A TRANSATLANTIC NETWORK: AMERICAN AND GERMAN WOMEN IN THE KINDERGARTEN MOVEMENT

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In 1903, the German teacher and educational reformer Eleonore Heerwart praised the movement that had popularized the kindergarten, a progressive form of early childhood education, in Germany, the United States, and around the world. “The wide ocean, the distance, the foreign language has proved no obstacle,” she wrote to her colleagues in the United States. “Books have been exchanged and translated, periodicals published, institutions founded, meetings held — and all on a scale so large that it puts the Mother-country to shame.”1 By the early twentieth century, the very small-scale educational experiment that the German educator Friedrich Fröbel had launched in the late 1830s had become the center of a global movement that extended not only to North America and Western Europe but also to China, Japan, India, Mexico, and many other countries. Within the dense network of communications that bound this movement together, the most fruitful exchange was between Germany, where the kindergarten had its roots, and the United States, where it gained its greatest success.

The movement that supported the founding of kindergartens, the training of teachers (or kindergartners, as they were called), and the study of child development was one of the earliest and longest-lasting of women’s transnational organizing efforts. As Margaret McFadden points out, most such initiatives — for example, those focused on the abolition of slavery, “moral reform” (that is, the rehabilitation of prostitutes and the abolition of state-regulated prostitution), temperance, and pacifism — developed at first as loose and informal networks; some later developed more formal organizational structures. In some ways, the kindergarten movement, which began with transatlantic ties formed through correspondence, personal contacts, and migration and later joined together in international organizations, followed this pattern. The evolution of this movement, however, illustrates not only the achievements but also the pitfalls of women’s international organizing. Most studies of these networks focus on the solidarity — in the words of one author, the “golden cables of sympathy” — that united women across national boundaries.2 The story to be told here, however, is not only about sisterhood and sympathy but also about disagreement, rivalry, and rupture.

1 Eleonore Heerwart-Ladies of the Committee for the Friedrich Froebel House Building Fund, January 18, 1903, in Box 1, Folder 2, Archives of the Association for Childhood Education International, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries (Hereafter ACEI).

2 Margaret McFadden, Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).
From its beginnings in the fragmented central Europe of the 1840s, the kindergarten was both a distinctively German and an international project. The philosopher and educator Friedrich Fröbel was a German patriot, who designed his new institution to prepare children between three and six years of age to become citizens of some future German state. In 1840, however, such a state was purely aspirational. Fröbel was also a cosmopolitan who assumed that all children, regardless of class, nationality, or gender, had the same basic abilities and needs. Comparing children to flowers that required only a favorable environment to flourish, he called the new institution a “garden of children” (“kindergarten”) and designed it for children aged about four to six years. He replaced the era’s conventional pedagogies, which were based on rote memorization and harsh discipline, with a classroom routine that engaged children in educational play with toys that were designed to teach both manual and cognitive skills. As these pursuits — for example, building with blocks, arranging tiles and sticks, folding paper — taught abstract mathematical concepts, they were easily transferable across barriers of language and culture. The toys also conveyed complex philosophical concepts: the ball represented the unity of creation, and blocks showed how parts fit together to form a whole. Fröbel believed that children were able to grasp these complex ideas intuitively. Group games taught cooperation; gardening cultivated love of nature; and an ecumenical religious atmosphere encouraged tolerance.

The early history of the kindergarten calls into question Karin Hausen’s picture of the early nineteenth century as an era of gender polarization. In fact, in some areas, gender roles and ascriptions were shifting and contested. “Kindergartening” did not become a female profession because of any stereotype — old or new — of women as nurturers. In the German-speaking world the role of teacher, even at early levels, was male. Only when his male colleagues rejected his pedagogy as sentimental and unscientific did Fröbel turn to women. When he insisted that women possessed a special gift for teaching small children — a gift that his disciples termed “spiritual motherhood” — many educated young German women responded with enthusiasm. What attracted them was the elevation of early childhood education from
a menial task for servants to a profession that required training. Fröbel presented the new pedagogy as a science, to be acquired in a two-year course that, by the standards of the day, was quite demanding. The first trainees came from a variety of social backgrounds, but most (for instance, Fröbel’s niece, Henriette Breymann, who was a pastor’s daughter) from the middle class and a few from the aristocracy. Some of these early kindergartners (as the teachers, not the pupils, were called) sought volunteer work, but many needed a paying job that was suitable to their class and educational background — that is, a profession.  

These aspirations were political as well as professional. In the revolutionary years 1848–1851, German kindergartners supported the aims of liberal and socialist factions, although they were barred from most political activities because they were women. They therefore created their own agenda, which focused on issues that they believed were of particular concern to women. Among these was early childhood education, which up to that time had existed mostly in the form of church-sponsored day nurseries for the children of the poor. The kindergarten provided a place to put these political commitments, which included religious tolerance, economic justice, and education for children of all classes, into practice. Many kindergartens founded during this era admitted children of all religions (Catholics, Protestants, and Jews), provided free tuition to families who could not pay, offered a curriculum that encouraged active participation rather than passive obedience, and put women in positions of authority. The tiny world of the kindergarten thus became a model for the larger society that activist women hoped to create.  


7  Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 39, for an example, see the account of Alwine Middendorff’s kindergarten in Wilhelm Middendorff, Die Kinder: Bedürfnis der Zeit, Grundlage einiger Volksbildung (Blankenburg: Verlagsbuchhandlung der Kindheit- und Jugendsbeschäftigung, 1848), 8.
Many such women fit well into the era’s movements for women’s rights — movements that protested the powerless position to which religion, law, and custom consigned married women. Authors and activists vindicated the right of women to refuse loveless marriages of convenience and to dissolve unhappy unions. For most women, however, this kind of personal autonomy required economic self-sufficiency. A young woman who was not able to earn her bread, argued the prominent women’s rights crusader Louise Otto, must inevitably resort to prostitution, on the streets or “in the secret shame of a marriage made for economic reasons, without love.”

The era’s most radical feminist venture was the Hamburg College for the Female Sex (Hochschule für das weibliche Geschlecht), which became the first post-secondary institution to admit women in the German-speaking world. The fact that the college was run by the notorious socialist Carl Fröbel (a nephew of Friedrich Fröbel) and offered kindergarten training along with academic studies caused the kindergarten to be associated with radicalism. Friedrich Fröbel protested that he shared neither Carl’s socialist ideology nor his ambitious vision of female higher education. After the failure of the revolution, the Prussian authorities nonetheless banned the kindergarten as a “part of the Froebelian socialist system, which is intended to convert our young people to atheism.”

The kindergarten survived its defeat in Germany only because its promoters were able to forge effective international connections. Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow, a friend and disciple of Fröbel’s, started in 1853 on a series of voyages to several countries — for example, Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and Italy — where she helped native educators to found kindergartens. Born as Bertha von Bülow into a family that was prominent in politics, the military, and the arts, the baroness belonged to that most prestigious of all
international networks, the European aristocracy. Her class and family name opened doors in all the European countries she visited. Other Germans relied on professional connections to find refuge from oppression. The friendly reception accorded to German kindergartners in exile — for example, to Fanny Wohlwill Guillaume and her sister Anna Wohlwill in Belgium and to Bertha Ronge in Britain, and to Margarethe Meyer Schurz in the United States — enabled them to survive and to continue their work. In 1859, when Prussian Crown Prince Wilhelm (who ascended the throne as Wilhelm I in 1861) took over as regent from his incapacitated brother Friedrich Wilhelm IV, he repealed many measures enacted in the counter-revolutionary era. In response to a request from the well-connected Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülow, he lifted the kindergarten ban in 1860. The baroness returned to Germany and set up training programs in Berlin and Dresden, which attracted students from all over Europe and from North America. She continued to travel and cultivate her international contacts until her death in 1893.

The network of German kindergartens had extended to the United States in the 1830s. Caroline Frankenberg, a student at Fröbel’s teacher-training institute in Keilhau, was one of a group of German educators who migrated to the United States in the 1830s. In 1836, she set up a “School for the Active Instincts of Childhood and Youth” in Columbus, Ohio, where she probably used some of the kindergarten methods that Fröbel and his students had developed. Frankenberg soon returned to Keilhau for further study and then taught in Germany before returning to Columbus to found another kindergarten in 1852.

The exiles of 1848 (called Forty-Eighters) laid the basis for the American kindergarten movement. In 1856, Carl and Margarethe Meyer Schurz joined the large German immigrant community in the town of Water-town, Wisconsin. Margarethe Meyer belonged to a rich and progressive Hamburg family and had received her training as a kindergartner at the notorious College for Women in Hamburg. After the kindergarten ban she took refuge in Britain with her sister Bertha Ronge, also an exiled kindergartner, who had scandalized all Hamburg in 1851 by divorcing her husband and marrying Johannes Ronge, the leader of a dissenting religious group known as the German Catholics, or the Lichtfreunde. In London, Margarethe taught kindergarten and married Carl Schurz, a former revolutionary and refugee from Prussia. In 1857, shortly

after the couple arrived in their new country and settled in Watertown, Margarethe opened a small kindergarten for her own daughter and children of acquaintances in 1857.18

Although this and other early kindergartens were taught in German and served the children of German immigrants, the new pedagogy won support among English-speaking Americans, at first among native-born white Protestants. While the United States had experienced no revolution in 1848, many American progressives felt great sympathy for the ideals that European revolutionaries, some of whom lived in exile in the United States, still championed. Elizabeth Peabody, a Boston teacher and social reformer, had already heard about the kindergarten from the American educator Henry Barnard, who had observed it in Britain, when in 1859 she met Margarethe and Carl Schurz and their daughter Agathe (who seemed to her a model kindergarten alumna).19 Peabody immediately began the task that she would pursue for the rest of her life: to promote kindergarten education in the United States.20

Like many American social reformers of her era, Peabody looked to Europe for guidance. She founded her first kindergarten in Boston in 1861. Although she felt guilty about taking time away from the antislavery cause, to which she was also committed, she continued teaching throughout the Civil War.21 By the time the war ended, however, she had decided that her knowledge of Froebelian methods was inadequate and that she needed further instruction.22 In 1867 she traveled to Germany to consult with colleagues; on another trip, in 1871, she was able to meet with Marenholtz-Bülow in Florence.23 On these trips, Peabody made contact with several German kindergartners, whom she invited to teach children and train students in the United States. Emma Marwedel came to the United States around

20 Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 50-57.
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1870, taught first on the East Coast, and later moved to California. Matilde Kriege, a former student of Marenholtz-Bülow, migrated to Boston along with her daughter Susan in 1868, and together they took over the Boston kindergarten that Peabody had founded. Maria Boelte (later Kraus-Boelte), emigrated to New York, married another German immigrant, the educator John Kraus, and together with her new husband opened a kindergarten and training school in New York in 1872.24 These German Americans stayed in touch with colleagues at home and often traveled back and forth across the Atlantic.

As a basis for transatlantic cooperation, Peabody and Marenholtz-Bülow developed a gendered professional culture that was based on a conception of female abilities as well as duties. They claimed that it was universal and therefore valid across national borders. Both women extolled the virtues cultivated in the home — compassion, empathy, nurture — as the basis for the broadened sphere of female opportunity that included professional teaching. Marenholtz-Bülow, for example, exhorted woman to practice “spiritual motherhood” through service in “the great social household ... as the educator of the human family.”25 This ideal appealed to middle-class women in all Western countries because at mid-century they often found themselves in very similar situations. They could not vote, often lost control of their property when they married, were barred from most kinds of higher education as well as from occupations labeled male, and were consigned by social and cultural norms to domesticity. In search of opportunities outside the home, women of many nations devised specifically female professions — for example, kindergarten teaching — which they claimed were within acceptable norms of female behavior.26

Although its chief goal was to educate young children according to Froebelian methods, the kindergarten movement also advocated the advancement of women, particularly through the educational and professional opportunities that the kindergarten provided. The movement’s leaders might not have called themselves “feminist” — a term that did not come into general use until the twentieth century — but they certainly belonged to what both Germans and Americans of the nineteenth century called the “women’s” (or “woman”) movement. This was a broad and diverse coalition of organizations that included some that were devoted to the rights of women, as well as many others that focused on various civic issues — education, temperance, social reform in many areas — that women activists

believed were within the female sphere of responsibility.\textsuperscript{27} All such initiatives, these women contended, applied the distinctive virtues and talents that women originally developed in the home to a public sphere that seemed desperately in need of compassionate female energies.

In both Germany and the United States, the first kindergartens were not part of public school systems but were usually supported by tuition payments or charitable organizations. Some private kindergartens were sponsored by male educators — for example, by the German teachers who headed the German Fröbel Union (Deutscher Fröbel Verband, founded in 1874), or by Felix Adler, who was born in Hesse as the son of a rabbi, moved to New York with his family as a child, and founded his first kindergarten there as part of the secular humanist Ethical Culture Society in 1877.\textsuperscript{28} Others, however, were owned by women, and all were staffed by women. Woman-headed private institutions included both kindergartens and training colleges. Though their economic basis was often precarious, these institutions offered work environments where women could use their talents not only as teachers, but sometimes as administrators, scholars, and theorists.

Kindergartners of all nations were also bound together by a shared admiration of German learning, particularly in the field of pedagogy. William Torrey Harris, a Hegelian philosopher, who was also the superintendent of schools in St. Louis, founded America’s first public-school kindergartens in 1873 and entrusted them to a fellow philosopher and Germanophile, Susan Blow.\textsuperscript{29} Blow headed to Dresden to study with Marenholtz-Bülow and later continued her training with the German American Maria Kraus-Boelte.\textsuperscript{30} In subsequent years, a substantial number of American kindergartners followed her example by studying in Germany.

From the 1850s until the outbreak of the First World War, the kindergarten movement pursued the goal it shared with other transnational women’s organizations — to create bonds of sisterhood across national boundaries — with unusual success. Unlike the diverse membership of the International Council of Women, which when founded in 1888 linked women chiefly on the basis of rather general ideological and ethical principles, kindergartners were bound together by a common professional culture and common economic and social aspirations.\textsuperscript{31} During the years between the 1850s and 1900, this professional sisterhood afforded not only moral but also practical support in many


\textsuperscript{30} Margaret Hiliker, “Life and Work of Susan Blow,” unpub. typescript 1963, 1-26, Missouri History Museum Library and Reference Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

forms. German kindergartners found economic opportunities in the United States, where they often opened their own kindergartens and training colleges. These women, whom a recent article identifies as early “social entrepreneurs,” found a much more hospitable environment in the New World than in Germany, where even after it became legal the kindergarten grew slowly and still faced opposition from conservative clergy, educators, and moralists who still associated it with socialism, atheism, and revolution.32

American kindergartners found opportunities of another kind in Germany, where they studied and gained valuable professional credentials. When they returned to found and staff their own kindergartens and training colleges, they promoted their German mentors by translating the works of Fröbel, Pestalozzi, Marenholtz-Bülow, and other German-speaking educators into English and filling professional periodicals with pictures of romantic Thuringia, where Fröbel had once walked the earth. American visitors brought valuable prestige to German training colleges. “How many very interesting ladies came across the wide ocean, to see my aunt and to learn from her!” recalled the niece and biographer of the Baroness Marenholtz-Bülow. “Young American girls came and wished to see my aunt just once, even from a distance.... Sometimes ladies came with red Baedekers in their hands ... as if on no account would they miss the celebrated propagator of the Fröbel method.”33 While Americans depended on Germans for knowledge and credentials, Germans in their turn relied on Americans and other foreigners for the financial support and prestige that they often lacked at home.34

In the 1880s, the kindergarten became part of another international reform movement, this one focused on the many social problems caused by the rapid growth of cities.35 Fröbel’s niece and former student, Henriette Breymann (who, after her marriage to Karl Schrader, a liberal politician, called herself Henriette Schrader or Schrader-Breymann) played a leading role in creating a new mission for the kindergartner as an agent of urban reform. In 1872, she and her husband moved to Schöneberg (then a separate community adjoining Berlin), where in 1874 she joined other liberal civic activists to found an organization, the Verein für Familien- und Volkserziehung (Society for Family and Popular Education). The society sponsored various programs, including a kindergarten, teacher-training course, and after-school center for older children, which Schrader-Breymann combined in an institution that she called the Pestalozzi-Fröbel Haus (PFH) in 1879.36

34 Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 59-86.
35 A general account of this movement is given in Andrew Lees, Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press), 191-320.
The mission of the new institution was to train young women to educate the children of the urban poor. Henriette Schrader’s views of this targeted population resembled those held by social reformers in many nations that had experienced rapid urbanization, including the United States. She was convinced that working-class mothers, who often had to work for a living, were not in a position to provide a materially or emotionally secure environment for their children. Her kindergarten, therefore, aimed to provide the home that these children lacked — a home that replicated the rural household that adults of this era, many of whom had moved to cities from rural or small-town environments, still considered ideal.37 She abandoned many of Fröbel’s original games, which she claimed had become too formal and regimented. In the classrooms at the PFH, pupils engaged in activities such as cooking, gardening, and other household tasks under the guidance of a teacher who acted as a “spiritual mother.” Along with these overtones of conservative nostalgia, however, Schrader-Breymann’s pedagogy also promoted more progressive ideas. Her institute, which by 1896 was housed in an impressive new building, won international fame for its modern hygienic services, kitchens, classrooms, and playgrounds. She created an updated version of women’s social mission by extending the responsibility of her trainees outside the classroom, requiring them to get to know the children’s parents and the conditions of the neighborhood in which they worked.38 This was among the earliest steps in the formation of another female profession: social work.39

International connections provided essential support for this ambitious enterprise. As the spouse of a liberal politician, Schrader-Breymann often faced opposition in conservative circles because of her political associations. She compensated for her weak domestic

37 Henriette Schrader-Breymann and Mary Lyschinska, 
Henriette Schrader-Breymann: Ihr Leben aus Briefen und 
Tagebüchern zusammengestellt, 
2 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig: 
Walter de Gruyter, 1922), 2:183.

38 Henriette Schrader, Der 
Volkskindergarten im Pestalozzi- 
Fröbel Haus, Berlin (Berlin, 
1890); Henriette Schrader, 
Kleine pädagogische Texte 
(Weinheim, 1930), 114.

39 On the origins of the social worker in Germany, see Iris 
Schröder, Arbeiten für eine 
bessere Welt: Frauenbeteiligung 
und Sozialreform 1890-1914 
(Frankfurt; New York: 
Campus, 2001), 277-377.
position by cultivating influential foreign patrons. The most important of these was certainly Crown Princess Victoria, a daughter of a daughter of the British Queen Victoria, who was married to Crown Prince Friedrich, the heir to the imperial throne. Victoria became a patron of the Pestalozzi-Fröbel Haus and mediated important contacts with educators, policy-makers, and women’s social-reform movements in Britain. She encouraged connections with the United States, which she admired for its active women’s movement. Many Americans, not only students but also more experienced educators, visited the Berlin institution and publicized its methods at home. Schrader-Breymann joined her allies, one of whom was Helene Lange, who would soon become the leader of the German feminist movement, in hoping that when Victoria became empress she would throw her support behind educational reforms of many kinds, including both kindergartens and women’s vocational training. “I think I am ready to take power into my hands,” reflected Schrader-Breymann confidently in 1883, “and to win influence over women’s education.”

When Victoria finally did ascend the throne as empress in 1888, however, the death of her husband Friedrich III in the same year cut short her reign. Victoria continued to support the PFH, but of course her political influence was greatly diminished. Schrader-Breymann compensated for this loss by working harder than ever to cultivate foreign alliances. She reached out to her American and international colleagues in 1893 by sending her friend and coworker, Annette Hamminck-Schepel, to the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago to mount an exhibition of the Berlin work and attend a meeting of a new organization, the International Kindergarten Union (IKU).

The founding of the IKU was part of a general trend toward women’s international organizing at the turn of the twentieth century — a trend that had begun in 1888 with the founding of the International Council of Women. Founded in 1892 and introduced at the World Columbian Exposition of 1893, the IKU provided the first international organizational structure for a movement that until that time had grown through a host of informal contacts. The IKU proclaimed its commitment to internationalism by promising to “to gather and disseminate knowledge of the kindergarten throughout the world.” Despite these declarations of international solidarity, the IKU was a very North American organization; its officers were American or Canadian, and it held its annual meetings in the United States or Canada. Perhaps in response to this American initiative, the German...
Eleonore Heerwart founded an international organization centered in Germany, the Internationale Kindergärtnerinnen-Verein, in 1893. These organizations were divided by disagreements among their members. In both countries, a new generation of kindergartners had greatly modified the original Froebelian pedagogy by substituting activities based on practical tasks — cooking, building, sewing — for Froebel’s occupations, which had used abstract toys to teach theoretical concepts. Henriette Schrader-Breymann was the leader of this revisionist generation in Germany, and she exercised considerable international influence. The resistance of orthodox Froebelians such as Heerwart to this trend gave rise to bitter controversy. Schrader-Breymann initially refused to join the Internationale Kindergärtnerinnen-Verein, brusquely informing Heerwart that the students and alumnae of the PFH had already formed an association. American kindergartners of both orthodox and revisionist factions joined the IKU and filled annual meetings with discussions of their differences. Despite these internal divisions, the American organization gained much greater international visibility than its German counterpart. While the IKU held well-organized annual conventions to which it invited foreign delegates, the Internationale Kindergärtnerinnen-Verein held meetings only "from time to time" and left few records.

The growing international prestige of the American kindergarten arose from its domestic success. Often influenced by their German colleague Henriette Schrader-Breymann, American kindergartners had broadened their mission to include urban social reform. Such initiatives won wide support in the United States, where cities were overwhelmed with immigrants from many areas of the world. American kindergarten educators and their supporters formed charitable associations that supported kindergartens designed specifically for the children of immigrants. They successfully promoted this form of early childhood education as a way of assimilating these children at the age when they were best able to adapt to a new language and a new culture. Educators forged alliances with women’s civic organizations across a broad spectrum that included the huge and influential Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the many women’s clubs that devoted themselves to civic work, and the women’s societies of churches and synagogues.

The activities of these urban kindergartens were designed to teach English and to introduce children to their new country. Children celebrated the Fourth of July, sang patriotic songs, and learned

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47 Eleonore Luise Heerwart, Fünfzig Jahre im Dienste Friedrich Froebels: Erinnerungen (Eisenach: Hofbuchdruckerei, 1895), 337.

48 For more on this split, see Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 87-107; and Beatty, Preschool Education in America, 72-92.


50 Beatty, Preschool Education in America, 72-100.

about American history. Kindergartners, most of whom were white and native born, sometimes disparaged their pupils’ native cultures. For example, the most popular literary picture of an urban free kindergarten was Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *The Story of Patsy*, in which a kindergartner saved an Irish boy from a drunken and abusive father.52 Other educators, however, encouraged children to appreciate both their ancestral and their new countries. For example, the German American Olga Huncke, who in 1907 began teaching in a Chicago kindergarten that served chiefly the children of Chinese immigrants, organized a children’s band that played both American and Chinese music. The scrapbooks that she left behind suggest that she was very popular in the Chinese American community.53

As the kindergarten became more popular, it also became more diverse. African American women’s clubs, which joined together in 1895 to create the National Association of Colored Women, created kindergartens for African American children and training programs for kindergartners.54 Catholic and Jewish communities also established kindergartens, sometimes as part of religious schools.55 By 1897 the U.S. Commissioner of Education reported that about 400 kindergarten associations throughout the country had responded to his request for information.56

American kindergartens were also incorporated into a new form of social outreach, the settlement houses. These were communities of educated young people who lived, worked, and provided social services in immigrant communities. Many were founded, led, and staffed by young, unmarried women who sought both personal independence and useful work. A kindergarten was among the

first services provided by Hull House — a settlement founded by Jane Addams in 1889 that later won international fame.57 This original kindergarten was the first of a wide range of child-welfare services, which by 1896 were housed in an impressive Children’s Building. The training school of the Chicago Froebel Association, headed by Alice Putnam, moved its headquarters to the fourth floor of this building. At Hull House and other settlements, trainees visited their pupils’ homes in order both to meet parents and to gain an understanding of the problems of the neighborhood.58 Like the German women trained at Henriette Schrader-Breymann’s Pestalozzi-Fröbel House, the kindergartners of the American settlement houses pioneered the methods that the professional social worker later developed.59

By the 1890s, many American female activists had rejected the genteel traditions that had confined women to charitable activity.50 Even though most of them were not allowed to vote, they worked effectively to influence government at all levels and to change public policy.61 Contending that private charities could no longer fill the demand for kindergarten services, they put pressure on urban public school systems to incorporate kindergarten classes into public schools. An aspect of American culture that worked in their favor was the gender composition of the American teaching profession. Although male school superintendents and politicians still made educational policy, the vast majority of American elementary-school teachers were women, who hoped that public-school kindergartens would provide opportunities for them and their colleagues.62 Organizations such as the National Education Association, which had a largely female

57 Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 73-80.
59 On the origins of professional social work, see Anja Schüler, Frauenbewegung und soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Salomon im transatlantischen Dialog, 1889-1933 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004).
61 After 1870, a growing number of states permitted women to vote, but all American women did not win that right until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. In some states, women were permitted to vote in municipal but not in state or national elections. Through municipal school-board elections, they influenced educational policy.
membership, mobilized public opinion to win over male policymakers. By 1900 most American urban school systems offered kindergartens on a non-compulsory basis, sometimes including segregated classes for African American children.63 These were school classes that met four hours a day — they were not day-care centers, which most educators of this era (even feminists) considered appropriate only for the very poor.64

Domestic success brought international prestige to the American kindergarten. In its early years, the kindergarten had spread outward from Germany to many European countries and the United States. Although many kindergartners still studied in Germany, by the 1890s most looked to the United States for training, advice, and role models. In Canada, early-childhood educators in the 1890s followed the American example.65 Rosaura Zapata, the leader of Mexico’s kindergarten movement, had studied in both the United States and Europe.66 In Russia, too, the educators Alexander Zelenko, Luiza Karlovnaschleger, and Valentina Shatskaya modeled their first kindergarten, opened in 1905, on those that Zelenko had observed in the United States.67 In 1885, American missionaries founded a kindergarten in Izmir and went on to open others in the Ottoman Empire.68

Japanese pedagogues modeled their first kindergartens on an exhibit some of them had seen at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, and by 1887 the American missionary Annie Lyon Howe became the leading advocate of Christian kindergartens in Japan.69 Kindergarten pedagogy spread from Japan to China, where it was also promoted by American missionaries.70 By 1917, the IKU included both Japanese and Chinese branches.71 In India and other territories of the British Empire, kindergartens were a favorite project of both British and American missions. Under the conditions of the time, few educators from such distant countries could travel to IKU annual meetings, but at each meeting the head of the Committee on Foreign

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64 Sonya Michel, Children’s Interests, Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 87–90.
71 Wollons, “The Missionary Kindergarten in Japan,” 128. “A Few Facts about the IKU” unpub. typescript 1924, in Series I, Box 1, ACEI.
Correspondence read aloud letters from kindergarten societies all over the world.\footnote{For example, see “Report of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence,” Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the International Kindergarten Union, St. Louis, 1908, 32-34.}

While the international prestige of the American kindergarten movement increased, that of its German counterpart declined. This disparity was chiefly due to the slow growth of the kindergarten in Germany in comparison to its popularity in the United States. One obstacle to the growth of the German kindergarten was the gender composition of the German elementary-school teaching profession. In the United States and many other countries this occupation attracted large numbers of women, for whom it provided an accessible job opportunity. In Germany it remained predominantly male, for German teachers stubbornly resisted the feminization of their profession.\footnote{Carl Louis A. Pretzel and Robert Rissmann, Geschichte des deutschen Lehrervereins in den ersten fünfzig Jahren (Leipzig, 1921), 264. See also Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 118-35; and James C. Albisetti, Schooling German Girls and Women: Secondary and Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 141-49.} Whereas American teachers usually supported the integration of kindergarten classes into public school systems, a majority of German teachers rejected kindergarten methods as unscientific and early childhood education as unnecessary and even harmful. Behind these arguments lay their fear of giving women a foothold in the schools.”\footnote{H. Elm, “Vorschläge zur Verallgemeinerung der Fröbelidee,” Kindergarten- und Elementarklasse, no. 12 (1865): 177-81; B. Baehring, “Der Kindergarten auf der allgemeinen deutschen Lehrerversammlung zu Augsburg,” Kindergarten- und Elementarklasse 30 (1889): 161-69.} Another obstacle was the continued opposition of conservative Protestant and Catholic clergy. American churches often sponsored kindergartens in order to attract new members, particularly immigrants. By contrast many German churches continued to look back to 1851, when the kindergarten had carried the taint of revolutionary movements such as socialism and feminism.\footnote{Otto Beetz, Kindergartenzwang! Eine Mahnung an Deutschlands Eltern und Lehrer (Wiesbaden, 1900), 31; Paul Sydow, “Wider den Kindergarten,” Hamburgische Schulzeitung 8, no. 50 (December 12, 1900): 405-407; Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 118-36.}

German women’s civic groups, though often vocal and well-organized, could not overcome this conservative opposition. In 1898, Henriette Goldschmidt, who was not only a kindergarten educator but the co-chair of Germany’s major feminist organization, the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, petitioned Germany’s state education ministries to add kindergartens to public school systems, but the petition failed.\footnote{Henriette Goldschmidt, Ist der Kindergarten eine Erziehungs- oder Zwangsanstalt? (Leipzig, 1902).}

The different trajectories of the kindergarten movement in the United States and Germany were due to broader social, political, and demographic differences. German cities faced few of the social crises for which Americans offered the kindergarten as a remedy. German cities were culturally homogeneous, and their well-organized governments were admired throughout the world.\footnote{Lees, Cities, Sin, and Social Reform, 49-74.}

German kindergartners adapted their professional strategies to this environment. Some gave up the goal of public-school adoption, for
how could the kindergarten survive in such a hostile atmosphere? They found better opportunities in municipal welfare systems, which were far more extensive than their American counterparts. An increasing number of German cities granted partial subsidies to private kindergartens, which were required to stay open all day to care for the children of working mothers. Such institutions, however, never became part of school systems but remained social-welfare agencies that offered services to children who suffered from poverty, physical or mental handicaps, or parental neglect. An interesting exception was Munich, where the school superintendent Georg Kerschensteiner — an admirer of the American John Dewey — created a public-school kindergarten system in 1911.

The differences between American and German developments were symptomatic of a much broader trend. As the kindergarten won acceptance, kindergartners of all nationalities adapted their goals and strategies to their diverse political and cultural environments. These variations did much to undermine the movement’s original spirit of solidarity, which had been based on the assumption that women throughout the world shared the gender-specific set of abilities, characteristics, and ethical commitments summed up in the phrase “spiritual motherhood.” By 1900 kindergartners typically aspired to the professional credentials that were required by their respective educational systems more than to any shared ideal of womanly virtue — an ideal that some now considered old-fashioned and sentimental. In the United States kindergarten pedagogy was incorporated into college, normal-school, and university degree programs; in Prussia and in some other German states the government introduced a qualifying examination for kindergartners as well as other social workers, who were trained in expanding vocational institutions.

Within the kindergarten movement as outside it, the once friendly German-American relationship deteriorated after 1900. Some kindergartners kept up their transatlantic contacts: in 1911, for example, a large group of American kindergartners undertook what they called a “Froebel Pilgrimage” to visit German colleagues and the sites where the first kindergartens had developed. Even such friendly encounters, however, gave rise to national rivalry and invidious comparisons. Americans claimed that the absence of kindergartens from German public-school systems showed that Germans had failed where Americans had succeeded. Germans accepted the criticism but rightly argued that American successes depended on conditions that could

81 Allen, The Transatlantic Kindergarten, 137-60.
not be replicated in Germany. In 1911, Martha Back, the head of the largest organization of German kindergarten teachers, congratulated her American guests on coming from an exciting new country where “everything...is created and planned on a very broad basis, with a great deal of money,” and added that Germans, who lacked such resources, must “attain at a snail’s pace what you Americans have succeeded in executing in a much shorter time.”

Not only American kindergartners but also educators at all levels lost their original respect for German pedagogy and expressed an assertive confidence in American superiority. Amid the international tensions that led up to the First World War, moreover, American academic as well as popular culture promoted an increasingly negative image of this once admired nation. John Dewey, the era’s best-known educational theorist, not only criticized the German educational system but blamed it for encouraging political passivity and thus upholding a state that he considered authoritarian and tyrannical. Dewey insisted that the failure of the kindergarten to flourish in Germany was one of many symptoms of German backwardness. He urged progressive kindergartners to throw off their Teutonic baggage and devote themselves to the democratic values that he defined as uniquely American. Patty Smith Hill, a leader of the American kindergarten profession, supported Dewey by declaring that the Froebelian pedagogy that had provided the original basis for the kindergarten was outmoded, appropriate only to German village children, and irrelevant to American ideals of democracy. German educators responded to Dewey in different ways: although some admired him, others rejected his theories along with all recent American philosophy and pedagogy as typical products of a superficial and materialistic culture.

German American kindergartners, however, maintained their ties to their ancestral culture, and some worked to discredit anti-German propaganda by encouraging international understanding. Among the most prominent women of the German-speaking world was the Austrian baroness Bertha von Suttner, the first woman ever to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (in 1905), whose book *Lay Down Your Weapons (Die Waffen Nieder)* called on women to mobilize for world peace. In 1912, the Chicago Women’s Club invited von Suttner to lecture to women’s clubs and organizations throughout the United States. Two German Americans who were prominent in the kindergarten movement, the sisters Amalie and Mari Ruef Hofer, took the lead in raising money and making arrangements for a lecture tour
that took von Suttner to 120 educational, civic, and church societies across the country.88

When war broke out in Europe in 1914, the United States was still a neutral nation where public opinion was deeply divided: some Americans favored the Allies, some supported Germany, while others, such as the members of the Women’s Peace Party (later the American section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom) called for an end to violence and a negotiated settlement. The IKU initially aligned itself with the Women’s Peace Party and its first president, Jane Addams, who had supported the kindergarten movement. Pointing out that “women and children bear the great burdens of war,” the IKU leadership urged members to assist in the work of the Red Cross and to join local peace movements.89 In Kindergarten-Primary Magazine, American kindergartners’ professional journal, the kindergartner Bertha Johnson urged teachers everywhere to “offset the glamor of war” by highlighting the suffering of children all over the world.90

In 1915, however, the sinking of the British ship Lusitania by a German submarine swung American public opinion decisively against Germany. By 1916 the IKU had abandoned its ties to the peace movement, cut off communications with Germany, and forged new bonds with such allies of the United States as France, where American kindergartners worked to provide emergency assistance to child victims of war. American chauvinists brought wartime hostilities home by virulently attacking all aspects of German culture, including language, literature, philosophy, and music. German Americans, once praised as model immigrants, were now demonized as potential spies and traitors.91 All over the country, German names of streets, institutions, organizations, even food were changed to more English-sounding substitutes. The kindergarten seemed destined for the same fate in 1916 when advised by William Heard Kilpatrick, a prominent professor at Columbia Teachers College, to assimilate to its American homeland by giving up “even its distinctive name.”92

In the war’s bitter aftermath, kindergartners debated the name change at the IKU’s annual meeting of 1919. Alice Temple condemned the name as a sign of continued “aloofness” from the rest of the American educational system, and added that Fröbel himself, if he had lived to see this day, would have welcomed a new name such as “play school” or “junior primary” as a sign that the kindergarten had found a new home. Other kindergartners pointed out, however, that the

The kindergarten’s gentle founder represented the best traditions of Germany and would have been the first to oppose the Kaiser’s militaristic regime. The kindergarten kept its name but abandoned most other aspects of its German identity: the name of Fröbel fell into oblivion, and the German pedagogy that earlier generations so respected disappeared from American kindergarten classrooms and training courses.

The international kindergarten movement, here exemplified by the exchange between Germany and the United States, sheds a revealing light on the more general history of women’s transnational and international organizing during the years between 1840 and 1914. The German-American relationship was deeper than those formed within most transnational organizations, for it arose from shared economic and professional goals as well as more general ideological principles. It was, moreover, an “entangled” relationship that operated in both directions, in many venues, and over a long period of time.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, historical conditions favored the evolution of this and other forms of transnational organizing. Like many of the era’s progressive initiatives, the kindergarten movement emerged from the 1848 revolutions and affirmed revolutionaries’ aspirations to democracy, economic and gender justice, and international brotherhood. The failure of these revolutions and the ensuing repression did not destroy this democratic movement but, on the contrary, won it adherents in the many places, including the United States, where revolutionaries in exile found a sympathetic reception. Progressive women everywhere were drawn to transnational associations partly because they were excluded from national political life and thus lacked a forum in which to express their aspirations to equal citizenship and social reform. To these women and their fledgling endeavors, transnational networks could provide many forms of support — intellectual, practical, personal — that were not available locally. Kindergartners cooperated across national boundaries, first to provide refuge from oppression to exiled colleagues, and later to facilitate access to professional credentials, economic opportunities, publications that transmitted information and ideals, and institutional affiliations and exchanges. Above all, international recognition provided prestige and validation to women who often faced opposition within their local or national communities.

By 1900, however, women’s initiatives such as the kindergarten had gained increasing recognition within nations. Along with acceptance...
went the need to adapt to very different national environments — a process that weakened international solidarity. Though still excluded from electoral politics and subject to many disadvantages, women now increasingly identified themselves as citizens and often as patriots who extolled the superiority of their own nation over others. Certainly the trend toward transnational organizing continued — in fact, the period from 1888–1915 saw the formation of several major international organizations, including the International Kindergarten Union and two groups with which it was affiliated: the International Council of Women and the Women’s Peace Party. In these associations, however, transnational friendship was likewise disrupted by national differences and rivalries. The kindergarten movement, in which a long period of German-American friendship ended bitterly with the First World War, provides a classic example of the ways in which nationalist passions and international tensions could fracture ties of sisterhood.
