sequence of a Jena Plan school is the result of the rhythmic sequence of the basic forms of education and the educational situations. The conventional time table is not suitable. In the Jena Plan concept, the so-called rhythmic weekly work schedule is an alternative to the time table, it shows what activities will take place and in what order:

- the weekly work schedule shows how one strives for a rhythmic order by creating conversational, play, work and celebratory situations.
- Monday morning starts off with a celebration, a conversation.
- The weekly work schedule allows for a few periods of group work.
- The last school day of the week ends with a celebration, a conversation.
- For the last school day of the week, the weekly work schedule includes a period of free work – taking on responsibility.

School life, teaching and the sequence of the basic forms of education are supposed to swing in a natural week rhythm. The weekly work schedule is not primarily the basis for the weekly work periods; it is supposed to facilitate learning in interdisciplinary contexts on the basis of the basic forms of education. Peter Petersen has grave doubts whether the „rag time table“ with its permanently expanding combinations of subjects is a suitable way of making the world accessible to children. He designed the so-called „rhythmic weekly work schedule“ that structures the child's week in a meaningful manner, creates open spaces and obligations alike, it leaves room for teacher-centered teaching where it is educationally appropriate, but reduces its dominating influence in everyday school life.

For Petersen the weekly work schedule is an essential part of a school that views itself as a „place for living“ and not as a teaching institute. While the latter is simply interested in the pupil, the Jena Plan is interested in the child as a „whole person“. The classroom must not remain a „lecturing cell“, the time table must no longer cloud the view for the contexts (of life).

Ways of Grouping Children

One of the most distinct external features of Jena Plan teaching is the way the children are grouped. These are the possible age spans in the groups according to Petersen:

- 4 to 5 years – infant group
- 6 to 9 year olds

- 9 to 12 year olds
- 13 to 14 year olds
- 15 to 16 year olds

Peter Petersen has always vividly opposed the classical teaching structure and an age homogeneous class structure. The myth of a homogeneous learning group does not exist in the Jena Plan.

There are examples of the consequences of age-related teaching which goes back to J. Amos Comenius, such as the bureaucratization of school, teaching materials that are scheduled for one year only, for a month, for a week (for example, a weekly topic), for a day. By putting school children into age groups one wrongly assumes that children of the same age have automatically reached the same developmental stage, and that they are therefore capable of coping with the „same“ level of teaching. Another consequence of structuring a school according to year grades is that all pupils are expected to reach the same objectives at the same time, that the curriculum is fitted around the school grades and, finally, that children run the risk of having to repeat a year...⁶⁷ In a school without year grades there would be no need for children to repeat a year! In a school without year grades the pupils would still reach the learning objectives set by the curriculum, maybe sooner, maybe later, depending on the individual child's level of development.

In the different Jena Plan schools the children can join the following groups:

- The regular group,
- The table and work group,
- The standard group,
- The free choice group

Each child is attached to a „regular group“ into which the year grades are dispersed whose bankruptcy Peter Petersen did not tire to point out. Children of different ages are joined together in this group on purpose. As a rule, it should span three year grades. The regular group is, in turn, embedded in the school community. Peter Petersen only talks of a regular group, however, if the age heterogeneity is made use of in an educational sense. In the regular group the children are taught by the same teacher for several years. One teacher is responsible for the same regular group throughout primary school. The children have different teachers in their standard and free choice groups.

Within the regular group we distinguish „table and work groups“. The children are free to pick these groups themselves. The table group's function can best be observed during group work.

The children can also be put into so-called „standard groups“ for the purpose of differentiated and performance-related work. These groups take in children who have reached almost the same level in a certain area of learning. Programme elements at a Jena Plan school that are organized in this way are called standard courses. From fifth year onwards, the standard courses are simultaneously organized on a daily basis throughout the school. Thanks to the introduction of standard courses there is no longer the need for children to repeat a year. Each child can absorb the teaching matter according to his individual learning pace, since the child is put into the group on the basis of the standard he has reached. As ever, the regular group remains each child's home base. For the purpose of individualizing learning „free choice groups“ can be introduced, too. In that case, the child chooses for a certain period an activity he is particularly interested in. Through his own choice the child commits himself to sticking with that course until a new selection is available.

It is possible to change from the school introductory groups to the floodgate groups six times a year. Changing from the group for the six to nine year olds to the group for the nine to twelve year olds can be done once a year. The school introductory phase is compulsory from the age of five and is designed as a pre-school institution. Here, the children mainly learn „to go to school“, i.e. to independently find their way around the institution and settle in.

This organizational pattern which was successfully developed at this particular school is child-oriented and flexible. As defined by the starting form according to Petersen each Jena Plan school develops its own organizational pattern.

That type of organizational structure for primary schools can only be realized if the teachers do not just have the freedom to apply different methods but – as in the Dutch example – the „freedom of the school“ becomes the overriding principle of school life. Only then is it possible for a Jena Plan school that is based on Petersen's guidelines and the four basic forms of education to develop a rough structure according to the educational ideas of teachers, parents and children⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, the advantages of that particular type of primary school organization lie in the flexibility of the system and the opportunity for the children to switch groups – there is no longer the need to repeat a year – , in the child-oriented organization of the introductory school phase and in abandoning grades in favour of age heterogeneous groups.

This type of organization facilitates as far as possible individualization of teaching and complies with the elements of Jena Plan Pedagogy in an educationally responsible manner.

Characterizing instead of Marking

Wherever possible, and legislation permitting, no marks are given. The traditional school report is replaced by an objective and a subjective report. The objective report is the basis for communicating and agreeing with the parents on the joint educational work.

The subjective report is the basis for a final session with the child and at the same time it is the „school report“ the child takes home⁷⁰. It is hardly worth mentioning that marks and school reports lose their hypertrophied importance when a type of learning is cultivated that is based on the interests of the child. However, it is worth mentioning that efforts are being made to find ways of acknowledging and individually assessing the children's achievements in an educationally responsible manner. There is no

justification for uniformity at a Jena Plan school.

Examples of Characterizations Replacing Marks

The form of assessment has hardly anything in common with our understanding of traditional marks. Children and parents are given precise information. In that sense, the examples quoted here certainly tell us a lot more than the marking system we are familiar with. Within the bounds of legislation, each Jena Plan school will develop its own forms of characterization. Marks are only given when the child goes on to secondary education

Summary

Individualizing teaching by providing educational situations is an essential element of school life according to the Jena Plan. At the Jena Plan school the individual process of meaningful and exploratory learning is at the forefront of the educational work. For example, what someone thinks about certain issues at the end of a conversation is his business. Therefore, discussing the problems and transmitting specialist knowledge are two separate things. The knowledge provides the necessary base for a meaningful dialogue. If the knowledge is not used, it remains sterile. If it is not experienced, physically, rationally and emotionally, there will be no integration, then, we are only feeding the memory during teaching...

A school concept based on the Jena Plan offers teachers the opportunity to organize school and a school introductory phase in a flexible way that suits the children's needs. School is no longer organized in year grades. Regular groups with the educational advantage of age heterogeneity, learning from and with one another; highly differentiated and individualized teaching, pupils' participation in planning and school organization, focussing on conversation and celebration and freedom of school organization on the basis of a starting form all characterize the Jena Plan concept of school.

„To turn school in its entirety into something new means to radically and completely change all of school life. And then, it is a matter of placing teaching into that setting and of carefully checking and putting to the test how it will change if one is forced to continually sustain that new school life, to preserve the new way of thinking, in short: to subject teaching to education, first of all to be an educator, then a teacher.“⁷¹

Such a concept of school is also based on Peter Petersen's hope ...“that those teachers who do not wish to serve the young people as party politicians nor as tools of politicizing denominations, teachers, in fact, who adopt the idea of educational activity as their guiding principle in their daily professional work, are still in the majority.“⁷²

The Jena Plan School is interdenominational, intercultural and rejects exclusion on ideological grounds. Thus, a Jena Plan school is not only a school of the present, but it is also a school of the future.

Montessori's Pedagogy as a Concept of Self-

Education

Maria Montessori – Accessing the Process of Self-Education

Montessori's early research interests centered around the scientific study of attention skills which she called „psychological re-actions“ as well as around experiments on the conditions that stimulate attention. For the purpose of her analysis, Maria Montessori took into account the relevant research works by Jean Gaspard Itard and Eduard Seguin. Maria Montessori included another factor, too: the study of child development, not as a prerequisite for new findings in child psychology, but as an observation of the child's self-expression in specifically designed educational-didactic situations which allow him to develop freely.⁷³

Montessori regards the tedious experiments which Jean Gaspard Itard and Eduard Seguin encouraged her to carry out, but which remained unnoticed, as her first contribution to education. The essential experimental period took place between 1898 and 1900 when she was headmistress at the Scuola Ortofrenica.

Her contribution first materialized when she took on the organization of the Roman children's house in San Lorenzo which brought a finding that would become the focal point of all further research in experimental psychology – the polarization of attention

The polarization of attention is the key phenomenon discovered by Maria Montessori which enabled her to find effective ways of supporting the child's development. She calls this phenomenon „an essential base on which the child's work is built.“⁷⁴ Maria Montessori discovered the phenomenon of the polarization of attention while she was observing a three year old child who was playing with insertion cylinders:

„At the beginning I observed the little one without disturbing her and began to count how often she repeated the exercise, but then, when I realized that she continued to do what she was doing for a long time, I grabbed hold of the chair on which she was sitting, and placed the chair and the girl on the table: soon, the little girl gathered up her game, placed the wooden block on the arms of the small chair, placed the cylinders in her lap and continued with her work. Then I asked all the children to sing a song: they started to sing, but the girl carried on regardless with repeating her exercise, even after the short tune had ended. I had counted 44 exercises; and when she finally stopped, she did so irrespective of the stimuli in the environment that could have disturbed her; and the girl looked around contentedly as if she had just woken from a restful sleep.“⁷⁵

Here is what Maria Montessori wrote on the educational relevance of this phenomenon:

„This seems to be the key to education: to recognize these precious moments of concentration in order to use them in the teaching of reading, writing, arithmetic's, later of grammar, maths and foreign languages. Incidentally, all psychologists agree that there is only one way of teaching: to rouse the pupils 'deepest interest and with it their vivid and continuous attention.“⁷⁶

This discovery enabled Maria Montessori to gain access to the child's self-educative process. She trusts in a skill which is only present in the child: the absorbent mind:

We absorb, we fill ourselves with impressions and keep them stored in our memory, but we never become one with them, just as the water remains separated from the glass. The child, on the other hand, undergoes change: the impressions do not simply penetrate his mind but they shape it. The impressions are incarnated in it. As it were, the child creates his „spiritual flesh“ by dealing with the objects in his environment. We have named this form of mental activity the absorbent mind.“⁷⁷

Adults take in knowledge with the help of their intelligence; the child absorbs it with his psychic life. That is precisely how the different nature and quality of early childhood intelligence and activity manifests itself.⁷⁸ Children are different!

Chronological Table of Montessori's Life and Work

1870	Maria Montessori is born on 31st August in the small march town of Chiaravalle.
1876 – 1890	attends primary school and secondary schools in Rome
1890	student of mathematics and natural sciences at Rome University
1891	takes the final examination in a preliminary course in medicine, fights a persistent battle to become the first woman in Italy to study medicine. She represents Italy as a delegate during the international Women's Congress in Berlin. On her return, she starts to read literature on disabled children. She is impressed by the works of the French doctors Itard (1774 – 1838) and Seguin (1812 – 1880). She is convinced that these children can be better helped through education than through mere medical care.
1897/98	attends lectures on education
1898	birth of her son Mario Montessori
1902	she translates Seguin's entire works into Italian and discovers that Seguin demanded as early as 1866 that his method should be applied to educating healthy children, too.
1907	the first „Casa die bambini“ for healthy children opens in San Lorenzo
1908	the „Casa die bambini“ opens in Milan with Anna Maccheroni as headmistress

1909	first international training course for nearly 100 teachers. Her first book is published: „Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicate all'educazione infantile nelle case die bambini“.
	Maria Montessori adopts his concept of the „sensitive periods“
1917	first visit to Holland. Meets up with the biologist Hugo de Vries.
1922	the famous Montessori house for children in Vienna is founded by Lilli E. Peller-Roubiczek. Emma Plank-Spira, Anna Freud and others also belong to the Viennese Montessori – circle.
1923	In March visit to the Montessori school in Vienna where the book „The Child in the Family“ is published.
1924	Second visit to Vienna
1925	Training courses all over the world. They contribute to Montessori Pedagogy being spread and recognized world-wide.
1949	The book „The Absorbent Mind“ is published in Madras.
1952 (Holland)	plans for a trip to Ghana. Maria Montessori dies on 6th May in Noordwijk on Zee

Criticizing School

The reasons for changes in education are always manifold. Maria Montessori observed children under a certain aspect and with great sensitivity. During her observations, she discovered what children need for their development in order to develop by themselves following their „inner construction plan“ and how she could help them to help themselves. She also looked at the children's developmental needs and produced adequate materials that would support that development. While the world looked on in astonishment she showed what great achievements children were capable of with the help of these materials if they were allowed to work with them (on themselves) in the freedom of their own responsibility. By doing so, Maria Montessori made a great contribution in our century to making school more humane.

„If learning were restricted to mere receiving it would not be much more effective than writing sentences on water; for it is not the reception, but the self-activity of comprehension and the strength we need to use knowledge again which enables us to own that knowledge.“⁷⁹

In her book „l'Autoeducazione...“ Maria Montessori takes a critical look at the traditional educational

practice:

While the (traditional teacher) sees himself as the „creator of the child’s mind“ education according to Maria Montessori means „self-creation“.

In her dispute with J.F. Herbart she refers to the problems of „producing“ interest and attention: „to artificially make oneself interesting which means to make oneself interesting to someone who has no interest in us is a very difficult task, indeed. For hours or years to tie not just one, but numerous persons to us through interest who have nothing in common with us, not even age: that is a superhuman task“...“(Comprehending and learning – the author) is a work which happens within us and which he (the teacher – the author) cannot command.“⁸⁰

Maria Montessori further criticized the „dominant principle of economy“ in school – as much as possible in as little time as possible –after all, the curriculum has to be fulfilled.

At the centre of Maria Montessori’s pedagogy, however, is the phenomenon of the polarization of attention.⁸¹ In order for this phenomenon of focussing on the child’s „inner“ work and development to come about, specific educational conditions have to be established.. Above all, Maria Montessori mentions a prepared and relaxed environment, the freedom of the child to develop by himself, taking into account the sensitive development phases of the child and the teachers’ dealing respectfully and lovingly with the child.

About the prepared environment

The prepared environment does not only provide the educational structure, but it is its indispensable prerequisite.

In it, the development materials are offered to the children after they have been arranged according to didactic aspects. As there are

- The development materials for the exercises of daily life, which „...help the person to keep his inner balance, his emotional health and his sense of direction under the present circumstances of the outside world.“⁸²
- The development materials for developing the child’s sensory perception and
- The so-called didactic materials for the development of the child’s mathematical, linguistic and scientific skills.

In Montessori pedagogy, the materials for the exercises of daily life include, for instance, „ exercises in pouring something“ „exercises in spooning“, „exercises in taking care of oneself, for example: cleaning one’s nose or combing one’s hair“, „exercises in looking after the environment“, or simply „carrying a chair“. Among the sensory materials we find exercises for improving the sense of hearing with sound boxes, exercises for the improvement of the sense of touch with materials of different grades of roughness and many others. Among the most renowned and famous ones are the didactic materials in mathematics, for example the „blue and red sticks for first counting“, the „ pink tower and the brown steps for understanding dimensions“, or the „ binomial cube for first understanding basic mathematical structures“,⁸³

The adapted, prepared and relaxed environment must be of a nature that encourages the child’s independence and enables him to build (increasingly organize) his or her personality through his own

activity. That, in turn, is only possible by interacting with the environment.⁸⁴ The environment must be structured clearly and easy to grasp for the child.

„With the material, we offer the child structured stimuli, so we do not teach directly as is usually done with small children, but through a structure which is in the material and which the child can acquire on his own. We have to prepare everything in the environment, including all objects, in such a way that the child can carry out every activity independently.“⁸⁵

In addition, the didactically prepared environment must be structured in such a way that it encourages the child to act. The child must have the freedom of action and take the initiative in order to be able to make his own choice from the materials offered to him. The development materials enable the children to develop their intellectual, emotional and motoric ability. During the sensitive periods, the child is particularly successful in doing so. Children can work and learn independently with the help of these materials.

Material Characteristics

We find the following features throughout all the material groups:

- The principle of isolating problems,
- The feature of aesthetics and
- The feature of self-control.

The materials are designed in such a way that the child is able to concentrate on a „problem“ that has to be learned. For example, while studying multiplication the children can concentrate on the learning of multiplication as such by using the multiplication board, without being distracted by complicated mathematical operations. Self-control helps the pupils to develop important qualities and skills: the aim is for the pupils to act responsibly and honestly when controlling their work.

The prepared environment, in which these materials are made available to the children, provides a structured framework for the children's work. The children choose the materials themselves, they can work with them independently or the teacher shows them how they can work with the material. The prepared environment is that type of educational structure which is essential to any form of so-called open teaching. Children need a clear educational framework which helps them to find their way and makes it possible for them to work independently.

Apart from the prepared environment the teacher's behaviour is an essential mainstay of an education which allows the child to become him or herself. The true task of educators or teachers who work with the development materials is to take on a role as mediator between the child and the prepared environment with its development materials. The mediator's role is a very difficult and demanding one. The material is only a point of reference for establishing intellectual ties between teachers who transmit ideas and children who take these ideas on board.⁸⁶ Further fundamental demands on a prepared environment are the result of efforts to create appropriate conditions for the polarization of attention and to give sufficient room to the child to move around as an essential factor for the development of consciousness:

- The classroom should be large enough for the bigger half of the floor to remain unoccupied.
- The didactic materials are put up on shelves at the children's free disposal.

- As far as time is concerned, it is necessary to abolish individual periods.
- A compulsive (rigid) time table and the principle of continuously teaching children in classes are abandoned.
- Free work is at the centre of school work and life.

About Free Work

In free work, the child follows his or her own interests and needs in choosing work materials from the prepared environment. He also decides whether he wants to work on his own or whether he prefers to carry out the work together with another child. He also decides – mostly together with the teacher – whether he needs a demonstration on how to use the materials or whether he prefers to discover it all by himself. Once he has finished working the child will put the material back on the shelf where it belongs in order for the other children to be able to use it. Thus, the children work on the basis of their freedom to decide and become responsible for themselves. According to Maria Montessori, to be free implies above all the freedom for the child, but also for the teacher, to follow their own individual development.

„If, in education, one talks of the freedom of the child, one often forgets that freedom is not equivalent to being left to one’s own devices. To simply set the child free so that he can do what he wants does not mean that he is truly free.

Freedom is always a great achievement, it is not easy to attain. One does not simply gain it by putting an end to tyranny, by breaking chains.

Freedom is structure, freedom has to be built; one has to erect it in the environment and within oneself. This is our true task, the only help we can give the child.“⁸⁷

This process of an intensive personal development, of intensive individual learning, requires an educational structure that is reasonable and acceptable to all involved. To Maria Montessori, the aim of education is to actively encourage the child’s independence and autonomy by letting him do things by himself.⁸⁸ Hildegard Holtstiege quotes Maria Montessori as she uses another description of her educational objective: „To be one’s own master“, a state of being that is synonymous with freedom.⁸⁹

Working with the didactic materials for language, mathematics or Cosmic Education is a vital part of Montessori Pedagogy, but it does by no means represent Maria Montessori’s entire educational concept-. On the other hand, the use of the materials is imperative in individual learning, and their didactic effectiveness and didactic-methodical structure are unrivalled. Let us quote Jean Piaget to illustrate this: for him, there is no doubt that the true importance of mathematical education lies in the intelligent use of concrete objects long before the introduction of symbols.⁹⁰ The didactic material facilitates the intelligent use of concrete objects in the holistic sense of learning with one’s mind, heart and hands. Anybody who is prepared to work with Montessori materials will be able to experience and begin to understand this deeply educational phrase by Jean Piaget, and he will begin to understand what difference it can make to our children’s learning and life. Adults, too, can rediscover mathematical structures by working joyfully.

In order for it to make sense, free work will last for at least two hours of every school day. Children need that amount of time to decide on what work they are going to do, to get involved in and finish their work or even carry out a number of tasks. With the help of the materials, the children work on their own development and at the same time meet the requirements of the curriculum. In fact, the existing

materials cover large parts of the curriculum.

Apart from the free work, there are also periods of tied teaching for Montessori classes. The teacher teaches the entire class or a group of that class while the other children are busy with their work. In Montessori classes, teacher-oriented lessons complement free work. Free work is and must be the rule, not the exception, happening maybe only once a week. In that case, Montessori Pedagogy would not have been completely understood.

A Morning in a Montessori Class

Some days start with the chair circle; on other days, several children are already busy working at 8 o'clock in the morning. The teacher looks out for those who need help. Some children even approach the teacher and ask for help with choosing the materials or with getting used to the material. Most of the children work independently with the help of the materials they have taken from the shelves. Some children will be doing maths work others will be writing a text or practising their spelling. The materials are made up in such a way that the children can learn and work independently and are also able to control their work. The atmosphere allows all children to work in a concentrated manner. Some children are working on their own, others are working in pairs, but they speak only in a low voice. During free work, all the children are always busy and work hard. If a child needs help while the teacher is busy with other children, that child can ask other children for help or simply wait until the teacher is available.

It is very important for all the children to experience that they are responsible for themselves while learning maths, language or sciences. The following are of great didactic importance for the children:

- planning and structuring their work independently,
- Helpfulness,
- Sense of responsibility for people and objects,
- knowing their own limits and abilities,
- Ability to cooperate with others,
- finding their own work pace.

At some schools the children can determine how long the free work should last. Having started the day together or on their own, the children go on to find their own work rhythm which can differ from day to day. If children are free to structure their work, can take breaks without disturbing others, they usually have a two and a half to three hour period of free work before having their first longer break together. During free work the teacher takes notes of her observations and parts of the children's work are documented. Free work ends with a discussion during which the children report on their work.

At the end of break time group teaching resumes. Physical education and fine arts subjects are studied together.

About the lesson

The teacher's task consists in demonstrating how an activity has to be carried out- at the same time she has to avoid the possibility of being imitated. The activity has to speak for itself. The teacher must show to the child what action is required, but she must leave it to the child to carry it out in his own way. She is supposed to help the child to do it himself. And she adds something important to this famous

phrase: ...we should always teach by teaching, not by correcting!

„She (the teacher – the author) must respect the working child without interrupting him. She must respect the child who makes mistakes without correcting him. She must respect the child who is resting and observing the work of others without disturbing him and without forcing him to work. But she must not tire of offering objects to those who may have refused them in the past and who make mistakes. She must do so by stimulating their environment with her care, with her deliberate silence, with her gentle words, with the presence of someone who loves.“⁹¹

Didactic Structure and Documentation

To give children freedom can never mean to leave them to fend for themselves. For the Montessori teacher the child's freedom implies the commitment on her part to have things under control and structure them. She must be able to understand in what order and in what context the individual materials are related to each other, which materials she can first offer to a child, which ones she can offer at a later stage. She must know and handle the materials in such a way that she is able to decide what type of material the child needs at that particular stage in his learning and development process.

The Montessori materials are clearly structured and build on each other. The prepared environment will reflect this structure so that the child can recognize and experience it. Thus the teacher can accompany the child as he develops his personality. Extensive documentation is necessary in order to maintain an overall view what each child of the learning group has already learnt or what work he has been doing. The children help by making up their own documentation. The documentation also forms the basis for completing the work quota books. The work quota books pre(de)scribe the tasks a child has to complete throughout his school life, the child's progress is documented in the form of notes that are written next to the respective quota (task description). The description of the work quota is also based on the development materials, the presumable development the child will take and on the curriculum. It replaces the conventional school report with its marks.

The documentation table constitutes an example. It is designed to make it easier for the teacher to gain an overview of the different pupils' works. The documentation is an important base for the verbal assessment or for describing the pupils' works according to the quota.

An Example of a Verbal Assessment

Dear Victor,

There are many days when you work quietly and with concentration during free work. You are interested in many topics and are able to broaden your knowledge on your own, since your reading speed and comprehension have improved. Carry on practising with the spelling box so that your spelling will improve even more. You have already worked on part of the phonogram chest. Continue that work with further phonograms and use the phonogram tables, too!

In maths, you have done many sums and subtraction with the help of the golden pearls and the chip game and you have worked hard on your homework. You are good at mental arithmetic. Continue to lay rows with the coloured pearls and learn them by heart. You should try and take more care in your written work. Take your time doing it.

Unfortunately, you often argue with other children. Try to talk to them before coming to blows. We are happy to help you find solutions. You could always say what's on your mind during morning circle or write it on the blackboard for the daily conference.

The teacher's notes are in school handwriting. Most Montessori schools use work quota books which have been specifically developed at that school.

About Cosmic Education

The concept of Cosmic Education applies to the entire educational work of Montessori Pedagogy. It is the concept for work in natural sciences, but also for work in mathematics and languages. As it were, Cosmic Education is the superstructure of Maria Montessori's pedagogy. It contains the important central themes and guiding principles of that pedagogy: to enable children to form their own ideas. Only then can they become themselves. Because of the overriding importance of Cosmic Education we will discuss it in some detail.

Maria Montessori created her educational concept of a Cosmic Education on the basis of her own cosmic conception and her own imaginative view of child development. She assumed that the whole of creation was based on a coherent „plan“⁹²: our earth, nature, forms an entirety in which each part, each plant and each living being fulfils a purpose for the whole. In return, the whole serves the individual parts. Thus, a harmonious interplay is achieved and maintained.⁹³ For the purpose of explanation, she quotes some of Darwin's – as she sees it – shining examples of the close interaction between blossoming plants and insects. The insect that flies out to look for nourishment in the flowers unknowingly carries out an altruistic task: pollination of the flowers. That way it safeguards plant cross-breeding and survival. All other living beings carry out a „cosmic“ task in much the same way, for example through the process of their own nourishment or search for food, and thereby contribute to maintaining the harmonious state of purity in Nature.⁹⁴

Within that system man plays a special role. While Nature unconsciously fulfils its predetermined „plan“, he can make decisions. Human beings change Nature. That change is (...we are particularly aware of this today at a time of environmental disasters...) not always positive for Nature – the Cosmos. Maria Montessori sees Man as part of a cosmic plan of creation. Her declared view was that of a unique universal and harmonious society, in which respect, help for the weak, gratitude and love are prevailing virtues. Man's special role consists above all in him being – as we assume – the only living creature on this planet that is aware of his actions, and he can therefore foresee the consequences of his actions. Only Man can think in the future and in the past, which implies that he is the only living being capable of acting responsibly and – in a moral sense – is compelled to do so. Therefore, Cosmic Education is to a large part about educating human beings to be responsible for themselves, other people and the environment. Cosmic Education intends to help the individual to become aware of his cosmic task: to continue the work of creation (not in the sense of an egoistic exploitation, but by „serving“ that creation).

Maria Montessori hoped to unite in harmony human conscience and responsibility through Cosmic

Education. Many of Montessori's ideas may sound idealistic, but they are especially relevant today. She anticipated our own changing attitude towards Nature more than half a century ago. We must not see ourselves as masters of creation, but as part of a whole. For Maria Montessori, Cosmic Education means to enable children to comprehend, understand and feel as complete personalities (as part of the cosmos) Not only is it the task of Cosmic Education to give the child an idea of the interplay of Nature and Man, but also to help the child

form his own idea of growth and development, of existence and of the changes that take place in this universe,, above all to develop his own most individual idea and powers of imagination.

About Imagination

One of Maria Montessori's most fascinating qualities was her ability to establish a link between present day life and the life of a distant past. A simple occasion would be sufficient to motivate her to create a panorama-like overview of human development to this present day, and in doing so, she irresistibly stimulated her auditors' powers of imagination.

Her son Mario Montessori writes that the development of her concept of a „Cosmic Education“ arose from this extraordinary talent to combine present and past through imaginative thinking. As she explained herself:

„The imaginative view differs entirely from mere the perception of an object, for it has no boundaries. Imagination can travel not only through infinite spaces, but also through infinite periods of time; we can travel back through the ages and have a vision of the earth as it was then, with the creatures that were inhabiting it at the time. In order to establish whether a child has grasped something or not, we should try to find out whether he can develop a mental picture, whether he has gone beyond the level of mere understanding...It is the secret of good teaching to view the child's intelligence as a fertile field where the seed can be sown in order to grow in the warmth of a fiery imagination. Therefore, it is not only our objective to make the child understand and even less so to force him to memorize something, but to touch his imagination and inspire his inmost core.“⁹⁵

Maria Montessori does not simply aim at equipping the child with knowledge, neither in teaching nor in her concept of a Cosmic Education. To her, simple knowledge of ecological issues would not have been a sufficient educational factor for the development of the child's mind; her concept does not stop at the stage of understanding, either. Instead, she wants to help people to develop „within themselves“ their own concept (imagination) of their own self, Nature and Creation. She describes a quality in the educational process which even today only few children benefit from. To be able to form ideas and discover truths has a great influence on the development of moral attitudes and humanist values in a person. In this context, I dare put forward the hypothesis that people who have been allowed to form their own ideas are much more morally responsible when dealing with their fellow human beings and the environment. Perhaps this is even the prerequisite for the capacity to live in peace.

Thus, according to Maria Montessori's concept it is possible to check the direction in which we are moving and to develop perspectives which enable us to influence things in such a way that with our ability to adapt, our intelligence and our creativity, we will find a constructive way of dealing with our world – a world that is a wonderful place to live in.

The Child's View

The view of child development in Montessori Pedagogy is also characterized by Jean Piaget's fundamental question:

„- .whether childhood is simply a necessary evil, which one should get rid of as soon as possible, or whether we can understand that childhood has a deeper meaning which the child can show us through a spontaneous activity and which he should savour for as long as he can.“⁹⁶

Having stressed the importance of childhood, Piaget insists that the right to an ethical and intellectual education means more than the mere right to acquire knowledge, listen and obey: it is the right to develop certain invaluable instruments for intelligent behaviour and thought (e.g. the powers of imagination...)

What is needed to achieve that is a specific social environment, but not subservience to a rigid system. Education in school and in the family must be geared towards the full development of the human personality. It should be able to create individuals who are autonomous both intellectually and morally and who respect that autonomy in others by applying the law of reciprocity in the same way it is applied to them.

Such a concept of man and human development contains an educational imperative: it can only be possible to educate ethically thinking people if they are allowed to discover truths by themselves. It is a particular aspect of Maria Montessori's educational concept that it was this great educator's declared aim to assist human beings in their momentous task of undergoing an inner development that is necessary in order to grow from childhood into adulthood.⁹⁷ According to Maria Montessori's educational theory the way a person is integrated into his environment during the first six years of his life is particularly important to human development.⁹⁸ We support the children's development through the exercises of daily life and through exercises for improving sensory perception. We help the children to find order, to learn in personal freedom and make their own progress.

From the age of six, many children enter a new and equally important development stage in their lives. While in Montessori's view they had been busy up to the age of six to integrate themselves into their environment they now begin to „integrate their environment“. Indeed, children of this age begin to ask important philosophical questions relevant to their mental development: „Who made the world?“ „Where does the world come from?“ „Where do I come from?“

The concept of Cosmic Education is not about giving the children final answers that put an end to their thinking and questioning. On the contrary, it is about stimulating the children's powers of imagination in order for them to develop their own concepts in relation to the questions they are asking. Maria Montessori gives us an essential indication as to how we can deal with the children's interest in the universe and the universal, their interest in great and global things: by giving the children the details from which they can infer the whole.

„Children of this age are fascinated because this history concerns them personally. They begin to become aware of their own situation as growing human beings and in a natural way discover the difference between humans and other living beings. There is an interrelation between them and the environment. This interrelation manifests itself in what Maria Montessori calls the cosmic task – all individuals, the individuals of each species, must serve the environment on which their existence

depends, so that it will support their descendants, generation after generation.“99

„Cosmic Education offers the kind of help that activates the new potentialities consolidated on this initial level of integration. The way for this activation has been paved through the indirect preparation at an earlier stage. All experiences the child had previously been offered in the prepared environment were basic experiences, which were needed either for the development of later functions or as a key which allowed him to explore his world and orientate himself in it. Once he has reached this second stage of maturity he should be offered a more comprehensive view of the world, i.e. a view of the entire universe.100

It is not easy for teachers to select details from which the Whole becomes accessible to the children. Martin Wagenschein¹⁰¹ gives us some indication through his Principle of the Exemplary which matches the concept of Cosmic Education beautifully.

Conclusion

Maria Montessori has created a self-contained didactic system. At its centre is the self-determination of the child with the framework and structure being laid down by the educator.

The quality of the development materials for the children's self-education must be stressed. These materials are surely unique in their materialization of an abstract content and in their suitability for children. This pedagogy centers exclusively around the development of the child. In this sense, it is a pedagogy starting from the child for the child.

Much as in the Jena Plan and Dalton Plan Pedagogy, the group structure in a Montessori institution is also age heterogeneous. In Montessori Pedagogy, groups of mixed ages are preferred: 6 to 9 year olds, 9 to 12 year olds, 12 to 15 year olds and so on. I have deliberately avoided the term Montessori School. Wherever possible Montessori Pedagogy can be found in a „Children's House“, where kindergarten and school are no longer separated. Some of these Montessori institutions start with three year old children and go on offer the opportunity to take A-levels.

Like all the other reform pedagogical schools of thought I have presented Montessori pedagogy is a performance- oriented pedagogy. However, it offers more than mere performance orientation. It offers a quality in the dimension of self-determination that a teacher-oriented school does not offer. And because it is child-oriented and uses the development materials it offers the distinct opportunity to concentrate on the child's individuality in the learning process. In this context, I am not afraid to argue that an integrative class, in which disabled and non-disabled children are taught together, would be unthinkable without Montessori Pedagogy. In that sense, Montessori Pedagogy is an integrative pedagogy.

Looking back at the history of Austrian education, time and again we find traces of reform pedagogy, reform pedagogical approaches and the remarkable history of Montessori Pedagogy in Austria. During the late twenties, the school inspector for Vienna had a Montessori school built. Yet, in 1926 the future headmistress of the Viennese Montessori school wrote: „The didactic structure of Montessori education is today relatively well known, but hardly of any interest here.“¹⁰² Today the interest is great, and the hope remains that –as was the case then – there will again be a Montessori school or another reform educational school within the state school system.

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