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*How did the “active child” come into educational theory?\*)*

The “active child” is the signal word and slogan of anglo-saxon progressive education. Progressive education is also called *child-centered education*. It was John Dewey who coined a famous metaphor describing progressive education. In 1899 in an address to parents and students of the University of Chicago Elementary School, Dewey spoke of a “Copernican Revolution” in education, indicating a radical shift to the child. The metaphor meant to express that the new education would focus on the learning of the child. The focus of the old education had been on the teacher, the schoolbook, on anything *but* the child. Dewey (1907) wrote:

On that basis there is not much to be said about the life of the child. A good deal might be said about the studying of the child, but the school is not the place where the child lives. Now the change which is coming into our education is the shifting of the center of gravity. It is a change, a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized. (p. 51)

In *Experience and Education*, published in 1938, Dewey (2002) distanced himself from the radical approaches that centered on the child *alone* and had shaped progressive education in the 1920s in the form of *child-centered education*. Dewey never accepted the idea that school and instruction were of interest *only* as experience (Erlebnis) of the child, as it was also claimed by reform-pedagogy in the German-speaking world (Hofer & Oelkers, 1998).

In 1899, Dewey’s notion of the active child, and especially his metaphor of the “Copernican Revolution,” caused much interest and almost a sensation in the international discussion of educational reform. The metaphor quickly became proverbial and the much cited reference point of “new education.” Child-centeredness was a program of a new education that

- did not simply swear by the “nature of the child,” as in the eighteenth century,
- and did not seek to bless every child with school, as in the nineteenth century,
- but instead sought to do justice to the *individual* child, to *each and every* person.

The “nature of the child” was viewed psychologically; therefore, the traditional school could be criticized in terms of the needs or interests of children. From this, there emerged effective pairs of *opposites* that decisively shaped the new education and have continued to have an impact up to today. Such opposites were:

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- child *versus* curriculum,
- person *versus* institution,
- individual interest *versus* educational order,
- free experience *versus* leveling instruction, and so on.

These dualisms were developed and represented in international progressive education by movements and sponsors. In association with these, the powerful and influential popular press had a lasting influence on the public opinion on education. The writings of left-wing literati, philosophers, and artists granted the alternative schools the status of a fundamentally new education, and they were portrayed as the only way to design the education of the future. Connected with this was strong criticism of conventional schools, which were described as anti-children and inefficient.

However, the notion of the “active child” in 1899 was not new, and in this sense the “new education” was not at all as new as it itself claimed. I can give you an example from the English Enlightenment literature of the late eighteenth century. In 1798, Richard Lovell Edgeworth<sup>1</sup> and his eldest daughter Maria Edgeworth<sup>2</sup> described a theory of ‘practical education’ that was guided not by books, but by children’s activities and active experience. Edgeworth and his daughter were members of the *Lunar Society* in Birmingham, England,<sup>3</sup> a group of engineers, natural philosophers, writers, and inventors (Burr, 2000 and Uglow, 2002) that met to discuss experiments and the application of scientific discoveries. The society has been called the *Lunar Society* since 1775,<sup>4</sup> because the members met each month close to the full moon, when there was the most light to travel home by.

The Lunar Society was a *social club* at the heart of the Enlightenment in the English Midlands, and it was founded by Erasmus Darwin,<sup>5</sup> grandfather of Charles Darwin, who developed the theory of evolution. Many of the most important developments in the Industrial Revolution go back to the members of the Lunar Society; to name just a few: James Watt,<sup>6</sup> who invented the steam engine, Joseph Priestley,<sup>7</sup> the clergyman/chemist who discovered

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817), was the son of a large landowner owning properties in Ireland. Edgeworth studied at Trinity College in Dublin and later at Oxford University. He became known as a designer and inventor; he invented various machines, including a land-measuring machine, turnip cutter, and carriages. He made his first visit to Lichfield (Staffordshire) in 1770, the center of the English Enlightenment philosophers. Edgeworth returned to his estates in Ireland in 1782. He experimented in electricity and was a pioneer in telegraphy.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) was the eldest daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth who married a total of four times, producing a family of 22 children. Maria was educated in London until the age of fourteen. In 1782 she returned to Ireland with her father and acted as his chief assistant and secretary in the management of his estates. Her first publication was *Letters to Literary Ladies* in 1795, a treatise in defense of woman’s education. Her first novel, *Castle Rackrent*, published in 1800, was an immediate success. She became one of the most influential and respected writers in England in the first half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lunarsociety.org.uk/history.html>

<sup>4</sup> The first formal meeting of the Society was on December 31, 1775.

<sup>5</sup> Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) studied medicine in Cambridge, practiced first in Edinburgh and then opened a private practice in Lichfield in 1756. Darwin published extensively in many scientific fields. In 1787 he translated Linné, and in 1797 he published a study of woman’s education (*A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*).

<sup>6</sup> James Watt (1736-1819) worked as a maker of scientific instruments for the University of Glasgow starting in 1757, where he learned the principles of heat and steam. In 1769 he registered a patent for “A New Invented Method of Lessening the Consumption of Steam and Fuel in Fire Engine.” In 1774 Watt moved to Birmingham and collaborated with the industrialist Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), who marketed Watt’s steam pump.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) was a member of the Dissenting Academy of Daventry in 1751. Ten years later he began teaching at Warrington Academy, where he wrote *Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1765). In the book he stressed the importance of science, arts, modern languages and modern history and argued they were better suited than the classics for students heading for careers in commerce and industry. He also wrote

oxygen, John Whitehurst,<sup>8</sup> a pioneering geologist, the architect Samuel Wyatt,<sup>9</sup> and writer and social reformer Thomas Day.<sup>10</sup> Here the principle of “experimental learning,” going back to Francis Bacon and the Royal Society, took on practical form. “Practice” referred to the development of new technologies but also to the fields of everyday experience.

One field of reform was education, which Richard and Maria Edgeworth understood experimentally as a process of practical experience, or “trials of dexterity and activity.” Their treatise, *Practical Education* (Edgeworth and Edgeworth, 1798), appeared in 1798. It advocated that the methods of observation, experiment, and inventive spirit should guide learning, which is seen as an explorative process. What later came to be called “discovery learning” was described probably the first time in concise teaching terms. Teaching is not “filling in” something, the child has to find it out and thus must be “active.”

The same holds for the importance of playful learning in the child’s world of experience, to which the Edgeworths also counted children’s books and a ‘rational toyshop’ of educative playthings. The principle advocated by the book was a pragmatic one; whatever promoted children’s learning was good. A number of members of the large Edgeworth family contributed to the book, including some of the older children, so that here the term “child-centered” can be taken quite literally (see *The Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 2003). The Edgeworths’ treatise was highly influential at the close of the eighteenth century.

The “active child” is the foundation of progressive education, but it also has roots in the history of Christian education that are seldom considered. The English poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld<sup>11</sup> published *Hymns in Prose for Children*<sup>12</sup> in 1781, which influenced the educational notion of child-centered education. In these hymns, children learn that they are not too small to praise God, and they learn that their world of imagination has a place in creation. Children *discover* the world, and with the world, God, without having to memorize a catechism. They are not asked questions about their beliefs; they can ask the questions

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*Essay on Government* (1768) at Warrington. In the 1770s he published numerous scientific works, including works on the nature and properties of gases. Priestley was the first to describe the properties of oxygen.

<sup>8</sup> John Whitehurst (1713-1788) was a trained clockmaker and opened his own shop in 1736 in Derby. He also made scientific instruments, compasses, barometers, and hydraulic machines. But his main interest was in geology. In 1778 Whitehurst published *An Inquiry into the Original State and Formation of the Earth*, in which he described the strata of Earth and estimated the age of fossil finds.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Wyatt (1737-1813) worked as an architect and master builder in London from 1744. Wyatt was responsible for the neo-classical style in the building of industrial Birmingham.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Day (1748-1789) began the study of law at Oxford in 1764 and was strongly influenced by Rousseau. Day lived in Lichfield starting in 1770. Here he experimented with the education of two foundling girls that he adopted and tried to bring up as young ladies fit for him to marry. His hopes centered on the girl he renamed Sabrina, but the “Sabrina experiment” failed in 1771. His anti-slavery poem, *The Dying Slave*, was published in 1773 and became a best-seller. Day went on to support the American Revolution and work towards social reform in England. His children’s book *The History of Sandford and Merton*, published in 1783, describes “natural education.”

<sup>11</sup> Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld (1743-1825) was educated in the home of her Presbyterian parents and taught Latin and Greek by her father, John Aikin (1713-1780), who was a schoolteacher and later theological tutor at the dissenting academy in Warrington. Warrington Academy was a center of natural sciences in England. Anna Laetitia Aikin was a close friend of Joseph Priestley and his wife; Priestley also taught at Warrington and was one of the founders of modern education in England. Anna published her first poems in 1771. In 1774 she married Rochemont Barbauld (died 1808), descendant of the French Huguenot refugees, who had come to Warrington in 1767. Together, the Barbaulds established a boarding school for boys, which they managed until 1785. Anna Barbauld became one of the most influential writers in England, who after 1790 also published social criticism and political tracts.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1781) *Hymns in Prose for Children*. London: J. Johnson. The genre of hymns for children goes back to Isaac Watts (1764-1748) and his publication *The Divine and Moral Songs for the Use of Children* (1715). Watts was headmaster at the Grammar School in Southampton.

themselves. The sixth hymn in Barbauld's book speaks to the "child of reason" ("*Child of reason ... What has thine eye observed, and whither has thy foot been wandering?*"), who uses his reason to draw conclusions about the world that he experiences. The child must open his eyes in order to see the world of God; he must go out into the world, and when he sees and observes, he will perceive the greatness of God (Barbauld, 1781, pp. 36ff.).

American progressive education took as its starting point this active child, although it did not refer explicitly to texts like the writings of Anna Barbauld. But the child-centered orientation was not just a matter within psychology; it also has theological preconditions. The development of child-centered education did not emerge from within itself. Anna Barbauld put forward her own theory of education, which is again astonishing. In *On Education* in 1797 she equates "education" with *experience* - a notion that has been ascribed to the much later John Dewey. But Barbauld wrote as early as 1797 the following words (Barbauld, 1825):

This education goes on at every instant of time; it goes on like time; you can neither stop it nor turn its course. (p. 307)

Children's habits are independent of those of their parents, because they are formed in the present and do not have anything to do with the past, namely, with their parents' biographies. There are no "precepts" in education, that is, no guiding principle or recipe upon which we can base our actions. Children see through adults' plans of education, and they judge adults' morality according to their actions and not according to what they preach. In Barbauld's (1825) words, "be as cunning as you may, they - the children - are always more cunning than you" (p. 312).

Education is an attempt, not a particular effect, Barbauld (1825) writes further; and this attempt is often a kind of "over culture" that achieved little with great expense:

Do not you see how seldom this over culture produces its effect, and how many shining and excellent characters start up every day, from the bosom of obscurity, with scarcely any care at all? (p. 318)

Barbauld (1825) also addresses and rejects the often-heard objection to that "relative" view of education:

Are children then to be neglected? Surely not: but having given them the instruction and accomplishments which their situation in life requires, let us reject superfluous solicitude, and trust that their characters will form themselves from the spontaneous influence of good examples, and circumstances which impel them to useful action. (pp. 318-319)

Theories of this kind were not necessarily successful; today, you are not likely to find a reference to Anna Barbauld in the history of the notion of the "active child." But it is held to be certain that this notion entered into educational theory at a certain point in time and then never left it. References are often taken to be indicators of the impact and spread of a concept. One reference of this kind is the application of educational theory in children's literature.

Thomas Day, a follower of Rousseau, published a children's book in three parts in 1783-1789 titled *The History of Sandford und Merton*. Day's purpose in the book was to connect Rousseau's principles of natural education with social criticism. *Sandford and*

*Merton* was much read in the nineteenth century,<sup>13</sup> but it had little to do with practical education. The readers were advised that wealth contributed nothing to education and that luxury was the enemy of human nature. The story tells of Tommy Merton, the spoiled and naughty son of a rich plantation owner in Jamaica, who is sent to England to be educated well. Here he meets Harry Sandford, son of a poor farmer, who with his natural and simple virtue needs no artificial schooling (*Schulbildung*) to become morally good. A natural life in the country is all that is needed to be able to live in harmony with oneself, provided that one is taught the few really important things in life, as the boys were – by their tutor, Reverend Barlow.

Later figures in children's literature like *Tom Sawyer* or *Oliver Twist* were conceived by their authors in opposition to the artificial morals of the followers of Rousseau, who precisely did *not* understand what children experience and feel. Thomas Day just simply doubled the basic situation in Rousseau's *Emile*, by having two boys instead of one go through a natural education, and Day did not change anything of the artificiality of Rousseau's model. In this sense, the set phrase "child-centered" should certainly be seen as ambivalent, for although it attempted to focus on the activities of the child, it at the same time focused on the steering of precisely these activities by well-meaning tutors or governesses.

In many historical accounts, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Fröbel are to be held as the founders of progressive education. From Rousseau to Fröbel, that is, from *Emile* to the *Kindergarten*, there is, supposedly, a particular chain of themes and concepts that underpin the modern view of the "active child." Pestalozzi is said to have taken his orientation from Rousseau, Fröbel from Pestalozzi, and progressive education from all three. However, that would assume that the relevant works were widely read later, which was not the case. Rousseau's works were not the main reading matter for progressive education, and at the time around 1900, Pestalozzi tended to be merely cited, named or mentioned rather than really studied. Seen from today's perspective, the theoretical concepts of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Fröbel do not fit together, and they are hardly oriented to the "active child."

A look at Rousseau's *Emile* illustrates this. The theory of natural education associated with *Emile* is indebted to the psychology, or philosophy, of sensualism. The basic tenet of sensualism is the following: Nothing can be in the mind that did not enter through the sense organs. Man "grasps" with the mind only that which has previously been literally grasped, or touched - a simple formula that is still popular today. But this also means that education can become connected with strong control fantasies. That is, if all learning takes place through the senses before it can become mental structures, then education can be said to *build* the mind, because it controls the input of all the child is learning.

That is exactly what Rousseau describes in his *Emile*, the building of reason through sensory learning from things. The child has no inner potential; the mind is at first a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, that absorbs what it is entered into it, without having its own filter at its disposal. For this reason, it is no wonder that *Emile* is an artificial figure and seems like a robot to the modern reader. Rousseau's contemporaries, of course, read the book differently. They were either filled with admiration for the possibilities of education described or were outraged that Rousseau had the nerve to distance himself so far from conventional education.

The book *Emile* is a mixture of sensualist methods and spartan rules for living. Rousseau was convinced that all luxury was damaging. For this reason alone he was regarded

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<sup>13</sup> The book (Day, 1783-1789), appeared in three volumes, together went through 140 editions up to 1870.

in Paris as an oddball, but it was this very mixture that many of his readers found attractive. They encoded ‘natural education’ as preparation for a life without the courtly forms of social behavior, without excess and corruption, without constant distraction by incessant amusements that were ultimately only too meaningless. Rousseau’s declared enemy was Voltaire, who defended luxury and viewed the natural life as a relapse into barbarism.

Voltaire wrote a letter to Rousseau on August 30, 1755 (Voltaire, 1978, pp. 539 squ.), stating that he would leave this “*allure naturelle*” to those who were more worthy of it than he. He himself could not set out for Canada to live with the Iroquois. Why, the illnesses alone that he suffered could only be treated in Europe; there were no doctors in Missouri. Moreover, Voltaire wrote, assuming that the Indians in Canada were probably just about as bad (*méchant*) as the Europeans, there was hardly gain to be expected from living the natural life. In any case, for a peaceful life in solitude among the savages he himself was not suited. We would have to add here that neither was Rousseau. But Voltaire was at this time over sixty years old, and it was not he, but Rousseau who wrote for the younger generation, which was thrilled by his ideas.

But this does not mean that we can trace an ancestral line from Rousseau via Pestalozzi to Fröbel, which consequently led to the active child coming into educational theory. If we understand “educational theory” to be public reflection on education problems at various levels and varying in different cultures, then a total of three authors can simply not have been decisive. The idea is also misleading that the educational literature alone determined the notion of the active child. Examples of the art of the seventeenth century show that the notion of the active child is older than the assignment to Rousseau, and they foreshadow the appearance of *Emile* in 1762.

A painting by the Dutch painter Frans Hals from the year 1620 shows *The Infant Catharina Hooft with her Nurse* (Bedaux & Ekkart, 2001, p.15).<sup>14</sup> The picture is cheerful, it shows a relationship that looks almost playful; the infant girl, although lavishly draped and outfitted, does not look like a miniature adult, and most of all, the educational reference here has no religious connotations. This is not a holy child, but a child with a mischievous smile and a slightly curious and sharp-witted look that is not fixed on any sort of holy shrine. There is also nothing threatening in the attention the nurse shows to the child and no pedagogical demand, except for that of social class. The nurse is *playing* with the child, without educating her, at least that is the impression of the moment that the painting wants to convey.

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<sup>14</sup> Frans Hals (1580/84-1666): *The Infant Catharina Hooft with her Nurse*. c. 1619-20. Oil on canvas; 86 x 65 cm. Staaliche Mussen zu Berlin, Germany.



**Frans Hals. *The Infant Catharina Hooft with her Nurse*. c. 1619-20. Oil on canvas; 86 x 65 cm. Staatliche Mussen zu Berlin, Germany.**

In 1625, Peter Paul Rubens painted his only portrait of a child outside his family, *Infant with a Bird* (Bedaux & Ekkart, 2001, p.123).<sup>15</sup> The painting depicts an extremely childlike moment, namely, a mixture of delight, astonishment, and excitement that seems timeless. The bird on the string seems to be flying away, and yet it is tied at the foot; the child has the bird in its power and can play with it anyway that it wishes. Tame goldfinches were a popular toy, so that the metaphor of the flying bird can be taken quite realistically (p. 124). Although Rubens had originally wanted to paint an angel, what you see in this painting is a child that appears to be totally self-absorbed in the moment of letting the bird free. An angel has no gender, and in this respect Rubens kept to his original intention; the painting leaves open whether this is a boy or a girl. We see a *child*, an *active* child, and not in the Christian sense of a “holy child.”

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640): *Infant with a Bird* (1614/1624/25) (oil on panel, 50, 8x40, 5cm) (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz) (Gemäldegalerie, inv. 763). There is a sketch of this painting from 1614. Rubens also painted his sons, including the famous painting, *Artist's Sons Albert and Nicholas* (Bedaux & Ekkart, 2001, p. 250).



**Peter Paul Rubens. *Infant with a Bird*.** c.1624-1625. Oil on panel. Gemaldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.

However, you can also see *symbols* in the painting, if you consider the teachings of the times. The goldfinch in the hand of an angel could be seen as a perfect symbol of the human soul that returns to Christ (Bedaux & Ekkart, 2001, p.124).<sup>16</sup> Even the child's necklace made of coral can be given an educational interpretation. Since ancient times, coral has been ascribed with protective powers; the necklace is meant to protect the child from danger. At the same time, coral also has an emblematic function, for it is a symbol of refinement and improvement, and thus it portends the success of education (p. 124). But the paramount impression that the painting conveys is that of the nearly breathless child playing with utmost concentration, taking notice of nothing but the object of play. This is a child *through and through*, more than one hundred years before “*the*” child was supposedly invented by Rousseau.

A painting by Johannes Verspronck of 1654 conveys this impression even more strongly. In *Boy Sleeping in a High Chair* (Bedaux & Ekkart, 2001, p. 227),<sup>17</sup> the child has fallen asleep while eating, observed by a sad cat that does not know what to make of the scene. In the boy's right hand is a spoon that appears to be about to be let go. Perhaps the child has dozed and is falling into a deeper sleep. The child keeps his balance and is not falling forward, although he seems to be tipping somewhat. You see here not just a child but a boy, for rectangular collars made of linen were the fashion for men in the in Holland at that time, and they were never worn by women or girls. There are no religious symbols visible. The boy wears a white undercap under a cap of brown striped silk, tied at the sides with red bows. This is not a hint of holiness; it simply supports the depiction of a child.

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<sup>16</sup> The image appears in a sentence by the Antwerp Jesuit and poet Adriaen Poitiers (1605-1674). The source text (*Afbeeldinghe van d'eerste eeuw der societeyt Jesu*), however, was published only in 1640, the year in which Rubens died.

<sup>17</sup> Johannes Verspronck (c. 1603-1662): *Sleeping Boy in a High Chair* (1654) (oil on panel, 96 x 75, 7cm) (private collection). The painting was rediscovered in 1988.





**Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck, *Boy Sleeping in a High Chair*, 1654, oil on panel, private collection.**

Notions of the active child shaped not only art but also the emerging genre of children's literature. In the nineteenth century, a genre of literature for young readers developed in which child protagonists experience stories, go through adventures, and are active. They are not dependent upon their well-meaning tutors, they do not attend kindergarten, and they often do not go to school. These are children of a literary imagination that takes no reference from the reigning educational theories. These books were written to be read, to shape the imagination of not adult educators and teachers but of children and adolescents (McGavran, 1999).

Take, for example, the English writer and Christian Socialist Charles Kingsley,<sup>18</sup> author of the successful children's book, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*, published in 1862.<sup>19</sup> Kingsley wrote the book for his youngest son. It tells the romantic story of Tom, a young chimney sweep, who one day falls from the roof through the chimney into the house of a clean and neat girl named Ellie. Looking in a mirror, Tom becomes aware for the first time of his own dirty blackened body. Tom flees from the house and falls into a nearby river. Here he discovers a magical underwater world and is transformed from a land-baby to a water-baby.

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) studied first at King's College in London as a day student and then studied classical languages and mathematics at Magdalene College in Cambridge. Kingsley left Cambridge in 1842 to read for Holy Orders. In July of the same year he became curate and in May 1845 rector of Eversley Church in Hampshire. Kingsley responded to the working class agitation that climaxed in the collapse of the Chartist movement in 1848. The Chartist movement has sought radical reform of the English Parliament. His interest in the condition of the working classes led Kingsley to join with others to form the *Christian Socialist movement*, which represented the rights of workers. Also in 1848 Kingsley published his first literary works, which dealt with social issues. He came into conflict with the high church faction of the Church of England. Later in his career Kingsley wrote historical novels that extolled the Germanic people or their English Protestant descendants and heroicized the Anglo-Saxon Middle Ages. In 1860 Kingsley was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge.

<sup>19</sup> *The Water-Babies* was an exceptionally popular fantasy serialized in Macmillan's Magazine 1862-1863 and then published as a book in 1863. There is a famous illustrated edition (Kingsley, 1916) with color plates by painter Jesse Willcox Smith (1863-1935), published in 1916 by Dodd, Mead & Company of New York.



”He looked up at the broad yellow moon and thought that she looked at him.” – Jessie Willcox Smith. One of twelve color plates by Smith for Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* in the illustrated 1916 edition published by Dodd, Mead & Company, New York.

This tale explores the underwater world as an alternative world that can be experienced after some transformation. The underwater world knows no unpleasantness and is full of bizarre characters, such as the characters with tongue-twisting names that were unforgettable by English children:

- Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby
- and Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid

Some years later, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*,<sup>20</sup> Lewis Carroll wrote a similar story exploring an alternative world, as did also T. H. White in *The Sword in the Stone* (1936), which told of young King Arthur’s education by Merlyn the Magician. Merlyn lives his life from the future to past, going backwards in real-time, which is a question that children often wonder about. Books for children like these represent a separate genre, and they always maintained a Romantic overtone. The stories are always about journeys or some sort of discovery that leads into a new world that differs from known experience. These stories portray children’s learning generally as discovery and they also promote the active child. And to be up-to-date, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis<sup>21</sup> belongs here, as does also the now fifth *Harry Potter* book.

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis Carroll (pen name for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1836-1898) published *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865.

<sup>21</sup> C. S. Lewis (1898-1963): *The Chronicles of Narnia*. (1950-1956).

In the nineteenth century it became conventional also in the education literature to generalize a particular picture of the child that was connected with metaphors of Paradise and brought childhood together with expectations of protection. *Paradise of Childhood* (Wiebé, 1896) was, for instance, the title of an 1896 English guide to kindergarten pedagogy that also contained a biography of Fröbel. It is a good example of the sentimental view of the child. Friedrich and Louise Fröbel are depicted as the ideal married couple that founded the *kindergarten culture*, its place of origin being presented to the English reader as the romantic *Thuringen Forest*.

To investigate the construction of the figure of the active child, in the addition to the education literature, we should consider also publications in the popular press – the popular magazines and “home companion” books of the nineteenth century. Here images play a role, not theories. The generalized picture of “child” becomes a part of mass communication, which can be demonstrated by a look at the German family magazine, *Die Gartenlaube* (arbour of the garden). one of the most famous periodicals in the history of the German press.<sup>22</sup> The pictures and picture-text combinations in the illustrated magazine utilize Romantic motifs and are at the same time an articulation of family-like feelings finding popular expression. Here children are protected and active only within the context of the family.



<sup>22</sup> The family magazine *Die Gartenlaube* appeared from 1853 to 1944. Founded by the Leipziger publishers and author Ernst Keil (1816-1878), the periodical reached, with a circulation of 382,000 copies in 1876, more than five million readers. It offered regular contributions on the topics of bringing up children, children’s medicine, and preventive health, thus functioning as an “aid” and “friend of the family.”

Further evidence is found when we examine magazines that were written expressly for children and adolescents. These periodicals were in wide circulation in the nineteenth century and enjoyed a large readership. I take as examples some American children's magazines and show the shift to the active child as evidenced in the illustrations on the magazine covers,<sup>23</sup> which provide indications of the general view of the child. Between 1820 and 1880, there was a gradual development towards depiction of the active child, who is no longer seen as a little adult, but who can also appear without any pedagogical aura. Here the child is not, as in the Romantic period, seen in an elegiac fashion, but is instead placed into stimulating learning environments that are meant to recall Romanticism only in the manner of style.

In May 1827, the magazine cover of *The Juvenile Miscellany* in Boston<sup>24</sup> showed two children in a domestic setting. The girl is reading aloud from a book, and the boy is listening attentively. The two children seem obliged to the educational world of the adult, which consists in books and conversation. Above the illustration, the cover announces an article in this month's issue:

„\*\*\*\*\* exert a prudent care,  
To feed the youthful mind with proper fare;  
And wisely store the memory, by degrees,  
With wholesome learning, yet acquir'd with ease.”



The June 1836 cover of *Parley's Magazine*,<sup>25</sup> published in New York and Boston, shows children of both sexes being taught from a book by an adult male. This is an scene out-of-doors; one child reads on his own; three children are looking at the book held by the man; some of the children have their toys with them; this seems to be instruction in passing, on the street, so to speak; the adult is explaining something in the book; there are no typical school utensils; the man carries his walking stick under his arm; he is not holding a switch, so he does not appear threatening. The same is true of the children; there are being instructed outdoors, but they are no street kids as appeared in depictions of New York at the time.



The cover of the Boston *Boys' and Girls' Magazine* of November 1843<sup>26</sup> shows girls and boys in separate educational spheres. The boy on the left is practicing with his baseball bat; the girl on the right is reading and holds her doll. The two spheres are connected by means of the flowered border indicating that the two sexes are made for one another but grow

<sup>23</sup> Source: Pat Pflieger: A Small Gallery of Magazine Covers. On the Internet at merrycoz.org  
<http://www.merrycoz.org/covers/COVERS.HTM>

<sup>24</sup> *The Juvenile Miscellany* Vol. II, No. II (May 1827).

<sup>25</sup> *Parley's Magazine* June (1836). The magazine was published from 1833 and 1844.

<sup>26</sup> *The Boys' and Girls' Magazine* Vol. III, No. XI (November 1843).



up differently. The girl sits, while the boy stands; she lowers her eyes; he has his wide open. She seems reserved; he seems challenging; but both children are surrounded by a childlike aura. And by the way, the first formal rules for baseball games were established in 1845, while the game itself had been played since the beginning of the nineteenth century – by boys only, as a photograph of the champions of the 1865 National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) championship shows.



The 1865 Brooklyn Atlantics (Library of Congress)

The February 1844 cover page of *Robert Merry's Museum* of Boston<sup>27</sup> features a romantic reading scene, with a Rousseauian governor standing in the background who could also be the children's father. Whether the boy or the girl is reading aloud is not recognizable. The boy is sitting, the girl kneeling; perhaps she is explaining something to him. But this is still not a school situation. The children are being watched over, but in an idyllic landscape setting in which learning can be natural, also between the sexes. The encircling botanical border of leaves and branches stands here for the educational relationship, the adult side of which is represented by the man of the household.



The cover page of FRANCIS WOODWORTH'S<sup>28</sup> *Woodworth's Youth's Cabinet* published in New York shows in November 1851<sup>29</sup> a teaching scene in the home. All members of the

<sup>27</sup> *Robert Merry's Museum* Vol. VII, No. 2 (February 1844).

<sup>28</sup> Francis C. Woodworth (1812-1859) was also a well-known author of children's books and a series called "Theodore Tinker's Stories for Little Folks" (12 vols., New York, 1854-58). His books for children include *The Diving Bell* (1851) and *The Holiday Book* (1853). The lyrics to a popular song, *The Song of a Snow Bird* (January 1858), were also written by Woodworth.

<sup>29</sup> *Woodworth's Youth Cabinet* Vol. VI, No. 11 (November 1851).

family are learning. The father is demonstrating magnetism by suspending a pair of scissors from a magnet. Standing behind him, mother listens attentively. The eldest son is leaning on a large globe and is apparently already a student. The other children are listening to father's lecture; one of the boys looks up from a book; the girl is kneeling and watching her father. The smaller of the boys appears to be asking a question. The scene itself is enclosed, which again is indicated by the encircling flowered border. *Woodworth's Youth Cabinet*, by the way, appeared with a motto that hints at progressive education: "Amusement our means - instruction our end."<sup>30</sup>



The December 1851 cover of *Forrester's Boys' & Girls' Magazine*<sup>31</sup> combined the two educational spheres of boys and girls with an education family idyll in which the mother appears as teacher. *The Child's Friend and Youth's Magazine* of April 1853<sup>32</sup> also showed that the two spheres could be combined depending on the educational purpose. You see boys and girls playing on each side. However, the symbols for science and domesticity are clearly assigned to the sexes. And when *Merry's Museum* and *Parley's Magazine* merged, published by S.G. Goodrich,<sup>33</sup> the cover in October 1854<sup>34</sup> depicted an entire curriculum for education in the home. However, science is reserved for the boys; the father is listening to a lecture; and mother and her daughters are busy with the arts.



<sup>30</sup> *Woodworth's Youth's Cabinet* Vol. IV (1849) was published from 1846 to 1857.

<sup>31</sup> *Forrester's Boys' & Girls' Magazine* Vol. 8, No. 6 (December 1851).

<sup>32</sup> *The Child's Friend and Youth's Magazine* Vol. XX, No. 4 (April 1853).

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Griswold Goodrich (1793-1860), son of a Congregational minister, was born in Connecticut. He published the illustrated annual *The Token* from 1828 to 1842 in Boston, and in 1827 he began, under the name of Peter Parley, to write his series of books for the young. He also wrote schoolbooks and contributed prose and poetry to numerous periodicals. A volume of his poetry was published in 1838, *The Outcast and other Poems*. His *Les Etats Unis d'Amérique* was published in Paris in 1852; *Recollections of a Lifetime* appeared in 1857. He was chosen a member of the Massachusetts State Senate in 1837, in 1851-1853 he was consul at Paris. With his books Goodrich earned a fortune (Obituary: *New York Evening Post* 9 June 1860, p. 619f.).

<sup>34</sup> *Merry's Museum & Parley's Magazine* Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 1854).



The April 1869 cover of the monthly periodical *The Schoolmate*<sup>35</sup> showed the house of learning for boys and girls; both were to be open to the world. The boy and girl are reading together. An earlier issue of *The Schoolmate*, which was published in New York, showed in January 1853<sup>36</sup> the principle of discovery learning at home and at school, here again with clear divisions between the sexes.



Cover for 1869



Cover for 1853-1854

In January 1870 the magazine *The Little Corporal*<sup>37</sup> depicted the little soldier, with a faithful companion behind him, defending the fatherland. The eagle pictured at center is “Old Abe,” the real battle mascot of the C Company of the Eighth Wisconsin Regiment, which became a famous symbol in the Civil War.<sup>38</sup> In October of the same year, *The Children’s Hour*<sup>39</sup> showed the idyllic scene of a family and the at once instructive and entertaining situation of reading read to by mother. *The Little Chief*, finally, another magazine for boys and girls, showed in February 1871<sup>40</sup> a group of children discovering the world. They are storming up the mountain and leaving the city behind them. Here we find the presence of “discovery learning” before the term even existed.



<sup>35</sup> *The Schoolmate. An Illustrated Monthly for Boys and Girls* Vol. 23, No. 4 (April 1869).

<sup>36</sup> *The Schoolmate. A Monthly Reader for School and Home Instruction.* New Series Vol. II, No. 3 (January 1853). This periodical appeared between 1852 and 1854.

<sup>37</sup> *The Little Corporal. An Original Magazine for Boys and Girls and for Older People who Have Profound Hearts* Vol. X, No. 1 (January 1870),

<sup>38</sup> Old Abe died in 1881. The eagle appeared on the cover of *The Little Corporal* for the first time in March 1854.

<sup>39</sup> *The Children’s Hours. A Magazine for Little Ones* Vol. III, No. 4 (October 1870).

<sup>40</sup> *The Little Chief. A Magazine for Boys and Girls* Vol. V, No.2 (February 1871).





These last examples also show how this educational culture became more widespread. The magazine *The Little Chief* was published by Shortridge & Button in Indianapolis, *The Children's Hour* by T.S. Arthur in Philadelphia,<sup>41</sup> and *The Little Corporal* by Alfred L. Sewell in Chicago.<sup>42</sup> The first such magazines were published exclusively in Boston and New York. The market for educational periodicals thus expanded during the course of the nineteenth century. And the pictures established themselves firmly. In 1869 the periodical *Our Young Folks* in Boston<sup>43</sup> featured an illustration in the Antique style depicting the central position of the child. You see a little princess on her throne; this is no longer a Romantic child. The princess motif was also present in German light fiction of the same period.<sup>44</sup>



What did American children really look like in the nineteenth century? There exist early photographs<sup>45</sup> that show defiant little girls, hanging and perhaps even smoking in a hammock, young self-assured ladies, small children in thoughtful poses, and distressed children against the backdrops of the photography studios. You do not find romantic photographs; the childhood in the experience of *children* is not sentimental, despite the attributions made by adults up until today.

My conclusion goes as follows: If the active child entered into educational theory, then this was not simply an application of psychology, but instead a complex transformation in the imaginations and educational intentions of adults. This shift can be explained as a shift in the popular press – not explained as emerging from particular theories or particular educationalists. And the “active child” is a popular image that was not invented by progressive education but rather was a precondition for its success. Without the image of the “active child” the theories of progressive education would hardly have found any believers.

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<sup>41</sup> T. S. Arthur (1898-1885) was a popular author during and after the Civil War. One well-known book by Arthur was *Ten Nights in a Bar Room and What Saw I There* (1854).

<sup>42</sup> Alfred L. Sewell founded *The Little Corporal* in 1865. The first issue appeared in July. Sewell published the magazine together with Emily Huntington Miller, and they continued publication up to April 1875.

<sup>43</sup> *Our Young Folks. An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls* Number 53 (May 1869) (years of publication: 1865 und 1873).

<sup>44</sup> E. Marlitt: *Das Heideprinzesschen*. Leipzig 1872. Marlitt's novel was published in 1871, first in serialized form in *Die Gartenlaube*. E. Marlitt is a pen name for Friederieke Henriette Christiane Eugenie John (1825-1887), who was originally a valet and later active as a lady of society. Her first novel, *Goldelse*, appeared in 1866 and brought her sudden fame. In the 1870s she was the most successful contributor to *Die Gartenlaube*.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.merrycoz.org/CHILDREN.HTM.gallery>

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