

Robert Hamm

German Kinderlaeden: From Alternative Projects to Professional Pedagogy

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“It took me a long time to realise that education was not only an ethical and aesthetic practice but a political act, a dialogue, an act of creating awareness.” (Paolo Freire, 1988, 18)

The German term *Kinderladen* [plur.: *Kinderlaeden*] means literally shop of the children. It refers to alternative pre-schools that were created by cooperative groups in the late 1960's and to their successors. Until recently *Kinderlaeden* remained largely unknown in the English speaking world. In 2013 Peter Appelbaum and Belinda Davis presented a photo essay on the early years of *Kinderlaeden*. It is available online and I wish to direct the reader to this contribution for a more global look at the curricular program of the early groups (Appelbaum & Davis, 2013).

Kinderlaeden were not one-dimensional. In them critique of education was connected with critique of educational institutions and critique of society (Moysich, 1990, 120). The developments in the *Kinderlaeden* over their first 20 years, from 1970 to 1990, provide an example of a specific

dynamic in alternative educational projects. In this essay I will attend to this dynamic that led to a process referred to as institutionalisation and professionalisation (Karsten & Kleberg, 1977, Soprun, 1987, Burbach, 1988, Hamm, 2005).

When speaking of *Kinderlaeden* in the plural it needs to be remembered that each group has its own history. However there are yet shared experiences and common developments in the *Kinderlaeden* that allow to speak of them in the plural even if a given conclusion may not fit the situation of each and every group.

To be true to the *Kinderlaeden* one would have to find an adequate translation for the actual role title of the adults who took on the role of educators. In German they are called *Bezugsperson*. A literal translation would be *person to relate to*, terms offered by a rather reliable translation service include *attachment figure* or *psychological parent* (www.dict.leo.org). All of these sound odd in everyday English. Appelbaum & Davis use the term *teacher* or *caregiver* in their essay. I have decided to use the original term in my article. As a former *Bezugsperson* myself I see this as a matter of respect to the conceptual idea that is expressed in the term – and to all my *Kinderladen* colleagues also.

Anti-authoritarian aspirations and counter-culture

The first *Kinderlaeden* were established at the end of the 1960's as a reaction to two interwoven problems.

On the one hand there were not enough pre-school places available in Germany. Women were often trapped in their traditional role as mother and housewife. If they wished to work or study it was essential to have a place where their children would be reliably looked after. Kindergarten was available for only 30 % of the children.

On the other hand a stark critique developed in discussions prompted by the anti-authoritarian movement. The educational system was seen as a pivotal factor in the perpetuation of a reactionary society. It was held responsible for the creation of the notorious authoritarian character, notably in the context of post-fascist Germany. Transforming society would rely on a different socialization of its members. This had to start with the way children were treated (Seifert, 1969, Adorno, 1971,

Breitenreicher et al., 1971).

Between 1967 and 1969 numerous *Kinderlaeden* were founded, mainly in urban environments around universities (Frankfurt, Berlin, Stuttgart, Munich etc.). The name *Kinderladen* reflected that many of these groups found their home in empty shops [German: Laden] that were rented by a collective of parents. Within a short period of time the term became a brand name.

Kinderlaeden were as much projects for the adults as they were projects for the children. It was common for the adults to engage in long discussions, often related to their own behaviour and attitudes, in an attempt to overcome fixations acquired in their own socialisation process. Psychoanalysis, Marxism and Critical Theory provided a theoretical background for the projects.

In the beginning, actual practice with the children in the groups was far from being worked out. In some *Kinderlaeden* the adults tried to practice what they understood to be a socialist education. Yet more frequent, and in impact more important, were those groups who aspired to allow the children to grow up in a non-repressive climate. Accepting the children's expressions of their libidinous drives was an essential aspect. A partnership between adults and children was to replace the old model of paternalistic authority. Hence also the term: Bezugsperson, instead of teacher or educator.

The concept of children's self-regulation was at the core of the educational ambitions of the adults in *Kinderlaeden* but they had no personal experience with such a concept. Accordingly the lived practice in the groups could be inconsistent and a matter of discussion amongst the adults.

All we knew was what we did not want. We did not want a patriarchal nuclear family with a father who lays down the law and a mother who knuckles under but afterwards beats up the child with the wooden spoon.

That we did not want. But, what else? That was to be found out and tested yet. (Köster, 2011) [my translation and hereafter, RH]

It took the collectives a while to negotiate normative standards for the interactions in their groups. In the course of the experiments with new forms of relationships between adults and children boundaries of old were pushed aside. This led to situations that could easily be exploited by the mainstream press to scandalise the practice in the *Kinderlaeden*. Pictures of preschool children walking over a piano¹, sitting on tables instead of chairs, eating with their hands instead of spoons

1 The scene of children standing on the piano became iconic. It was originally part of a film made in the

and forks, experimenting with fire and tools incited an image of unruliness and misbehaving. Nevertheless after a certain period of experimental turmoil each group worked out their own acceptable standards (Saß, 1972, 221- 245, Aly & Grüttner, 1983, LAG, 1988).

At the beginning parents often took shifts to secure adult presence during the opening times. It was evident quite soon that having different parents in the group every day led to stressful situations, unhappy children and unhappy adults alike. Most groups reached the point where they opted to also have a neutral adult (i. e. not a parent) permanently in the group. For a group in Berlin in 1972 Monika Aly notes: “The active involvement of parents (...) proved to bring more chaos than help in the end. We realised soon that Lisbeth and the children on their own could spend the day far more undisturbed and concentrated” (Aly & Grüttner, 1983, 40).

The people who were employed for this purpose were mostly members of the wider social circles that organised a *Kinderladen*. It was not essential that they had a formal training. What was important was that they had an allegiance to the political and social visions of the anti-authoritarian movement. Nevertheless the nature of the job was obviously attractive for formally trained educators.

Due to lack of public subsidies the groups were notoriously underfunded. Hence in *Kinderlaeden* the Bezugspersonen [pl.] were paid significantly less than their colleagues in traditional kindergarten. To work in a *Kinderladen* required a motivation that went well beyond the idea of having an income. An internal discussion paper from 1976 gives a good impression of the mindset.

Why I am (still) working as a Bezugsperson in a *Kinderladen* (and not for double the wages in another institution):

Based on the desire to change (revolutionise) society the insight arose that changes on the macro level of society are possible only if the individual changes. That means changed social structures would be possible only with people whose character was formed differently to what bourgeois society demanded. One had to start at the very bottom, namely with the desire to change oneself, define education in a new way, think about educational targets that correlated with the desire for social change. The aim was, plain and simple, to live in a society that is not based on the principle of

'Kinderschule Frankfurt'. What is omitted in the reproduction of the image is that the piano was already broken and could not be played anymore before it was donated to the 'Kinderschule'. (cf Aden-Grossmann, 2014, 135)

exploitation, free of economic and human oppression, where everyone can live according to their desires and abilities, where power and domination of a few over an entire people would not exist any longer. During the early years of the student's movement I had already thought intensely about these connections and I believed that via this route there would be a chance to change people in line with the above. On this basis I studied pedagogy and started to work [in the *Kinderladen*]. (Zimmermann, 1976)

This view was no exception. Many Bezugspersonen in *Kinderlaeden* shared motives expressed by Ulrike Zimmermann. They understood their educational practice as a political engagement.

Kinderlaeden in the 1970's were embedded in the counter-culture that emerged from the anti-authoritarian revolt. Alternatives to bourgeois forms of social intercourse were promoted and attempted in this counter-culture. The intention was to find ways to counter forms of social relationships based on property, commodification and competition. The most obvious expression of these attempts was the establishment of commune-like flat-sharing groups and the dissolution of traditional family structures. It is a commonly reported experience of members of *Kinderladen* collectives that a high percentage of marriages broke up and were replaced by more collective forms of life.

[The group] offered the chance to discuss questions of education, questions of self-development and general political questions. This brought about more intense personal relationships. In consequence most of the marriages broke up, the partners moved in with others in shared flats, went on holidays in large groups of parents and children and spent the weekends together. (...) Despite several conflicts and long psychoanalytic debates, the desire to be part of the group and the strength that we found in it kept us together. (Gruner, 1983, 56)

“Flat sharing communities, women's groups, *Kinderlaeden* were – in analogy to the struggles in the third world – 'liberated zones' and at the same time practical critique of the dominant culture and the states apparatus that protected it” (von Werder, 1977, 27). It is not important here to discuss the material essence of this statement. What is important however is that the members of the relevant groups could indeed experience their lived reality in these terms. This applies to the Bezugspersonen, too. Their feelings of belonging were real (see e. g. Gruner 1983, Asal 1996).

In many cases they sold their labour power to the collective at a dumping price, but this was often of little importance to them as they identified themselves as members of a bigger social context.

In the first phase the educators (...) saw themselves (...) as members of a political movement that aimed at a wide spectrum of social aspects of which education was merely one. They saw it more as a lucky co-incidence that they were paid for what they did. (Karsten & Kleberg, 1977, 62)

The solidarity and appreciation which they experienced in their social environment played a big role.

When I started [in 1979], I was paid 600 DM. But the social compensation made up for the underpay. The appreciation within the scene at the time was simply great. Even more so as a man in the *Kinderladen*. That was simply a status that outbalanced the underpay. (Beruf Bezugsperson, 1993)

Changing environment and labour as commodity

But the social environment changed. Increasingly in the 1980's Bezugspersonen in *Kinderlaeden* found themselves dealing with parents who had only a loose connection (or none at all) to the initial aims and ideals. More and more parents would define their role as customers who were paying for a service, namely their children to be minded. A group of adults who step by step emancipate themselves in a mutual process of constant reflection, organising a *Kinderladen* as a collective project - as part of a bigger context of initiatives and projects aiming at changing society: all this became pure fiction.

Constitutive for entering into the specific relationship of a Bezugsperson in a paid capacity in a *Kinderladen* were originally the two aspects of shared visions (solidarity, allegiance, political-social-educational) and the agreement to exchange labour for money. In the changing social environment the first one broke away. Effects of such a development were already anticipated in the discussion paper of Ulrike Zimmermann.

Maya once said, the *Kinderladen* is the space of the children; she has nothing to do with it. This is exactly what I don't think. I see myself still as a member of a collective, rough-and-ready as it may be. I don't want the whole thing to slide into the corner of a service agency, for principled reasons, but also for a completely different reason. (...) We were often told: you are quite naïve sweeties with all your trust in the parent group that they

will look after you if you resign or if the project goes bust. (Unemployment assistance etc.). And we always answered that we absolutely trust and for that reason keep working partly without tax or without written contracts and also without fixed hours for parent meetings and who knows what else. And I get scared if parents are of the opinion that they have nothing to do with the *Kinderladen* because then they essentially also have very little to do with us. Then it is all about assigning rights and duties and then it is indeed possible that we will be doomed with our trust. (...)

When I start claiming compensation hours for parent meetings, when my holidays are strictly regulated, when I start to work with contracts and job descriptions I may have an increased certainty, but I can guarantee that 50 % of my commitment would go because what would be important then is what is the price for my work; and no longer what are we trying to achieve together and what can I contribute. (Zimmermann, 1976)

What Ulrike Zimmermann expresses here puts flesh on the bones of the thesis of the structural professional indifference of waged educators (Heinsohn/Knieper 1975). For educators in comparison to e. g. metalworkers, carpenters or mechanics the raw material in their work situation consists of children, living human beings. Hence the actual work of educators is always work in and on relationships with children.

However to be in a position to enter into these relationships it is first of all necessary that a (prospective) educator enters into a relationship with other adults. In simple terms: the educator needs to find an employer. This is not different in the case of the *Kinderlaeden*. Here the employer is the group of parents. Hence the relationship with the children – the relationship proper of their professional activity – is always mediated by the initial relationship with the parents.

When the collective project is no longer experienced as lived reality the aspect of value for money becomes dominant. The labour power of the educator therefore is reduced to its character as a commodity. And like any other commodity its value splits into use value and exchange value. From the outset then, the two parties stand in a competitive relationship in which it is structurally implied that the buyer tries to buy (and extract) as much use value for as little money as possible and the seller tries to gain as much money for exerting as little labour power as possible (i. e. retain saleability as long as possible).

One may argue that this was the case from the very time that *Kinderlaeden* paid wages to (neutral) Bezugspersonen. Yet for the identity of the Bezugspersonen and from their subjective perspective the integration in a social network that offered solidarity, affection, allegiance beyond the pure monetary gratification countered the indifference that comes with their reduction to commodity status. One may further argue that this integration leads to self-exploitation and that it is progress if the veil is lifted and a purely economic relationship is brought to the fore. This however dismisses the subjective experience of the Bezugspersonen and therefore fails to acknowledge their efforts (and those of the collective) to move towards a society with new forms of social intercourse.

For Bezugspersonen in *Kinderlaeden* in the 1980's it was the case that the formerly available tight social network of a collective project became increasingly loose. The framework for reflection on their work changed accordingly. "Today I miss the collective discussion of theory. To the most part I have sole responsibility at work, and I am on my own." (Knoop, 1980, 26).

Where parents appear as customers and no longer as partners in a collective project the identity patterns that are realistically available for the Bezugspersonen have to change, too. Their identity and the action possibilities derived thereof are dependent not only on their self-perception but also on the acceptance of this perception by parents and children. On this level the Bezugspersonen intervened in the new situation by developing a *professional* identity that was not prevalent before.

Professional identity and good money for good work

After 10, 12, 15 years of actively practising *Kinderlaeden* the uncertainties of the early days were gone. The Bezugspersonen could rely on accumulated experiences. They didn't have to invent everything anew. In every group standards were established that had proven to be acceptable in each given environment. The initial ideas of self-regulation and acceptance of libidinous drives were transferred into a rather consistent practice. Hence the Bezugspersonen gained a more assured position in their work situation. This happened first on the level of the individual groups.

At the beginning of the 1980's there was little coherence amongst the groups (Rodewald, 1980, 21, Moysich, 1990, 23) However

(...) the 'lonely pedagogue' in truth is not that alone (...). This already in terms of the 'supra-individual' inventory of knowledge, and definitely not in

the establishment of contacts with other pedagogues who work in similar institutions. In umbrella organisations the exchange [of experiences and thoughts] of like-minded pedagogues seems possible. (Soprún, 1987, 10)

Such umbrella organisations were founded during the 1980's in various parts of Germany (e. g. Frankfurt 1980/1984, Münster 1985, Hamburg 1985, Berlin 1986, Hannover 1988). Here discussions were possible beyond the confines of individual groups. As a personal effect of meetings and exchange of experiences between Bezugspersonen, Robert Soprún reports of emotional reassurance, greater self-confidence in actions, and general professional qualification for future jobs in education (1987, 11). In the words of Petra Bernhardt: "I got a lot out of it for my professionalisation ... for my well-being, too" (Bernhardt, 1996).

So now, when the Bezugspersonen engage in exchange about their *professional* role in the alternative childcare settings they gain clarity of the characteristics of this role: what it should be and also what it should not entail. This constitutes a decisive step in the process of professionalisation. In their self-perception they distance themselves from the idea of a solidly united collective group. Instead they define their status as (a group of) pedagogues vis-à-vis the group of parents. This mirrors the self-definition of parents as customers, but it adds another dimension. In defining themselves as *professional* educators the parents are also constructed as laypersons. Hence the educators acquire an expert status which also has an economic dimension.

The way also to a better economical safeguarding of their position lies in the adoption of the ideological phrase of 'good money for good work'. Hence the quality of the *pedagogical work* in the *Kinderlaeden* can be established as a relevant category. And those who deliver it are naturally the Bezugspersonen. I will return to this aspect further below.

By analytically distilling the characteristics of their work situation (particularly in its differences to mainstream institutions) they also gain clarity in formulating their own demands for their workplace, most importantly in relation to decision making about enrolments, new colleagues and obviously the entire area traditionally understood as curriculum planning and implementation. One outcome of such demands was the establishment of projects by Bezugspersonen themselves. These are *Kinderlaeden* that were set up by professional pedagogues with the explicit vision of earning an income. Here a reduced dependence for the educators on parental whims as employers is meant to "free up space for a pedagogy that allows the children to live independent of the structure and

dynamic of the family. And, last not least, maybe also create a job (...)” (Krämer & Pertoft, 1988, 36).

These projects worked alongside parents' initiatives and highlighted a new reality for the *Kinderlaeden*: their character as institutions offering a service to parents by means of paid labour of the *Bezugspersonen*.

Another development that is closely connected to the establishment of the umbrella organisations is the emergence of bigger units in the form of associations who organised (and owned) not only one but a number of *Kinderlaeden*. In Frankfurt these associations have become a driving force in the expansion of the childcare sector since the 1990's. A further 20 years on from inception and they are well established service providers and partners for local authorities. Such organisations are not restricted to Frankfurt; one can find them in many other towns also. They operate on different scales from running a few *Kinderlaeden* up to the administration of more than 150 *Kinderlaeden* (not all of these label themselves *Kinderlaeden* any more, rather they are named daycare-centres [Kindertagesstaetten], see e. g. <http://www.bvz-frankfurt.org>). There is a tendency in these large units towards centralisation and reduced autonomy of the individual groups (see Hamm, 2005, for further discussion). It is noteworthy that the umbrella organisation of *Kinderlaeden* in Berlin (DAKS e.V.) purposefully declined requests to run and own groups itself with the intent to preserve the autonomous structure of the individual groups.

For *Bezugspersonen* in the 1980's the reflective comprehension of the characteristics of their field of work also led to the competence to describe this field accurately. This is a basic condition for further steps that aim on giving guidance to novices in the job. “By now *Bezugspersonen* can pass on their knowledge and experiences in various circles. This lets others participate and guarantees that not everyone has to start at point zero again” (Burbach, 1988, 150). This type of support has two sides. It informs but also reduces the chances for newcomers to make their own experiences in a similar fashion to the creative evolutions of practice that belonged to the 'old ones'. By disseminating and circulating certain standards of work and by inculcating newcomers into these standards, they are at the same time determined as the right ones. This happened through publication of concepts that function as models for others (see e. g. LAG, 1988), but also through start-up advisory services.

New role expectations and standardisation

Towards the end of the 1980's *Kinderlaeden* were accepted and acceptable to local authorities to the point that “the diverse options of day-care cannot be thought of without them any more” (Endres, 1986, 126). In contrast to the early days of the *Kinderlaeden* they were recognised as reliable institutions and funding was made increasingly available, albeit with time delays depending on locality and always short of the actual costs involved.

However, the increased funding also allowed the creation of paid jobs for coordinators and administrators in the umbrella organisations. Here former Bezugspersonen and parents from within the *Kinderlaeden* took on the function of mediators of the standards and essential characteristics of the professional role which the Bezugspersonen developed in their professionalisation process. Through the umbrella organisations they disseminated, promoted, and factually prepared the implementation of these standards. For new groups starting up at this stage they formed a clear frame of orientation.

This relates to both the formal conditions of work relationships (pay rates, reflection and preparation times, reflective supervision etc.) which became more and more standardised across the board of the various groups, but also the patterns of identification that were on offer for adults as a basis for joining the *Kinderladen*.

Robert Soprún summarises what is required from the Bezugspersonen:

(...) permanent development of their personality in the work situation towards minimising their own limits through reflection and clarification of their own childhood background.

(...) a delight of childhood and at the same time the consciousness of one's own role as an adult (social mandate, own demands, alternatives etc.).

Authentic behaviour with the children and at the same time self-reflection (authenticity is in permanent flux).

Interest in aspects of organisation, implementation of political interests, continuing self-education, thus stretching beyond the daily work with the children. (Soprún, 1987, 176)

And for parents a typical statement:

Parents are involved and participate in the following: administration work;

cooking [for the children] on two days every months and being present on these days between 1 and 2 pm. in the group; cleaning; buying of breakfast goods; maintenance work; attendance at the monthly parents meetings and planning them in relation to organisational and pedagogical matters.

(Kindergruppe Spatzennest, 1996, 6)

When the new definition of identity categories of Bezugspersonen and parents in a group becomes acceptable for the different parties a new form of working together can develop. Yet such an acceptance does not 'just happen'. In each individual project it requires (at times highly intense) struggles that arise relating to various elements of the micro-social fabric. The reality in most *Kinderlaeden* however was that the Bezugspersonen increasingly gained control over the institutional environment. This included decisions about admission of new children or also “(...) through struggles, through intense conflicts we have (...) achieved a situation where we pick the colleagues who are to work with us, yes, not with the parents, but with us” (Asal, 1996).

When these struggles are over there is a situation of relative balance.

[T]he educators in the team control the entire project. They guarantee the institutional standards and take care of the group of children. Parents appear as simply existing consumers – there may be waiting lists. The financial operations are to the most part secured by public funding, the work conditions of the employed educators are 'respectable'. The problem [of uncertainty about role expectations] is permanently solved. (Soprún, 1987, 127)

The claimed permanency is obviously difficult to project into the future, but for the time being the actors in the field can accept their respective role expectations.

The changes in the relationships between Bezugspersonen and parents are also reflected in the emergence of the use of employment contracts, where in earlier days often there were none. Even in 1988 a study of work conditions found that 60 % of the Bezugspersonen in *Krabbelstuben* [= *Kinderladen* for children age 1 – 4] worked without a written contract (Bacherl, Bock, Kallert 1988, 111). This changed drastically and by the early 1990's it was an exception for a Bezugsperson to work without a written contractual agreement.

Waged labour and social reflexivity

The concept of waged labour was an *element* of the relationships in *Kinderlaeden* from the moment that neutral Bezugspersonen were employed. Through the dynamic that has been described here it became eventually accepted as a *condition* of the relationships. The category of waged labour as a determining factor in the system of relationships brings with it a number of problem areas: the problem of fair salaries, the problem of converting concrete work into abstract monetary units, the problem of evaluating lived practice, and particularly the problem of measuring the concrete acts of educators in a preschool.

“The abilities (...) which a teacher needs to develop to be able to motivate students, to encourage them to educate themselves, in other words his [or her] psycho-pedagogic potency cannot possibly be expressed in socially necessary labour time” (Jouhy, 1984, 10). This is obviously the case for any educator in a preschool, or Bezugspersonen in *Kinderlaeden*, as the case may be.

In discussions about the legitimacy of the salary of educators and subsequently the scale thereof the argument of 'good money for good work' becomes relevant. There is a general agreement amongst educators of all institutions, mainstream and *Kinderlaeden* alike, that their work is not adequately paid. What is of interest here is not the question of the salary of an educator being high enough to pay the bills at the end of the month which in many cases is in fact difficult. It is the factual acceptance that there could be something like a fair, or just salary, and that what justifies the salary is the quality of work delivered in return.

The fiction of a fair salary corresponds closely to the work assigned to the labourer. For educators that means that they also have to argue their case in terms of the difficulty and quality of their work. In turn that means to make visible their work in defined units, and themselves as the qualified agents of delivering these units. In this manner pedagogy is brought back into the *Kinderlaeden* as a trade of specialists.

Taking up a position as specialised agents of their trade, educators gain a certain footing in their *professional* existence. To argue for better wages is always easier if one starts from a position of specialised skills. Reverting to pedagogy as a trade (that also has to be learnt and cannot simply be

exercised by anyone without training) helps to strengthen the position of the educators. The construction of the educators as experts however brings about the status of the parents (and children!) as lay-persons.

Such a split in status is a far cry from original aspirations in the *Kinderlaeden*. Political ambitions, countering bourgeois forms of social intercourse in search for collective forms of life, a desire for self-development and collective emancipation of the adults don't go together with this split.

The demands on the institution as a social site have changed. (...) I think that parents come here because they see that there is a lot of freedom for the children and that is what they want, but self-development, I believe that is no longer a demand of parents. (Asal, 1996)

Consequently:

I became more professional, too, that means the parents see this as my status. With some of the women in the group I get closer. Here my professionalisation is a hindrance because here I would also like to talk about my own problems as a women. (Knoop, 1980, 26)

This points to the alienating effect of professionalisation. As depicted in the quotes of Jutta Knoop and Gabi Asal it alienates the Bezugsperson from the parents (and vice versa). It also leads to an alienation in the way one relates to oneself.

Professionalisation is a consequence of the necessity to sell one's labour power. Klaus Ottomeyer has referred to self-reflection as a capacity specific to human beings. He also notes that the way one relates to oneself is always dependent on the way one takes into account and anticipates the behaviour and the perspectives of the interaction partners. Combining the two elements he speaks of the *social reflexivity* of human beings. And he notes that

one can say that under the constraint to sell my own labour power, whereby I have to relate to myself as a commodity and an object for sale, an extremely alienating and objectifying form of social reflexivity is systematically brought to the fore. Instead of nurturing processes of mutual understanding it isolates human beings and makes them deeply suspicious of each other. (Ottomeyer 2004, 69)

Professionalisation in the *Kinderlaeden* can be understood as an intervention to counter the

dissolution of the initially close-knit alternative community. The protagonists act in ways of which they think may reduce their anxieties, alleviate potential threats to their identity and material safeguarding. Understood in this manner professionalisation is not only a move made by the Bezugspersonen. What becomes professionalised is more than the person who works as Bezugsperson; professionalised are the *relationships* that are possible, accepted and aspired to amongst the various actors in the social field of a Kinderladen. In their professionalised form these relationships are characterised by structural elements of bourgeois forms of social intercourse (commodity and value). As such, they are deeply ambiguous. It is only against the grain of these structural elements that the actors can enter into a social reflexivity beyond the constraints of alienation and objectification.

A way of coping and a political act

Most of the material presented here relates to adults and their relationships. However the obvious purpose behind these adult relationships is the actual lived practice between Bezugspersonen and children in the *Kinderlaeden*. In the collective group sharing a common vision and taking collective responsibility for the project, the individual child is in fact as much a member of the collective as everyone else, including the Bezugsperson but also the other children. In the professionalised environment the child is back to its status of familial property, a status that was openly criticised in the anti-authoritarian concept of the *Kinderlaeden*. As familial property the children are handed over to the Bezugspersonen who exercise their professional skills *on* them. Hence the subject status of the child, and the Bezugsperson alike, is to be always negotiated *against* the structural dimension of professionalised practice.

For Bezugspersonen permanent development of their personality, delight of childhood, authenticity, self-reflection and interest in organisational, political aspects beyond the daily work situation with children will always be determined by the basis of the social relationships in which they find themselves. Where this basis is the commodification of lived practice it is a way of coping for educators to reduce education to the application of pedagogy as a trade. And returning to Paolo Freire's statement that introduced my chapter we can say that this reduction is in itself a political act.

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Author contact:

Dr. Robert Hamm
17 Meadow Vale
Sligo
Republic of Ireland
soha2000@gmx.net
www.schoolandritual.com