

## CURRICULUM AND TEACHING APPROACHES IN GERMAN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION - DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE 1970S\*

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**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.** Vorschulische Deutsche Bildung hat sich in letzter Zeit viel reformiert. Deswegen, versuchen wir die Grundbegriffe zu erläutern, die zur Entwicklung frühpädagogischer didaktischer und curricularer Ansätze seit Ende der 1960er Jahre relevant sind. Uns interessiert, welche Ansätze die Diskussion bestimmen und weshalb sie Aufwind erfuhren, damit wir uns die heutige Situation und Stand des vorschulischen deutschen Systems erklären können.

**Schlüsselwörter:** *Curriculum, Bildungsplan für vorschulische Bildung, Lehrmodelle, Lehrtheorien, Frühkindliche Bildung in Deutschland*

### 1. Problem-setting – Introduction

The idea of *self-education* and *self-construction of knowledge* is the centre of most current early education policies. Behind this approach, there is a picture of the child as a competent actor in his world. The aspects, which are emphasized in the various approaches of self-education, are: the acquisition of the subject's perspective, the connection with the self-activity and the educational support of his own active environment acquisition. The younger the children are, the more play space and occasions should be given to them so that they achieve individual experience.

Grell argues that some classics of early childhood education shorten the educational problem-setting. The question of which content, learning experiences and opportunities for action challenge the plasticity of the young child is excluded (Grell 2010). Frobel, for example, manifests himself for plasticity as *instinctual activity* of the child. Frobels education concept of the kindergarten focuses on the idea, that the creating exploring activity can be encouraged by educationally developed game activities and resources which permit activity and challenge culturally, in order to provide life skills, aesthetic and mathematical experiences. The Frobel

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\* This work was possible with the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/107/1.5/S/76841 with the title „Modern Doctoral Studies: Internationalization and Interdisciplinarity”.

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game activities are to be described in the sense that “adults select the objects, which he offers to the child for this *instinctual activity*” (Grell 2010, p.160).

The issue of *selection* of options allocated to children implies the urgent, plural and heterogeneous experience of all the stocks of knowledge and horizons of meaning and interpretation of action in social modernization process.

In sociology, the term *Individualisation* the increase of choices and sense opportunities for shaping your own life. This corresponds with the *Differentiation* of society into different sections, each with its own logic, knowledge stocks and discourses. It must also be decided which contents, themes, and knowledge from the pluralistic cultural funds are particularly suitable to encourage self-educational potential of children appropriately. *The combination of content and topics on the one hand and (self-)education potential on the other hand is the common initial question of teaching, curriculum and curriculum theory.* So, a broader perspective than in the psychology of learning is given, which does not emphasize the plasticity (as a philosophical category), but underlines education ability alone (as an empirical-psychological dimension). In this respect the following presentation offers a perspective that is meant to provoke the psychologically oriented listeners a strangeness experience.

This learning sequence includes a dual purpose. First we want to - systematically - explain and delimit the terms of teaching and curriculum in general educational perspective. Secondly, we want to reconstruct - historically - the development of central curricular and teaching strategies of elementary education in their historical-become since the 1970s. At this point we are even facing the problem of pluralism. Therefore we try to select approaches that can be considered typical for the early development of pedagogical theory.

## **2. Definitions**

### **2.1 What is teaching?**

Systematic analyzes of the teaching concept are in early education rare. Educational theories and models, however, are an integral part of teacher education. Trained as teachers, we were so surprised at first, even slightly surprised when we found out how heterogeneous the concept of teaching is still used in early education. There is for example "Social Teaching" or teaching as "educational attitude", as "teaching methods science", as "design of interaction processes" or "structured planning" (Schelle, 2010, p. 5ff). General educational theories are perceived only weak, probably because they are put on the same side with school teaching and apply as a counterpoint to holistic learning in kindergarten. Such an equation will not meet the general demand of general didactics to provide educational guidance for the various educational fields of activity and occupations (Wigger, 2004). Below we therefore try to outline the field of general didactics, to illustrate the basic issues and basic dimensions of educational thinking.

### ***2.1.1 Historical development***

In the 17th Century was teaching an art. Comenius defined teaching as an „art, to teach all things to all” and that “quickly and thoroughly enjoyable.”

In the 18th and 19th Century teaching was understood as a doctrine that is separate from the theory of education. So, two aspects are already clear: if we look at teaching as an art, then the repertoire of action and the leadership skills of teachers are considered important; looking at teaching as theory, the arrangement of the content and structure of teaching is considered relevant.

Particularly influential in the primary school sector were the didactics Herbart and the resulting lessons teaching by the Herbartians. Herbart developed psychologically based levels of education. The arranging of all themes and topics would have to come from the appropriation process of the student, which takes place at certain cognitive stages and teaching levels (clarity, association, system building and methods using).

In the 20th Century developed a third understanding of teaching. Now teaching was seen as a scientific reflection. So, teaching is seen as a branch of education, that focuses on the condition of teaching and learning moments. Henceforth, we distinguish between general multidisciplinary teaching, subject teaching (Mathematics, Geography etc.), department of teaching (eg. Reading education), the levels of teaching (eg. Primary Education) and type of school teaching (eg. Secondary school teaching) (Köck, 1997, Wigger, 2004).

### ***2.1.2 Object of teaching***

The various definitions of teaching differ in their concept covering. Kron distinguishes between the following term acceptations, which advance from a wide to a narrower concept covering.

What is teaching? (Kron, 1993, p. 43)

1. *Teaching is the science of instruction and learning.*
2. *Teaching is theory or science of instruction.*
3. *Teaching is theory of educational contents.*
4. *Teaching is theory of control of learning process.*
5. *Teaching is the use of psychological instruction and learning processes.*

In the following, we refer to the most comprehensive definition of teaching as a *theory or science of instruction and learning*. Here, it is very clear, that teaching involves more than school and instruction, it involves all areas *which imply any manner of instruction and learning as well as all forms of instruction and learning and all forms which are used in this processes* (Kron 1993, p.43).

Even in the etymological derivation from the Greek verb *didakein* there is a double meaning of teaching: on one hand as instruction/learning and on the other hand as to be taught/to learn. So teaching aims always the mediation between a

learner and a learning object. More precisely: mediation between the material structure of the content and the psychological prerequisites of the learners. The task of teaching, therefore, is to mediate between the thematic contexts and the conditions for learning and motivation structures of learners. The teaching triangle is a basic model, that visualizes the reciprocal relationship between teachers, learners and learning object.

### ***2.1.3 Teaching basic questions***

The exchange relationship between teacher, learner and content can be further differentiated and this leads to fundamental questions in the field of teaching (planning and performing) (Martin 2006).

Teaching basic questions:

- Which learning objectives should be pursued?
- Which educational content should be taught?
- Methods: How should be taught and learned?
- Relationship: How cooperate teachers and learners?
- On which anthropological and socio-cultural conditions is the learning process based?

### ***2.1.4 Teaching theories and models***

General educational theories and models differ in the position in the triangle and in the teaching questions, which are in the center of reflection in every situation. We give below an overview of the main approaches that are often mentioned in educational theories and models (Terhart 2008).

#### *Theoretical teaching theory*

Briefly said this teaching theory approach sets the question of the contents, which are worthy to be taught and learned. To answer this question selection criteria for educational content are developed. As a way to meet the educational content, the methodology has a subordinate, supporting role (gr. Methodos = path).

Education is in the theoretica teaching theory classically conceived as an encounter between selected, appropriate educational materials and the rising generation. Theoretical teaching makes the distinction between material, formal and categorical education.

Material educational theories define education from the content and its objective meaning. Asked is, for example, which educational content classical, exemplary and fundamental is. A task of this educational theory is about putting together a reading canon.

Formal education theories define education starting from the subject. Asked is, which facilities, forces and potentials that could be relevant to the learners in the present and future, should be encouraged. No objective value is attributed to the educational content, rather, this serve as mean and objective.

The Klafki's idea of categorical education aims to overcome the one-sided material and formal educational theories through their dialectical interconnection. "Education is categorical form in the double sense that people 'have opened up, and that they are doing it themselves - thanks to the self-completed, categorical perspectives, experiences of reality" (Klafki 1963).

"If we respect the culture and spirit" of the educational stimulation of the child's self-education, every general education will be "in the centre", inevitable as an educational theory (Terhart 2008, p. 17).

### *Teaching theory based on learning*

In contrast to theoretical teaching theory, this one takes into account several aspects of the didactic triangle. It is based less on normative theory of education, but more on the ideal of value-free empirical science and is therefore close to today's empirical teaching and learning and teaching research. The educational content will become a concrete form through the operationalisation process of learning objectives, so that the intended learning progress is observable and verifiable. The methodological and media package will be upgraded and used the purposive-rational and performance-control of learning outcomes.

A prominent example of this theory is the concept of the structural analysis of teaching of Paul Heinemann. Accordingly, a teacher is in certain condition fields when he wants to stimulate learning. These are, firstly, the socio-cultural and anthropological learning requirements of the members of the study group and secondly the curriculum guidelines. Based on this background, "a teacher has to make decisions regarding the four factors: objectives, contents, methods and media (decision areas). The ... so constructed and conducted lessons generate effects that must be verifiable and be remembered as conditions in the future planning" (Terhart 2008, p.17). The condition fields and the decision fields form the structure of the teaching moments.

### *Teaching based on communication and interaction*

We would like to mention just briefly the approaches based on communication and interaction. These focus on the relationship side of learning, grew out of critical pedagogy and are based on the ideal of power-free, symmetric pedagogical communication. They aim on the development of communicative competence.

### *Constructivist teaching and teaching based on neurosciences*

We would also like to nominate newer approaches such as constructivist teaching and teaching based on neurosciences. These approaches are dominated by the so-called new learning culture, which is explicitly focused on the learning subject. Based on the theory that all knowledge is constructed, teaching is 'in the traditional understanding impossible. The enabling of self-directed learning and

self-development processes are in the centre. In neurosciences findings "regarding the functioning, performance, characteristics and limitations of the human brain are used to underlie a brain-specific learning" (Terhart 2008, p.25).

Strictly speaking, it can therefore be neither constructivist nor neurosciences accepted because the material side of learning as well as methods of teaching are not only excluded, but even deconstructed. The statements of neuroscience are still too general to derive new consequences for the teaching action. Educational principles known as the learning connection are newly re-established.

### *What is a curriculum?*

Closely linked to the concept of teaching are the concepts *curriculum* and *education plan*. All address to the issue of selection of relevant education content and/or objectives. While teaching takes the micro-level of the design of instruction and learning processes in view, education plans and curricula are based on the macro-level of the education control system. These documents are, as Fend shows, the "content master plans", the "core of the macro planning of education system" (Fend, 2008, p.40). In ordinary language, the terms curriculum and education plan, but also canon and education plan, are often equated. In scientific space there are some differences to observe, as the definition of curriculum by Dörpinghaus, Helmer and Herchert shows:

"The concept of the curriculum identifies canonized, most diversified forms of selection and sequence of learning contents, so is it separated from certain terms such as education plan and curriculum" (Dörpinghaus, Helmer, Herchert 2004, p.565). Curricula aimed at the transformation of the culture of a society considered to be valuable in an educational program. "The curricula embody the effort to a common denominator, what an advanced civilization for its core holds" (Fend, 2008, p.40).

The culture is valuable in itself, but it doesn't form itself alone. It is a construct, a result of negotiation processes of various social groups such as churches, business, parties. The result of these negotiations will be the curriculum, that the political system established by law. With the increasing diversity of the modern, election process is more difficult. One of the last designs of curriculum was set by the educator and philosopher Flitner in the 1950s, for the high school. His starting point is the question about the traditions of the culture, which could have prevented the Second World War. Flitner saw the nucleus of western civilization according to the personal principle, "so in the various ways of thinking, which made the people to formulate the centre of thought and responsibility, universal rights and obligations" (ibid, p.48).

The path of development in the western tradition of the personal principle from Greek philosophy up to the Enlightenment is for Flitner the fundamental design principle for the high school canon to be formulated. In this design principle the following is clear: education plans have a subjective significance of life - they focus on the subjective appropriation and transformation of cultural tradition - and they have an objective cultural significance - the passing on of cultural heritage.

You've probably already realized, that the idea of the organization of educational content in education plans corresponds to the macro level of the education control system and the micro level of teaching and learning to the education theory of teaching.

Due to the pluralism problems, appeared in the 1960s a whole new discussion. The question about the objectives and content of education and teaching has been discussed between 1967 and the '80s in the most part under the heading term of *curriculum*.

This term known since Baroque, was in German-speaking countries forgotten and was re-imported in those years from the Anglo-Saxon world. Why? 'Curriculum' a fundamental innovation that should be marked as turning away from the traditional education plan development is? About this we would like to underline three aspects:

1. 'Curriculum' means not only the organization of educational content, but the whole of the educational institution in a targeted and responsible learning processes and their evaluation. It is not only limited to the page of program, but also makes statements on the implementation of learning. In this sense, the comprehensive education plan defined in 1973: "Under Curriculum is a system for the enforcement of learning processes in relation to defined learning objectives understood and operationalized. It includes learning objectives, content, methods, conditions, and evaluations. "

2. Curriculum development is a break of the idea of the cultural tradition. The past-related orientation of classical education plans should be overcome by the view to current and expected future life requirements. This involves a functional-pragmatic, oriented to understanding and applicability education. The question of what qualifications are necessary for coping with life, so what someone needs to live, is the relevant principle of construction of curricula.

3. Curricula should be no compromise of power between different social groups and their performance expectations of the education system, it should be developed with scientific rationality. We have to have in mind the present situation: education planned by the state in a collective way, education seen as a helper of the operationalization and implementation, that was the idea. With the curriculum term these aspects are aimed: right to transparency and rationality of learning objectives, learning content and learning organizational decisions. The problem about the neutral value justification of normative judgments remained unsolved in the scientific theory.

With Fend we can summarize:

"The introduction of the *curriculum* concept represents a new phase of the content and program management in the school. This started not from the cultural traditions that should be represented in the school but from the requirements that the young generation will face in their future. These different starting points separated the theoretical training and the qualification theoretical approaches. Some were oriented in the design on tradition and the ideal images and the others on the pragmatics of coping with life "(Fend, 2008, p.55)

The integration of learning objectives, methods and media level reveals a close relationship between curriculum discussion and the teaching theory based on learning.

### 3. Education plans: Revival of early educational planning in the last decade

In the 1980s, the interest in curricular and pedagogical approaches decreased. In the 1990s, educational reform approaches were deconstructed by motivated groups within the early childhood education in the post-modern time. For the last 10 years the idea of teaching and curricular planning of educational processes is, however with new power in the early educational discourse back.

It should be noted, however, that the discussion on increased curricular planning of educational processes already in the 1990s with the studies on quality of German kindergarten begins. It condenses in the wake of the recommendations of the Forum Education (2001) and the OECD report *Starting Strong* '(2004). The expert groups criticize among other things the traditional educational deregulation of early childhood education sector in Germany.

Recommended is the strength formalization of preschool learning in a clear educational mission and curriculum of kindergarten (see Wustmann 2009, p.326). Finally, the result of the international publications assessment studies contributed importantly to the promotion of discussion about early education curricula (Fthenakis 2003).

In comparison to the education debate of the 1970s is today's fundamental educational debate in the *implementation of education plans* in all provinces. Thus, there is another concept to be discussed. Education plans are a key instrument for politically control. Education plans fix the areas of education and skills to be promoted. With the introduction of educational plans follows a universalization of political responsibility for the areas and objectives of early childhood education processes. Diskowski sees a radical change that he describes, given the traditionally conservative governance as a "departure from the vagueness" (Diskowski 2008, p.157).

The term *education plan* is to be delimited in strict technical systematic language from the curriculum and the teaching plan. Unlike curricula, education plans present no relationship between decisions regarding objectives, content, organization and evaluation of learning. Unlike curricula, they also do not present material collections. They rather name educational areas and skills to be followed, without didactic and methodological statements. Thus for kindergarten, it gives the freedom to implement the education plans depending on the local present situation.

A large consistency exists between the curricula of individual states in the core content areas and in the understanding of education as a self-development into active engagement with the social and physical environments. There are differences in the extent of the liability, the age range and in the teaching orientation. Teaching allows two major trends, "on the one hand a more instructive approach, which is found for example in the Bavarian educational plan and on the other hand a more open educational approach, which assume the self-education process of children" (Wustmann 2009, p.329).

Since we assume that everyone is familiar with the areas of education plans, we will confine ourselves to finally draw attention to a contradiction in many plans. This contradiction is that the post-modern image of the child is placed in many



education plans on an anthropological basis to provide a picture, "that does not even want to fit the process of planning and its implications" (Konrad, 2009, p.8). On one hand, from educational philosophical perspective, holism and self-activity are accentuated as features of early childhood education and the child is described as a small, researcher, discoverer and inventor and, on the other hand, desired levels of education and skills targets are set in analogy to school education.

This contradiction is thus constituted as in the commentaries and plans in the educational debate often between self-education and curricular and systematic learning polarized is. Teaching, but this is an abbreviated view of the problem, but if it was aimed at teaching as the mediation between the child's psychological conditions and external demands, it would be the property, structures of any content or social skills expectations. Exactly this balance between educational learning aid and the self-referential world appropriation competent children should be placed in the centre of teaching model developments in early education.

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