

American and German Women in the Kindergarten Movement, 1850–1914

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Boston reformer Elizabeth Peabody, though duly respectful of the awesome intellectual and bureaucratic authority wielded by St. Louis School Superintendent William Torrey Harris, had no hesitation in arguing with him. In 1877, Harris wrote that the Froebel kindergarten, which he had introduced into the St. Louis school system in 1873, would have to be “Americanized” in order to meet the needs of American children. Peabody responded indignantly, “I hope . . . that you will distinctly say that by Americanizing it you do not mean departing from Froebel’s principle. . . .Froebel in his lifetime specially recognized the fact that the spirit of society in America was more coincident with his system than that of his Fatherland. He thought of emigrating to establish it here.” Historians of American early childhood education such as Michael Steven Shapiro often picture the Americanization of the kindergarten chiefly as a movement away from its German counterpart in response to uniquely American conditions. However, this process did *not* show American rejection of foreign influences, but rather the continuing relationship of German and American cultures. Although the American kindergarten developed differently from its German counterpart, German influences were important at each stage in its development from 1856 to 1914. German and American kindergarten activists stayed in contact, visited each other, and often used the differences in their situations and ideas as a basis for cross-cultural dialogue.¹

The popularity of the kindergarten cause among educated, middle-class American women in the period from 1870 to 1914 suggests the complex

1. Peabody to Harris, January 19, 1877. Harris Papers, Missouri Historical Society. For historical views of the divergence of the American kindergarten movement from its German models, see Michael Steven Shapiro, *Child’s Gardens: The Kindergarten from Froebel to Dewey* (University Park, Pa., 1983), 29–45; and Agnes Snyder, *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education* (Association for Childhood Education International, Washington, D.C., 1972), 173–81; Snyder describes the development of the American movement as “Changing Directions through an Indigenous Philosophy” (173) and “Changing Directions through an Indigenous Psychology” (178).

and shifting meanings of the concept of "Germany" in American intellectual life. The fact that Froebel accorded high honor to motherhood and recommended the involvement of professionally trained women in education does not in itself explain his appeal to American women. In the later decades of the nineteenth century this idea was much more influential in America than in Germany, and many American writers, among them Catharine Beecher, had expressed it in considerably less abstruse and more readable form. A more important reason for the appeal of kindergarten pedagogy to some women, however, was the prestige accorded in America during this period to German philosophical and scientific learning. Many of the female kindergarten founders, German and American, were drawn much more to intellectual speculation than to the practical work of early childhood education. "For though I am a woman and thus terribly driven by practical work," wrote Peabody to Harris, "yet I find my heaven in speculative philosophy."

But women's opportunities for intellectual self-expression were very limited; childrearing was one of the few subjects on which they could speak with authority. Kindergarten theory gave them an impressive philosophical and scientific vocabulary with which to comment not only on childrearing, but on a host of related issues. Their use of this vocabulary enabled women kindergarten activists to enter the major intellectual and political discourses of their era; to legitimate their own intellectual, professional, and political agendas; and to gain a hearing from their male contemporaries. They used kindergarten theory as male intellectuals used other kinds of German learning – to argue for the integration of American individualism with alternative ethical values, supported by German ideas, stressing social responsibility and community spirit. The impact of German ideas was important to three major stages through which the American kindergarten movement passed during this period – the establishment of the first public school kindergartens and kindergarten training programs in the 1870s, the development of new methods based on the scientific field of child study in the 1880s and 1890s, and the incorporation of the kindergarten into social reform movements in the period from 1890 to 1914.²

The coming of the kindergarten to America, as ritualistically recounted in kindergarten literature, became a legend of the thwarted potential of the Old World and its realization in the New. Friedrich Froebel, founder of

2. Peabody to Harris, April 25, 1871; on the various stages of the kindergarten movement, see, among many other sources, Shapiro, *Child's Gardens*; and Ann Taylor Allen, "Let Us Live with Our Children: Kindergarten Movements in Germany and the United States," *History of Education Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1988): 24–48.

the kindergarten, envisaged his new institution as an alternative to traditional authoritarian forms of education and as a seedbed (or garden) of a new generation of citizens. Three aspects of Froebel's theory were particularly important to his American disciples. Drawing on post-Kantian philosophy, his pedagogical approach stressed the relationship of the part to the whole, of the individual to the group, and of freedom to responsibility. He regarded the mother-child relationship, in which self and other were perfectly merged, as the natural basis for these social virtues. Even more important was his assertion that children's development followed certain scientific laws that must be studied and used in education. Child nurture, he asserted, did not rest merely on instinct or emotion, but was a science that must be learned through an extensive program of education and training. And he insisted that early childhood education must be based on play, directed but not controlled by the maternal discipline of the teacher, rather than book learning.

Kindergarten method, originally designed for the use of mothers in the home, was adapted to an institutional setting in 1840, when Froebel founded the first kindergarten in the small Thuringian town of Blankenburg. Though this educational experiment attracted little attention at first, the kindergarten movement became a major form of social activism among liberal German women in 1848. It acquired the taint of radicalism and godlessness largely through its central place in the curriculum of the Hamburg Academy for Women, a daring educational experiment in which both Friedrich Froebel and his nephew, Carl, were involved. The Academy, based on ideas derived from dissenting religious sects and from utopian socialist theory, was open for only two years, from 1850 to 1852, when it closed in response to the reactionary political atmosphere created by the suppression of the 1848 revolutions. In 1851, largely because of its association with religious and political movements now defined as subversive, the Froebel kindergarten was banned in Prussia and in some other German states. The Prussian ban was not lifted until 1860.³

Though Froebel himself, who died in 1851, never realized his dream of emigrating to America, many of his followers joined the flow of liberal exiles to the New World. The first kindergarten in the United States was founded by Margarethe Schurz, wife of the eminent politician Carl Schurz,

3. On the history of the German kindergarten, see, among many other sources, Günter Erning, Karl Neumann, and Jürgen Reyer, eds., *Geschichte des Kindergartens*, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1987), 1: 29-46; Ann Taylor Allen, "Spiritual Motherhood: German Feminists and the Kindergarten Movement," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Fall 1982): 319-40; and Catherine N. Prelinger, *Charity, Challenge and Change: Religious Dimensions of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Women's Movement* (Westport, Conn., 1987), 94-100.

in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1855. Other emigrants from Germany or the German-speaking world, such as the Swiss William Hailmann and the German socialist Adolf Douai, also founded kindergartens that at first served to preserve German traditions and German language among the children of emigrants. Emigrants who were not political exiles sometimes returned to Germany for training. Caroline Louisa Frankenberg of Eddigehausen (near Göttingen), for example, founded a school (not a kindergarten) in Columbus, Ohio, in 1836. In about 1840, discouraged at the failure of her efforts, she returned to Germany, lived at Froebel's institute at Keilhau for six years, and then taught in Germany until 1858, when she returned to Columbus and set up a kindergarten. She recalled that curious neighbors peered through the windows of the kindergarten, astonished that children could learn without books. In 1862 Louise Pollock (originally Plessner), a German emigrant from East Prussia who had settled in Boston with her American husband and had received kindergarten literature from her family in Germany, opened what she claimed was the first "pure" kindergarten in America under the auspices of Nathaniel Allen, principal of a school in West Newton. In 1870 she sent her daughter Susan to study kindergarten methods in Berlin, where she herself also studied briefly in 1874.⁴

The spread of the kindergarten to the broader English-speaking constituency was largely the work of Elizabeth Peabody, a Boston intellectual and educator, whose interest in German ideas had already been awakened by the transcendentalist movement. Peabody learned about kindergarten methods from Margarethe Schurz. In 1860 she set up her own kindergarten in Boston, using chiefly English kindergarten guidebooks. In 1867 she traveled to Germany to study with the then most prominent female kindergarten founder in Germany, the Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülow. Marenholtz, who had worked with Froebel, believed that the new institution must create social peace by teaching the virtues of citizenship and social responsibility, especially to working-class children. Peabody, now persuaded that all existing American kindergartens were useless because they did not conform to the German model, persuaded some German kindergartens, including Maria Boelte (whom she met in England) and Emma Marwedel, to come to America. In 1868, Matilda Kriege, a student of Marenholtz-Bülow, set up a "German kindergarten," later expanded into a training school, in Boston. In 1873, Maria Boelte (later Kraus-Boelte)

4. Elizabeth Jenkins, "Froebel's Disciples in America," *German-American Review* 3 (1936-7): 15-17; Shapiro, *Child's Gardens*, 29-45; "Louise Pollock," in Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century* (Buffalo, N.Y., 1893), 578-9; *Letter and Data relating to the Early History of the Kindergarten in America*, (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 1-3.

established a two-year training program in New York. Marwedel emigrated first to Washington, D.C., in about 1870 and set up a kindergarten with Susan Pollock, the daughter of Louise Pollock. Kriege, Marwedel, and Boelte trained most of the best-known members of the first generation of American kindergartners.⁵

In 1873 William Torrey Harris, superintendent of schools in St. Louis, set up the first public school kindergarten system there. Harris was persuaded both by the German-American Teachers Association and by Elizabeth Peabody, who started an extensive correspondence with him in 1870. Harris was at first reluctant, objecting that the climate of St. Louis was less suitable to the kindergarten than that of Germany. "If St. Louis is not too hot for children to be born there," replied Peabody, "it cannot be too hot for the mind as well as body to grow on nature's plan of development, which is just Froebel's kindergarten plan."⁶

Harris was a Germanophile and amateur philosopher who, along with some German immigrants, had founded a society called the St. Louis Hegelians in 1858. His argument for public school kindergartens was based on a conception of the dialectical relationship of German and American cultures that proved influential in the American kindergarten movement, of which he was a prestigious advocate. Many German emigrants of 1848 had taken a negative view of the oppressive regime that had suppressed the kindergarten. Peabody, who identified herself strongly with these German exiles, did not admire German culture, and compared its "uninventive" and "bookish" spirit unfavorably with Yankee independence and ingenuity. But Harris reached the opposite judgment on the relative merits of practical and "bookish" learning. In a speech to the German-American Teachers Association, he declared in 1872 that the Anglo-Saxon tradition, dominant in America thus far, had emphasized practicality at the expense of intellectual depth. "Born as I was, among the rugged hills of Connecticut, I can still remember the immense astonishment I felt when I first came to learn of the province and scope of German thought. . . . To comprehend – *Begreifen* – is a German achievement and he who would attain that highest gift of man must aid himself with the works of German genius."

For Harris as for many postbellum reformers, a major consequence of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of individual freedom was disorder and disunity: "doubt and denial . . . skepticism, vice and corruption." He identified the

5. On the coming of the kindergarten to America, see Jenkins, "Froebel's Disciples in America"; and Shapiro, *Child's Garden*.

6. Peabody to Harris, May 18, 1870, and August 25, 1870; W. T. Harris, "German Reform in American Education," *The Western: A Review of Education, Science, Literature and Art* (September 1872): 327.

German philosophical tradition that defined freedom within, rather than apart from, the social organism as the essential corrective to this malaise. The kindergarten was a practical application of German philosophical theory to pedagogy. Using the dialectical method, Harris explained that the kindergarten would reconcile the freedom permitted by the family with the order demanded by the school. The initiation of the kindergarten in St. Louis served a practical purpose as well; Harris had observed that most working-class children left school at the age of ten; thus the inclusion of younger age groups in the public school system was the best means of increasing its effectiveness.⁷

The meaning of the kindergarten, and of the German culture that it represented, to some American-born women in the 1870s and 1880s may be illustrated by the career and ideas of Susan Elizabeth Blow, to whom Harris assigned the leadership of the St. Louis public school kindergartens in 1873. Blow was born in 1843 into the family of a wealthy businessman who later became a politician and diplomat. According to a friend of the family, philosopher Denton Snider, Blow's early education, supervised by a German tutor, reflected the high prestige accorded German culture in St. Louis in the 1850s and 1860s. But, though exposed to German learning, she was not encouraged to pursue it; her teacher regarded her passion for philosophy as unfeminine. She herself was dissatisfied with her education, which was completed at a New York boarding school, and supplemented it with a personal program of reading that included much German philosophy and literature.⁸

Temperamentally unsuited to the ornamental role of young lady, Blow longed for a vocation, but was prevented from taking up a profession both by a lack of training and by the opposition of her conservative father. Blow's only experience of meaningful work had been in childrearing, for she had helped to raise her numerous brothers and sisters. In the American culture

7. Peabody to Harris, October, 1878 (no day); Harris, "German Reform in American Education," 327; *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the St. Louis Public Schools, for the year ending August 1, 1873*, 18–19. On St. Louis Hegelians, see Denys P. Leighton, "William Torrey Harris, the St. Louis Hegelians, and the Meaning of the Civil War," *Gateway Heritage: Quarterly Magazine of the Missouri Historical Society* 10 (Fall 1989): 32–45. On the more general discourse on American individualism and its problems, see William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York, 1980), passim; and Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1965), 66–71, 130–59.
8. Denton J. Snider, *The St. Louis Movement in Philosophy, Literature, Education, Psychology* (St. Louis, 1929), 296; Blow to Harris, July 9, 1892, Harris Papers, Missouri Historical Society. On Blow's early life, see also Margaret Hilliker, "Life and Work of Susan Blow," typescript, 1953, Missouri Historical Society, 1–26; Snyder, *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education*, 59–63; Committee of Nineteen, *Pioneers of the Kindergarten in America* (New York, 1924), 185–7; and Shapiro, *Child's Garden*, 45–65.

of the 1850s and 1860s, however, mere practical experience with children was increasingly devalued by experts, who called for more scientific approaches and defined childrearing as a social, rather than simply an individual and familial, responsibility. Thus, in order to speak and act with authority, women such as Blow needed academic credentials and a public or social field of activity. Froebelian pedagogy, which emphasized both the intellectual prestige and the public importance of child nurture, provided both. In 1876 Blow, who had already visited Germany with her family, once again traveled there to study with Marenholtz-Bülów, whose training course in Dresden was then widely regarded as the most faithful to Froebelian tradition. Because Froebel had defined kindergarten work as a highly altruistic calling – in Peabody’s words, “a vocation from on high” – it could be done as a volunteer activity, without the stigma of paid work. Blow functioned as a volunteer worker, and so, at the beginning, did many of her assistants. By 1880, there were fifty-eight public school kindergartens in the St. Louis system.⁹

Blow, who was not a gifted teacher of small children, became famous chiefly as an author and a teacher of teachers. In 1888, she left St. Louis and embarked on a career as a lecturer and teacher that culminated in an appointment to Teachers’ College, which she held from 1896 to 1906. The many works published during this period used concepts derived from German philosophy and pedagogy to create a theory of child development that emphasized the central role of woman as private and public nurturer. Blow had become a convert to German idealism chiefly because its concept of an orderly universe that could be understood by human reason provided an attractive alternative to the grim Calvinist religion in which she had been raised. She regarded Froebelian pedagogy as “a marvellous application of those verities to the interpretation of childhood.”

Her methods were designed to initiate the child into the order of the universe through symbols conveyed by stories and games. Along with Froebel, she believed that this process was based on the mother–child bond, as experienced from the first days of life. Much of Blow’s later career was devoted to a series of commentaries on Froebel’s *Mother and Nursery Songs*, a book of songs and games for mothers and infants. Blow explained the deep ethical and philosophical truths conveyed by the “Falling Game,” in

9. On Blow’s decision to adopt kindergarten teaching as a profession, see Blow to Harris, July 9, 1892; on her visit to Marenholtz-Bülów, see Blow to Harris, Dec. 3, 1876; on changes in idea of childrearing, see Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity* (New York, 1985), 97–114; on Peabody’s idea of the kindergarten profession, see Barbara Beatty, “A Vocation from on High: Kindergartening as an Occupation for American Women,” in Joyce Antler and Sari Biklen, eds., *Change in Education: Women as Radicals and Conservatives* (Albany, N.Y., 1990), 38–9.

which the mother lets the baby fall for a few seconds and then catches it. According to Blow, the game taught trust, which began with the mother and was then extended to other human beings and ultimately to God. Blow used maternal love as a metaphor for an idea of social order based on responsibility, cohesion, and community. This idea was derived originally from Pestalozzi, but Blow applied it specifically to the American scene: "Children must trust parents . . . we must all trust the tradesmen with whom we deal . . . the economic system upon which depends the fair participation of each man in the labor of all men, the government which orders and protects other institutions. . . . Faith is the beating heart of the body corporate."¹⁰

Blow's influential works proposed a vital role for women, not just in education but in the tempering of American individualism through new forms of social order. The order of the kindergarten classroom, anticipating the order of adult society, was achieved not through coercion, but through a freely accepted responsibility conveyed through the maternal pedagogy of the teacher. Kindergarten theorists and teachers during the period from 1870 to 1914 often used the kindergarten classroom as a metaphor for their ideal of community. "Froebel provides exercises in the Kindergarten for private duty and public," wrote Frances Lord of Boston in 1889. "Take the simplest circle game; it illustrates the whole duty of a good citizen in a republic. Anybody can spoil it, yet no one can play it alone."¹¹

In the 1880s, as Jurgen Herbst has noted, philosophy gave way to science as the most influential field of German learning in the United States. The new scientific interpretations of child development, or "child study," that eventually displaced Froebelianism as the basis of kindergarten theory were originally based on German research. American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, usually identified as the first to apply these theories to kindergarten method, had studied with Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig and was deeply influenced by German child psychologist Wilhelm Preyer. He used a German project, carried out by a group of Berlin teachers, as a model for his article "The Content of Children's Minds," which is often identified with the beginning of the child study movement in America.

But the new psychological and physiological ideas had another important early adherent in the United States. Emma Marwedel, who was born in

10. Susan E. Blow, *Letters to a Mother on the Philosophy of Froebel* (New York, 1899), 11–12; on Blow's conception of German idealism and its significance, see Blow, "The Service of Dr. Harris to the Kindergarten," *Kindergarten Review* 20 (June 1910): 592–3.

11. Frances Lord, "The Kindergarten as a School of Public Spirit," *Kindergarten Magazine* 2 (1889–90): 1. For more on the pedagogy of the kindergarten, see Allen, "Let Us Live with Our Children."

Minden in 1828, had been head of a girl's industrial school in Hamburg, to which a kindergarten training program was attached, and was also active on the leading committee of the German Women's Association, the first German feminist organization, which she joined in 1865. Marwedel, who (as we have seen) emigrated to America in about 1870, moved from Washington, D.C., to California, where with the help of wealthy philanthropists she established the state's first free kindergarten, open without cost to poor children, in Oakland. After 1879 she moved again, to San Francisco, where she became director of another such institution, Silver St. Kindergarten. This kindergarten was sponsored by a fellow German emigrant, Felix Adler, who had founded an organization, the Ethical Culture Society, that promoted secular ethical training through educational institutions. The head teacher at Silver Street was Marwedel's student, Kate Douglas Wiggin. Marwedel, who like Blow was a self-educated intellectual, had apparently known Preyer in Germany, and by 1880, even before the publication of Hall's article, was already interested in incorporating scientific ideas into kindergarten training. In 1881 (thus before the publication of Preyer's major work, *The Mind of the Child*) the curriculum for her training school included books by Marenholtz and Froebel, but also by Huxley and Spencer. Her book, *Conscious Motherhood*, published in 1887, was promoted by Elizabeth Peabody and became a well-known kindergarten text.¹²

Marwedel's scientific approach to childhood was very different from that of Susan Blow. Blow, who remained a philosophical idealist and orthodox Froebelian, was deeply troubled by scientific theories that seemed to emphasize the child's animal rather than spiritual nature. But both women looked to Germany as a source of intellectual inspiration. Marwedel characterized Preyer's book, *The Mind of the Child*, as "a remarkable book – the first of its kind in range and profundity," that answered "every query . . . which mothers and other educators should ask concerning the earliest physical, mental and emotional needs of the child." Both Blow and Marwedel used ideas derived from Germany to legitimate the claims of women to education, professional activity, and social influence. Women, claimed Marwedel, must be educated to "conscious motherhood," now based on scientific knowledge. "The characteristic of the nineteenth century," she

12. Herbst, *The German Historical School*, 67–71; the only biography of Marwedel is Fletcher Harper Swift, *Emma Jacobina Christiana Marwedel, Pioneer of the Kindergarten in California* (Berkeley, Calif., 1932); on her German background, see 149–54; on her career, see 154–80; on the curriculum of her training school see 173–4. Another discussion of Marwedel's career is Snyder, *Dauntless Women*, 97–101. On child study and its effect on kindergarten pedagogy, see (among many other sources), Shapiro, *Child's Garden*, 107–30; on Hall's own debt to Preyer, see G. Stanley Hall, *Life and Confessions of a Psychologist* (New York, 1924), 378–9.

wrote, "is its craving for truth. . . . Man not only puts the almost invisible parasite and worm under the microscope, but he subjects himself to the same investigation. . . . Is woman's moral and physical relation to her child not to be adjusted by the same laws which control the universe, from the star to the atom?"¹³

Marwedel also shared with Blow, Harris, and other kindergarten advocates a view of the kindergarten as a microcosm of a new form of social order. Like her contemporaries, she feared that the American spirit of liberty could turn to license if not tempered by a new spirit of responsibility, of which women as "conscious mothers" must be the proponents. America, she wrote, had the divinely appointed mission to solve "on free soil . . . the problem of social equality and not to turn her great future into a most fearful chaos of human passions and destructive forces." Against the specter of anarchy, Marwedel invoked the efficacy of private and public motherhood in the struggle for "moral reform" and against "the causes and effects of crime, idiocy, insanity, poverty and suicide." Because the new science showed that most characteristics were hereditary, the science of childhood included that of eugenics, which upheld the right of the child to be "well born." But hereditarian theories of personality development did not make the mother's role irrelevant. On the contrary, Marwedel believed, they underscored the need for scientific knowledge as a basis for guidance and education, for "the right unfolding of its higher inborn faculties into a good and happy being." Though Marwedel, who died in 1893, did not herself participate in the major revision of kindergarten pedagogy during the period 1890–1914 under the influence of Anna Bryan, Patty Smith Hill, Hall, and John Dewey, her students, especially Kate Douglas Wiggin and her sister Nora Archibald Smith, played influential roles in that movement.¹⁴

Marwedel's free kindergartens were among the first examples of a new and wide-ranging application of kindergarten theory and practice in the urban environment. The idea of the urban free kindergarten (or *Volkskindergarten*), which originated with Marenholtz in the 1860s, was developed in the 1870s and 1880s in America, where many groups, including male and female reformers, set up kindergartens providing care and education for the children of the urban poor. The first free kindergarten had been

13. Emma Marwedel, *Conscious Motherhood, or the Earliest Unfolding of the Child in the Cradle, Nursery and Kindergarten* (Chicago, 1887), 15, 19. On the role of scientific knowledge in the feminist arguments of this period, see Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union*, 64–99.

14. Marwedel, *Conscious Motherhood*, 73, 79, 137. For another view of Marwedel's work, see Barbara Beatty, "From Conscious Motherhood to Children's Rights: The American Kindergarten Movement and Child-Rearing in the Early Progressive Era," paper delivered at the convention of the History of Education Society, Oct. 29, 1989.

founded by the New York Ethical Culture Society in 1878; by 1890, there were 115 free kindergarten societies, maintaining 223 schools, in American cities. Kindergarten practice, which emphasized the teacher's involvement with the personal as well as the intellectual development of her pupils, provided an influential model for the developing field of social work. Many settlement houses, including Chicago's Hull House, included kindergartens; some of the settlements, such as Neighborhood House in Louisville and Elizabeth Peabody House in Boston, grew out of urban kindergartens. The kindergarten idea – order, cooperation, and community, mediated through a regime of maternal love – acquired a new significance in cities where an influx of immigrants had aroused the fear of social unrest and of the erosion of American culture through foreign influences. The evolution of kindergarten theory in the period 1880–1914 was shaped by the gender, class, and ethnic consciousness of the first generation of American kindergartens, almost all of whom were white, Protestant, middle-class, and native born. These women won acceptance for the kindergarten from many school boards, philanthropic organizations, and local government by emphasizing the importance of exposing foreign-born children to American culture, and poor children to middle-class values at the earliest possible age.¹⁵

American kindergartens, though adapting their methods to uniquely American conditions, nonetheless maintained contact with their German colleagues and learned from German examples. Until 1890, the most influential German kindergarten theorist in America had been Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülów, an orthodox Froebelian. After 1890, the interest of American kindergartners shifted to another German kindergarten founder, Henriette Schrader-Breyman, a great-niece of Friedrich Froebel. In 1873, Schrader-Breyman had founded a kindergarten training institution, the Pestalozzi-Froebel House, in Berlin. The school at first included an urban kindergarten serving the children of the poor as well as a training program; in the 1880s it developed many other services, including a day nursery, a school lunch program, and a school of domestic arts. From the beginning of her career, Schrader-Breyman had criticized Froebel's methods and had developed her own approach to early childhood education, which included practical activities such as housework, handicrafts, and gardening, nature study, and field trips. These methods reflected both a Pestalozzian belief in

15. On free kindergartens, see Shapiro, *Child's Garden*, 85–106; Barbara Beatty, "Child Gardening: The Teaching of Young Children in American Schools," in Donald Warren, ed., *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work* (New York, 1989), 76–81; on kindergartens in settlement houses, see Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890–1914* (New York, 1977), 44–7.

“learning by doing” and a conviction, also shared by Americans such as G. Stanley Hall, that exposure to nature was a vital part of the education of the urban child.¹⁶

The transition from Froebelian routines to activities based on practical activities and nature study was the most important, and most bitterly disputed, change in American kindergarten practice in the 1890s. Opponents of these changes cited the authority of Marenholtz-Bülow; proponents looked to Schrader-Breymann. The Pestalozzi-Froebel House became known to American kindergartners at least by 1880, when a visitor to Berlin published a very favorable report in Henry Barnard's *American Journal of Education*. Doubtless, the transition away from Froebelianism in America, as in Germany, was chiefly a pragmatic response to the practical demands of urban kindergarten teaching. In 1883, Wiggin wrote to Peabody that an article on teaching methods by Schrader-Breymann's coworker, Mary Lyschinska, had so closely resembled one that she had just written that she feared the suspicion of plagiarism. Anna Bryan, sometimes identified as the first to use the new methods, acknowledged no German influence on her experimental kindergarten in Louisville in 1887.

But the Pestalozzi-Froebel House was an important source of ideas to some American kindergartners, for kindergarten training in the 1880s and 1890s, still dominated by Blow, Kraus-Boelte, and their students, remained traditional. For example, Elizabeth Harrison, the head of the Chicago Kindergarten Training School, was surprised in 1889 by the pedagogical methods used by a German student who had previously studied at the Berlin institution and decided to travel to Germany in order to learn more about these methods. Cordially received by Schrader-Breymann, Harrison was at first shocked at her German colleague's abandonment of Froebelian orthodoxy. But she soon realized that training in practical activities was an effective means of achieving the goal that she and other American kindergartners had developed: the teaching of orderly and cooperative behavior. The Schraders, she wrote, were “striving as best they could to educate the inhabitants of this district into better ideas of cleanliness and economy.” After her return to the United States, Harrison put some of these methods into practice in her training school, renamed the Chicago Kindergarten Training College, which became a center of kindergarten training. She also applied her ideas about the reformative potential of such methods in her

16. On the Pestalozzi-Froebel House, see Mary Lyschinska and Henriette Schrader-Breymann: *Ihr Leben aus Briefen und Tagebüchern zusammengestellt und erläutert*, 2 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1922), 2: 1–50, and Henriette Schrader-Breymann, *Der Volkskindergarten im Pestalozzi-Froebel Hause* (Berlin, 1890).

work at Hull House, which was founded by Jane Addams and her colleagues in the same year, 1889.¹⁷

The visibility and prestige of the Pestalozzi-Froebel House were increased by the exhibit that it sponsored at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The editor of *Kindergarten Magazine*, the central organ of the American movement, was Amalie Hofer, a German immigrant who often visited Germany and publicized German developments. An editorial in this magazine asserted that a thorough study of the exhibit was "of vital import to the revival of natural methods" in the United States. Other Americans also pictured the Pestalozzi-Froebel House as an example of both the scientific expertise and the devotion to communal welfare that they considered characteristic of Germany. Hall, who visited the school shortly after the opening of its new buildings in 1898, characterized it as "the finest kindergarten installation in the world today." He praised the institution's emphasis on practical activities, nature study, and physical health and hygiene, contrasting its spirit of scientific rationality to the outmoded methods of his conservative rival and adversary, Susan Blow.¹⁸

Another example of the influence of the Pestalozzi-Froebel House was the creation of a student residence hall, known as the House of Gertrude, at Chicago Kindergarten College. Annette Hamminck-Schepel, a former student of Schrader-Breymann, who supervised the exhibit at the World's Fair, encouraged her Chicago colleagues to provide its trainees with a residence closely modeled on the Pestalozzi-Froebel House. Like their counterparts in Berlin, the Chicago trainees lived in an all-female residential community, sharing domestic, professional, and social activities. The purpose of the Chicago residence, named after Pestalozzi's heroine, was to train "young women in homemaking ideals, believing this to be the true foundation for their professional training." The building, located in a poor neighborhood, contained dormitory rooms, a dining hall, and a kindergarten. The residents, who combined practice teaching with domestic work,

17. A. Aldrich, "Mrs. Schrader's Kindergarten in Berlin," *Barnard's American Journal of Education* 30 (1880): 880-8; Kate Douglas Wiggin to Elizabeth Peabody, February 9, 1883, Elizabeth Peabody Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Elizabeth Harrison, *Sketches Along Life's Road* (Boston, 1930), 116-21; quotation, 121; on Bryan and the development of the American kindergarten, see Snyder, *Dauntless Women*, 239-50, and Shapiro, *Child's Garden*, 115-22.
18. "The Exhibit of the Pestalozzi-Froebel Haus of Berlin," *Kindergarten Magazine* 7 (1894-5): 10. Examples of other American responses to the Pestalozzi-Froebel House: "The Kindergarten Department Meeting at Denver," *Kindergarten Magazine* 8 (1895-6): 4; Laura Trefft, "The Transition and Elementary Classes at the Pestalozzi-Froebel House," *Kindergarten Magazine* 2 (1889-90): 414; "Pestalozzi-Froebel House: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary; Dedication of New Buildings," *Kindergarten Magazine* 11 (1898-9): 168-9; Amalie Hofer, "Death of Frau Henriette Schrader," *Kindergarten Magazine* 12 (1899-1900), 107; G. Stanley Hall, "The Pedagogy of the Kindergarten," in *Educational Problems*, 2 vols. (New York, 1911), 1: 16-17.

developed a sense of community through meetings, discussions, and recreational activities. Thus forms of female communal life that were practiced in many other kindergarten training schools, as well as in social settlement houses and women's colleges, were also encouraged by the example of the Pestalozzi-Froebel House. These substitute families provided young women professionals with emotional support and space for personal development.¹⁹

By the 1890s, both the American and the German kindergarten movements were well on their way to modifying or rejecting both Froebel's theories of child development and many of his methods. It is therefore all the more interesting that Froebel himself lost none of his stature as a symbolic figure. Froebel, a man who respected women, loved children, and honored motherhood, represented an appealing ideal of male behavior to women who aspired to tame the male-dominated world through the power of female influence. The effects of the feminization of childrearing and teaching in the latter half of the nineteenth century were apparent in portrayals of Froebel, who in his own lifetime had played the highly male-identified roles of soldier, patriot, philosopher, and teacher, as an androgynous and saintly figure resembling this period's image of Christ. "Let them [the kindergarten children] feel that the dear, good Froebel looks down with gratitude and happiness on the children's love and joy," wrote Wiggins on the occasion of the founder's birthday in 1895. The religious overtones of the movement were also apparent in the custom of the "Froebel pilgrimage" – a tour of Froebel's homeland of Thuringia, including the important sites of the early kindergarten movement. In 1899, German kindergarten Eleonore Heerwart, then president of the International Kindergarten Union, took advantage of this tourist traffic by appealing for American financial support for the creation of a Froebel museum, a library, and a home for retired kindergarten teachers in Blankenburg, where the first kindergarten had been founded. Lucy Wheelock, head of a Boston kindergarten training program and a national leader of the American kindergarten movement, cooperated with Heerwart to plan a Froebel pilgrimage for American kindergartners. By appealing to her American colleagues to rescue a project that had apparently found little support in Germany, Heerwart implicitly acknowledged America as the international center of the kindergarten movement.²⁰

19. Ruth Grey, "The Keilhau of America," *Kindergarten Magazine* 10 (1897–8): 619–29; on Schepel's visit to America, see Jenkins, "Froebel's Disciples," 18 and Annette Hamminck-Schepel, "Mitteilungen aus Chicago an Frau Henriette Schrader," *Vereins-Zeitung des Pestalozzi-Froebel Hauses* (October 1896), 1–2.

20. As an example of a Christ-like image of Froebel, see the bas-relief sculpture over the entrance of Wheelock College, Boston; Kate Douglas Wiggin, "On Froebel's Birthday," *Kindergarten Magazine*

The responses of Wheelock and her seventy colleagues who participated in the 1911 Froebel pilgrimage to Germany suggest a change in the American kindergarten movement's perception of Germany. To Harris, who admired Germany from afar, and to Hall, who often traveled there, Germany was the land of scientific and social progress. Wheelock also knew, visited, and admired, impressive institutions such as the Pestalozzi-Froebel House. But in her account of her travels, she emphasized chiefly the backwardness of Thuringia, which she sometimes described as sinister rather than picturesque. In 1903, her tour of Froebel's birthplace, Oberweissbach, included "the dark closet in which Froebel's stepmother used to shut him up for punishment," and she commented on the town's poverty and lack of modern conveniences. "It is the most primitive place that I have seen."

The Froebel pilgrims of 1911 learned from their German colleagues that the kindergarten cause had received far less official and popular support in Germany than in America. By 1900, many major American school systems supported kindergarten classes, and kindergarten teaching had been recognized as a department of the major teachers' organization, the National Education Association, since 1884. By contrast, in Germany, the majority of public school teachers still firmly resisted the idea of incorporating the kindergarten, or indeed any form of education for children under six, into public school systems. A major reason for this difference was the differing status of women in the two nations; the professions of teaching and social work, which in America were dominated by women, in Germany remained dominated by men. "The development of kindergarten remained outside the German school system," lamented one speaker in her welcoming address to the Americans. "Our German government, our German school officials, all those who had power and influence in educational matters, have not shown the slightest interest in the matter in the fifty years that followed Froebel's death." American visitors to Germany also noted that most male educators there, including those in university departments of education, had little knowledge of Froebel or of the kindergarten. By contrast, kindergarten teaching had been incorporated into the curricula of the University of Chicago and of Teachers' College by 1900.²¹

8 (1895-6): 549; an account of one Froebel pilgrimage is in Helen K. Mills, "A Froebel Birthday Celebration," *Kindergarten Magazine* 8 (1895-6): 733; on the Froebel Museum project see "An International Froebel Memorial," *Kindergarten Magazine* 12 (1899-1900): 106-7; and "Regarding the Future Froebel-Haus," *Kindergarten Magazine* 16 (1903-4): 315. On American support for this project, see Barbara Beatty, "Lucy Wheelock's Education and Vocation," in *Wheelock College: 100 Years* (Boston, 1988), 7-8.

21. Lucy Wheelock, "My Life Story," typescript, Lucy Wheelock Collection, Archives, Wheelock College, 66; Lucy Wheelock, *Letters from Europe* (Boston, n.d.), 16; "The Froebel Pilgrimage," *Kindergarten Review* 21 (1911): 488; other materials on the Froebel pilgrimage are held in the Lucy

A similar view of Germany as backward rather than advanced was expressed by John Dewey. Dewey, who acknowledged Froebel as an important influence on his own educational approach, nonetheless argued that the kindergarten had been deformed by its authoritarian German environment. Froebel, Dewey asserted, based his games on abstruse symbolism because he "could not regard the occupations of the schoolroom as literal reproductions of the ethical principles involved in community life – the latter were often too repressive and authoritarian to serve as worthy models." Only under the more "progressive" conditions of American life could Froebel's central ideal of education for citizenship be realized. Thus, after the turn of the century, many American educators echoed the sentiment of American kindergartner Alice Fitts, who while standing at Froebel's grave felt that "he was not dead, but living in America." The anti-German sentiment aroused by the First World War only intensified this change in kindergartners' image of Germany, which they now regarded as the home of tyrannical "Prussianism" rather than as the land of learning, order, and progress.²²

The relationship of the American to the German kindergarten movement suggests that, in this as in other cases, international contacts served less as sources of absolutely new ideas than as sources of cross-cultural dialogue, leading to a deeper insight into the participants' own cultures and their position within them. Most of the ideas introduced by the kindergarten movement to America were not absolutely new. The forms of female professionalism and social activism that it encouraged were already developing in America by the 1870s, when the kindergarten movement became popular among educated, middle-class American women. After a short initial period of dependence on German models, American kindergarten activists found innovative and inventive applications for kindergarten theory. For most of this period, German culture, as experienced through contacts with German colleagues, served the Americans less as a model to be imitated than as a symbolic "other" against which to assess the strengths and weaknesses of American culture.

By encouraging some women to acquire and use the prestigious vocabulary of German philosophy and science, the kindergarten movement enabled them to discover their intellectual potential, to overcome some

Wheelock Collection; see also Beatty, "Lucy Wheelock's Education and Vocation," 7–8; and Allen, "Let Us Live with Our Children."

22. John Dewey, "Froebel's Educational Principles," in *The School and Society* (New York, 1899; rpt. New York, 1967), 131; the quotation from Fitts is in Mills, "A Froebel Birthday Celebration," 734; Shapiro, *Child's Garden*, 184–5. On the incorporation of the kindergarten into the public schools in Germany and the United States, see Allen, "Let Us Live with Our Children."

cultural barriers to women's public self-expression and activity, and to gain a hearing from their male contemporaries. German and American women, moreover, did not worshipfully accept the wisdom of male pedagogues; they revised and transformed these ideas, often in ways that would have shocked their original proponents. By the 1890s, female kindergarten activists had incorporated kindergarten theory into arguments for many feminist causes, including educational and social reform, pacifism, and women's suffrage. Pestalozzi and Froebel, declared kindergarten teacher Eudora Hailmann (the American wife of German immigrant Wilhelm Hailmann), had recognized women as "the most important agency in the evolution of mankind. From the cradle to the grave it is woman who inspires, sustains, restrains, urges and guides." Their creative use of these ideas suggests that, for many of these women, the study of the child had provided the basis for a new understanding and affirmation of the self. "The child, any child I had almost said," wrote Kate Douglas Wiggin, "is the Columbus of the undiscovered world within you, in your heart, that goes without saying, but in your mind as well."²³

23. "Kindergarten Department Meeting at Denver," *Kindergarten Magazine* 8 (1895-6): 4; Kate Douglas Wiggin, "The Training of Children," in *The Woman's Book* (New York, 1894), 319.

