

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Visiting Glockseeschule in Hannover or: A Parabolic Flight Between Two Different Schools

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Whoever comes to visit the Glockseeschule in Hannover will soon find out that the school is not actually located in the area marked on the map as “Glocksee.” It is in fact located in the urban district of “Döhren” near the river Leine. The school consists of a large building surrounded by extensive outside spaces, a yard and a lawned area. The semi-open, slightly tangled design of the ensemble of spaces is immediately appealing. Adjacent to the schoolyard is a little church. It evokes the impression of a small missionary attempt set for failure from the outset, but the building nestles nicely into the overall brick-lined picture. The Glockseeschule is not an “island”—this much I can sense already.

This is where my two-week visit in March 2014 starts, a sort of tracing back of commonalities and differences of two schools: Glocksee and Freie Schule Frankfurt. The account that I am writing here is made up of several experiences, many conversations with teachers, lasting impressions, real and constructed examples, all of which I trust speak for themselves.

Encounters and observations

Waiting at the main entrance. The first children arrive, mostly in small groups on their scooters. Nobody carries a schoolbag. I hear that at Glocksee everything can be left at school. As there is no homework nothing needs to be taken home. The children travel together in fixed groups from all over Hannover.

I enter the school building, watched curiously. A six-year old child asks me what character I will be for carnival. I start laughing and say: “Sorry ... top secret.” Wanna-be Harry Potter still wonders what sort of a fancy dress I may chose and leads me into a classroom. This class consists of 22 children, first to third grade. There are two more groups of the same age bracket in the school, three groups of grades four to six, and also the senior cycle made up of one group of grades seven to ten. In total there are 220 children enroled at the school.

After an arrival period the junior cycle classes (grades one to six) start their day with a class meeting. I sit down and I am surprised about the calm and attentive atmosphere in the room when a child takes a stone in the hands and asks who would like to tell the group something. Children raise their hands and the stone is passed

on. One after the other the children now say what is on their mind, what they did over the weekend, what they like and what not. Some announce that they would like to meet others today and ask who would be interested in meeting. If someone wishes to comment on a contribution, they raise two fingers. I tell the group that I come from a town where a few days ago a skyscraper was blown to pieces. Many of the children seem to have seen this in television, or they have questions about it, immediately seven or eight raise their fingers. Now it is my turn to pick one of them to speak. A true conversation however, in which statements, questions and answers can freely oscillate, cannot develop. I am allowed to pick only two children for their contributions, then the stone has to be passed on again. That's the rule. Things would get out of hand otherwise. It is the teacher who is in control.

Part of the ritual is a bit of English practice. This consists of the children counting in English and talking about today's date. Then two songs are to be sung. The teacher realizes that most of the children are not interested in singing the second song anymore. Those who don't want to sing are allowed to get up. It gets noisy and the teacher starts a rhythmic clapping of her hands. The children react instantly by joining in with the clapping rhythm, in a call and response manner. This is the established calm-down ritual in this class.

In the following work period the children can choose between German and Maths. One child writes a story, another one uses a maths exercise book, others draw machines and add descriptions to them. The two teachers who are

responsible for the class agreed to abandon the separation into subject related lessons as they didn't find it helpful. One of the teachers wished there was more openness also in other areas of the timetable so that the individual interests of the children and their need for breaks could be better catered for. In other classes the children can often choose to work on their own topic within a given subject area. I also noticed a lot of ritualised aids for planning and reflection for the students: smiley-charts ("what I plan and how I get on with it"), log-books, learning journals, weekly plans.

Close to noon the "girls and boys hour" starts. The children separate into gender homogenous groups. I can be with the boys. The teacher anticipates that a radio play may be demanded. The children decide on which play to listen to and then start drawing and chatting. I want to know what girls and boys hour is about. A social-worker explains that they are long established in the school and that the adults are still in discussion about why and how they are run. He says boys are more likely to talk about their problems in same-sex groups, particularly in grades four to six. But then, it also seems that the children like these periods because during this time they can follow their own interests.

I also want to know what interests the children at Glocksee. I find a poster in a classroom that is explained to me by a child. The poster displays the wishes of the children addressed to the teachers for the current school year, e.g., more sport, more movement, more handicrafts, more art and good exercise books.

Slowly but surely I get an idea of how the children go about getting their way.

They don't directly challenge the given order, they don't dissent or at least only rarely do so. At any rate, I can see no obvious signs of it. Instead they use the school's "open spaces"—I am tempted to say: the system's "weak spots."

Older children in the higher grades also use this freedom if, for example during tutorials that are aimed at closing gaps in their academic knowledge and supporting each other, they generally prefer to "take a break." Although, so I am told, in their final years (grade nine and ten) the children actually use the tutorials in exactly the way they are meant, diligently focussing on their final exams.

I take a break. The atmosphere in the staff room is cheerful. In advance of my visit I was told that everyone, children and adults, are called by their first names. Sometimes children knock on the door, asking a question or looking for a particular artefact. Contact between children and adults is amicable, straight and not complicated.

At Glocksee there are no marked exams before grade nine. Instead of marks or grades the teachers write a feedback letter on the learning progress of the children. I cannot detect a trace of unhealthy competitiveness that might hamper relationships in the school. "Fear of school—no way!" That has always been the school's mantra. It is taken seriously by all involved. The school is clearly a repression-free zone, calmness and humor are determining factors in school life—at least as far as I can see.

I try to find out about the structures which expand beyond the class groupings. For the children there are multiple choices, interchanging periods with different timetables, project weeks, quarterly

projects, internships and a company simulation game for the higher grades. In the context of a "future day" children of grade five get a first impression of a profession. In grades four to six the children pick one of a number of tasks for six months. With adult support: they take on repair works for other classes; or they become shop-keepers at the school-shop, administer stock, take orders from classes, manage the cash flow, organise the daily rota for the counter and keep the shelves in the shop clean; there is a group of children responsible for the animals in the school; another group maintains the library; there is a group taking care of the school newsletter; another one organises and prepares the collective breakfast every Friday.

Every class in the junior cycle has an established multitude of tasks, in some cases the rules of the class are displayed on walls and doors. Classes one to six organise project weeks. I witness a part of the extensive preparation for this.

One morning 132 Glocksee children aged six to 12 meet in the assembly hall. Two teachers perform a scene in which they stage an experiment: they compare the volume of their closed hands first by simply holding them against each other, but then also by putting them into a jar with water so as to judge the volume according to the displacement of water. The children are asked to guess what the project week is going to be about: Research.

Every child can pose research questions. Some of the children already have ideas: What is the life of a celebrity like? What are drugs? How did the first flower emerge? How does a monk live? This special assembly functions well. Here

it is possible to speak and be heard. Could I use this ritual in my work with children?

Yet I also see the strong orientation of the children towards the adults. To me the latter seem to have a dominant position. They clearly mediate the structure and dissemination of information via well rehearsed and routinised rituals, taking care that everything runs smoothly. Children often ask whether they are allowed to do this or that or the other, in what order to do their worksheets, or whether what they choose to do is actually alright. I get the impression that these children could learn and express themselves more if the school structure and teachers allowed them to take more individual responsibility and let them make mistakes.

I experience an example of allowing more individual responsibility on a Monday afternoon. All 66 children in the five to nine year old age group meet in a classroom. Whoever feels like it can offer an activity for the following 90 minutes. I am told that children are welcome to make such offers. On this Monday, however, only teachers offer activities: felt work, storytelling, playground excursions and playing boules are on the list. Again I am impressed how easy it is for the group to communicate and focus on a common "agreement." Then all the children leave the room, join in with one of the activities or start doing something on their own.

I also visit the senior pupils. Teachers apologise to me for the unspectacular lesson and the chaos. Maybe they are surprised that I am not interested in seeing a showcase for good teaching or discipline in class. I had expected to see children taking individual responsibility for their own learning and that this would be taken

seriously by their teachers. I had expected that they would create their own order out of the necessary group "chaos" and take charge of it. At the end of the day they are, after all, almost adults and one would expect more of them than of the younger ones in the junior groups. Instead I feel like moving back in time to my own secondary school where school meant following a more or less hidden agenda with the occasional choice between options A and B.

I learn to play boules outside. There is a lot of wild vegetation in the grounds. I am happy to chat with a teacher who has been at the school since 1988. She tells me that up until recently there had been a lot of founding teachers still active at the school and she is the most senior remaining member of staff. I hear that children of teachers attend the school, former pupils want to have their children enrolled and a former pupil works as a social-worker in the school. She finds that the eldest of the senior pupils stand out in terms of their autonomy, zest for learning, stability of character and their competence in setting themselves priorities.

Other teachers express similar views. I realise that in Frankfurt we speak similarly about our own school leavers. If both perceptions are accurate I wonder what the truly determining factors for such dispositions in these school leavers are because our schools are in fact different in many ways.

I realise that over the years the Glockseeschule has to some extent reinvented itself and thereby also left a good bit behind. Many teachers still voice support for the school and its founding principles. Some teachers can still tell

stories from the old days. It's worth having a look at what's been left behind.

Leftovers

I find it challenging to write about a story which has not been my own. Nevertheless I'll try to carefully present a limited cross section of the views of some of the people who were actively involved.¹ For more detailed information I refer to Glocksee's documentation (Köhler & Krammling-Jöhrens, 2000). Glockseeschule, founded in 1972, is an established alternative learning institution, anchored by the education act of the state of Lower Saxony and mainly financed by the said state. Its status is unique in Germany. Parents of primary age children in Hannover are free to apply to enrol their children at the Glockseeschule. Normally the number of applications exceeds the number of available places in the school four times over. Originally the school started small with one class group of grades one to three. Within a short period of time it expanded to include grades four, five and six. In 1986 the senior grades (seven to ten) were established.

I heard repeatedly that a new consciousness evolved with the establishment of the senior grades and the responsibility of providing final examinations for the children. This led to a willingness to give children earlier opportunities to confront learning options and learning demands. The resulting contact and engagement with subject matter brought up by the teachers was seen as a means of developing interests and strengths which previously were not of such central importance. In a way this was also meant to address the problem of dealing with exams instead of leaving it to

the schools that the children would attend after leaving the Glocksee. I could, at times, sense a trace of regret in the stories told by some of the people I talked to. Others however pointed out that they identified themselves fully with the learning situation as it is now and that they felt no need to distance themselves from it at all.

In the course of the school enlargement during the 1980s, the school moved to a "real" school building. It increasingly developed structures commonly found in mainstream schools (a set curriculum, obligatory daily, weekly and annual schedules).

In the school's early days a lot of debate ensued concerning children's aggression, learning and the level of adult intervention. Later it was changing childhood experiences in society that became the most prevalent topic and this, in turn, also led to a debate on the principle(s) of self-regulation. As a result of the changing work practices of some teachers and the input of scientific advisors, the Glockseeschule established a stricter time structure for its daily practice. This was achieved only after a great deal of intense internal discussion.

However, some of the teachers' anecdotes seem to run counter to this. One of the adults tells me about his time as a child at Glocksee and how he spent most of his time exploring wrecked cars, playing soccer and tending campfires. After the morning meeting the children would do whatever took their fancy for the rest of the day. Teachers would try to interest children in learning activities, they "kind of ran after them"—albeit unsuccessfully.

One of the first teachers remembers this era as a “time of chaos.” The teachers at the time wanted to change the way the school was but they had trouble asserting themselves in an appropriate manner.

Another story demonstrating the unreseved support adults showed for children was when pupils painted local peoples’ cars without permission and official complaints were made. Locals voiced their fears concerning such “experiments with children.” Another past-pupil remembered being referred to as “pupil at a terrorist school.” The pupils at the school at that time clearly felt the hostility.

Over a period of years, as teachers became more experienced and the tide of political turmoil receded, an educational movement that started as a revolt against outdated authoritarian structures, overcrowded classes and corporeal punishment grew into a pedagogy of negotiation between partners with equal rights. At the beginning the motto was: “This is the children's house!” On these grounds it was also clear that buying expensive furniture would be a complete waste of money because the children would turn it upside down anyway, use tables for building play-boats and no piece of furniture would survive for too long as a result. Thus the school was mainly furnished with used, second-hand and otherwise scrapped furniture. Nowadays the adults don’t hold back their own opinions and desires concerning a longer term perspective on the common wellbeing of the entire school community as well as the prospective future school population.

I am invited to attend a staff meeting and note how such considerate yet

determined positions are developed. My impression is that the children are always kept in mind, that there is a great understanding of individual problematics and that in the end decisions are made with the involvement and participation of children—not against them. Thus the verbal discussions play an important role and I hear that in the past there were even more of them. The ideal was that everything was to be decided with everyone agreeing. Today decisions at Glocksee are made by majority votes. A teacher tells me in comparison to the past it is more structured and focused on efficiency.

At the zenith of this story

The Glockseeschule and the Freie Schule Frankfurt have common roots. Not only were they established at about the same time, in fact the founders and the ideas were identical. For a long period the two schools were in contact with each other.

In the context of the general political uprising at the end of the 1960s the educational system was harshly criticized all over Germany, in part due to the overcrowded classrooms. The history of our own school goes back to a small group of parents who refused to send their children to state run kindergarten. They wanted for their children an education free of punishments, shame, guilt, and irrational restrictions. At the time it was still common practice to scare children, corporeal punishment counted as an expression of love, obedience and conformance were seen as virtues. Monika Seifert was a driving force in a parents group, which managed to start up a private nursery (Aden-Grossmann, 2014) Inspired by Monika’s daughter it was named

“Kinderschule.” This Kinderschule was meant to be a space free of repression. In the vocabulary of the time this was expressed as anti-authoritarian education. A. S. Neill’s Summerhill school provided a model for the parents (Neill, 1973). A point of reference were also the writings of Wilhelm Reich. Years back he had already argued for self-regulation as a means to lead a fulfilled life. In a climate of suppression of children’s drives this could not be achieved. Instead the result would be neurosis and authoritarian character features. Long before Erich Fromm’s work, Reich was the first psycho-analyst who had critically studied people in fascism (Reich, 1933). As a physician he had an interest in the cure of people. He was also concerned with the question how children could grow up to be healthy individuals eager to work, eager to gain knowledge and capable of loving. For the generation of 1968 this was a radical counter model to Auschwitz and its aftermath.

When the children of the Kinderschule reached school age the project-group developed concrete ideas for an alternative school (Seifert & Nagel, 1977). Their initial aim was to establish a model school within the state’s system. Many of the group members were willing to face what they called the “long march through the institutions.” They anticipated a long process before their project would gain legitimacy. Members of the project group were also Oskar Negt and Jürgen Seifert. Their children attended the Kinderschule. Both of them were offered academic positions in Hannover and took up the offer. In Hannover they continued promoting the ideas of the project group from Frankfurt.

The local situation in Frankfurt had been heated up through discriminatory media reports about the Kinderschule and Monika Seifert. The social-democrats in power in the city council were hostile towards the project group. In Hannover the situation was different. Oskar Negt, whose children had been in the Kinderschule in Frankfurt, and who had no interest to send them to a mainstream school, remembers that in Hannover it was possible to establish an alternative primary school as a state run model within only 4 months. This was due to the immediate support of the then Lord Mayor Herbert Schmalstieg, himself a member of the social-democratic party.

One of the five founding teachers was Dieter Hermann. He had already tried at another school to break with old structures and modes of thought. He remembers that the general attitude in education was summed up in slogans like: “Bend early what is meant to be a hook” or “If Johnny didn’t learn it, John will neither.” This attitude also informed government departments of education at the time. A school that promised emancipation was a frightening prospect for many people. It did not fit into the common concept of learning and growing up.

German television showed a documentary in 1972 about a model classroom that had been established by Renate Stubenrauch in Frankfurt with children from the Kinderschule. Here the classroom practice followed the interests and demands of the children. They decided what they wanted to learn and had an essential impact on how they did things.

The film documented the zest for learning of the children at the Kinderschule, but also the massive

behavioural problems of the other children who had grown up in repressive circumstances. The film was screened in Hannover at the University with Oskar Negt and Renate Stubenrauch as presenters. Dieter Hermann recalls that the room was packed to the roof and a second screening had to be scheduled.

The early days of the Freie Schule Frankfurt

The group in Frankfurt eventually decided to start up a school outside the state system. In 1974 the Freie Schule Frankfurt started working in number three, Vogelweidstraße. The first couple of years were difficult in many regards, but particularly because of the illegal status of the project. It took until 1986 for the school to secure the status of a recognized private school.

In its early days the Freie Schule Frankfurt followed an educational concept based on a type of therapeutic approach. The writings of Wilhelm Reich were influential. Bootleg copies of his books are still kept in the archives of the school. Pedagogues and parents discussed post-Reichian therapy concepts (Jacob Stattman), and engaged in working through their own biographies.

At the time of the Kinderschule they found already that their own restrictive socialization constituted limits to their dealings with the children. In turn the children displayed their so far repressed desires in the now liberated environment, and they also mirrored the parents' problematic quite clearly. Hence the school was thought of as a "therapeutic setting" where children could "act out" problems. The house was "owned" by the children. For adults it was crucial to

engage in discussions about the liberated space time and time again.

The school was organised by parents and pedagogues. Conceptual questions regarding the everyday practice in the school and how to deal with the children were discussed and decided by a plenary meeting. Yet, active parental involvement was restricted to the areas of adult relationships. The school was defined as a "second layer of socialization," where alternative experiences to the family environment would be possible for the children. Therefore parents were (and today still are) not present during the school day.

Over time the role of the teaching staff became increasingly important. They became more conscious about their professional role and drew clearer boundaries towards the parents. In discussions amongst teachers and parents it became more important to find a common understanding or definition of a situation or of children's behaviour; the discussions were no longer a means of decision making. Instead the school established a model of self-governance whereby the pedagogical team had sole responsibility for the day to day running of the school. Parents were elected to different committees in charge of e. g., enrolment of new families, PR-work, etc.

The therapeutic focus and the idea of acting out were replaced by a conceptual view of education as a process of building relationships and by the importance of genuine processes of negotiation between adults and children. The presence of the teachers was more felt from then on. They claimed their own rights to be taken care of just as much as the rights of the children. Rules in the school were made as

agreements and they were open to negotiation between children and adults.

Just like at Glocksee it would be unlikely today that the children in Frankfurt were to claim that the house is theirs, albeit that it may still be easier at the Freie Schule Frankfurt to turn a table upside down and use it as a play-boat for a day or to paint on walls.

For a long time parents saw the random spaghetti on the ceiling in the dining-room as evidence of the equal rights of the children in the school. Such spaghetti appears from time to time on the ceiling when children fling it up, and it can be stuck there for a few days or weeks. No adult would encourage such behaviour or join in. Yet, the random spaghetti on the ceiling is still a hint that rules can be broken and questioned. Nowadays the spaghetti is an alibi-spaghetti.

At some stage the teachers at Glocksee found that the children had a wish for traditional instruction. They wanted to face the so-called “reality.” They wanted to be challenged and they wanted a school that is a “real school,” i. e., an ordinary school. Such a wish is also mirrored in Frankfurt where children organise a game called “Playing-Strict-School.” In Hannover and in Frankfurt it was increasingly possible to accept and request forms of learning and topics that were far less problematic for the children than for the adults who carried with them their own school experiences.

The current Freie Schule Frankfurt in light of Glocksee

The children at Glocksee asked me several times what would be different in our school. Teachers were also interested to learn about similarities and differences. I was able to speak at a staff meeting about

my observations. I noticed that Glocksee has a huge outside area, yard and garden. It is used by children unrestrictedly and largely free of adult supervision. Children need to feel safe and reassured, but not under observation. Children are trusted and also expected to use these spaces. In Hannover this has led to the establishment of a separate “yard culture” amongst the children. A teacher tells me the story of a girl in first grade who was told by older children that the tree-house was the “outside-toilet.” She made use of it accordingly and was rather surprised when she eventually was told “the other truth” by adults.

A room at Glocksee that is used for a while now as a library was formerly known as “OLGA.” This acronym was built for the German expression “Ohne Lehrer Geht es Auch,” which translates as: teachers are not always necessary.

Where are spaces nowadays for children to be amongst themselves without constant adult supervision? In Frankfurt the OLGA-principle materialises at least for a period every day when all members of staff assemble for a meeting of 30–60 minutes.

At Glocksee, just as in Frankfurt, it can happen that children of the lower grades are naked during hot days in summer, for example if there are nice puddles inviting to play on the yard. During school tours boys and girls can share a room, junior and senior cycle alike. In Frankfurt being naked is particularly popular among the three to six year old children.

Relationships among the children and their desire for a social life that expands beyond the school experiences are valued in both schools. At Glocksee a caretaker telephone was available for the children to

use for making phone calls and arrangements to meet others. In Frankfurt there is an in-house phone system installed with a phoneline available to the children on each of the four floors of the building. Beside this individual mobile phones of children and adults are in use but to have one is not necessary.

At Glocksee the basis for the collective work amongst adults is constant exchange and communication. Team meetings, topic specific conferences, case conferences, working groups, parents meetings, plenary parents assemblies are scheduled in different intervals. Teachers state that they normally attend two to three meetings every week. Specific topics of interest are currently: media, diet/food, linking inclusion and support. The main organisational basis in Frankfurt is similarly the constant flow of communication. This can be demanding. It means first to share thoughts to make something a topic, and second to make it a shared topic for all. These processes take some time and involve intensity.

In Hannover and in Frankfurt it is parents who are accepted to the school, not so much children. The parents' stance is the main factor, not a child's behaviour or development (with the exception of physical disabilities that can not be catered for due to architectural restrictions or shortage of staff). A clear commitment of the parents to the values and concepts of the school is the first and most important condition for enrolling a child.

At Glocksee a system is established whereby the final decision about enrolments is made by drawing lots. Parents apply for enrolment via the public enrolment scheme similar to all other primary schools in Hannover. Applicants

are invited to take part in an information evening. Then an individual meeting for parents with teachers is scheduled. Eventually the parents come for a sit-in-day to the school (without their child). Finally the names of those parents who are still interested to enrol their child are put into a box from which 22 are drawn. In Frankfurt a draw is not necessary. The demand is normally not as big. Yet there is also great emphasis on making potential new parents aware of the school structures. A longer process of considering and decision making is allowed before finally confirming enrolment. Any or all parents involved with the child is supposed to agree themselves to sending their child to FSF. Cooperation is the basic condition for the pedagogical work.

Some differences—for discussion

Education at this point in history has to be located between the two poles of "structure" (a term often heard at Glocksee) and the appreciation of "self-regulation" (a term often heard in Frankfurt). Where structure is missing children lack the chance to find orientation and counterparts for challenge and resistance, for exposure to demands and confronting social requirements. Where appreciation of self-regulation is missing it is only possible to talk about children in terms of their conforming to required standards or potential problematic behaviour. The essence of the children, their topics and interests, their desires and phantasies, their suppressed troubles and anger, hidden creativity or the "illumination" that springs from overcoming a period of boredom, all of this vanishes as a possible point of reference.

Oskar Negt speaks of self-regulation as a form of knowledge that enables the exposure of all “blackmarket-phantasies.” In an environment where expression is limited or repressed there will only be space for phantasies which fit into the adult’s concept. This can be seen e. g., in the works of Montessori or Steiner. Other phantasies are moved to the blackmarket of your soul and maybe then into the unconscious. At a blackmarket you get things which are actually forbidden. Blackmarket phantasies hide challenging matters which come out in a fearless environment with space to act freely so that they can actually be seen and talked about.

At Glocksee a particular focus is on academic knowledge, inciting consciousness, on the planning of learning processes and didactics of various subjects. There is no equivalent value put on these elements in Frankfurt. Instead there is a lot of room for movement, art and crafts, for imaginative role play and laughter. The Freie Schule Frankfurt is a merry school. All children are present for a clearly defined period of the day during which everything can be negotiated and put into practice. There is surely “book-pencil-paper-learning” happening, foreign languages are encountered and pre-planned work takes place; yet the sublime learning within the flow of the group and in accordance with the “inner voice” have significant weight. That makes the Freie Schule Frankfurt a lively place.

At Glocksee I was impressed by the friendliness and harmony amongst the children and also by their zest for exploring, exercising, their work and the common discussions. The children seemed well balanced. They were occupied by

genuine tasks that most likely help them progress. They used the meetings and trusted the order and rhythm of the numerous rituals through which the teachers structured their lessons in some classes. That was quite pleasant. Everything simply worked.

And yet, that raises doubts in me. I did not see instances of disorder or distemper that would have indicated that order here was negotiated and agreed upon in shared responsibility amongst adults and children. The perfect organisation of the school seals off against chances for the groups of children, supported by the adults, to make experiences with self-imposed rules. This also in relation to “book-pencil-paper-learning” and the conclusion of its usefulness. Even today Oskar Negt speaks of schools as “nurseries of democracy” and about the importance to establish an “atmosphere of autonomy” where adults abandon some power so that children can learn from each other (Negt, 2014, p. 39). Glocksee has exited this path. But still I discovered some “oases of obstinacy”: At the time before the official school day starts the school-bench is redefined as a table-tennis table and the lounge becomes a stage for a playback display of Rammstein. In a room that everyone calls “Stabbeleria” it is possible to read, do handicrafts, play ukulele or lie around on one of the sofas. The children can spend their breaktime in the school building or outside and they use this time with great pleasure.

Largely, however, the inner rhythm of the children and their spontaneity are restricted due to the fixed timetable, the lesson planning and the scheduled projects. The children have to follow this schedule and adhere to the resulting format

of tasks. Choices are normally limited to the area of a particular subject with tasks mainly of reproductive nature. In many cases I witnessed the principle: “The same for all and at the same time,” in form of worksheets, etc.

In a few cases there are methods used at Glocksee that incite a bitter (behaviourist) aftertaste. Smilies, charts of good behaviour, bottle-of-fame and similar measures in my opinion are means to manipulate children, entice them and make them behave in a way that is defined as correct (which in this context simply means: less problematic). Children get a shallow pleasure out of these practices. They hardly see through the dependency established in this manner, and they don't know of alternatives.

On this issue I had an interesting discussion. I was asked what we would do in Frankfurt and what our intense discussions would lead to if, at the end of the day, no concrete intervention was to follow. For dealing with the problems of troubled children we have no standard recipe either. However, our practice is strongly anchored in hermeneutic thought. Here any knowledge is always regarded as provisional and processes of further insights are seen as part of finding solutions. Therefore we don't assume a right to “manage” children systematically. What is more, we often find that in-depth discussion of a particular issue sets in train changes on the matter in question already, even if we cannot exactly pinpoint the underlying dynamics. Maybe it can be understood as: An improved understanding evokes a different view on matters. Conspicuous are judged in a new light, the consciousness regains clarity, intuitively we react differently and

relationships are potentially newly defined. Sometimes this is sufficient for a “knot” within a child or a group to become untied, and something new and unknown happens. This in itself isn't a certain structure, but it depends on a firm trust in self-regulation. So the quality of structure is more important than any question about the quantity of structure.

I leave Glocksee with a pleasant and relaxed feeling. I met cordial people for whom the aspects concerning relationships are important in working with others, people who value exchange of opinion and communication as a matter of course. There is certainly room for further discussion of differences and common understanding. After all, Wilhelm Reich still has a point in stating: “Everyone is right in some way” (1999, p. 25). To learn about different ways of alternative education we must try to understand those ways in the first place. This was my intention for visiting the Glockseeschule. I am not finished yet.

Notes

1: Oskar Negt (Interview 14.03.2014), Dieter Hermann (Interview 14.03.2014), Marei Hartlaub (Interview 06.03.2014), Renate Stubenrauch (Interview 08.03.2014)

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