

The transatlantic kindergarten: education and women's movements in Germany and the United States

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Abstrak

The kindergarten as institution, as educational philosophy, and as social reform movement is among the most important contributions of Germany to the world. At first, however, Germany proved an inhospitable environment for this new institution, founded by the educator and philosopher Friedrich Frobel around 1840. After the failure of the 1848 Revolutions several German governments banned the kindergarten, alleging that it was a hotbed of subversion, largely because of its links to the eras movements for womens rights. German revolutionaries who were forced into exile introduced the kindergarten to America. In an era when convention limited middle class women to the domestic sphere, the kindergarten provided them with a rare opportunity, not only for professional work, but also for involvement in the social issues of education, child welfare, and urban reform. Through three generations, American and German women established personal friendships, institutional affiliations, and international organizations, many of which are still little known. This is a transnational history of the kindergarten as it developed in both Germany and America between 1840 and 1919. It shows how transnational contacts shaped national cultures. This is also a comparative history in which a common body of ideas and practices is shown adapting over time to two very different national environments. The issues raised in the nineteenth century are still important today. The provision of public preschool education an aim first developed by nineteenth-century kindergartners is still an unfinished and much discussed project in both the United States and Germany.