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„Das Paradies der Kindheit“. Disciplinary Styles of Education and the Conditionality of Happiness¹

Florian Eßer und Wolfgang Schröer



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Abstract

The article takes the recent (re-)emergence of punitive concepts as a starting point to reflect on the relation between the notion of childhood as a happy phase of life and disciplinary styles of education. While the two ideas seem incommensurable at first glance, several interconnections can be found in a historical perspective. The example of the ‘Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung’ reveals how romantic notions of childhood were activated between 1896 and 1914 to reproduce the hierarchical structures of Wilhelminian Germany. Moreover, analysis shows that happiness was seen as having a conditional and limited character in relation to children and therefore may also refer to disciplinary concepts of education.

Keywords: history of education, happy childhood, disciplinary education, romantic notions of childhood



Wolfgang Schröer

Das Paradies der Kindheit. Disziplinärer Erziehungsstil und Bedingungen des Glücklichseins

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag nimmt das gegenwärtig zunehmende Interesse an punitiven pädagogischen Konzepten zum Anlass, den Zusammenhang zwischen der Vorstellung von Kindheit als einer glücklichen Phase des Lebens und disziplinierenden Erziehungsstilen historisch zu reflektieren. Während die beiden Ideen auf einen ersten Blick unvereinbar erscheinen, können entsprechende Zusammenhänge in historischer Perspektive aufgezeigt werden. Das Beispiel der Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung zeigt, wie zwischen 1896 und 1914 romantische Vorstellungen von Kindheit im Sinne einer Reproduktion der hierarchischen Strukturen des Wilhelminischen Deutschlands gewendet wurden. In diesem Zusammenhang kann auch herausgearbeitet werden, dass die Idee des Glücks insofern auch auf disziplinierende Erziehungskonzepte verweisen konnte, als dieses in Bezug auf Kinder immer als ein bedingtes und begrenztes Phänomen angesehen wurde.

Schlüsselworte: pädagogische Historiographie, glückliche Kindheit, disziplinierende Erziehung, romantische Vorstellungen von Kindheit

1 Introduction

The recent (re-)emergence of punitive concepts of education has provoked a controversial public and scientific discussion during the last few years (e.g. *Bergmann* 2009; *Brumlik* 2007; *Bueb* 2006; *Winterhoff* 2008). For critics, those calls for greater rigour in the relationship to children seem to re-establish notions of an evil child, regarded as a menace to society (e.g. *James/Jenks/Prout* 1998). In a historical perspective the progress that was achieved thanks to Educational Reform during the so-called ‘century of the childhood’ is called into question. Discussed in terms of a history of childhood, the happy and innocent child of a child-centred education is at risk of being displaced by the petty tyrant of an oppressive pedagogy (e.g. *Rutschky* 1977). According to common representations in the history of childhood, the child of the Educational Reform was respected for his or her own sake while more rigorous concepts were and are committed to the common good and ready to sacrifice the child’s happiness for that purpose (e.g. *Oelkers* 2006). Disciplinary styles of education are aimed less at supporting an individual pursuit of happiness and more at serving the purposes of society’s cultural development in general. In this vein the social pedagogue Paul Bergemann wrote as follows in 1904: “Wir sind ja nicht auf der Welt, um glücklich zu sein; sondern wir haben die Bestimmung, tüchtige Menschen, Kulturarbeiter zu sein“ (*Bergemann* 1904, p. 510).

2 Happiness in Punitive Concepts of Education

In a recent article Harry Hendrick analyses disciplinary styles of education within television shows such as ‘Supernanny’. He comes to a startling conclusion regarding the line of reasoning of these popular television shows: in gaining control over their children, *Hendrick* (2010) argues, “parents will be ‘empowered’ to manage their own lives” (p. 21). This is why all the shows have a happy ending: (‘The illusory but comforting message is that through discipline/punishment of our children, we can overcome our difficulties – *once again*, we can be a ‘happy family’ and, therefore, be ‘HAPPY’) (ibid.). *Hendrick’s* findings are puzzling because they give rise to a further question: if happiness and punitive concepts of education are not mutually exclusive one may ask how *happy* children can be addressed in terms of *disciplinary* education – because a happy family is not likely to be built up on distressed children.

This article will take a historical approach to address the relation between the idea of a happy childhood and disciplinary education and, therefore, goes back to the turn of the 19th century. The argumentation refers to the contributions in the German *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* from the period 1896–1914 (e.g. *Eßer* 2010). The publication in question is a professional pedagogical journal that was mainly founded by the two Herbartians *Johannes Trüper* and *Christian Ufer*. The aim of the publishers was to combine 19th-century Herbartian pedagogy with ‘child studies’, which at the end of the 19th century spread from the U.S. and England to Germany (e.g. *Depaepe* 1993). The contributions of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* will show that even in reference to punitive notions of education, the concept of childhood as a Garden of Eden can be seen as something self-evident, since even for traditionalists the child finds himself in a naturally happy state,

which he only needs to leave gradually. In this sense individual happiness is not a goal in itself and the pursuit of happiness should not be viewed as unconditionally worthy of support.

This leads to the main thesis of this article: in relation to childhood as well as to education happiness has never been regarded as limitless. As a conditional state that was to be achieved for children, happiness worked as a point of reference for disciplinary styles of education. This article will cover the thesis in two steps. First, it will show that the notion of a happy childhood has been a fundamental theme in the sphere of all pedagogic theories – representatives of more disciplinary styles of education regarded it as a socio-anthropological state of children, as did representatives of Educational Reform. Second, it will explain both that happiness has always been considered conditional and what varied forms this has taken.

For several reasons the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* is a suitable reference source for demonstrating the thesis of conditional happiness in punitive education. The journal is considered a classic example of the biological and pathologizing view of children and childhood in the German history of education research (e.g. Göppel 1989; Stroß 2000; Tenorth 2006). In this context children and childhood always represent a risk and a danger – happiness in childhood at first appears not to represent a meaningful point of reference when it comes to avoiding undesirable individual development and treating ‘pathological individuals’. Thus the journal serves as an unlikely case. Furthermore the publishers defended pedagogical Herbartianism, which is considered conservative, against critics of the Wilhelminian era from the field of educational reform. For contemporaries those Herbartians embodied a hierarchical and disciplinary understanding of education (e.g. Bonus 1905).

3 Childhood’s Garden of Eden and the Bourgeois Home

Generally the idea of a happy childhood in the contributions of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* derived from certain notions of evolution theory that were typical for the time (e.g. Bernstorff 2009). In 1906, in a guest submission in honour of the ten-year anniversary of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*, the Dutch researcher J. A. Schreuder summarized the matter by asking “Why and for what purpose does one engage in the study of children?”:

„Die Hypothese, daß die Entwicklung des Individuums eine gedrängte Darstellung ist von der Entwicklung der Gattung, daß die Ontogenese in raschem Gang dieselben Stadien durchmacht als die Phylogenese im langen Laufe der Jahrhunderte, diese „Arbeitshypothese“ macht das Kind zu einem wertvolleren Gegenstand der Untersuchung als die ältesten Ausgrabungen und die tiefstliegenden Versteinerungen“ (Schreuder 1906, p. 52).

At the beginning, according to other authors also, the child finds himself in a “dream-life” (“Traumleben”) (e.g. Großmann 1899) from which he or she only gradually awakens. On the whole, the articles of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* show signs of a theory of cultural stages and of evolution; this is typical first of Herbartianism and subsequently of the Darwinian-influenced natural sciences of the late 19th century. As far as the question of the extent to which Darwinian evolutionary theory and the Herbartian theory of cultural stages are reconcilable, opinions were widely divergent (e.g. for example Götze

1872; Vogt 1906). For the context to be elaborated here, however, all that matters is that the authors were in agreement that there are at least “similarities” (*Trüper*) between human history and that of the individual. These evolutionary theories were, as *Donna Haraway* has stated with respect to primatology, subject to a “salvation theory”. It is a matter, moreover, of (Judeo-) Christian Science: “primatology is about primal stories, the origin of ‘man’, about reformation stories, the reform and reconstruction of human nature.” As is the case with the sciences of monkeys and apes, “the story of the Garden of Eden [...] along with versions of the origin of society, marriage, and language” (*Haraway* 1989, p. 9) also appears implicitly and explicitly in the more or less simultaneously rising sciences dealing with children. Linked to this ‘dream-world’ of childhood’s paradisiacal immediacy is also the notion of a happy phase of life: “Sich glücklich zu fühlen in seiner eignen kleinen Welt, gehört zu dem Wesen der Kindernatur”, *Schreuder* (1906, p. 2) continues. And, according to him, it is precisely this happy and self-contented nature that makes children and, consequently, also child research so interesting from an aesthetic and ethical point of view.

This normative assumption about children who are happy in their “own little world” pervades the articles in the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*. The “Garden of Eden” of childhood to which the happiness of children is tied represents an alternative world to that of adulthood. This is true in several ways:

„Kinder besitzen im Gegensatz zu Erwachsenen “weder klare Logik, noch Gewissen, noch moralische Einsicht; daran zu appellieren, ist verlorene Liebesmühe. [...] Sie leben in der Gegenwart und denken nicht an das Morgen; sie lassen den morgigen Tag für das Seinige sorgen. Das ist ja eben das Paradies der Kindheit, das Glück das nie wiederkehrt, und das wir ihnen nicht stören sollten” (*Großmann* 1898, p. 148).

In contrast to the bourgeois subject, who plans rationally and acts morally (e.g. *Reckwitz* 2006), children have a different world of experience, a different inner world. Children do not yet have logic or a conscience that allows them to direct their behaviour toward the future or toward higher values, and neither do they need it. Children are allowed to pursue what gives them joy in the here and now, almost (!) without any moral restrictions.

Second, the happiness of childhood arises not only from the distinctiveness of the child’s own “inner” little world but also from that which concerns the ‘outer’ world of the social. Children are believed to spend their lives outside a society, which was considered by contemporaries to be potentially dangerous and risky. They are, according to the publisher Johannes Trüper, for example, underage and hence “nur als Glieder der Familie, der sie angehören [...] Staatsbürger“ (*Trüper* 1911, p. 35). Children are, as a consequence, not exposed to the hardships of social life. *Ziegler* (1900) states that they are able to enjoy the cheerful, happy atmosphere of the lively nursery, in which the loving hearts of siblings warm each other and on which the double star of parental love shines.

In the nursery of the (bourgeois) family, the child finds his or her own safe and sound little world that protects him or her from ‘the world outside’ and in which he or she can and should be happy. This is the belief in being able to preserve the Garden of Eden in the bourgeois home and to transform it into the conditional joy of childhood. That way happiness becomes a socio-anthropological state of children which is not limited to certain (post-)romantic notions but connected to childhood in general.

4 Educational Strategies Surrounding the Conditionality of Happiness

The crucial fact is that this childhood happiness is neither self-evident nor limitless. To a certain extent it may be so to the children themselves, who live in their “own little world” (e.g. *Schreuder* 1906) and cannot yet see the larger context, but it is not so to the educator. The pedagogue himself is aware of the limits of happiness and the finiteness of childhood. Thus *Großmann* asks himself how a child can become a criminal and explains in this context:

“Ich habe stets viele Kinder um mich gehabt, und bin unter ihnen am glücklichsten gewesen. Ich freute mich der Frische der Kindesnatur, der Ursprünglichkeit der Anschauungen, Empfindungen, Eigenarten, Handlungen. Aber oft, wenn ich ihnen in die lachenden Augen sah, oder ihr Herzchen an dem meinen schlagen fühlte, überkam es mich wie Schrecken. Jetzt bist du mein, jetzt bist du gut und unschuldig – aber wie wirst du sein, wenn der Schmetterlingsstaub der Jugend abgestreift, wenn Du Mann oder Weib geworden bist? Und ich forschte in den Augen und in den Zügen nach der Zukunft, und manches süße Antlitz schien sich mir zu verzerren in Sünde und Schuld” (*Großmann* 1898, p. 131).

To some degree the educator can, therefore, share in the happiness of the children. But his concern takes over at the very latest when the happiness of childhood comes to an end. This example can be generalized: in the articles of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*, the possibility of unhappiness is always present and being dealt with (pedagogically). This can happen in different ways:

The Garden of Childhood that Must Be Cultivated:

In a first variant, the happiness and unhappiness of childhood depend on how much the garden has been cultivated in which children are able to enjoy the happiness of childhood. In his article, *Großmann*, for example, also questioned the conditions under which children could become immoral. First, in this context he denounced parents who wanted to show their children in society and thereby snatch them away from the “unspoiltness so necessary” (“so nötigen Unberührtheit”) to them (*Großmann* 1898, p. 139). While this problem concerns the children of the upper classes more, *Großmann* also lamented the conditions of the lower classes, especially in the big cities: here children have no real home but at best only places to sleep – instead life happens in the street. These poor city children become old and hard before their time and in the end they have never really lived: “Es sind Kinder ohne Glück, ohne Sonnenschein” (ibid., p. 136). The paradise of children is thus not at all without preconditions. Their happiness is dependent on whether they live ‘untouched’ in a sheltered home that separates their world from that of adults – and particularly from the public.

But even when this is present, a happy childhood is still not a given. *Ziegler* (1900) describes as follows the problem of only children who are cheated out of their ‘joys of youth’ and, in addition, brought up to be egoists:

“Das fröhliche, heitere *Klima* der belebten Kinderstube ist ihm fremd, fremd sind ihm die stillen Reize des innigen, traulichen Verkehrs, an dem sich liebende Geschwisterherzen gegenseitig erwärmen” (*Ziegler* 1900, p. 90f.).

Thus the “garden of childhood” has to be cultivated pedagogically if it is to become a source of joy and happiness. Otherwise childhood can quickly lose its magic. At this

point it also becomes clear how closely “happiness” and ‘childhood’ per se are bound together. In the wrong circumstances children are cheated not only out of their happiness but also out of their childhood, and they grow up to become adults too quickly. The notion of a childhood Garden of Eden and evolutionary theory thus together form a normative tableau: children need to grow up in the safe and sound world of the bourgeois nursery (e.g. *Oelkers* 2007), because beyond this sheltered Garden of Eden they would develop too quickly.

Order and Adaptation as a Precondition of Happiness

In a second variant, another form of unhappiness is invoked from which children need to be protected: the false happiness of living out one’s wishes unrestrictedly. The happiness that children are able to experience in the privacy and seclusion of the family does not, according to the generally shared perception expressed in the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*, arise from the fact that children in this case are able to act completely freely.² This is because, as the Herbartian *Christian Ufer* made clear, education means “Anpassung an die Gesellschaft, nicht unbehindertes Sichausleben” (*Ufer* 1907, p. 40). The child first has to achieve this adaptation on a small scale, that is, within the family.

In this sense *F. M. Wendt* (1095) warned against a “pampering” (‘Verzärtelung’) of children. At the same time, however, he stressed that the relationship between parents and their children needs to be an affectionate one:

“Nicht im blinden Gehorsam, im Zittern vor dem Zorne der befehlenden Eltern liegt die Pietät der Kinder, sondern in der freudigen, pflichtgetreuen Folgsamkeit. Das Verhältnis zwischen Eltern und Kindern muß wechselseitig eine Quelle lauterster Freude, also eines echten Genusses sein.“ (*Wendt* 1905, p. 8)

Children’s love finds expression „in der *starken* aus *innerer Triebkraft* herauswachsenden *Anpassung* an die Bestrebungen des Elternhauses“ (ibid.). This also forms the basis of a happy relationship between parents and children. In this case the happiness of childhood does not lie in freedom but rather in a voluntary submission to the will of the parents. The little bit of happiness that freedom perhaps promises must be limited for children to discover a higher form of happiness and joyful relations with their parents. „Das bestrafte Kind ist wahrlich anhänglicher als das umschmeichelte. Aber was für eine Elternseligkeit, die keusche Blüte Kind sich entfalten zu sehen“ (*Delitsch* 1910, p. 354). The happiness of parents and children is thus bound up with the hierarchical family structure: the strict but just authority of parents together with the joyful submission of children forms the generational order of a harmonious and happy family.

The notions of happiness and harmony contained in this correspond to an attitude that is also politically grounded. The publisher *Trüper*, for example, thus objects to the adopting of American democratic educational models. These might perhaps have worked in democratic America where no differences existed that one could not do something about and where the awareness of the distance between adults and young people and of the obvious superiority of older people was also not as prevalent as in Germany (e.g. *Trüper* 1911). Here, however, the stratification of social classes and estates, the completely different force of tradition and authority required a more hierarchical structure than in America, “[wo] der individualistische Gedanke des „hilf dir selbst“ so vorherrscht” (ibid.).

In other words: in the opinion of conservative pedagogues the individual “pursuit of happiness” does not play any significant role in Germany of the Wilhelminian era. In-

stead, hierarchical structures must be passed on and, as a result, happiness, too, must to a greater extent be superindividually bound. This should also be reflected in the structures of educational institutions and the family, in which happiness can also emerge from factors such as obedience and submission.

Happiness and the Problem of Childhood Innocence

In a third variant, the happiness and joy of children is associated with their sexual innocence and unawareness. In a reverse conclusion it is presumed that children may be unhappy if they act immorally. The sadness of children thus becomes a sign of their moral inadequacy. For contemporaries of the early 20th century, an especial threat to children's happiness was posed by masturbation and homosexuality (e.g. *Laqueur* 2003). The physician *O. Preiss* thus stated that young patients from good families lost all strength and joy through these so-called "secret habits" ("heimliche Gewohnheiten"). He describes how juvenile girls and their mothers enter his surgery:

"Die oft in üppiger Kraft strotzende noch jugendfrische Mutter führt, als die schönere von beiden, ihr unlustig dreinschauendes, träges Töchterchen herein, dessen Gebahren mehr an ein alterndes Mütterchen erinnert, denn an die oft einzige Freude ihrer Eltern" (*Preiss* 1900, p. 103).

In this case, too, the loss of childhood happiness goes hand in hand with the loss of childhood and youth per se: the children have, to quote *Preiss* again, that "unsteten Gesichtsausdruck [...], der weder kindliche Freude noch Schmerz zeigen und niemals aus einer ängstlichen Erregtheit den Weg zu Ruhe und Gemütlichkeit zurückfinden kann" (*Preiss* 1900, p. 104). These children are not as innocent as they should be and cannot, as a result, be as happy and vigorous as they ought to.

As a consequence of this situation of immoral behaviour and childlike sadness, one could not conclude, however, that the happiness of unawareness should be preserved in children at all costs. The fact is that for the authors of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* it was precisely this innocence and unawareness that could emerge as a problem. The unselfconsciousness of children in sexual matters was indeed seen as a part of the normal psyche of children (e.g. *Moses* 1906). The physician and therapeutic pedagogue *Julius Moses* said he would fundamentally be happy to preserve this unawareness – and therefore also "das unbefangene, unbewußte Liebesspiel, über das ein Hauch von Poesie ausgebreitet ist, den wir uns scheuen, zu zerreißen" (*ibid.*). Again according to *Moses*, the signs of the times nonetheless stood in the way of this:

"Wir haben heute nun allerdings ausführen müssen, daß die kindliche Unbefangenheit unter dem jetzigen von der ganzen Kulturwelt sanktionierten System oft früh genug in einer gefährlichen Weise durch unberufene Aufklärung beendet wird, der wir begegnen müssen dadurch, daß die Erziehung selbst die Belehrung in die Hand nimmt. Und wir wollen ein Erziehungssystem aufbauen, das die Kinder vor gesundheitlichen, sittlichen und ästhetischen Schäden schützt" (*ibid.*, p. 176).

To this extent he advocates, as do most of the authors of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung*, early sex education for children by the parents or school. In this case it is, consequently, the educator himself who must for the sake of the children sacrifice the happiness of unawareness and innocence so as protect their moral integrity.

The happiness of childlike unawareness comes in conflict here with the morality of the future adult. "Wie soll sich ein Mann", asks *André Raffalovich*, for example, "auf dem sexuellen Gebiet Frauen oder Männern gegenüber nach richtigen Grundsätzen benehmen, wenn er sich in der Jugend prostituierte oder an der Prostitution seiner Genossen er-

götzte?“ (*Raffalovich* 1896, p. 136). The person who, according to Raffalovich’s argument, as a child or youth has lived out his homosexual tendencies will not be capable even as an adult of living an ethical life. In this instance the happiness of childhood must subordinate itself to higher moral aims: the veil of innocence must be torn for the sake of moral integrity.

5 Conclusion – Conditional Happiness and Disciplinary Education

Generally the notion of happy children and a happy childhood is to be found in varying pedagogical, contemporary-historical, political and philosophical contexts. Thus the notion of a happy childhood may be used to implement a revolutionary or at least progressive idea in pedagogy, such as have been expressed by some exponents of “Reformpädagogik” (e.g. *Baader* 2011).³ On the other hand, this article has broached the issue of a happy childhood and happy children in a tradition which aimed to preserve the hierarchical structure of the existing society of the Wilhelminian era: in the view of the authors an unlimited pursuit of happiness suited democratic America, though hardly Germany of the early 20th century. Happiness was to be sought in the hierarchical generational structure, not in the individual pursuit of happiness. The German child was to find his joy by accepting the rules and the authority of the bourgeois home that represented the order of society.

In that sense most of the authors of the *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* did not approve of utilitarian and pragmatic codes of ethics which regarded happiness as a goal in itself. Instead they favoured a deontological code of ethics that emphasized the duty of each single person to act upon the right basic principles. In pedagogy this was transformed in a life course perspective by partly excluding the children from the sphere of ethics and politics: “happiness” was something that was reserved for children in general. Children were allowed to be happy – and even *had* to be happy. The happiness of childhood became a normative value insofar as the limits of happiness always referred to the limits of childhood. Children were supposed to be happy and if they were not, this was identified with a loss of childhood. Hence childhood itself becomes a normative concept. In our case it went along with ascribing a certain anthropological state to children that makes them more creatures of nature than social beings and citizens. As such they belong more to the laws of nature than to the laws of society and ethics. Here once again the bourgeois and romantic idea of the wild and uncivilized child can be found (e.g. *Richter* 1987).

Though they belong to different spheres, happy children and ethical adults had to be related to each other in Herbartian pedagogy. If the demands of the adult and the children’s world came into conflict, the happiness of childhood had to be sacrificed in case of doubt to higher aims – as we have shown by the example of sex education. Thus pedagogy had to produce a settlement between morality and the happiness of childhood: in the clearly structured world of the bourgeois home, the freedom of children was limited in terms of its morality – and it was precisely in those happy families that they could experience the paradise of childhood, the never-recurring happiness (“das Paradies der Kindheit, das Glück das nie wiederkehrt”) (*Großmann* 1898, p. 148).

In other words, disciplinary strategies were deployed in order to ‘produce’ the happy child. This discipline is not expressed in a justification of physical or mental violence

against children. On the contrary, a broad discussion on corporal punishment took place within the journal, dominated by the sceptics. Disciplinary strategies were more to be found in normative expectations of children (e.g. *Dollinger* 2010), the call for a clear-cut hierarchical structure between the generations and the designing of a ‘proper’ environment for a happy childhood. This notion fitted well within the conservative Herbartian pedagogy and those child studies that form the starting point for developmental psychology in Germany – but also may be understood in relation to modern punitive concepts of education.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was held at the 32nd International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE) 2010 in Amsterdam. Thus the article is written and published in English. The authors would like to thank the co-contributors and the participants of the forum for the lively discussion about the paper. The analysis draws on work with historical sources that originated from the project “Herbartianismus und Sozialpädagogik”, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) at the Universities of Freiburg and Hildesheim.
- 2 The reform pedagogue F. Gansberg, for instance, advocated this kind of view at around the same time: “Wir wollen geradezu die Methode des Hauses und der Straße aufnehmen: Frei und selbsttätig sollen die Kinder hineinwachsen in die Welt der Großen, in ihre Ideen und ihre Arbeiten!” (*Gansberg* 1905, p. 94).
- 3 ‘Reformpädagogik’ is an indistinct phenomenon (e.g. *Oelkers* 2005). Thus it is impossible to identify any specific features that are unique to ‘Reformpädagogik’ or identify an approach as “reformpädagogisch”.

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