

幼兒教育學的歷史探究－ 德國福祿貝爾教育學

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摘要

本文闡述福祿貝爾幼兒教育學之歷史發展脈絡。首先介紹福祿貝爾思想的淵源及其幼兒教育理念的中心思想，尤其是奠定其成為 19 世紀幼兒教育重要教育家之理念，也包括其創辦第一所幼兒園前的理念和受到的影響。本文旨在藉由梳理一手的歷史資料，呈現福祿貝爾幼兒教育理念，及迄今在德國幼兒園廣泛被接受與運用的理念。總之，本文主張福祿貝爾最基本的理念為幼兒遊戲活動，一方面讓兒童在遊戲活動中自在、自主的學習，另一方面，也在遊戲活動中引導兒童的學習。

關鍵詞：幼兒教育、遊戲、福祿貝爾

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Froebelian Pedagogy — Historical Perspectives on an Approach of Early Childhood Education in Germany

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Abstract

This article describes the historical origins of the Froebelian pedagogy as an international approach to early childhood education (ECE). A short biography of Friedrich Froebel as the founder of this pedagogical concept is first presented, followed by his core value of early childhood education. In this regard, the article describes the role of educators at the early childhood stage as Froebel conceived it in the 19th century. The significance of this study lies in the authentic and genuine historical sources that are used to describe the educational approach of Froebel. At present, Froebelian pedagogy is widely accepted as a major educational approach especially in kindergartens and nursery schools throughout Germany and worldwide. The basic idea of Froebel is the child's play arrangement and, equally, guided support during child's play.

Keywords: early childhood education, child's play, Froebel

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Introduction

The Froebelian pedagogy, named after the German pedagogue Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel¹ (1782-1852), is an educational approach conceived mainly for the type of education used in the first kindergarten² founded in 1840. As an educational concept, Froebelian pedagogy is directed especially toward early childhood education and child care. This pedagogy is rarely but still known as a concept for teaching in schools (Heiland, 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to represent Froebelian pedagogy primarily as a concept of early education where the arrangement of and support during child's play are the key factors (Heiland, 1998). At present, Froebelian pedagogy seems to be somewhat underestimated in value in some German kindergartens. Other early childhood education concepts, especially the Montessori approach, can be frequently found in Germany.

Nevertheless, a view about Froebel's classical, yet modern concept is necessary. In his view, the child is not only a self-constructing subject, but whose nature is seen by his acts of *playing*. Froebel's educational principles spread worldwide, in particular by trained female preschool teachers called "Kindergärtnerinnen" in the second half of the 19th century. Some of these principles were equally advanced through the so-called German "Reformpädagogik" in the early 1900's. The first principles of seriously considered early childhood education were developed by Froebel starting in the late 1830s (Heiland, 1998).

1 Instead of using the original Name "Fröbel" in the entire article, I will spell the name "Froebel" as commonly spelled in international research about the history of kindergartens.

2 In this article, I will use the name "kindergarten" equally for institutions like nursery schools and preschools like Froebel did. In the USA, the "kindergarten year" is the year before the first grade and is mostly mandatory for children. Nursery schools start at age 1; preschools start at age 3 to 5.

Due to children's self-constructing activities, concepts of early childhood education should not be understood as rigid control systems of human behavior. Thus, the Froebelian pedagogy is not a concept describing a preschool teacher's actions *in a permanently fixed form*. The concept of this teacher's role is seen in Japanese kindergartens differently than in USA. Furthermore, educators in these two nations are describing and using the concept differently than educators in Germany. Froebel's concept, which encompasses education and care, is currently viewed much more as a *framework* that applies to Nursery schools, preschools, and kindergartens worldwide in more or less "authentic" or "original" forms.

Since a cross-cultural study of various types of practical ways Froebelian pedagogy is used has not yet been undertaken, the present article refers mainly to "authentic" historical principles. These were explored especially in the light of German Froebel research and by using historical sources, e.g., Froebel books, articles or letters. Based on this fact, it seems possible to represent Froebel's educational approach as a system based on historical evidence. Due to the limited extent of this article, however, not all aspects of Froebelian pedagogy can be displayed in their conceptual and systematic depths. Therefore, the description of a reduced number of Froebel's core principles is necessary.

A short pedagogical biography of Friedrich Froebel

Today, Froebel's pedagogy is categorized in terms of the "classics" in the history of early childhood education and care (Grell, 2013). Froebel was born on April 21, 1782, in Oberweißbach, located in the principality of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt (at present it is part of the German state of

Thuringia) (Heiland, 1982). Froebel already lost his mother as an infant; she died before Froebel was one year old. His stepmother, however, disregarded him after only a brief period of loving care when she gave birth to her own children. Some Froebel researchers claim that these circumstances may be a main reason why Froebel became an educator, focusing specifically on a young child's basic needs (Krone, 2011). Indeed, such sad experiences were unfortunately still frequent in the 19th century.

Froebel's childhood and youth

Froebel's childhood, as much as his primary-and higher-level education were as marked by discontinuations, as were later periods in his life as well. Under the strict upbringing and high pressure of his father, a pastor in Oberweißbach, Froebel had a hard childhood. After his schooling, he undertook and passed an unsatisfactory apprenticeship as a forester. During this time Froebel began to read philosophical writings; his interest in science arose.

Thus the year 1799 marked the start of a short academic period of study in Jena. In 1801, Froebel had to quit his studies due to outstanding debt. Because of this, he was given a detention for a few weeks; his father only paid the debt when Froebel had renounced his paternal inheritance. After this unfortunate incident, Froebel's discontinuous life proceeded. He had to carry out his father's duties in Oberweißbach when the father became seriously ill. In 1802 Froebel's father died. A very unsteady work period for the still youthful Froebel then began: From 1802 to 1803 he was a field surveyor in Baunach near Bamberg; in 1803 he performed administrative work on an estate in the Oberpfalz; from 1804 to 1805 Froebel was secretary at a property in Neubrandenburg (Germany). In June of 1805 Froebel travelled to Frankfurt to receive instruction to become

an architect. Amid this apparent search for a satisfying career, he visited the Pestalozzi Reform School in Frankfurt and first became acquainted with the pedagogical ideas of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Froebel's reaction to these in a letter to his brother Christoph showed great delight: "I felt as if I had already been a teacher and had actually been born into this business" (Fröbel, 1805: 533).³ Froebel even wrote: "It seemed to me as if I had never considered living in another way as this." As a private tutor for the Holzhausen family in Frankfurt, Froebel worked from 1806 until the spring of 1811. During this time he visited and taught twice in Switzerland at the Pestalozzi Institute in Yverdon (in 1806 and from 1808 to 1810). At this institute, the "basic education (Elementarmethode)" (a didactical concept) consisted of teaching and looking on categorised aspects of the surrounding world. However, influenced by this experience, Froebel incorporated not only educational ideas of Pestalozzi, but developed his own pedagogical approaches as well. Particularly in 1810 he recognized that a *special form of educational action* is necessary for young children to develop. This emancipation from Pestalozzi led Froebel to engage in other set of university studies in Göttingen in 1811. Göttingen was where Froebel developed his philosophy of the sphere, which should be seen as a religious, though speculative basic pattern of thought found throughout his entire pedagogical life's work (Heiland, 1998). In 1816 Froebel founded a General German Education Institute (Allgemeine Deutsche Erziehungsanstalt) in Griesheim. As an experimental school, the institute moved to Keilhau, near Rudolstadt in the principality of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, in 1817. In 1819 Froebel married Henriette Wilhelmine Hoffmeister— a marriage that remained childless. In Keilhau, Froebel proved himself again as a teacher, but this time with Langenthal and Middendorff at his side— he became the school's director and the head of the institution.

³ This and the following translations were made by Ulf Sauerbrey.

The book “education of man”

When viewing the lessons taught in Keilhau, the pedagogical approach used was regarded as a form of primary school education. Froebel reduced and concentrated the knowledge and skills that had to be learned into a basic curriculum. This curriculum was characterized by categories like language, speech, shapes, quantities, numbers, and colors – referring to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s idea of basic education (Grell & Sauerbrey, 2016).

In Keilhau, Froebel wrote the “Education of Man (Menschenerziehung)” (Hoffmann, 1982a)— his educational masterpiece. The book was published in 1826 and is still considered to be the foundation of Froebel’s pedagogy. In the Education of Man Froebel had not yet created an educational approach to child’s play, although he took his important first steps toward it. The main contents of his Education of Man are a sphere-philosophical foundation of education in general, a description of human developmental phases, and subsequently the necessary educational actions resulting from these phases. Numerous educational accounts from this book are related to the educational practices of the Keilhau Institute (Heiland, 1993). Froebel used his practical experience to vividly represent his concept of how humans may and should be educated.

However, this concept did not only deal with school pedagogy and alternative forms of teaching. It describes in the Education of Man in general and, in particular, the actions of infants and young children. For the first time in the history of education had a pedagogue specifically pointed out the importance of play in the early childhood stage. According to Froebel, child’s play is not senseless and haphazard. Child’s play is to be taken seriously by having profound significance on the child’s personality and development (Fröbel, 1826).

Thus, Froebel's theory of a child's nature is quite modern and can be summarized as follows: a child's nature is primarily good and innocent. Therefore, education to Froebel means to stimulate and support a child's natural, inner being. In this regard, a child's sense of self-awareness and self-determination are viewed as basic needs for human development to occur (Hoffmann, 1982a).

Keilhau was seen as a main step in developing the Froebelian pedagogy, and the basis for the later-developed institutional project: kindergarten. From 1831 to 1836, Froebel lived in Switzerland. There he worked in an orphanage and in primary schools.

The first kindergarten worldwide in Blankenburg

In 1836, Froebel and his wife returned to Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt. In Switzerland, Froebel had developed his ideas for a special type of educational "method" for the early childhood. However, this "method", a form of action supporting child's play, must not be understood as a rigid method of instruction. It is still doubtful whether Froebel's ideas about supporting children's play can still be called a "method". According to Froebel's approach, educators should not apply a universal method of education to all children— as was the case in Pestalozzi's educational approach. Froebel's pedagogy was based instead on the development of each individual child. As he had recognized through careful observance and investigation, young children have an inner drive of play and engaging (Spiel- und Beschäftigungstrieb). Thus, Froebel drew a conclusion that an educational approach used in early childhood should provide support and guidance to children during child's play. For this reason, Froebel conceived his idea of guided support of children's play (Spielpflege). It

became the core of his entire kindergarten project.

Before Froebel had established the first kindergarten, his institution was called *Institution for the care and support of infant's drive of play and engagement* (Anstalt zur Pflege des kindlichen Spiel- und Beschäftigungstriebes) where material for young child's play was developed and tested. After a long period of preparation, Froebel finally founded the very first General German Kindergarten (Allgemeiner Deutscher Kindergarten) worldwide on 28 June, 1840 during an inaugural ceremony in Blankenburg (Bad Blankenburg) (Froebel, 1840). "General" in this way meant that the kindergarten was not only about educating by a comprehensive curriculum which had widespread educational dimensions. The institution was also intended for the general public— independent of any child's or family's social status or social class.

At that time, Froebel's idea was innovative due to the educational approach he deemed as appropriate for young children. In any case, it should be noted that the basic idea of young children's care outside the private family home inside public institutions was also similar to some facilities that had already existed. In 1840, more than 600 preschool institutions like Samuel Wilderspin's infant school, or so called schools for small children, day-care institutions/institutions of care (Kleinkinderschulen and Bewahranstalten) and other facilities under different names, existed in various countries in Europe (Reyer, 2006). With the beginning of the industrialization period in England in the second half of the 19th century, child care institutions had become increasingly common. Nevertheless, most of these institutions had hardly been tailored to the needs of children. Accordingly, there were rarely educators trained to support young children. Until the first kindergarten was established by Froebel, caring for young children in institutions very often meant to use unfounded, unscientifically-based and haphazard pedagogical knowledge and skills (Konrad, 2012).

Froebel recognized this problem and used the existing social circumstances as an occasion to establish the kindergarten in Blankenburg – not only as a place to deal adequately with children but also to train kindergarten teachers (Kindergärtnerinnen). In the 1840s, he made several trips where he spread his ideas of supporting child’s play during training courses, especially in Dresden and Hamburg (Heiland, 1982).

Simultaneously to his giving of training courses, Froebel organized the employment of his kindergarten teachers. Using a cooperative networking system of correspondents that he built up mainly via letter communication, Froebel provided a quick transition for the personnel he trained to work at still existing and newly established facilities. Thus, the trained men and women were not only working in kindergartens but also in schools and day-care institutions for small children (Sauerbrey & Friedrich-Fröbel-Museum, 2013). The profession of kindergarten teacher was born. In retrospect, it became one of the first professions for women in the 19th century worldwide. Friedrich Froebel died in 1852. At that time, the first kindergartens outside of Europe were founded (Sauerbrey, 2014)

Basic elements of Froebel’s educational approach

The following sections illustrate Froebel's concept of early education and his idea of children’s inner nature, his accompanying-type approach during children’s active periods and learning (play), his concept of guided support of children’s play (the educator’s action during playtime), and his whole system of play in practice— where the entire kindergarten is used as a place for guided support of play.

Education and the idea of children's inner nature

In his work *Education of Man*, Friedrich Froebel defines education as a multidimensional term: “Education is namely the treatment of man as a thinking, becoming-aware/becoming conscious and innocent” being “governed by an eternal law and with awareness/consciousness and self-determination” (Hoffmann, 1982 : 44). When viewing this understanding of education, it is clear that the 'man' or rather child is the center of Froebelian pedagogy. The child's role of “conscious” and “innocent” is attributed with an inner eternal law of the deity (God). Froebel's own religiousness (Brehony, 2010) built the “groundwork” of his whole theory about the human education (Hoffmann, 1982a). According to this form of understanding, a child's development follows an inner law governed by a higher power, while learning support by another human enables child's development. Froebel assumed that the development of a child's inner drive is from the beginning stages performed “with consciousness and self-determination”. Thus, the assumption is two-fold: First, children are becoming aware/conscious through education. Secondly, they are already aware/conscious. This dialectic problem in education is not resolvable.

Although, some so-called “sphere philosophical” arguments in Froebel's texts seem to be strange to us at present, and some terms describing children's education appear to be rather confusing. However, the basic principle of Froebelian education is clear: the educational action inherent in Froebelian pedagogy is centered upon the child's self-imposed actions and his inner law. In spite of all the historical changes which influenced new educational approaches, Froebel's understanding of education must be placed in the modern and new-age tradition of thinking that still exists today. We now consider the child today to be a creator

of his own knowledge and actions (Bruner & Haste, 2011). We describe him as being an “individual” — a term incidentally also used by Froebel (Heiland, 2012).

Play as a form of children’s action and learning — An agency approach

Froebelian pedagogy focuses on the child’s inner drive. Froebel noticed that small children in particular learn through their own forms of action: namely, they play. He already observed this inner “drive of play and engaging” (Spiel-und Beschäftigungstrieb) during his period as a student at Pestalozzi’s Institute in 1810 (Sauerbrey, 2013). An early idea of his regarding the necessity of child’s play was taken up by Froebel as he began to model material in the late 1830s. Therefore, Froebel developed didactical principles to educate children using their own forms of active engagement and learning. The child’s inner drive became the anthropological basis of Froebel’s instructional and child-learning principles.

Guided support of children’s play

Froebel’s earliest pedagogical ideas about early childhood education were unsystematic. Thus, researches on Froebel’s approach of early education require philosophical conceptual analysis and a reflection on argument structure. Researchers particularly have to consider the influences of philosophical paradigms as much as they do of Froebel’s biography itself. His early texts about play are characterized by a partially inconsistent use of pedagogical terms. In addition, these terms do not fully

comply with the terms we presently use in scientific discussions about education.

As abovementioned, the action taken by educators in the kindergarten is mentioned as guided support of children's play (Heiland, 1998). This form of action could be misunderstood as supporting any action of the child— without reservation. Since play is a serious activity in Froebelian pedagogy, it is always focused on an *object of learning made suitable for the child*. Guided support of children's play is the support given to the child during this learning process. Thus, supporting children's play is a gentle, not a rigid form of educational instruction.

To support child's play, it is not strictly necessary for the educator to interrupt him while the child is playing. It is indispensable, however, that play material is provided, prepared, and arranged by educators before it is made available to the children. Observing and accompanying the child's activities is also necessary. In this sense, there is no "free play" (without arrangement or without instruction) according to Froebel's early educational approach, where play occurs in a completely unprepared or uninfluenced room (Heiland, 1989; Sauerbrey, 2015). Even the selection of play material is occasionally educational support, and thus may have influence on child's play. Froebel considered that children create their own inner anticipation (*Ahnung*) while playing with this material (Heiland, 2003).

An element of Froebel's system of play: The gifts (*Spielgaben*)

To organize and arrange child's play as an early educational "method", Froebel specifically developed an educational system which included play material. In this article, the play material will be explained as the first

element of Froebel's system of early childhood education. The ball (Froebel gift number 1), and bowl, cylinder, and cube together (Froebel gift number 2) are the main shapes of his developed material. It is far from being randomly selected.

When arranging this material, it becomes obvious to the educator: the bowl rolls; the cube does not. The potential of rolling a cylinder depends on whether it is to be stood upright or placed on its side. An instruction about the impact the play material's shapes is provided by the material itself if children play with it. In addition, this insight is supported through demonstrations, speech, and language and song performed by the educator (Sauerbrey, 2013). The mathematical and geometrical properties of the cube are explored by the child when he observes and touches its surfaces, edges, and corners. Compared to the bowl, the ball has just one surface without edges and corners. These differences in shapes and their material structures are explored as a physical reality of cultural artifacts. As is evident in school pedagogical terms, at the beginning of his close examination of child's play, Froebel labeled this phenomenon as "teaching". Since November of 1838, Froebel increasingly called this phenomenon "play".

In addition to the elementary shapes previously mentioned (gift numbers 1 and 2), Froebel's pedagogical play materials for children were completed after he created more boxes with gifts, namely gift numbers 3-6.

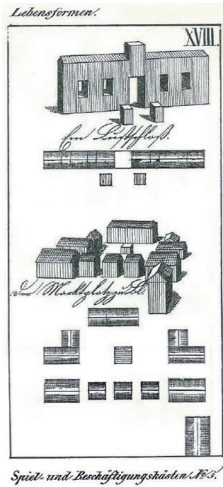
Figure 1 Froebel gift numbers 1, 3, and 4 (from right to left)



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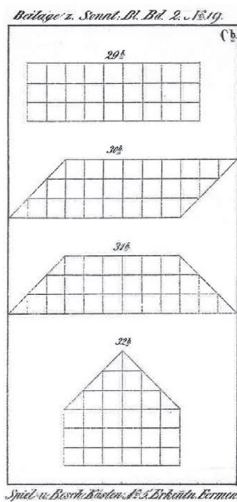
As the cube gets split into different shapes (Froebel gift numbers 3-6), Froebel's play pedagogy also becomes divided into categories, as illustrated by the body's shape in Figures 2, 3, and 4. "Froebel has distinguished between life shapes, shapes of knowledge and aesthetic shapes/shapes of beauty" (Erning, 2004: 34) (Fröbel unterscheidet Lebensformen, Erkenntnisformen und Schönheitsformen).

Figure 2 Life shapes



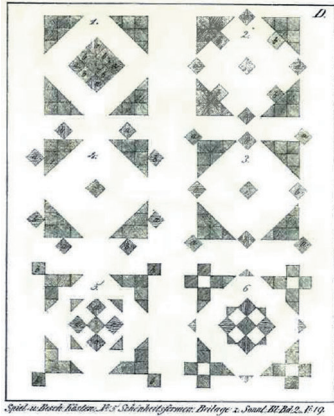
Adapted from “Friedrich Fröbel” by E. Hoffmann, 1982b, Friedrich Fröbel. Selected and edited texts, fourth volume: The gifts, Germany: Klett Cotta, p. 144. Copyright 1840/41 by Friedrich Froebel.

Figure 3 Shapes of knowledge



Adapted from “Friedrich Fröbel” by E. Hoffmann, 1982b, Friedrich Fröbel. Selected and edited texts, fourth volume: The gifts, Germany: Klett Cotta, p. 140. Copyright 1840/41 by Friedrich Froebel.

Figure 4 Shapes of beauty



Adapted from “Friedrich Fröbel” by E. Hoffmann, 1982b, *Friedrich Fröbel. Selected and edited texts, fourth volume: The gifts*, Germany: Klett Cotta, p. 141. Copyright 1840/41 by Friedrich Froebel.

Life shapes are formed by “the imitation of objects and situations of everyday life (Erning, 2004: 34-35):

e.g., a table, chair, etc., is recreated using the sub-cubes ... These buildings do not reflect reality, but represent structures and structural similarities. The elementary mathematical divisions of partial cubes are called “shapes of knowledge”: A whole, two halves, and four quarters, up to eight eighths”.

It is important, “while concretely experienced different shapes caused by divisions of the entire cube and the cube part up to the diagonal and diagonal double spacing or the longitudinal and transverse division...that Helmut Heiland”, the most active German Froebel researcher, “has suggested very clearly that the whole system of Froebel gifts has a basic mathematical character” (Erning, 2004: 35).

Finally, “shapes of beauty” are “the symmetrical designs occurring when laying down shapes with the cubes that form a dance of beautiful forms” (Erning, 2004) (Tanz der Schönheitsformen). “These beautiful

patterns emerge from a basic shape through various steps until a final shape is made” (Erning, 2004).

To summarize the previously outlined categories: Froebel’s “shapes of the world” tend to support child’s play by classifying forms used to access the world by representing practical life, theoretical mathematical insights and beauty, respectively. Each of the three shape categories separates the whole Froebel gift (number 3 to 6) into its parts and returns the parts back into a whole state— nothing is isolated, everything is unified. For the construction of these “shapes of the world”, all eight partial cubes from Froebel gifts 3 or 4 (see Figure 1) are used.

Other play elements in Froebel’s system: The circle and moving games, the mother and play songs and the gardening

The “Circle and moving games” (Kreis- und Bewegungsspiele) (Hoffmann, 1982b) may be considered the second element of Froebel’s system of play. The main source of our knowledge about this element is from a letter from 1842, written by Froebel to the Countess Therese of Brunsvik. She tried to introduce pre-school facilities for young children in Hungary and asked her staff member, Nanette Pivany, to contact Froebel (Hoffmann, 1944). Therese of Brunsvik had heard of “play material for early education...which a German, called Friedrich Froebel, developed since 1838 and had prove it with success in a kindergarten in Thuringia” (Beichler, 1993: 116). Froebel received Pivany’s letter in October 1841. At that time he already began a long reply to the questions about: “how he teaches the children”, the principles of his “method”, and, equally, the question as to how to apply the “so-called gifts” to child’s play (Sauerbrey,

2013: 225-226). The Froebel researcher Erika Hoffmann noted: “Friedrich Froebel wrote a reply to the letter from Hungary twice. It may be assumed, that the two letters were added separately to the post office” (Hoffmann, 1944: XVI). Both letters have been preserved and the main letter was edited by Erika Hoffmann (Hoffmann, 1944). Manfred Berger has analyzed Froebel’s circle and moving games, issued in the following five classes according to Hoffmann’s edition:

- (A) *Representing games of circles and moving*: Scenes from everyday life and nature are represented while playing (e.g., the game of visiting, the brook, the snail). For Froebel, “the purpose and spirit of these games is to observe nature and to introduce life's surroundings to children” (Fröbel & Hoffmann, 1842: 75).
- (B) *Imitations of living and natural objects*: For example, birds, rabbits, and fish are imitated. This class of moving games encourages learning about the connection between child and nature, as much as the capability of representing what is seen (Fröbel & Hoffmann, 1842: 82).
- (C) *Running games*: These games aim to develop and exercise the body just as much as the arms, legs, and fingers (Fröbel & Hoffmann, 1842: 87).
- (D) *Walking games*: Since the running games are to strengthen children’s bodies, these games which involve walking are safer and therefore more attractive. Body posture, and its sensible use, especially of the feet, is an intentional educational purpose for this class of moving games (Fröbel & Hoffmann, 1842:87; Berger, 2000: 18).
- (E) *Circle games*: These, finally, are to support the unification of the symbolic shapes of all Froebelian games of circles and moving (Berger, 2000:18-19). Almost all of these games are to be played in a group, requiring the cooperation and participation of all children.

The Mother-and play songs (Mutter-, Spielund Koselieder) (Froebel,

1982) can be defined as the third element of Froebel's system of play: It is a book for mothers, as well as for educators in kindergartens. It contains songs, verses, pictures, and finger games (Konrad, 2010), and was first published in 1844. Some of the songs are written for the youngest children, providing guidelines to stimulate infants' and toddlers' senses and perception, such as the play song called "Strampfelbein" (Kicking and pedalling with the legs) (Konrad, 2010: 170). In this song, the infant's legs push against the mother's (or educator's) hands, thus feeling his own moving power. While playing this leg-hand game, the educator sings a song about everything that has to do with power—in the song Strampfelbein, the subject is that of an old mill, normally commonplace in the 19th century. When examining the main principle of these songs by using the example of the Strampfelbein: Froebel's idea was not to merely imitate such play instructions, but to show the child structurally accessible real-life representations—cultural reality. Since mills are less a part of current everyday life, educators today may sing songs about a bicycle, for example, to teach the infant or toddler his own power by moving and pushing his legs. The *key principle* of each song, however, is that infants are already introduced to their surrounding culture via language, speech, song, and, in addition, via the sensual and physical experience they have. This is done by using themes from the songs (e.g., the wheel, the table, the gardener, the knight) that are selected by the educator from the child's surroundings. Educators are instructing the child by pointing, speaking, singing, and moving fingers, all in an attempt to represent the surrounding culture.

Figure 5 The first kindergarten and children's garden beds in 1840 in Blankenburg



Adapted from “Friedrich Froebel” by Heiland, H. (1982). Friedrich Froebel in *self-testimonies and image documents*. Hamburg, Germany: Rowohlt, p. 96. Copyright 1939 by Waldemar Döpel.

Finally the aspect of *gardening* is a barely noticed element of Froebelian pedagogy. Outside the kindergarten in Blankenburg (see Figure 5) Froebel created garden beds for children. While caring for the plants and cultivating the garden beds, the children apparently taught themselves. Froebel assumed that the plants have an educating character to the children (Sauerbrey, 2013: 151).

The kindergarten as a place of guided support of children's play

The institution where guided support of child's play was to take place, in addition to the family's care of the child at home, was in 1837. It was first called an “autodidactic institution” in a letter to Langethal written by Froebel (Sauerbrey, 2013:139). In his early work, the self-activity and self-instruction of the child built the main focus of Froebel's practical research (Heiland, 1998:302). The Kindergarten (Froebel, 1840) became an educationally grounded addition to the already existing institutions of

public care for young children (Froebel, 1840). With this facility, Froebel intended to lay the foundations for an education of free and thinking humans, aware of themselves. The kindergarten and its surroundings were geared to support the child's inner drive and play activity. As an institution, it enables children to play, and, at the same time, keep disturbing influences of the cultural world outside of it. Thus, in contrast to the family, it is a complementary place of learning and education, though consciously meant to be an insulated cultural world: The children were given a representation of selected objects from the surrounding culture as much as from the cultural environment in a didactical, structured and pre-planned and given arrangement.

The role of educators in child's play

As aforementioned, educators prepare child's play by arranging settings and surroundings, and by selecting material that is appropriate for children. At first, educators encourage and support educational situations before the children take part in a play activity. *In this case*, Froebelian pedagogy seems to be very similar to Maria Montessori's ideas about so-called *prepared environments* (Montessori & Gutek, 2004). Secondly, when in the midst of the situation itself, Froebelian educators are aware of child's play by observing children's actions and inner drive. Then, if support is needed, the educators are to encourage them gently, accompanying child's play through speech, language, singing, and by pointing out things found in the surroundings. This dialectical relationship between learning and instruction in child's play is the main idea of early education in Froebelian pedagogy. The child needs support to build its inner drive. The role of educators, according to Froebel's educational approach, "depends on the contact between him/her and the child" (Heiland, 2009: 22). Thus, the "kindergarten teacher plays an active role".

Closing words

Froebelian pedagogy is a modern concept of early childhood education and care. In Germany, it is presently becoming more widely accepted as an early educational approach especially in kindergartens and nursery schools – not just because Friedrich Froebel founded the first kindergarten, and now being the main preschool institution in today’s world. Froebel’s pedagogical principles also seem to be a basic part of modern life. Currently, kindergartens in Germany are becoming like the “first step” in the educational system.

Froebel wanted to educate “free-thinking and self-dependent humans” (Boldt & Eichler, 1982: 71). In his respect, the place for such development is the kindergarten, in addition to the child’s family home. The guided support of children’s play is, for Froebel, the central form of educational action in the kindergarten. This is the result of an overview on central historical sources written by Froebel.

However, further research needs to examine the historical development of elements and ideas from Froebelian pedagogy, as well as its impact upon human development during the early education period (Heiland, 2012). The Kindergarten-Movement started in Germany in the 19th century. But the entire history of the froebelian kindergarten is an international history (Wollons, 2000; Nutbrown, Clough & Selbie 2008; Lascarides & Hinitz). Today, kindergartens are existing worldwide (Sauerbrey, 2014). An international comparative research project spanning over the countries seems to be essential to discover educational concepts for early childhood ranging from their historical origins to the present in a globalized world.

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