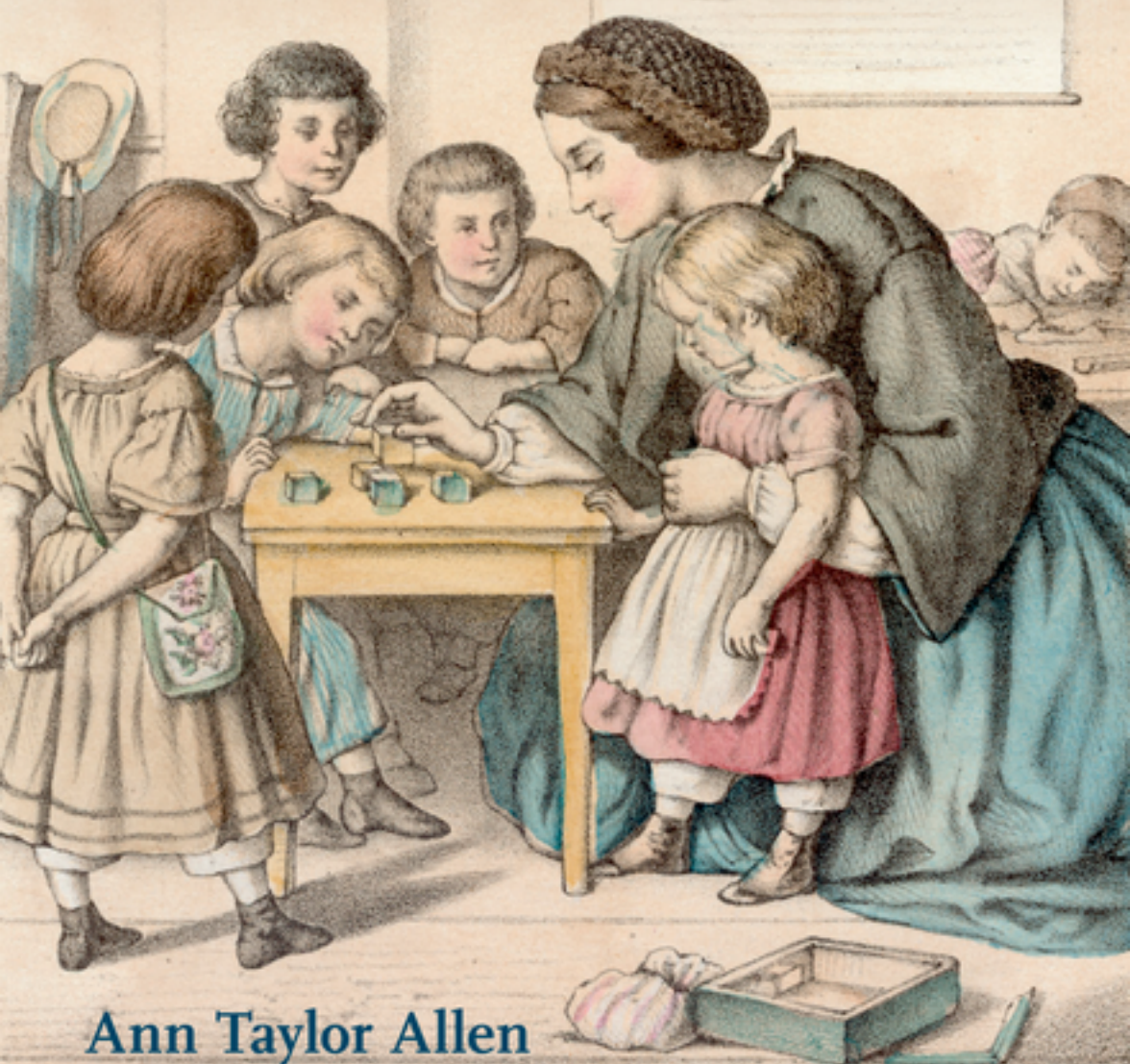


The Transatlantic Kindergarten

Education and Women's
Movements in Germany
and the United States



Ann Taylor Allen

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*Education and Women's Movements
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ANN TAYLOR ALLEN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Allen, Ann Taylor, 1944– author.

Title: The transatlantic Kindergarten : education and women's movements in Germany and the United States / Ann Taylor Allen.

Description: New York : Oxford University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016028407 | ISBN 9780190274412 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780190274436 (ebook epub) | ISBN 9780190274443 (online resource)

Subjects: LCSH: Kindergarten—Germany—History. | Kindergarten—United States—History.

Classification: LCC LB1342.A46 2017 | DDC 372.21/8—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016028407>

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed by Sheridan Books, Inc., United States of America

Frontispiece: Children celebrate Christmas in a Chicago kindergarten about 1900.
National Louis University, Archives and Special Collections, 13-001_B11F4_NLU.

To Nancy,

With thanks for many years of friendship

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Preface

I came to this topic almost by accident. As a newcomer to the field of German women's history in the early 1980s, I was surprised to learn that the kindergarten, which I had of course regarded as a thoroughly respectable institution, actually began as the radical creation of feminists, revolutionaries, and political exiles. I was also fascinated by the transmission of this German invention to the United States, by the network of German–American exchanges that built the kindergarten in both countries, and by the decline and end of these contacts in the early years of the twentieth century. This story seemed to me to exemplify the many modalities of transnational relationships: friendship, cooperation, support, rivalry, discord, rupture.

During the more than thirty years of research and writing of which this book is the final product, I have received many kinds of support and assistance. The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville financed sabbatical leaves and responded generously to requests for library materials, including the Gerritsen Collection of Aletta H. Jacobs, a treasure trove of material on all aspects of women's history. Colleagues in the Department of History encouraged me at many stages of the process. My parents, Ann Updegraff and Franklin Gordon Allen, provided many kinds of support for all my endeavors.

My research has taken me to many libraries and collections, where I have received invaluable assistance. I thank the staffs of Ekstrom Library of the University of Louisville, the William T. Young Library of the University of Kentucky, the Filson Historical Society of Louisville, the Gottesman Library of Columbia Teachers College, the Wheelock College Library, the Library and Research Center of the Missouri Historical Society, the Research Center of the

Chicago History Museum, the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, and the Schlesinger Library of Harvard University. In Germany, I appreciated the assistance I received from the staffs of the State Archive of Hamburg, the State Archive of Berlin, the Helene-Lange Foundation, the German Central Institute for Social Questions, and the Library for Educational Research. I also received a cordial welcome at the Froebel Archive of the University of Roehampton, London. A special thanks is due to Elizabeth Novara and Lauren Brown of the Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries; Sabine Sander and Adriane Feustel of the Archive of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus, Berlin; Mark Burnette and Meghan Ryan of the Archives and Special Collections of National-Louis University, Chicago; James Procell of the Dwight Anderson Music Library, University of Louisville; and Sabina Beauchard of the Massachusetts Historical Society

During my frequent visits to Germany I received financial support from the German Academic Exchange Service, the Fulbright Foundation, and the University of Louisville. Many colleagues made me welcome and gave useful advice, both scholarly and practical. Heinz-Elmar Tenorth and his colleagues at the Humboldt University of Berlin hosted me as a Fulbright Teaching Fellow. Gisela Bock and Juliane Jacobi welcomed me as a guest lecturer at Bielefeld University. Imbke Behnken and Jürgen Zinnecker patiently coached me when I gave my first scholarly talk in German. I look back fondly on the time I spent with all these fellow scholars, and also with Iris Schröder, Meike Baader, Elke Kleinau, Karen Priem, Christa Kersting, Mira Böhm, Ursula Nienhaus, Pia Schmid, Volker Hunecke, Katja Münchow, and many others.

The response and criticism of readers is essential to any author. Over my many years of writing and research, so many colleagues have commented on various parts of this work that this list must be incomplete. I thank William J. Reese, Allen J. Share, Nancy M. Theriot, Karen Offen, Juliane Jacobi, Gisela Bock, James C. Albisetti, John Fout, Andrew Lees, Jürgen Herbst, Jürgen Zinnecker, Imbke Behnken, Karin Hausen, Marcus Gräser, Pia Schmid, Edith Glaser, Katja Münchow, Ursula Rabe-Kleberg, Barbara Beatty, Roberta Wollons, Cornelia Osborne, Kevin Brehony, Helmut Heiland, Julia Dietrich, Mary Ann Stenger, Nancy Potter, and Thomas A. Allen for the time and patience that they put into reading and commenting on various stages of this work. Nancy Toff of Oxford University Press has been a generous, responsive, and demanding editor. All these colleagues and friends have enriched my life in countless ways.

The Transatlantic Kindergarten

Introduction:

An Entangled History

In 1848, twenty-one-year-old Henriette Breymann, the daughter of a Protestant pastor, left her home in the small Saxon city of Mahlum to enter a kindergarten training course headed by her uncle, the renowned educator Friedrich Fröbel. In an era when women had few educational opportunities, Breymann began her training with high hopes: “Finally, finally, I will feel free!” she confided to her diary. “I will have a profession, which will give me the right to think, to develop my intellect.”¹ Amid the ferment of this revolutionary period, educators such as Breymann and Fröbel linked educational reform to a broad political agenda that called for educational and professional opportunities for women, cooperation between Christians and Jews, and a united, liberal Germany. After the failure of the revolution, the governments of many German states disappointed these hopes when they banned the kindergarten as a hotbed of “socialism and atheism.”

The aspirations of 1848, however, found much more sympathy in the American republic. In 1852 Margarethe Meyer Schurz, a trained kindergarten teacher from Hamburg, followed her husband Carl Schurz, an unrepentant revolutionary, into exile in the United States. When they moved to the German-speaking community of Watertown, Wisconsin, Margarethe unpacked the materials that she had brought from Germany—colored paper, blocks of various shapes, wooden tiles, balls, and other educational toys—and opened a kindergarten for her own daughter Agathe and for the children of her neighbors. In 1859, Margarethe and Agathe accompanied Carl to Boston, where they met the prominent educator Elizabeth Peabody. “That child of yours is a miracle,

so child-like and unconscious, and yet so wise and able,” Peabody remarked to Margarethe. “No miracle, but only brought up in a kindergarten...a garden whose plants are human,” the mother responded. Peabody, who traveled to Europe several times to meet German educators, introduced the kindergarten to English-speaking Americans.²

Within a generation, the movement had come far from its troubled beginnings in Germany. In 1893, Henriette Breymann (who after her marriage to the liberal politician Karl Schrader called herself Schrader-Breymann) was the head of a famous and rapidly expanding center of kindergarten training and community services in Berlin. She sent her friend and colleague Annette Hamminck-Schepel to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago—a fair that attracted visitors from all over the world—to set up an exhibit about the Berlin work and to attend a meeting of a new organization, the International Kindergarten Union. Though she suffered from the summer heat and the confusion of the fair’s opening days, Hamminck-Schepel enjoyed meeting her American colleagues and visiting the flourishing institutions that they had founded in Chicago. “I am sure that nothing could be so useful to the development of education,” she wrote back to Berlin, “than a combination of the achievements and characteristics of the old and new worlds.”³

This book is a comparative and transnational study of the kindergarten movement in the United States and Germany between the 1840s and the First World War. The fact that “kindergarten” is among the very few German words that have been fully adopted into the English language tells us much about its history. From its founding in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, the kindergarten became the center of a movement for educational and social reform—a movement that spread to many parts of the world but had its greatest success in North America. Though given its name by a man, the German educator Friedrich Fröbel, the kindergarten owed its development largely to women, who reconfigured kindergarten teaching (or “kindergartening,” as they called it) as a female mission, and later broadened its scope to include many other kinds of work and activism. The kindergarten’s importance to its female promoters went beyond the classroom—it also provided opportunities for professional and intellectual development, personal independence, and a broadened area of social activity and influence.

The history of the kindergarten, like most such narratives, has been recounted almost entirely in the context of various national histories.⁴ These are important stories, but they miss an essential dimension. In this as in many other cases, national frameworks obstruct our view of the transnational forces that shape cultural and social history. Neither the kindergarten itself nor the broader movements for women’s rights, educational innovation, and social

reform to which it was linked were contained within nation-states. All were embedded in broader historical processes that overlapped not only political but also linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries.

Though often associated with one iconic figure, the German philosopher Friedrich Fröbel, the educational theories on which the kindergarten was based were in fact the product of an international dialogue that continued over several generations. These theories assumed that the potential, needs, and rights of children were not peculiar to any nation, but universally human. While kindergarten supporters adapted their strategies to the various national environments where they worked, they defined their mission as universal rather than national and legitimated it through international organizing. The broader women's movements to which the kindergarten was connected claimed a gender identity that transcended nationality and cultivated transnational connections.⁵

The story of the kindergarten adds a new dimension to our understanding of the working of transnational currents in history. Recent works of history have dealt with German-American relationships in the academic world, and in the realm of social policy.⁶ Some of these works include women social reformers; most focus on predominantly male academic and policy-making elites.⁷ It is time to broaden the scope of this inquiry to include the other areas of life—including pedagogy, parental practices, gender roles, women's organizational activities, and the material culture of the home and the classroom—that the kindergarten influenced and reflected. This was not a merely private realm. In an era when states set an ever higher priority on the management of their human resources, the health and welfare of children moved to the center of public discourse. A gender-appropriate professional expertise provided a standpoint from which kindergarten activists could enter broader debates on the relationships of men to women, parents to children, the school to the home, and the family to the state—issues that engaged reformers on both sides of the Atlantic.

What new historical insights does the transnational perspective provide? Having arisen as an expression of nineteenth-century nationalism, the modern discipline of history has conventionally taken the nation-state—its origins, its changing boundaries, its language, its distinctive political and cultural institutions, its military fortunes, and its rise and fall—as its central subject matter. “All historical study,” declared a founder of the discipline, the German Heinrich von Treitschke, “must return finally to consider the state.”⁸ National narratives—some now widely criticized—provide the structure, often implied rather than stated, for existing histories of kindergarten movements.

In Germany, the story is usually told as part of a German *Sonderweg* (special path) that led, some say inevitably, to such catastrophes as the defeat of

democracy and the rise of dictatorship. German historians include the kindergarten among the liberal aspirations of the 1840s—aspirations that were suppressed by the failure of the Revolution of 1848, allowed only limited development under the monarchical system that united Germany from 1871 until 1918, imperfectly implemented during the period of the Weimar Republic, and perverted by National Socialism.⁹

The American story is integrated into a more optimistic narrative—that of “American exceptionalism”—that credits the United States with unique success in realizing universally human aspirations to liberty, equality, and democracy.¹⁰ The kindergarten, according to this popular view, was the creation of freedom-loving immigrants who rapidly abandoned their German baggage, assimilated into American society, and realized the failed dreams of Europe in the New World.¹¹

These and other national narratives rest on the assumption that national citizenship is the most important determinant of all identities, both individual and collective.¹² Although the field of women’s and gender history has rejected many other accepted historical paradigms, it has until recently followed this one by integrating the story of women, along with that of men, into national histories. It would be naïve to underestimate the compelling claims of nationality during the brief period that we call modernity. National identity, however, has not always held such a high priority in the lives of individuals, for many nation-states and their legitimating ideologies are of very recent date.

The story to be recounted here, though very recent in the total span of human history, does not begin in modern nation-states. In the early nineteenth century, when the kindergarten originated, neither the territory loosely called “Germany” nor the United States were nation-states according to the usual criteria, for neither had an effectively centralized government or (despite the patriotic rhetoric of literary and political elites) a unified national culture. Both were confederations of states and territories that were linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse. Between 1864 and 1871, both Germany and the United States created centralized governments, though only at the price of wars that established the hegemony of one section over others.

During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, national identity in both countries was a work in progress. In the period from 1870 to 1914, both new states were more open to transatlantic contacts and influences than after the First World War, when enduring hostilities embittered international relationships.¹³ The German-American relationship was particularly close. Many Germans looked to the United States as a land of political freedom and economic opportunity, and many Americans to Germany as a center of academic learning, philosophical insight, and pedagogical expertise. Despite

the formidable barrier of the Atlantic Ocean, people and ideas flowed easily between these nations.¹⁴

One way of understanding the German-American relationship is by comparing the historical development of the two nations. Such comparisons, in fact, form the unacknowledged basis of many national narratives.¹⁵ These narratives assume that each nation is unique, but uniqueness can be established only by comparison to other examples. Comparisons of specific aspects of two or more nations, states, or cultures help us to identify more general similarities and differences. German and American kindergarten educators adapted a common body of theory to fit two very different national environments. As our story touches on many aspects of culture and politics, it will suggest the specific variations in these environments—variations that shaped not only the kindergarten, but many other aspects of the two societies. in which it developed. A drawback of comparative history, however, is its tendency to create the very result that it intends to avoid. By defining all forms of difference as national, comparisons often reify the nation's picture of itself as a distinctive and self-contained entity.¹⁶

Among nations, commonality as well as diversity, and connections as well as conflicts are important.¹⁷ If the nation is, in Benedict Anderson's memorable phrase, "an imagined community," then people are also capable of imagining communities that are smaller or larger.¹⁸ Three terms, sometimes used interchangeably, denote various forms of contact across national boundaries. The term "international" applies to associations at the level of the state, to organizations that include people from many nations (such as the International Council of Women), and to widely shared political ideologies or theoretical frameworks (such as international socialism or feminism). Women's organizations of this era, however, used "international" in cases where a modern speaker might use "transnational," and the text will follow this usage.¹⁹

The term "transnational" denotes relationships that fall outside formal governmental and organizational structures and evolve from the many ways—migration, travel, intellectual exchange, institutional cooperation, publication, correspondence, conferences, to name only a few—in which people and ideas cross national boundaries. Such relationships shape both material conditions and individual experiences.²⁰ The history of migration, for example, is often recounted as a process of assimilation through which individuals who are "uprooted" from their native lands take on a new nationality. In fact, migrants—including German American supporters of the kindergarten in the United States—often aimed less to throw off their native traditions than to blend the best aspects of both native and adopted cultures.²¹

Another term—"entangled history"—captures the complexity of these transnational exchanges, which did not come to an end with one-time cultural transfers, and did not operate in only one direction. The transmission of the kindergarten from Germany to the United States resulted from a complex and long-lasting, indeed "entangled," relationship in which both nations alternated in the roles of giver and receiver.²²

In both Germany and the United States, the women who founded the kindergarten also engaged in many related activities—secondary and higher education, professional training, national and international organizing, journalism, social work, academic research, state and local politics. An exceedingly important basis for such women's endeavors was an international ideology of gender, the family, and child-rearing—an ideology that the kindergarten movement itself helped to develop.²³

Kindergarten activists and organizations often linked their own work to broader campaigns for women's rights and opportunities. Should these endeavors therefore be labeled "feminist"? When applied to the early nineteenth century, this term raises problems, as it did not come into general use until the 1890s, and then not everywhere. Some historians apply the concept of feminism broadly, in order to emphasize the continuity that links women's aspirations across time and space, sometimes tracing feminist consciousness to the Middle Ages or earlier.²⁴ Others however, confine the term to historical actors who stressed individualism and equal rights—ideas that are central to many modern liberal women's movements.²⁵

In the present as in the past, however, women's movements are diverse in both ideology and practice. Whereas some feminists reject all conventional notions of gender difference, others praise virtues—for example, non-violence, compassion, the ability to cooperate—that they attribute specifically to women.²⁶ Whereas some create a gender-neutral definition of rights, others claim for women the right to be different without suffering disadvantage.

Historians point out that feminists, like other reformers, developed highly flexible rhetorical strategies which emphasized gender difference or similarity, rights or responsibilities, as the time, place, or situation demanded.²⁷ Karen Offen offers a definition that takes account of both diversity and commonality: a feminist is (or was) a woman or man who affirms the validity of women's own accounts of their lives and experience (as distinguished from culturally accepted stereotypes of virtuous womanhood or femininity), acknowledges the injustice of the subordination of women as a group to men as a group, and struggles against women's subordination in some area, whether politics, education, the family, or many others.²⁸

Like most historical actors, kindergarten teachers and activists of the past do not fit easily into categories devised by later generations. Certainly not all their work can be called feminist, for much of it was concerned with children rather than directly with women. As individuals, they held various convictions and not all would have called themselves feminists even if the term had been available. The term “feminist” fits only those who were specifically concerned with improving the status of women as well as the educational opportunities of children.

Even if not “feminist” in the contemporary sense, however, the kindergarten movement as a whole was part of the historical process that laid the foundations for the emergence of modern feminism in its many forms. It belonged to what in the nineteenth century was called the “women’s movement” (or sometimes the “woman movement”), which included a wide variety of women’s organizations and initiatives. These focused both on issues specific to women (for example, suffrage or the reform of marriage laws) and on the broader civic and social concerns for which women assumed a particular responsibility.

The kindergarten movement vindicated two rights that were of central importance to the leaders of this movement. First among these rights was autonomy, imagined most basically as freedom from degrading dependence on male relatives or a loveless marriage of convenience. Because this form of autonomy was available chiefly to women who could support themselves financially, nineteenth-century feminists often identified access to education and to professional opportunities—major goals of the kindergarten movement—as rights that ranked far above such political concerns as suffrage in importance. The second objective, closely related to the first, was to improve society through the use of abilities that were widely considered distinctively female. Kindergarten teaching, among the earliest occupations created largely by and for women, supported both the autonomy gained through professional opportunities and the moral authority derived from gender-appropriate work in educational and social reform.

In an era when women were barred from most male occupations, early female professions were closely related to domestic tasks, which in this era included child-rearing. Those who created these opportunities, however, did not simply accept conventional gender stereotypes. Rather they challenged these stereotypes by protesting against the contempt—often disguised by sentimental clichés—of male-dominated society for women’s abilities, and indeed for women themselves. They revalued the domestic realm as a source not only of skills but also of moral values and intellectual insights. Although women’s work was different from that of men, they insisted, it was equally valuable and should be extended beyond the home to the public world of politics and the state—a world that was desperately in need of women’s reforming energies.

Like other women's professions, kindergarten teaching was limited to the minority of women who could afford the extensive education that was required to gain credentials. Class consciousness played a formative role in such women's personal and professional self-image. Though mostly middle class, however, this group was in other ways more diverse than many women's organizations. Among its members were single, married, and divorced women of all ages who belonged to many religious, ethnic, regional, and occupational backgrounds, and in the United States included many educated African Americans.

Kindergartners challenged prevailing definitions of masculinity as well as femininity. Lacking the intellectual authority to develop their own theories, women activists often presented themselves as disciples of the male founders of the movement, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel. They refashioned the historical image of these men, however, to make them icons of sensitive masculinity—men who loved children and respected women. Like most feminists throughout history, the kindergarten activists had some male allies.

Other men, however, were more resistant. Although the modern reader may assume that child-rearing and early childhood education were always women's concerns, in fact they were defined as such only in the early nineteenth century, and in this as in other fields the gendered division of authority was shifting, controversial, and contested. The female image of the teaching profession, even at early levels, was not (as contemporary readers who are accustomed to women teachers might assume) part of a universal and timeless gender order based on uncontroversial notions of male and female abilities. It was culturally specific, and the comparative history of this profession and its gendered composition suggests broader differences between American and German societies.²⁹

During the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, women whom we would call "kindergarten teachers" referred to themselves as "kindergartners"—a word that in today's usage refers to pupils rather than teachers. This word carried a specific meaning that is not conveyed by the modern term "teacher." The founders of the first kindergartens insisted that the kindergarten was not a school—an institution that they associated with male-dominated bureaucracies, rote memorization, and rigid discipline. Through her female gender and consciously "motherly" pedagogy, the kindergartner set herself off from the teacher, whose profession was in some places still strongly male-identified. Even when kindergartens became part of school systems, they struggled to maintain this distinctive educational philosophy and mission.

Between 1850 and 1914, women activists formed many transnational and international organizations, and the kindergarten movement followed

more general patterns. Kindergarten pedagogy with its universal view of childhood lent itself well to international organizing. Communication with colleagues in other countries provided encouragement and advice to activists who often started out with few resources and little experience. Later, kindergarten activists joined other social reformers in devising new ways to address the social problems that beset rapidly growing cities in many parts of the world. The kindergarten movement thus illustrates the many ways in which ideas and people crossed boundaries and national and international agendas overlapped. By 1900, however, national rivalries frayed and ultimately snapped the ties of international sisterhood. The kindergarten movement illustrates not only the promising beginnings and productive results of women's transnational organizing but also the conflicts that often disrupted ties of transatlantic sisterhood.

1

Pestalozzi, Fröbel, and the Origins of the Kindergarten

In 1810, Betty Gleim, who headed a girls' school in the north German city of Bremen, pondered the revolutions in France and North America that had sent out seismic waves to all parts of the Western world. Attempts to elevate the human condition through "political upheavals, carefully designed constitutions, and new states," she declared, had often failed because they had not transformed the attitudes of individuals. Only education could plant the "seeds from which a new generation can grow."¹ Educators on both sides of the Atlantic shared these concerns. In the wake of revolutions that seemed to threaten all inherited forms of authority, many aspired to create a new form of social cohesion based on the virtues of the citizen rather than the coercive power of rulers. Such ambitions called for a new theory and practice of teaching. Two German-speaking pedagogues—the Swiss Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and the Thuringian Friedrich Fröbel—gained enormous influence as educational reformers both in Europe and in North America.² Much support for their theories came from women who claimed new authority as mothers and new professional opportunities as teachers. A transatlantic community of educators received and developed these pedagogies, which laid the foundation for the kindergarten between 1800 and the early 1840s.

The context for the kindergarten's development was a change in familial relationships that began in the eighteenth century and had spread to all Western cultures, including both English- and German-speaking areas, by the early nineteenth century. This process shifted much authority over the raising of small children from fathers to mothers, and from men to women.

Contemporary feminist theorists often regard the association of female gender with motherliness as a timeless and universal stereotype.³ It is true that the physical care of children has probably always, in some way, been a job for women, though not necessarily for mothers—in fact, many mothers throughout history have left their children in the hands of servants or relatives.⁴ The elevation of motherhood to a position of moral and pedagogical authority, however, was not a product of tradition, but rather of the revolutionary era. Revolutionaries, and particularly the women among them, assigned to mothers an important civic function—the education of their children in the virtues of citizenship. Pestalozzi and Fröbel affirmed this reconfigured maternal role by placing a distinctively female and motherly capacity for empathy at the center of their educational theories and practices. In both the United States and the German-speaking world, women educators and social reformers used the new theories to their advantage.

Historians usually describe the kindergarten as a “German” institution that was eventually transferred to, and assimilated by, an “American” culture. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, there was no truly “German” culture or identity, but only a culturally diverse and politically fragmented central Europe. Pestalozzi was born in Zurich, which until the last decade of the eighteenth century was one among a federation of self-governing Swiss cantons. In 1798 the Swiss confederation was conquered by Napoleon and unified as the “Helvetic Republic” under a new constitution. The fall of Napoleon in 1815 resulted in the restoration of the federal structure. Friedrich Fröbel was a native of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, a tiny principality within the Holy Roman Empire. After the fall of Napoleon, who had abolished the Holy Roman Empire, the German states were reorganized into a loosely structured German Confederation. Fröbel never lived in a united German state, and his liberal “Germany” was aspirational—in the memorable words of Benedict Anderson, an “imagined community.”⁵

Pestalozzi and Fröbel experienced successive stages of the social transformations that marked the onset of the modern era. In the early eighteenth century both mothers and fathers combined their responsibility for children with a variety of agricultural and manufacturing work that created products both for use and often for sale. Both parents shared in the rearing and education of children, who in German-speaking central Europe and North America—both societies that achieved a relatively high level of literacy—commonly learned reading and writing as well as religion and practical tasks. Moralists of the era did not create a specialized role for mothers, but assumed that children felt the same bonds of love and duty to both father and mother.⁶ Law, custom, and

religious authority upheld the father's control over children's religious, moral, and vocational education as well as other decisions that affected their lives.⁷

In the course of the eighteenth century, it became customary for a male breadwinner to work outside the home and support a dependent wife and children. In such households, the wife and mother took less responsibility than before for economic production and more for child care and domestic tasks. This pattern gained prestige as the choice of urban elites, though it did not spread to working-class families until much later.⁸ Philosophers and moralists of the eighteenth century placed a high value on domestic harmony, contending that the spirit of "benevolence" cultivated in the home was the source of public virtue and morality.⁹ The same norm applied to parent-child relationships. Although harsh religious views of children as vessels of original sin persisted well into the nineteenth century, progressive pedagogues took a more positive view of childish nature.¹⁰ The British philosopher John Locke, who was respected in both the English- and German-speaking worlds, advised parents to avoid harsh punishment and to teach morality by example and reasoned argument. Education, Locke insisted, was more effective when attuned to children's abilities and interests, including their love of play.¹¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Émile* (1762) was one of the most influential texts on education ever published, went further to insist that the energy of the child rather than the will of the teacher must propel the learning process. Believing that individuals were born good but corrupted by society, Rousseau pictured his fictional pupil Émile growing up in a rural environment under the guidance of a male tutor, whose main duty was to stimulate the boy's innate capacity for learning.¹² Rousseau's German disciples, who called themselves the Philanthropists, popularized education "à la Jean-Jacques" among educated families, whom they admonished to stimulate rather than repress children's natural energies (*Tätigkeitstrieb*).¹³ The Philanthropists set up schools for upper-class boys where teachers avoided harsh discipline, modified traditional curricula to emphasize subjects such as geography and nature study over classical languages, and left plenty of time for physical activity.¹⁴ Similarly, many colonial American families molded their children's character through affection and respect rather than the fear of punishment.¹⁵ Such training prepared elite children, and especially males, for a new type of society in which advancement could be the reward of talent rather than simply of inherited status.

Enlightenment pedagogues, however, did not idealize motherhood—in fact, they endorsed paternal authority and gave mothers a very subordinate role. "Would you have your Son obedient to you when past a child?" Locke asked fathers. "Be sure then to establish the authority of a Father as soon as he is capable of submission and can understand in whose power he is. . . . So shall you

have him your obedient subject while a Child and your affectionate Friend when a Man.” As to mothers, philosophers included them in their generally low estimate of women. First among female faults was vanity; Locke complained that mothers taught their daughters “to be proud of their Cloths before they can put them on.”¹⁶ Rousseau condemned irresponsible mothers who entrusted their children to wet nurses or confined them in swaddling bands.¹⁷ Such German authorities as the physician G.F.C. Wendelstädt likewise castigated mothers for entrusting their infants to “the breast of a filthy slut, where they gradually starve.”¹⁸ Pedagogues took a chiefly negative view of maternal affection, warning that if left unchecked it could lead to dangerous spoiling.¹⁹

Insight into the physical and emotional needs of children was not considered a distinctively female gift—on the contrary, the teachers of even the youngest children were male.²⁰ Nor did Enlightenment moralists give motherliness high priority among female virtues. Although Rousseau believed that girls must learn to be good mothers—“on the care of women depends the early education of man”—he placed a much greater emphasis on the endangered virtues of maidenly chastity and wifely fidelity, and on the subtle art of pleasing men.²¹ Similarly, American educators of this era dwelt more on women’s duties as wives or as Christians than as mothers.²²

Like all cultural constructions of gender, however, the maternal role was open to discussion. The American and French revolutions briefly created a heady atmosphere in which a few women and their male supporters burst the bonds of propriety and challenged male supremacy. “Yes, ye lordly, ye haughty sex, our souls are by nature equal to yours,” wrote the American essayist Judith Sargent Murray. “We will meet upon even ground the despot man; we will rush with alacrity to the combat, and crowned by success, we shall then answer the exalted expectations which are formed.”²³ The British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who observed the revolutions with enthusiasm, argued that women as well as men were rational beings, entitled to education, professional opportunities, and even (though she feared the suggestion might “excite laughter”) to a role in the “deliberations of government.”²⁴ In the German-speaking world, the philosopher and civil servant Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel assured his skeptical readers that women were capable “of organizing kingdoms, . . . of making wide-ranging plans” and of “taking part in legal practice.”²⁵

These revolutionary thinkers rejected the conventional view of motherhood as a barrier to political participation. On the contrary, they claimed that mothers had important public responsibilities.

The “care of children in their infancy,” wrote Wollstonecraft, was no menial task, but “one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature.” Wise motherhood demanded intelligence and maturity. “Unless the understanding of

women be enlarged and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly.”²⁶ Well-educated mothers raised their children to be good citizens. Could the state, asked Hippel, “exclude an entire half of the human race from the honor of being citizens—and specifically, that part of the race which plays the most essential part in its own creation and reproduction?”²⁷ Equality of rights would not distract women from their children, but make them better mothers. If women could “be members of national assemblies,” declared the Marquis de Condorcet, they would be all the more fit to “bring up their children and form men.”²⁸ French revolutionary women whose assertive public behavior shocked conventional observers included the education of future generations among the patriotic duties of the female citizen.²⁹

The outcomes of the American and French revolutions disappointed most of these hopes. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, a new government called a halt to social unrest and allowed few changes in women’s political or legal status. In France, the suppression of women’s political aspirations did not await the end of the revolution; in 1793, after the execution of Louis XVI, the military dictatorship led by the Committee of Public Safety closed down women’s political clubs and excluded women from political life. The military dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte put a temporary end to open struggles for women’s equality and enacted laws that reinforced the traditional powers of married men to control their wives.³⁰

The civic importance of motherhood—referred to in the American context as “republican motherhood”—was among the few revolutionary ideas that maintained and increased its influence during the counterrevolutionary era.³¹ Some historians have regarded this chiefly as a symptom of this era’s more general tendency to distinguish between a “private sphere” of home and family, reserved for women, and a “public sphere” of politics and the state, assigned to men.³² Education, however, was a field that linked family and state, and connected the emotional ties of mother and child to the rational virtues of the citizen. As women aspired to public identities as professional teachers and school founders while men cultivated “motherly” insights into child development, new definitions of masculinity and femininity began to emerge. Among the educators of this era, there were both assertive women and sensitive men.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Sacred Motherhood

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was born in 1747 into an impoverished middle-class family in Zurich. Having lost his father at an early age, he was raised by



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was a Swiss educator whose pedagogical theories influenced progressive educational movements throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. His understanding of the mother-child relationship and the psychology of early childhood provided the basis for Fröbel's kindergarten. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-10897.

his mother and a family servant. As a young man he joined a group that called itself the “Patriots,” which aimed to bring the ideas of the Enlightenment to Switzerland. It was here that he was exposed to the political and educational theories of his controversial compatriot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and set out on his career as an educator. Inspired partly by Rousseau’s idealized view of the countryside as an abode of “natural” virtues that were lost in the city, Pestalozzi and his wife, Anna Schulthess, moved to the country and combined scientific farming with the education of the poor. His first school, founded in 1767 on the farm that he called Neu Hof (New Farm), served poor village children, using a curriculum that combined academic with practical training in agriculture and in industrial work, particularly in the cotton industry that during this era of proto-industrialization was transforming the Swiss countryside. Pestalozzi was never an efficient administrator, and this educational experiment ended in 1780, when he was forced by financial difficulties to close the school.³³

By this time, however, he had gained a growing reputation as an author, and in 1780 he published a novel entitled *Lienhard und Gertrud* (*Leonard and Gertrude*), which soon became a best-seller and appeared in translation in many languages, including English. Though written in the tradition of German advice literature on the management of households (*Hausvaterliteratur*), this novel broke with a central convention of the genre by assigning the major role in both household and community to the mother rather than the father.

Gertrud, the heroine of the novel, was a rural wife and mother of a large family who reformed both her husband, a lazy drunkard, and her village.³⁴

Pestalozzi depicted Gertrud's home as a school for both her own and the neighbors' children. Ignorant of this era's conventional pedagogical techniques, which enforced rote learning with the threat of punishment, Gertrud fostered the children's inborn energy (*Selbsttätigkeit*) as Rousseau recommended, by encouraging them to explore their own environment and ask questions about it. She combined cognitive with moral lessons that inculcated an unorthodox but deeply felt religious sensibility. The retired lieutenant who ran the village school showed an unusual respect for this peasant woman by asking her for advice. On a visit to the main room of her cottage, he observed children combining vocational and academic skills by reading books attached to their spinning wheels. Though clearly influenced by *Émile*, Pestalozzi's novel departed from Rousseau by transferring pedagogical responsibilities from a male tutor to a mother, whom he endowed with a moral authority that even men respected.³⁵

The storming of the Bastille in 1789 transformed Pestalozzi's view of education and its relationship to politics. In an intellectual transition that resembled that of other German-speaking thinkers, Pestalozzi first responded enthusiastically to the principles enunciated in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, and in 1792 even became an honorary citizen of France. Though he acknowledged that the monarchy and aristocracy deserved their fate, he was nonetheless shocked when France plunged into the horrors of the Reign of Terror. In a treatise entitled "Yes or No?" he concluded that a just form of authority must rest on moral principles that could not be legislated, even by such an impressive document as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, but must be internalized from birth. Education, not revolution, was the key to progress.³⁶

Pestalozzi soon had an opportunity to try out his pedagogical methods. In 1798, when the French general Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Switzerland and reorganized it as the "Helvetic Republic," Pestalozzi, along with other Swiss intellectuals, at first hoped the French would be enlightened rulers. In the next year, however, French armies disappointed them by cruelly repressing a revolt in the Catholic canton of Nidwalden—an action that left many children without parents. For these children the Napoleonic regime set up an orphanage in the town of Stans and appointed Pestalozzi as its head. In this "unhappy land," Pestalozzi worked under conditions of extreme hardship: "Not just money, but everything was lacking," he wrote in a letter that would become one of his best-known pedagogical statements, "and the children crowded in before we had a kitchen or rooms or beds for them."³⁷

In the orphanage, Pestalozzi created a new role for the teacher as a nurturing father rather than a disciplinarian. "I wanted to show," he declared, "that the advantages of familial education must be imitated by public education." He reassured readers who might have been alarmed by the prospect of educating peasants that his schools would not alienate children from their native environment but integrate them into it more fully.³⁸ For Pestalozzi as for other educators of his time, the aim of education was not upward mobility but rather a more humane version of the existing class system.³⁹

When forced to give up the orphanage, Pestalozzi moved several times, and in 1804 he established a school and a teacher-training institute in Yverdon, in French-speaking Switzerland, which he headed until 1825. Although most student teachers were men—for the teaching profession in the German-speaking world was predominantly male, even at the lowest levels—the educational community also included a *Töchterinstitut*, or training school for girls. Its main purpose, Pestalozzi explained, was to prepare young women for motherhood. In addition, however, the curriculum contained a combination of practical and theoretical fields—including languages, nature study, arithmetic, drawing, and history—that was also intended to qualify "older, mature girls" as teachers.⁴⁰ Pestalozzi's own schools sometimes employed female teachers, often as assistants; for example, a British traveler who visited one such school in 1818 reported that the "principal instructor was a sister of the chief master."⁴¹

Pestalozzi owed his international prominence chiefly to his best-known work, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (*Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder lehrt*). Here he took the familiar discourse on patriotic motherhood to a deeper level by exploring the psychology of the mother-child relationship. Along with Locke and Rousseau, he identified sense perception as the source of all learning. Pestalozzi derived many psychological insights from his observation of peasant mothers. Some of these mothers, he wrote, hung "a large, many-colored paper bird" over their babies' cradles in order to stimulate cognitive development in the first weeks of life.⁴²

Pestalozzi's basic ideas are now so widely accepted as to seem obvious to the modern reader. Conventional teaching methods that required rote memorization of content that had no meaning to the child (for example, Bible verses or Latin words) were worse than useless. In order to be meaningful to children, abstract ideas must be connected to tangible and familiar objects. Children should begin to learn reading and spelling by sounding out familiar words; mathematics by counting everyday objects; science by exploring their own natural environment. The Pestalozzian classroom was full of objects—plants, tools, globes, rocks, musical instruments. Theoretical learning should always be connected to doing, and therefore schools should

teach manual along with cognitive skills.⁴³ As the learning process began with the first sense perceptions, infancy and early childhood—dismissed by traditional educators as a period dominated by instinct—became the most important phase of growth, and the mother the first and most memorable teacher.⁴⁴ In fact, Pestalozzi exhorted every teacher to educate pupils in a spirit of maternal love—a striking departure from the customary harsh discipline of the schoolmaster. Pestalozzi regarded the mother-child bond as the prototype for all social ties and the foundation for the virtues of citizenship. In a passage widely quoted by nineteenth-century educators, he pictured the infant who “knows his mother’s step; he smiles at her shadow. He loves those who are like her . . . he smiles at his mother’s face, at all human faces; he loves those who are dear to his mother. . . . The germ of human love, of brotherly love is developed in him.”⁴⁵

This idea, articulated by many nineteenth-century thinkers, gained widespread acceptance. In fact, twentieth-century psychoanalysts characterized the mother-child relationship as the first experience of “basic trust and confidence”—emotions from which later loyalties to family, tribe, or nation arose.⁴⁶ Pestalozzi also derived religious feeling from motherhood, for children endowed mothers with some of the attributes of God Himself. “The feelings of love, gratitude and trust that were developed at her bosom extend and embrace God as father, God as mother. . . . the child . . . does right now for God’s sake as he formerly did right for his mother’s sake.”⁴⁷

Pestalozzi urged rulers to establish public-school systems that were open to all classes.⁴⁸ Without education, he wrote in 1815, “human nature cannot be improved by any kind of constitution, any kind of mass movement, any kind of state . . . O Fatherland, can you hesitate to raise your citizens through education?”⁴⁹ Both in the United States and the German kingdom of Prussia, this message met with a favorable reception. These were very different polities: the former a republic with rapidly broadening popular base, the latter an absolute monarchy. Both, however, were ruled by educated Protestant elites who belonged to what the historian Jurgen Herbst calls an “Atlantic community of Whigs.”⁵⁰

Both Americans and Prussians believed in education for idealistic and practical reasons, as a means of enhancing the intellectual and spiritual potential of individuals and the economic success of nations. They shared the fear that the wrong kind of education might undermine religious belief and social order, perhaps leading to further revolutionary upheavals.⁵¹ Though sometimes dubious about Pestalozzi’s nondenominational approach to religious teachings, they found in his method the right combination of intellectual and moral instruction.