



Georg Peez (Ed.)

Art Education in Germany

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Waxmann 2015
Münster • New York

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

Print-ISBN 978-3-8309-3265-9

E-Book-ISBN 978-8309-8265-4

© Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2015
Münster, Germany

www.waxmann.com
info@waxmann.com

Cover Design: Inna Ponomareva, Jena

Cover Picture: Andrii Pokaz – Fotolia.de

Typesetting: Sven Solterbeck, Münster

Print: Hubert & Co., Göttingen

Printed on age-resistant paper,
acid-free according to ISO 9706



Printed in Germany

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Art Education “Made in Germany”

This book is the first publication in English that gives a compact overview of art education in Germany. There are several motivations for doing so. First of all, it is about documenting contemporary discourse currents in art education, which are historically deduced and divided into several chapters. Furthermore, this publication aims to offer insights into the themes that German art education has occupied itself with in recent years. Thirdly, a broad spectrum of content and a certain heterogeneity is emphasized, so as not to restrict the current state of discussion in art education. In addition, the book aims to make the vividness and multitude of approaches transparent: between theory and practice; between conservation and change; between analogue and digital; between art, everyday life, and the persons involved. It was a conscious decision to pick brief articles, as the motivation was to enable a first start into the discourse of German art education in English. Further literature is often referenced at the end of the texts, most of it is available in German only, however.

“Glocal” Diversity

The steadily increasing interconnectedness in education, as well as the importance of art education topics and cultural education on the European and even global level demand the publication of an English book of this kind – make it indispensable even. At the same time, the backdrop of this international interconnectedness shall serve as a stage for asking for the independence of local cultures, as well as local cultural and art educational debates. This local diversity should be seen as an asset and is to be preserved and nurtured accordingly (fig. 1). Both is needed “glocally”: the appreciation of cultural and art educational diversity on the one side, as well as transparency, documentation and discussion on an international level, to enable communication.



Fig. 1 The art classroom (from a lesson by Stefan Bergmann, Oberhausen, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany)

Educational Federalism in Germany

This plea is given, keeping in mind that Germany has a total of 16 different curricula for the specific subjects and school forms, which the federal states and city-states developed partially independently of each other. This federalization of education is certainly among the reasons why German art pedagogics cannot be characterized as a coherent body of work but is manifested in a variety of facets instead. Standards are often not shared across state borders. This holds true despite the existence of the “Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany” (KMK) (<http://www.kmk.org/information-in-english.html>). The KMK has published a helpful overview of the education systems in the federal republic of Germany.

Ties to German-speaking Neighboring Countries

By way of the shared German language there are indeed many connections to art education in Austria and Switzerland; in both countries it is usually referred to as “Bildnerisches Gestalten” (“Visual Arts”; “Pictorial Design”).

While cross-border exchanges among both art education researchers and practitioners from the three countries are becoming increasingly common and joint congresses are held, differences in culture, policy and historic background imply that the scope of the selected articles should be focusing on art pedagogics in and from Germany.

The Book’s Structure

The book is structured as follows: After this brief introduction, the first chapter “Prologue, History & Tasks” offers an abridged overview of the development of art education in Germany from 1945 until today. Phases in the subject’s development are specified and their theoretical-historical background is identified and elaborated on. In addition, the development of art education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR; 1949 to 1990) is expanded on. Contemporary art pedagogics in Germany can be categorized into three stylized orientations, which are certainly often blended together in everyday practice.

The second chapter “Spheres of Activity, Processes & Examples” presents reflective concepts for practice that are exemplary for art pedagogics in Germany. The primary question here is: What does German art education look like in practice? Readers will receive a vivid introduction to the topic.

Under the headline “Designs, Concepts & Modes of Thought”, the third chapter emphasizes the theoretical outline and legitimization of various concepts from German art pedagogics. Influences from neighboring disciplines, e. g. pedagogics and psychology or media studies, can be recognized and connections to examples from practice are provided. The chapter aims to explain aspects of theory in an understandable and practical way.

The forth chapter “Studies, Ideas & Insights” presents results of empirical research of the last few years. Naturally, a selection had to be made that represents the full broadness of the research areas: investigation of the discipline itself, research concerning the job of teaching and fundamental research related to perception.

As the fifth chapter’s name “Transitions, Horizons & Perspectives” indicates, this part of the book provides an outlook on discourses, which allow for tie-ins with other sciences and potential future developments. With analysis of current practice in art pedagogics a variety of perspectives open up. It certainly has to be acknowledged that these are far from complete.

A sixth and last chapter named “Organizations, Publications & References” aims to provide ways for engaging oneself with German art education in a more extensive and targeted fashion.

How Contributions Were Sourced

The texts contained in this publication have for the most part been published in German on an Internet platform named “Kunstdidaktisches Forum” (Forum for the Didactics of Art) as part of the “Schroedel Kunstportal” between 2007 and 2012. Due to the fleeting nature of online publications, it is to be expected that the PDF versions of the German texts will not remain available online forever. What’s more, the website has been discontinued in July 2014 and is only reachable via “archive.org” or “www.kunstlinks.de”, where parts of it were archived.

The year of publication of each text is stated. Especially with respect to articles on the use of digital technology, it should be noted that, while technical development has progressed since, the basic art didactical considerations have remained as relevant as ever.

Of the over 70 contributions that were published online on the “Kunstdidaktisches Forum” of the “Schroedel Kunstportal,” only a limited selection could be chosen for publication in this book. Criteria for selection were the aspects mentioned in the first paragraph, emphasizing in particular the presentation of variety, the integration of multiple perspectives and the heterogeneity of discourse.

May this book provide everyone, who wants to inform themselves about German art education in English, with a short and vivid overview.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Farah Abdel Aty, Tim Bonowski, Anton-Johannes Peez-Zvetina, Christian Tobias Pfaff and Nikolai Fritzsche for their diligent translations from German to English. Furthermore, I am grateful to the authors for critically reviewing and updating the translated texts.

Prolog, Developments & Tasks

Historical and Current Concepts

Aspects of Art Education in Germany after 1945

The history of art as a subject forms the basis for the aims we pursue today. Before 1933, the art education movement exerted crucial influence on various areas of school education within the framework of progressive education. Drawing and painting were geared to the forms of experience typical of the stages of childhood development. Moreover, the emphasis on the fine arts became a principle of education in general.

The Nazis' education policy abused art education just as it abused many other fields and subjects of school education by subordinating these to the fundamentals of national socialist ideology.

Consequently, educational policy of the 1920s was revived and refined under the term of art education in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1945. The subject received an accurate structure in terms of content and teaching methods. Students were to be gradually familiarized with art as they advanced in age, the departure point being children's drawings. Design principles of the Bauhaus and a playful approach to creative means gradually became integral parts of lessons in art education.

In the 1960s, art education was criticized for being remote from art. The debate pushed "humanistic education" into the background and applied itself to contemporary art. Regulative factors as well as aspects of art theory and history were foregrounded in both the observation and the creative production of art by students. The inclusion of art into teaching, as a way of approaching art, was the main objective. Production and reflection became equal subject-matters of what now went under the name of "Kunstunterricht" (instructive art classes). The issue of learning objectives and how to monitor them played an important role in this, as did the rating of student performances.

The debate about the subject's functions in the 1970s was affected by the key word "emancipation". Concurrently, the social relevance of communication media induced a turn towards "visual communication" in art didactics. Children and adolescents were increasingly perceived as parts of society. Within this new approach to the subject, tendencies emerged, which strove for a change of the system as a whole and a comprehensive innovation of the subject. While these ambitions did not prevail in their radical form, it did become clear that art didactics embraced social change.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the 1980s were dominated by a growing environmental movement. Efforts that were inspired by cultural criticism and partly by technophobia precipitated the conception of an aesthetic education, which to a greater extent addressed all senses. Aesthetic-emotional connections to nature were aspired to. This concept picked up on the desire for integrated modes of life and behavior.

Equally, art education in the German Democratic Republic featured various currents. The GDR was founded in 1949 and in a process of turn-around joined the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990 in the form of five new federal states. Currents in art education in the GDR included the alignment with the style of Socialist Realism in the 1950s and the political ideologization within the framework of Marxist-Leninist art studies in the 1960s. In the 1980s, art teachers in the GDR were increasingly geared to non-representational art movements and pedagogical tendencies of subjectification. What was to rank as “art” and thus to take its possible educational effect in art teaching was often at the center of debate. Art teachers’ approximation to, or delineation from, the political system revealed itself in their standpoint on this issue. A movement which went by the name of “art-appropriate art teaching” rebelled against ideological instrumentalization by “real socialism.” During the “Wende” in 1989 and 1990, many art teachers in the GDR came to perceive of classes with a strong focus on art as inadequate with regard to social change and the expectations towards art as a subject. Thus, they opened up to the wide range of aesthetic education practiced in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The current situation of the subject is dominated by three positions. The brief outlines provided here are inevitably of a simplified nature.

Image Orientation

It is beyond doubt that children’s and adolescents’ appropriation of the world around them as well as the development of their personalities are significantly shaped by their use of images. This entails a constantly growing need for “image competence” (including one’s own creation of images) and “visual competence” (receptive and analytic involvement with visual phenomena) far beyond the realm of art. Thus, experiential and learning processes with images as indispensable elements of general education should in fact have come to rank as one of the basic competences alongside reading, writing and calculating.