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Art Education in Germany

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Georg Peez

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 fourth 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.