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IT'S PLAYTIME AT BERGEN

The following represents an interim review* of an attempt by all the Primary School staff at E.S. Bergen to improve the possibilities for play for our children during breaktimes, and to put them into the context of a general educational framework.

The significance of Playtime

We consider that playtimes are an important component of every school's framework, and this is particularly so for European Schools, for which the area of social learning is a constituent element of their educational task. Even at relatively small schools like ours questions regarding playtimes often only arise in regard to administrative or organisational aspects (e.g. duty, accidents, pupil conflicts). Supposedly, as the size of school grows, such questions also increase, and there is a growing tendency to ignore fundamental educational considerations concerning the organisation of breaktimes. Such a tendency will be reinforced, if "Playtime" is only seen as an interruption of work time with the aim of relaxation: the children can eat their snack and release their pent up energy and need for movement in the open. However, this is a somewhat limited view in which playing - "getting on" together - collecting of social experiences appears inevitably as a by-product. Thus the fundamental significance of play in this case remains unconsidered.

(Reference: Burk, Karlheinz, Die Entdeckung des Schulhofs, in: Burk, K./Haarmann, D. (Publ.), Wieviel Ecken hat unsere Schule, Vol. 2 Frankfurt a.M. 1980, S. 4ff)

Pedagogical Perspectives

Thus consideration of playtime is not undertaken simply to react to "disturbances" during break with regimented measures. An important task of the school is to make time, space, and equipment available so that the children can satisfy their often very different needs during playtime as undisturbed and free from conflict as possible. Alongside the positive pedagogical effects of play (demand for creativity, fantasy, perseverance in play...) the aspect of social learning in particular comes to the fore for our school. "Playtime organisation, playground experience belong... to the pedagogical area of responsibility of a school which counts social learning as its central task. The bringing into discussion of social behaviour in the playground, however, should not only serve to accustom the children to playtime rules and to ensure their observance, but to work out the requisite factors of the related social behaviour on the basis of relationships in the playground, and if need be to reflect on the remedy of the background conditions." (Burk).