

The Siljan School

a Swedish example of reform pedagogy
with a focus on arts and the history of
women

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to shed light on the reform school Siljan School as a historical lens on the education system. The School is analysed in the main part of the article in relation to The New Education Fellowship, and the reform pedagogical approaches which led to new schools. What is central for Swedish free school's formation are the ideals of reform pedagogue Ellen Key based in women's history and the view of arts education. In relation to the ideas of the Siljan School, its founder Signe Bergner Alm (1881–1945) is discussed as a fore-runner of the free schools which flourished in the tracks of the women's movement. Methodologically, Ricoeur's history criticism is a method of interpretation where the concept of retroactive forgetfulness (*reservglömska*) is significant. In terms of education history, links are demonstrated to the pedagogical significance of the middle-class salons for home-centred schooling in an era of collective education discourse

Keywords: reform pedagogy, arts education, home-schooling, the personal development ideal, aesthetics, free school system

The Siljan School

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'It is fully possible to be serious and playful at the same time, and defines the ideal mental condition'

John Dewey

The start of the 20th century was characterised by radical ideas on school reform. Based on the spirit of Rousseau, it was demonstrated how teaching in schools, against the understanding of the time, reduced children's ability to learn and develop. One of the most interesting thinkers was John Dewey (1859–1952) who wanted to resurrect 'activities' in teaching practice. What was significant about his activity pedagogy was the experimenting on everyday experiences inspired by Pestalozzi's home-schooling ideal. The background lay in the break-down of the home which industrialisation had caused.²

In both its more organised form and in smaller, private examples, reform pedagogy involved thinking about how education reform would benefit both the individual and society. A group of great significance for international education science was the *New Education Fellowship* (NEF) 1921–1938. Through conferences and subject-specific journals, the consortium contributed towards the spread of anti-

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2 Gerd B. Arfwedson, *Reformpedagogik och samhälle: En komparativ studie av pedagogiska reformrörelser i USA och Tyskland från 1890-talet till 1930-talet*. (PhD thesis Stockholms universitet, 2000), 9, 42-45, 75, 92-93.

authoritarian ideas which challenged conservative values. The idea behind new education was to create meeting spaces where driving forces for New education reforms mixed with eminent educationalists and psychologists.³ Reform pedagogy was a reply to the development of modern society and the school system created to raise an obedient proletariat. With the child in focus, the teaching style which saw the pupil as a receiver of knowledge was questioned. Instead of teaching the child, the child's own curiosity and creativity were to be stimulated.⁴

The reform pedagogy movement was a time for bold experiments. With its reduced devotion to authorities and societal institutions, the artistic *Avant garde*, among others, helped to define reform pedagogy as a process of culturally radical democratisation. In this way, Modernism was given a prominent role in the ideas that characterised reform pedagogy.⁵

The New Education Fellowship contributed towards reform pedagogical influences being brought to Sweden. The NEF was organised into national sections in different parts of the world, and the consortium's publication *Education for the New Era* which was started in 1920 contributed through a world-wide network to so-called *New Schools* being founded.⁶ There was an equivalent movement in Sweden, whose journal, *Pedagogical issues*, was published from 1925–1940.⁷ In many issues, the Siljan School in Tällberg is mentioned.⁸

3 Kevin J. Brehony, 'A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938' in *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, Volyme 40:5-6 (October 2004), 733-755.

4 Arfwedson (2000), 41–43.

5 Arfwedson (2000), 75f, 184, 360.

6 Brehony (2004), 737

7 *Pedagogiska Spörsmål* (PS).

8 *Pedagogiska Spörsmål* (PS). 1931–1940.

The Siljan School was founded in 1927 with the aim of challenging schooling in Sweden. The couple Signe Bergner-Alm (1881–1945) and Harald Alm (1898–1976) offered an alternative to traditional teaching where practical work and creative artistic activities were given attention.⁹



*Signe and Harald Alm,
the founders of The
Siljan School in
Tällberg*

In this respect, the couple joined the discourse surrounding reform pedagogy, which, against the background of mechanical learning methods in schools, the lack of competence in teaching at elementary school and the lack of aesthetic subjects, pointed towards a lack of respect for children and their need to be creative. This negligence towards the foundations of personal development represented a nihilistic attitude which threatened the development of society, according to the promoters of reform pedagogy. Elementary schools aimed, they argued, to raise an acquiescent citizen proletariat but where would innovators, inventors and artists flourish? In such words were formulated the Alms' criticism towards general schooling. It had to be

9 Signe Bergner Alm & Harald Alm, *Icke blott kunskaper: En bok om skol-, hem, och uppfostringsfrågor*. (1944), 68–77.

quite wrong to push children together with the aim of freeing the female workforce, the Alms write. This wastes children's innate power to develop.¹⁰ A strong thread in the Alms' pedagogical work was the focus on artistic subjects. According to the couple, the reason was the subjects' significance for personal development.

The so-called practical subjects do not only have significance for children and adults. They also have a great task to develop personality. Nowadays it is not just adults who only value school as a means to reach a certain paid profession. In our day, it is also children who have already been gripped early by this terror of "what shall I become".¹¹

Referring to the ideas of the work schools which were developed by leading light Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), the idea behind the Siljan School was set out in their motto *Veritas, Caritas, Labor* (truth, love, work).¹² The Alms harboured a conglomerate of pedagogical ideas. The couple were interested in reform schools in Europe, where a selection of German and Austrian schools were visited. An important feature was the international network which the couple had at their disposal. With extensive references from China and South-east Asia, USA and England, Signe Bergner Alm is one of the women with the best reputations of her time. Bergner stayed for longer periods in China where we learn about plans for a pedagogical institute.¹³ During her marriage to the successful Sinologist Gunnar

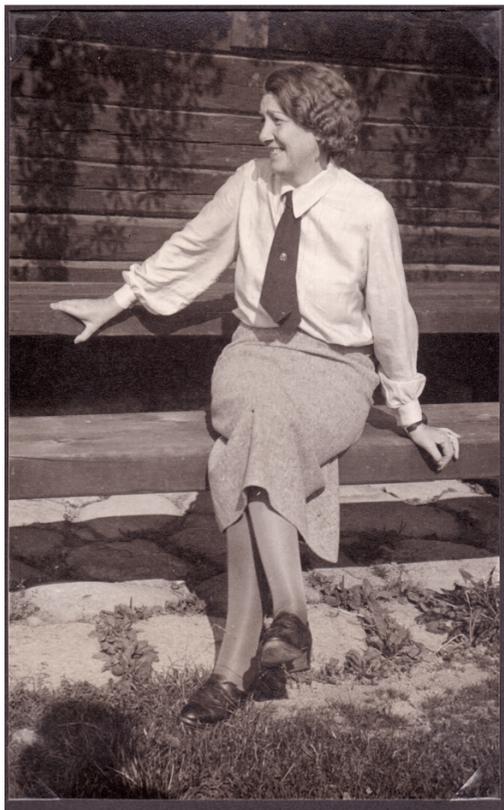
¹⁰ Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 55–77, 95–98, 196–203.

¹¹ 'De s.k. övningsämnen ha icke bara betydelse för barnen som vuxna, De ha också stor personlighetsutvecklande uppgift. Nu för tiden är det icke bara de vuxna, som värdera skolan endast som ett medel att nå fram till ett visst, avlönat yrke. I våra dagar är det även barnen, som redan tidigt gripas av denna "vad-skall-jag-bli'-skräck'.' Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 23–24. Cf., 80.

¹² Harald Alm, *Kärleken på jorden. Siljansgården och Siljanskolan under 50 år* (1969), 39; *Pedagogiska spörsmål* (1931:1), 43.

¹³ Juvas Marianne Liljas, 'En ny musikuppfostran: Reformpedagogiska anspråk på Siljanskolans bildningsinnehåll' In: Sara Backman Prytz & Lisa Rosén Rasmussen (eds) *Nordic Journal of Educational History* Vol. 3:1 (2016), 51, 69. See also Alm (1969), 8–9,

Andersson,¹⁴ a network was also created which helped her development within social welfare, which was later put to good use in the profile of the Siljan School. In this circle belonged Kerstin Hesselgren (1872–1962) who was a trend-setter in the fight for the right to vote and who was Sweden’s first woman member of parliament. Her profession was as Sweden’s first inspector, which also came to be one of Signe Bergner’s professions.



Signe Bergner Alm
(1881-1945)

38.

14 Gunnar Andersson was a professor of archaeology and the founder of the East Asian Museum in Stockholm. Because of his successful research, he was called ‘China Gunnar’. The couple had a daughter in 1905.

Bergner, who was first educated in the Red Cross, was a social care inspector and director of gymnastics. In 1912 she came to Bedford College for Woman in London and the course 'Scientific Instruction in Hygien'. During her studies in England, she got deeper into women's healthcare structures and child labour in industry. Bergner was founded by the Fredrika Bremer society,¹⁵ one of the oldest organisations for women in Sweden. Didactically, she was inspired by the 'summer schools' in USA.¹⁶ The professional competence she commanded is simultaneously a source of complexity regarding her view of teaching. Together with her third husband Harald Alm,¹⁷ Bergner wanted to create a modern education system with the home as its basis. With home-schooling as its ideal, the Siljan School wanted to resist the institutional thinking of the time.¹⁸

An important figure is Ellen Key (1849–1926). Key's ideas about reform pedagogy came to have great significance for the free schools which wanted to be certified as pedagogically influential. A great success was the book *The Century of the Child*, 1900¹⁹ through which Key got international attention. With views spanning from Michel de Montaigne to John Dewey, Key manifests herself as one of the most interesting education designers of her time.²⁰ Thinking of the break-through Key had

15 The scholarship was grounded by Sophie Leijonhufvud Adlersparre, a leading force for the women movement during the 1900th century.

16 Peter Reinholdsson, 'Siljanskolan och dess grundare' in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 10–11.

17 Signe Bergner married for a second time (in China) to Carl Gimbel, an important official for the international Salt Union.

18 See Åsa Bartholdsson 'För hemmet som framtidens skola-hemideologi och reformpedagogik vid Siljans strand 1928–1961' in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 138–158.

19 Ellen Key, *Barnets århundrade I* (1900).

20 Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Ellen Key: En Europeisk intellektuell* (2012), 184–194, 210; Arfwedson (2000), 30, 45.

as a former of opinions in the women's history circles where Signe Bergner resided, terms such as *society motherliness* and *home-schooling* are prominent. Through this lens, the historical conditions of home-schooling fight against the industrial society and the growth of elementary schools in Sweden. No less was Key a role-model for elementary schools where the term *Storgården* manifests itself as a model for home-centred pedagogy with its roots in Swedish farming society.²¹ Key's contribution and cohesive ideological glue for the conglomerate which made a counter-offensive against the welfare state and institutionalised discourse in Sweden is an important starting-point for the Siljan School and an analysis of contemporary private school-oriented political education discourse.

The aim of this article is to shed light on the Siljan School in Tällberg as a historical lens on the education system. The Siljan School is promoted as the answer to the ground-breaking education reforms of the time and the place where people of the future are created. The central questions that are discussed are: (i) how is the Siljan School's idea about home-schooling motivated in relation to thoughts on education ideology from the last century? (ii) in what way are the significance of the arts communicated, and (iii) what role may Ellen Key have played in this reform school project?

After many years of expansion, the Siljan School was closed in 1951, to be later mothballed. Harald Alm kept some courses going until 1971, but the school had already lost momentum in 1945 when Signe Bergner Alm died.²² The treasury of knowledge that lies hidden in the Siljan School is weighed through the private archive

21 Bo Sundin, 'Ljus och Jord! Natur och kultur på Storgården' in Tore Frängsmyr (ed) *Paradiset och vildmarken. Studier kring synen på naturen och naturresurserna* (1984).

22 Juvas Marianne Liljas, "Det måste ha varit något fel i vår sånguppfostran": Siljanskolans replik på det reformpedagogiska idéklimatet under 1900-talets första hälft' in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 107. Cf. Reinholdsson (2017), 12-13.

created around the school. The private archive, which is administered at the owner's wishes by Dalarna University, consists of documentation of all school activities, teachers and participants through the years. A yearly edited register of cuttings has been created from the registers of courses, programs and pedagogical planning; a comprehensive collection of photo albums has also documented courses in picture form which is partly complemented by moving images in the form of feature films.²³ The forgotten history in the archive is a history that is eager to be told. Historiographically, Ricoeur is interested in memory which moves from collective memory to the forgotten pieces of memory that survive the history writings of the past. The theory rests on the thesis that individual memory preserves what collective memory has erased.²⁴ This theoretical foundation constitutes the methodological basis for this article.

Previous research

There has been very little research on the Siljan School. Two theses on the collective memory of the School are partly a cultural– sociological mapping of the field of music pedagogy in Sweden during the 20th century, and also a discourse-analytic study of the song repertoire during the mid-war period in Sweden.²⁵ Both touch on the break-through the Siljan School made regarding the further education of teachers in music during the 1930s and 1940s and the change towards a folk music heritage which was legitimated. Within a project in Musical Science, Ursula Geisler problematises how the Siljan School can have played into the hands of the Nazis through the leadership of prof. Fritz Jöde. The article pushes against the historical

23 The Siljan School archive (SSA), Dalarna University. Cf. Reinholdsson (2017), 13.

24 Paul Ricoeur, *Minne, tid, historia* (2005).

25 Jonas Gustafsson, *Så ska det låta: Studier av det musikpedagogiska fältets framväxt* (PhD diss., Uppsala Universitet, 2000), Birgitta Ryner, *Vad ska vi sjunga? En musikpedagogisk diskurs om tiden mellan två världskrig* (PhD diss., Stockholms Universitet, 2004).

musical exchange between Germany and Sweden which blossomed around the Second World War and which is defined by an increased interest in Nordic and Germanic culture.²⁶ I have further investigated the reform pedagogy of the Siljan School. In my article ‘A new form of musical upbringing: Pretences of reform pedagogy content in the Siljan school’, the link between the Siljan School and progressivism is analysed.²⁷ The Alms’ view of the artistic subjects anticipates developments in Swedish curricula where the term *aesthetic learning processes* soon replaces an older skills-based approach. The development which mirrors the reform pedagogy of the Siljan School was inspired by John Dewey’s democratisation of education and the way you can represent knowledge through artistic forms. In a thorough analysis of the 1946 School Commission and the 1947 Music Investigation, it is stated in my other article ‘There must have been something wrong with our song up-bringing’ that the Siljan School in many ways contributed to new thinking regarding the aesthetic subjects in Swedish schools. In particular, it is argued that the Swedish sing-along movement started at the Siljan School.²⁸ The article is part of the anthology *Up-bringing and personal development for a different modernity: The Siljan School as a reform pedagogy alternative*.²⁹ In the book, six writers set out a broader basis for understanding through education history. The inter-disciplinary approach places the Siljan School in a discourse on modernity with a focus on

26 Ursula Geisler”” Ur vårt svenska folkliga musikarv”: Tysk nationalsocialism och svensk musikkultur’ in Greger Andersson & Ursula Geisler (eds.) *Fruktan. Fascination och frändskap: Det svenska musiklivet och nazismen* (2006).

27 ’En ny musikuppfostran: Reformpedagogiska anspråk på Siljanskolans bildningsinnehåll.’ Liljas (2016).

28 The phenomenon ‘Allsång på Skansen’ (Sing-along at Skansen) was started by the Siljan School in the 1930s and is still going on. Every summer the programme is broadcast on Swedish television. See further Liljas (2016), 69-70; Liljas (2017), 101, 124-132.

29 *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (ed) Urban Claesson (Årsböcker i svensk undervisningshistoria Volym 222, 2017).

attempts at reform, raising for peace, public education, home-schooling and music education.

A similar school was the Zilliacus School in Tölö, a Swedish Sami school in Finland, which started in 1928 and was run as a boarding school with a limited number of pupils. In a memorial publication a comprehensive picture is given of the school's ideological basis, which in many ways corresponds to the Siljan School in Tällberg. The school is described as a 'society within a society' where children are raised to be democratic citizens through pupil-run education which questions the authority of teachers. The importance is also raised here of self-expression through creative studies as a means for peace. The school was strongly criticised for its lack of lessons and homework but was appreciated by the pupils and teachers. Its founder, Finn Laurin Zilliacus, had experience of English boarding schools and, similarly to Signe Bergner Alm, a comprehensive international network.³⁰ Finn Laurin Zilliacus was also one of the editors of *Pedagogical Issues* and had in that role a comprehensive contact with the New Education Fellowship (NEF) and the publication *Education for the New Era*.³¹

In A close-by Waldorf school was Björsgården's school and holiday home in Leksand 1932–1949. The philanthropic theme which runs throughout the history of free schools is particularly well described in Torsten Lundberg's historical study of Björsgården's school and holiday home which was set up based on Rudolf Steiner's health pedagogy.³² 'The school home is best suited to those children who cannot keep

30 Zillen 60 år 1928–1988: Tölö svenska samskola: jubileumsbubbla. Helsingfors: Zilliacuska skolans jubileumskommitté, 1988.

31 *Pedagogiska spörsmål* 1930–1940, Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm (The Royal library).

32 Torsten Lundberg, 'Berättelsen om systrarna Runström, lilla Ulla och Björsgården i Leksand: En historisk studie av 'Björsgårdens Skol- och feriehem i Leksand- från 1932–1949 – baserad på Rudolf Steiners pedagogik' in *Specialpedagogiska nybyggare: En historisk antologi om organisation, funktionshinder och särskilt stöd under 1900-talet* (2011), 58–91. See especially pp. 62–63.

up with school work in big classes and are in need of country air.³³ The school's focus on theater, art, music and eurythmics³⁴ is explicitly linked to students with marked difficulties, which can be compared with the Siljan School's concentration on psychological health connected to artistic subjects and aesthetic knowledge.³⁵ In Ambjörnsson, important connections are made between Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophic pedagogy and Ellen Key as the founder of the Ellen Key Waldorf School in Stockholm.³⁶

In a later chapter in this article ('the reform pedagogy movement') important female for-runners for free-schools in Sweden will be described. Especially 'the Whitlockska Sami School' grounded by Anna Whitlock 1878, will be viewed because of Ellen Key's contribution. The School had an artistic view on education and both authors, painters and performers was brought up there.³⁷ However, most of these schools belongs to an urban milieu in the early 1900s why both 'the Fogelstad group' and the rural concept 'Storgården' offers interesting comparative alternatives. Focused on home-schooling concept and extended family education as a model for elementary schooling in the 1900s, Karl-Erik Forsslund's generational novel mirror the urbanisation problem and the advantages a mother-centred home-schooling model will have on the society.³⁸ In both Sundin and Ambjörnsson the phenomenon is described as a vibrant pedagogical concept. Not least has Brunnsvik's elementary school (the University of the workers' movement) said to have rested on ideas from 'Storgården' set out by Ellen Key.³⁹ The Fogelstad group was a feminist group with

33 Facsimile of a programme declaration in Lundberg (2011), 73.

34 Eurhythmics, which refers to rhythmic movements performed to recitations and music, are a central subject in the Waldorf pedagogy. See further Lundberg (2011), 71-73.

35 Alm (1969), 70-84.

36 Ambjörnsson (2012), 209.

37 See further references at page 18 in this article.

38 Karl-Erik Forsslund, *Storgården: en bok om ett hem* (1900).

39 Ambjörnsson (2012), 434-437; Sundin (1984), 321, 327, 344-347, 353.

radical ideas about women's education. One of them was Honorine Hermelin an extraordinary skilled teacher. Together with the author and journalist Elin Wägner, the landlord Elisabeth Tamm, the doctor Ada Nilsson and the social politician Kerstin Hesselgren, the school principal Honorine Hermelin started the group 1925.⁴⁰ The group challenged the societies view on women's rights in general and offered a lot of courses at 'Lilla Ulfåsa', a mansion in Sörmland. They started 'the National School forewomen' and the weekly paper 'The Period'.⁴¹

In this article, a woman's history perspective is added to previous work on education history. The reforming status of the Siljan School is linked to known and unknown attempts at reform with links to Ellen Key and the women's movement in Sweden. The point is to shed light on the Siljan School and from an exploratory contemporary context set the reforms of education and the ability of women to run alternative schools in relation to their historical implications, where the middle-class salons have great significance as a bridge between older home-schooling practices, private schools, and today's system of free schools.

The Siljan School

The history of the Siljan School begins in the 1920s, a time when welfare society starts to take shape. In Dalarna, as a counter-offensive, a passion for agriculture in a declining peasant culture was promoted. Dalarna and Tällberg had grown up as cultural centres which was an attraction for a prominent Swedish elite. The myth of the history of the landscape was linked to the royal Wasa line and the power that rested in nature. Here was preserved that which was originally Swedish – the people

40 Lena Eskilsson, *Drömmen om kamratsamhället: kvinnliga medborgarskolan på Fogelstad 1925–35* (1991), 441–442.

41 *Tidevarvet* 1923–1936.

– the art of building – music - culture. Out of this, Sweden would be recreated as a resistance to the destructive forces of urbanisation.⁴²



The Siljan School in Tällberg

The Siljan School was built in beautiful nature on the shores of Lake Siljan like a farm complex with older timber buildings from different ages.⁴³ The significance of the architecture for the holistic experience of children was described in *Pedagogical issues* as a part of the pedagogical concept. ‘Here there are no classrooms which smell of chalk, ink and worry (...) just large, light, personally designed rooms and a cottage

42 Urban Claesson, ‘Dalarna och svenskt nationsbygge som Siljanskolans sammanhang’ in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 15–27; Gustaf Näsström, *Dalarna som svenskt ideal* (1937), 59–87; Marika Hevosmaa, ‘Att söka kulturen i naturen’ in Hanna Hodacs & Åsa Karlsson (eds) *Från Karakorom till Siljan: Resor under sju sekler* (2000), 260–269, 274–277.

43 The Siljan School first began (1916-1918) as a guesthouse. In 1927 it was turned into a private school.

with an open fireplace and rag carpets'.⁴⁴ Among school spaces were included different gardens and the nooks and crannies where children could play hide-and-seek. Our school nourishes 'the whole child' and not just their cognitive capacity, explained the Alms. Children need activity and rest in healthy doses and that is to be found in games. Games are underappreciated and underdeveloped as a pedagogical tool, the couple claim. The nourishment children need has to mark both the inner and outer environments.⁴⁵

The Siljan School was built as a 'family-like boarding school' consisting of a summer school and a winter school. At the planning stage, the *Pedagogical summer institute* was also sketched, which took the form of comprehensive adult education courses and teacher training as the main concept.⁴⁶ While the summer school was organised as 'a sensibly organised summer place and school sports home' for children on holiday, the winter school offered an eight-year formal basic education. The summer school was set up *per se* as a practical working school. With teachers in cooking and gardening, artwork, sewing and handicraft, teaching was directed towards the kind of 'life knowledge' where social responsibility and concrete tasks have direct significance for daily life. The goal affects the character of work, write the Alms.⁴⁷

Gardening does not just give knowledge of botany, it also contributes to the kitchen. Many of the children also get their own little garden and the products from that can be sold to the household. The School is a real working school.⁴⁸

44 Harald Alm, 'Siljanskolan' in *Pedagogiska Spörmål* (1931:1), 40.

45 Bergner Alm & Alm, (1944), 30, 44- 47, 49. Cf. Alm (1969), 38.

46 Siljanskolan i Tällberg (1933), 19. Script in the Siljan School archive (SSA). See also Liljas (2017), 107.

47 Alm (1931:1), 40-41.

48 'Trädgårdsarbetet ger icke bara kunskaper i botanik, utan lämnar bidrag till köket. Skolan blir en verklig *arbetsskola*'. Alm (1931:1), 41.



Pupils at the Siljan School picking gooseberries in the garden

In Pedagogical issues, cooperation across age and gender is emphasized, which the school applied with the aim of equipping pupils with a greater understanding of the chores that needed to be carried out in a home. The thought was, according to the Alms, to mimic the division of work in a home where the pupils are the family. In this, we see the declaration of intent that is the original idea of the Siljan School. The Alms saw themselves as surrogate parents in the school which did not just promote home schooling, but was also *set up* like a home. The fact that the home is the basis for children's feeling of safety and learning has been neglected to too high a degree with dire consequences for the individual and society, the Alms claim. The couple saw their most important task as to reconstruct the home as the natural place of learning.⁴⁹

The Siljan School was set up for children from broken families or whose parents were dead, the Alms write. In some cases, the school becomes the home the children

49 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 68–77.

live in all year round.⁵⁰ Ideologically, the couple are fighting against the break-down of the home and the virtues characterised of the contemporary romanticisation of the countryside. Modern town life has been detrimental from the point of view of upbringing, the Alms claim. School life where children are sitting during winters with little sun has combined with meaningless tasks during summer holidays; ‘children have had to drift around’.⁵¹ The Alms argue that they are filling an important function for single parents, families with only one child, problem children, and parents who work abroad. One of the children who stayed at the Siljan School was the son of German commander Hermann Göring (1893–1946) and his Swedish wife, Carin von Rosen (1923–1931). According to the Alms, he was one of the archetypal pupils at the school, because of his care needs.⁵²

In this replacement home, they applied the method of *child-raising through work*. In this work, there is a great deal of variation, write the Alms, but work and play complement one another and are a pre-condition for children to be receptive for teaching. It is the natural rhythm between work and play that is the hallmark of the Siljan School. Through work and ordered play, which is not supported by competition, children get closer to nature. Narrowly-focused school work and the push for grades cause psychological problems and children who are trained to get ahead at the cost of others, explains Alm.⁵³ Competition is a poison that kills children’s self-esteem. The teaching method in the Siljan School is based on the children finding their own challenges. The phenomenon is mirrored in everyday actions where interaction and togetherness are a part of their principles, write the Alms.⁵⁴

50 Alm (1931:1), 43.

51 Alm (1931:1), 40.

52 Alm (1969), 48f.

53 Alm (1931:1), 42.

54 Ibid., 42.

At the Siljan School, they practised theoretical teaching, practical work and physical games, in turn. After the morning's theoretical studies, the afternoon was set aside for play. During trips into nature, games were arranged which offered an opportunity for 'city children to grow up with nature'.⁵⁵ In the Siljan School's pedagogical program, games were advocated which built on voluntariness and spontaneity which, according to Alm, teach children about 'obligatory play and sports' but do not necessarily fulfil the criteria for 'play'. The motivation to win focuses on rewards but 'great, deep, liberating play does not'.⁵⁶



'Friendly competition', a pedagogical motto at the Siljan School

In an attempt to promote the permissive atmosphere of the Siljan School, Alm claims that the school does not build 'on orders and bans'. The morning and afternoon assemblies that frame the day are created in concert with one another and nature, writes Alm. The power of a collectively created atmosphere replaces routine morning

55 Ibid., 40–42.

56 Ibid., 42.

and evening prayers. The pupils themselves choose a poem which ends the day together with a patriotic song.⁵⁷

As a backbone for the reforming environment that the Siljan School is meant to be, a pupil-based perspective is adopted in the ‘question evenings’ where anonymous questions of any kind can be asked. The question box and those questions that criticise the regime of the School form the basis of Bartholdsson’s article ‘Because we won’t be lazy’.⁵⁸ With a child-first perspective, Bartholdsson problematises the reform-friendliness of the home-school in relation to the rules that children and parents find quite strict. Above all, we find the duty to work and obligatory rest after lunch where you find the switch between work and rest. Here, we see the pupils at the School in a clearer way than elsewhere through the lens of the upper class that questions the freedom that is bounded by the school’s rules. The Siljan School replies by educating parents, something which expanded to a ‘Family school’ educating parents and teachers.⁵⁹ The status of the Siljan School in terms of reform pedagogy is made legitimate by the pupils asking their own questions. The interactive climate in ‘Storstugan’⁶⁰ safeguards the school’s democratic values, claims Alm; here we see both large and small questions about life.

57 Ibid., 43.

58 Åsa Bartholdsson, ”För att vi inte ska vara lata’ – Röster om nyttan med det praktiska arbetet på Siljanskolan 1927–1969” in Urban Claesson & Dick Åman (eds.) *Kulturell reproduktion i skola och nation. En vänbok till Lars Petterson* (2016), 130–132.

59 Siljanskolan i Tällberg (1933), 19. Script in the Siljan School archive (SSA). See also Bartholdsson (2017), 146.

60 ‘Storstugan’ is a sort of big living room in older architecture in Dalarna County.



Home-schooling in ‘Storstugan’, the heart of the Siljan School

A particular quality is ascribed the double teacher and parent roles that he and his wife embody. ‘Stronger than at any time, you get during these evenings, when everyone is collected in the cottage around the open fireplace, a feeling that you are all one big family.’⁶¹

61 Alm (1931:1), 43.

The specific role of the arts in the Siljan School's pedagogy

The Siljan School defines itself through classical rhetoric from reform pedagogy. Above all, the couple distance themselves from elitist perspectives in favour of the artistic focus on children's self-awareness and learning. A prominent part of the Siljan School's programme description are the pedagogical qualities which are inspired from the Ancients' views of the character-building potential of the musical arts. Music is legitimised through its ability to develop harmonious individuals and peaceful societies. Alm also writes that music has a higher purpose, namely contact with the cosmos and eternity.⁶²

The learning communities which the couple are trying to build are based on artistic grounds – children's aesthetic understanding of the world is supposed to equip them for the future, claim the Alms. Behind this lie some of the Western world's foremost child psychologists and pedagogues who recommend greater awareness for the benefit of children.⁶³

In order to contextualise the Siljan School phenomenon and its reform pedagogy in a context where the arts exist, demands us to look back with an approach where the idea of the canon is central. The Siljan School was permeated by the idea that the arts freed one's creativity and ability to create. Through these methods, the Alms wanted to point out the normative nature of teaching which worked against the purpose of the arts, namely, to question values and ideals. In their source material, the Alms claim that artistic forms of expression are a form of investment for society,

62 Alm (1969), 72. In Liljas the term 'music of the spheres' is analysed in relation to the pedagogical claims of the Siljan School (2016), 54, 66.

63 Programs and Courses. The Siljan School archive (SSA). Alm (1969), 38f, 249-250.

something which has been lost through rigid forms of teaching where the arts are seen as elitist.⁶⁴

The pupils at the Siljan School got to experience in practice what the couple meant. In their everyday work, theoretical knowledge was replaced by aesthetic forms of expression like dance, poetry, song, theatre and improvisations of different kinds. Lessons could take the form of practical exercises, and examinations were replaced by dramatisations where knowledge was demonstrated in different creative forms. Apart from physical forms of expression like dance, and oral forms like vocal forms of expression, a broad range of art, painting, handicraft, pottery and sculpture were used.⁶⁵ In the 'summer courses' the content are reflected.⁶⁶ The Alms writes; 'drawing and artistic creation, especially for children, are one of the most important methods in psychological healthcare and development'.⁶⁷

Not unexpectedly, Bergner bases her work on rhythm. With a background as a gymnastic director, Bergner is well aware of physical, rhythmic elements. No matter what their background, people have an innate feeling for rhythm which can be related to what we call musicality, claims Bergner. Well aware that not all children are seen as musical, Bergner speaks of a dimension of values which is ontologically based, and which concerns how we appreciate joy and feelings in music. There is a power to be found in music, argues Bergner, which people need and which the adult world must take greater responsibility to impart.⁶⁸

When the couple talk about 'the century of the body' they are referring to the physical experience of musicality through the Dalcroze pedagogy. Émile Jaquez-

64 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 18-26. See further. Liljas (2016), 56.

65 Alm (1969), 37-40, 200-203. See further Liljas (2016), 52.

66 'Siljanskolans sommarkurser 1934' in *Pedagogiska spörsmål* (1934:2), 50-53.

67 *Ibid.*, 51.

68 Signe Bergner, 'Uppfostran genom sång' in *Folkuppfostran* (a journal published by the association for public education 1938:1 årg. 1), 13.

Dalcroze (1865-1950) contributed by protesting against the theoretical teaching method of Western but also by hiring internationally acclaimed lecturers and pedagogues for the Siljan School.⁶⁹ The couple continually educated themselves at reform schools on the continent and especially the 'Rhythmic dance' got more space in the Siljan school way of applying modern ideas.⁷⁰ Among the acclaimed reform pedagogues educated at the Dalcroze Institute in Geneva, there were many German song and music pedagogues with roots in the Wandervogel movement and the ideals in *kunsterziehung*.⁷¹

Grounded in the solidarity exercises of play pedagogy, the couple's ideas about games of song and dance took form on the meadows beside Lake Siljan. The joy and freedom which children experience in the simple rhythms of song games are a part of the rhythm of life itself, write Bergner Alm & Alm. In the interplay between body and soul which games offer, we also find aesthetics, explain the couple.⁷² Taking a distance from the noble voice of artistic singing, the Siljan School also sought to develop a vocality which is based on the human need to be allowed to sing without risk of being judged for your vocal and singing ability.⁷³

Driven by a strong passion, the Siljan School set a new paradigm in order to renew the practice of music pedagogy. Strongly based in the reform pedagogy of the 1900s, the couple's ideas were put into practice in the idea of 'community singing'

69 One of them was Karin Fredga (1884-1972). Fredga started to educate Dalcroze-pedagogues in Sweden 1933. Karin Fredgas papers left behind 1904-1971 at the Royal library in Stockholm. Kungliga Biblioteket (KB),

70 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 30; Alm (1969), 38, 64. Cf Liljas (2016), 67, 69-70.

71 *Pedagogiska spörsmål* (1939:2), 14; Alm (1969), 193, 249-250. About 'die wandervögel' and the connection with reform pedagogy and 'kunsterziehung' see further in Arfwedson (2000), 54, 83-85.

72 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 25, 30f, 49.

73 Ibid.36; Alm (1969), 87f; Liljas (2016), 53-55.

which would bring the nation together, assuming that a skills-based middle-class teaching method was sorted out.⁷⁴

In analyses of how their actions can be placed within the greater context of reform pedagogy, the later text looks at the inspiration they got from Ellen Key, the women's movement and the ideals of home schooling. In the analyses, the term *retroactive forgetfulness* operates through the meaning the artistic activities are given in historical narratives. Above all, the meaning of the term contributes to an epistemological reflection about how free school reforms and the philosophical significance of the arts have grown and where they have their roots. Our methodological knowledge increases about how their reforms have been either supported or broken down, when the arguments for the arts, play and children's singing are based on the social ideals and context of education philosophy.

The reform pedagogy movement

Speaking of reform pedagogy in the definite form is not without problem since the term covers a series of ideas which have been interpreted in different ways. However, in an attempt to get closer to the core, three principles with a preserved legitimacy can be distinguished: 'to preserve and increase the moral power of children', through respect for the child's individuality 'free the power of their souls' and that teaching is based on individual development. The principles which were deduced from the congress in Calais in 1921 where *The New Education Fellowship* was created were based on seven underlying theses around which they could unite. These were the demands for a school to qualify as a reform pedagogy school. Schools with a reform pedagogy standard could look quite different even through the principles were just

74 Harald Alm 'Allsang in Schweden' in Reinhold Stapelberg (ed) *Fritz Jöde Leben und werk: Eine Freundesgabe Zum 70 Geburtstag* (1957), 139-144; Liljas (2017), 116-118; Liljas (2016), 56, 67-69.

about followed. What was common for them was a more child-centred school where the authority of teachers was reduced. Teaching should take place in *consultation* with students and based on the idea that knowledge should not be built on competition and hierarchical systems; competition was rejected unless it was children competing against themselves. Due to equality, gender-neutral environments were proposed. In summary, it was argued that education could not be reduced to what was coming during the child's working life, but what would benefit the individual. Something that orientated the NEF's reform pedagogical principles were the concrete proposals of Finn Laurin Zilliacus about these 'characterise feature and underlying principles'.⁷⁵ In seven points were listed categories that can be related to the Siljan School: *activity, freedom, cooperation, individuality, the study of the individual student, cooperation with parents, artistic, creative work*.⁷⁶ After analysis, we see that these demands can be recognised from the Alms' claims. Whether it can be interpreted as a confirmation of the Siljan School's reform pedagogical standard is a rhetorical question. What is interesting is that many students who stayed at the Siljan School developed in the artistic professions. Some of them contributed to regrowth by returning as teachers on various courses.⁷⁷ To use modern terms, sustainable development could be seen as relevant in syllabi of today.

In Morawski's anthology chapter on the Siljan School, the foundation is laid for what could be defined as an attempt towards reform pedagogy in Sweden. With the Siljan School as its basis, attention is turned towards similar private schools with the ambition to be treated as a reform pedagogical institution.⁷⁸ What is decisive for this study is the impact of Swedish central figures such as Anna Whitlock (1852-1930),

75 'kännetecknande drag och underliggande principer'.

76 Finn Laurin Zilliacus, 'Den nya uppfostran; kännetecknande drag och underliggande principer' in *Pedagogiska spörsmål*, (1930:1), 6.

77 One of them was the artist and writer Sandro Key Åberg (1922-1991). He returned as an adult as teacher on different art courses. The Siljan School archive (SSA). See also Alm (1969), 51, 70-71, 250.

Ellen Key and Anna Sandström (1854–1931) since their private schools had clear links to the women’s movement.⁷⁹

No less important are ‘the Fogelstad group’ with the previously named Kerstin Hesselgren as one of its founders. Apart from Signe Berner Alms’ personal contacts, ‘the Fogelstad group’ in Sweden is strongly related to the women’s movement and the right to vote. As inspirational lecturer, Ellen Key was brought in.⁸⁰ What is notable is that two of the group’s representatives, Emilia Fougelklou (1878–1972) and Kerstin Hesselgren, were hired when the Siljan School was started.⁸¹

The theoretical significance of reform pedagogy sprung from 18th century philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). They claimed that art contributed to independent thought which reduced the risk of one being a slave to others’ opinions. Rousseau realized, for example, that children could compose music in order to train their creativity. The ability to be creative instead of reproductive was linked to the aesthetic project in Kant’s view of ethics.⁸² The importance of developing independent people was made concrete in the difference between being educated into a person or into a profession. This was the meaning of Kant’s categorical imperative.⁸³ The significance of reducing a person to a

78 Jan Morawski, ‘Siljanskolan och den reformpedagogiska rörelsen’ in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 42–47.

79 Morawski (2017), 50. See also pp. 51–60.

80 Lars Båtefalk, ‘En ny människa för en bättre värld: frågor om samhälle och fostran vid Siljanskolan under mellankrigstiden’ in Urban Claesson (ed) *Fostran och bildning för en annan modernitet: Siljanskolan som reformpedagogiskt alternativ* (2017), 86; Ambjörnsson (2012), 208, 500.

81 Alm (1969), 29.

82 Anne Scott Sørensen, ‘Salonens og skønåndens kulturanalytik’ in Anne Scott Sørensen (ed) *Nordisk salonkultur: et studie i nordiske skønånder og salonmiljøer 1780–1850* (1998), 40–48.

83 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785, 1993), 14.

profession reduced their capacity as human beings.” According to Kant’s second version of the categorical imperative, every person should be treated as a goal and never as a means.”⁸⁴ The ideas which came from Rousseau and were developed by Kant, attracted those working in reform pedagogy who recommended an alternative form of education. Among these, we find John Dewey.⁸⁵ Based on what is lacking on a human level due to the need for a profession, creativity took a prominent role.

.....and inspiration from Ellen Key

From a Swedish perspective, these theories were promoted by Ellen Key, among others. Growing up in an upper-class environment, the home as well as aesthetics were important parts of the free school system she came to influence.⁸⁶ Above all, Key was interested in children’s conditions and in her book, *The Century of the Child* in 1900, a new paradigm began in Swedish education history. The book which was translated into 13 languages showed how deeply she was based in the European discussions on personal development.⁸⁷ Key, who wanted to gain support for a more open view of education, talked about ‘the death of the soul’ in schools.⁸⁸ Maybe her ideas were not always suitable for the practical work of schools, but on an ideological level a vision formed of the ‘free’ child who is able to grow into an independent person in an aesthetic and harmonious environment with specially adapted studies. The ideal came from the situated environment which was her own, a beautiful and

84 Göran Collste, *Inledning till Etiken* (2010), 105.

85 Sven-Eric Liedman, ‘Bildning, frihet och motstånd’ in Anders Burman & Pär Sundgren (eds) *Bildning: Texter från Esaias Tegnér till Sven-Erik Liedman* (2010), 392–393; Donald Broady, ‘Om bildning och konsten att ärva’ in Anders Burman & Pär Sundgren (eds) *Bildning: Texter från Esaias Tegnér till Sven-Erik Liedman* (2010), 367–369.

86 Morawski (2017), 50–60; Thorbjörn Lengborn, *En studie i Ellen Keys pedagogiska tänkande främst med utgångspunkt från ’Barnets Århundrade’* (1977), 66–70.

87 Ambjörnsson (2012), 184–194, 210.

88 ‘Själamorden i skolorna’. Ellen Key, *Barnets århundrade II* (1912), 110–118.

well-educated home with governesses and visiting German tutors.⁸⁹ What was radical for its time was that no distinction was made between the family's boys and girls. The education Key received mixed with a varied outdoor life, excursions into nature and artistic work.⁹⁰ According to her own testimony, it was the physical activities which gave her insights into the conditions of country children, which became a decisive factor in the problems of traditional education. The proportion of physical upbringing⁹¹, in combination with the Keys girls' avoidance of 'the regular training in "accomplishments" for upper class girls', is thought to be essential for the alternative view of education which became her calling-card.⁹²

Ellen Key has good experiences of small-scale home-schooling. Her own introduction to this pedagogy related to her family and the Sunday school she established for children in Sundsholm. Ambjörnsson argues that Ellen Key as an interpreter of older references to personal development was a co-creator of 'the development of European individualism'.⁹³ Education at 'the Rossanders' education course for women' in Stockholm led to her job in Anna Whitlock's private school.⁹⁴ Key's references to the conditions for teachers were also founded in *Tolfterna*, the association she started with women from different social classes with 12 in each group.⁹⁵

89 Ann Margret Holmgren, *Ellen Key. Människovännen* (1924), 17; Catharina Hällström, *Från upplevelse till tanke 1. Ellen Keys barndom* (Ellen Key-sällskapet 2006), 19.

90 Cf. Axel Forsström, *Ellen Key* (Ellen Keys Stiftelse Strand 1985), 4.

91 Physical activities which were part of Ellen Key's up-bringing included swimming, rowing, sailing and riding.

92 Hällström (2006), 19.

93 Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Hemmets århundrade* (1976), 17.

94 Catharina Hällström, *Från upplevelse till tanke 2. Ellen Keys ungdomsperiod* (Ellen Key-sällskapet 2008), 14.

95 Forsström (1985), 16.

During her up-bringing, Key took part in the family's salons where social topics of the day were discussed by the intellectual elite of the time.⁹⁶ Early on, Key became her father's secretary and through his political engagement, she got an insight into emancipation and the significance of social structures.⁹⁷ What was particularly important from a practical standpoint was her teaching in Anna Whitlock's school. Whitlock was one of the leading women who with the support of the women's movement started her own school in 1878. This first took place in the Key family's Stockholm apartment with seven girls round a table. 'We sat like wherever we wanted, since aunt Ellen didn't like structures – she was most interested in us listening to what she was telling us.'⁹⁸ Key was a well-liked teacher, but certain sources argue that she had a hard time keeping order and maybe did not place much importance on it. Instead, Key focused on artistic freedom which she realised was important for human development. An example of how this took form is the Swedish author Elsa Beskow's (1874-1953) testimonies. Beskow (née Maartman) describes Ellen Key as a very enthusiastic teacher who could quickly take on to the perspective of her students. 'She was not like other pedagogues'.⁹⁹

'The Century of the Child' at the Siljan School

This description of Key reminds us of the Siljan School. Apart from the written documentation of the Alms, the different collections in the archives witness the ideas represented by Key.¹⁰⁰ At the Siljan School, the value is emphasised of the value of small teaching groups, individualised teaching, and the pedagogical conversation that

96 Ellen Key, *Minnen av och om Emil Key, part II* (1916), 290.

97 Emil Key was a member of parliament for the farmer's party.

98 Mia Leche Löfgren, *Upplevt* (1960), 12.

99 Stina Hammar, 'Var kom det vackra ifrån?' in *Elsa Beskow – Vår barndoms bildskatt* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum 2002), 17.

100 Key (1900), 34-36, 57-58. The photo collection in the Siljan School archive (SSA). See also Alm (1969), 39, 53, 156.

can take place between the teacher and students.¹⁰¹ Inspired by progressive ideas, the couple wanted to break up both the classroom and subject teaching. The unwillingness to grade students' performance points towards a formative process which rejects competition, and which defines the important function of physical play.¹⁰²

We applied concentrated reading, which is that children got to study subjects one after another in a cohesive way instead of getting them chopped into pieces. They got very little homework. (...) they got to do plays and above all they grew up in an aesthetic environment. We did not give any grades (...) we had no year groups but let every child read at their own pace. (...) We had no examinations.¹⁰³

This method is based on the NEF description of reform schools,¹⁰⁴ and can be compared to Ellen Key's work at Anna Whitlock's free school 40 years earlier:

In every way children's own work was stimulated. Teachers consciously tried to avoid what was called 'over-studying', i.e. short lessons in different subjects according to a set schedule. They tried to get rid of homework. Instead we worked on concentrated reading and a free choice of subjects (...) Practical work was mixed with theory.¹⁰⁵

During the 20 years Ellen Key debated on the social reforms which protect women and children, her principal concerns moved from pedagogy to politics.¹⁰⁶ Given that

101 Bartholdsson (2017), 138-142.

102 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 25, 36; Alm (1969), 39-40, 87f. Cf. Morawski (2017), 36-37, 48f; Liljas (2017), 23, 128.

103 Alm (1969), 38.

104 See further Morawski (2017), 48f.

105 Sven Hartman, *Det pedagogiska kulturarvet: Traditioner och idéer i svensk undervisningshistoria* (2005), 197; Cf. Key (1900), 113.

106 Lengborn (1977), 28-30; Leche Löfgren (1960), 31.

these lectures and publications mainly reached a middle-class audience, it should be pointed out that Signe Bergner was very much engaged in the status of unmarried women. Among other activities, she opened a home for unmarried mothers in Stockholm in 1912.¹⁰⁷ What is central for both Key and Bergner is the position in favour of the child, at the expense of mothers and paid industrial work. Through associations with views on evolution and natural feminism, the relation of both clashed with the women's movement.¹⁰⁸ Key's rhetoric about 'the worker bee, the gender-less relative of the ant' was seen as an insult to women's entry into the job market.¹⁰⁹ Claiming the legitimacy of the Siljan School through home-schooling can therefore have been directly counter-productive.

Ellen Key had faith in the conquests of the forward-marching discipline of psychology. Inspired by the thought that humans can be shaped, Key took the view of the Spencerans. Evolution theory pointed out that inheritance could be affected by up-bringing and that important characteristics are inherited by children. The interest and belief in the idea that education and up-bringing could shape people and society pointed to the important role of parents.¹¹⁰

With the aim of meeting the demands of modern teaching methods, the Siljan School recruited teachers from different reform schools in Europe. The humanistic values of their education were defined based on the significance of modern developmental psychology. In their teaching, the school seeks to apply the best of modern psychology and pedagogy. Through its independent position and limited number of students, the school has an advantage over state schools of being to adapt

107 Reinholdsson (2017), 10.

108 Key (1900), 71-73; Hartman (2005), 195-197; Liljas (2016), 65; (2017), 132. See further Båtefalk (2017), 76-77 and Signe Bergner, 'Vi och våra barn' lecture to the Stockholm General Social-democratic Women's Club 6/4 1933. The Siljan School archive (SSA).

109 Key (1900), 76.

110 Key (1912), 4, 158-159; Cf. Hartman (2005), 195f.

their teaching more effectively, and to group subjects according the pre-conditions of the children and as a result reach a more personal and cohesive state of personal development.¹¹¹

Put into practice through well-reputed pedagogues with reform pedagogical experience, the best child psychologists of the age were recruited to the Siljan School. Alfred W. Adler (1870–1937), Heinrich Hanselmann (1885–1960) and Charlotte Bühler (1893–1972) each popularised ground-breaking theories with a bearing on progressive pedagogy for children’s early years.¹¹² Adler points out the mother’s key role in upbringing and that children’s play should intent on co-operation instead of competition.¹¹³ Adler, as the creator of the individual psychology school, points towards the possibility of stopping criminality and negative development by conscious methods. Professor Bühler warns, with a basis in empirical ‘tests’, against ‘prematurely high performance’ since children’s progress can be hindered. Early quick results should not be rewarded, and quick developers should be held back, argues Bühler.¹¹⁴

To stop children’s development from being too focused on performance demands a conscious method, argue the Alms. It is here that the aesthetic elements get their ‘new’ significance. Instead of the abilities that old paradigm encouraged, children’s harmonious development should be guaranteed. Such development is promoted by teaching which focuses on the child’s artistic expression instead of performance. The couple argue that the aesthetic forms of expression work against competition and competitive thinking if they are used for creative purposes.

111 Pedagogiska spörsmål (1931:1), 44; (1934:2), 9.

112 Harald Alm, ‘Siljanskolans pedagogiska sommarkurser’ in *Pedagogiska spörsmål* (1933:1), 20.

113 Edit Wennerberg, ‘Professor Adlers föredragsserie vid Siljanskolan’ in *Hjälpskolan* årg 13 (1935),

114 ‘Jubla aldrig över brådmogna prestationer’ (‘Never rejoice over prococius achievements’) in *Svenska Dagbladet* 12/4 1938. The Siljan School archive (SSA).

According to the categorical imperative, the Alms argue that creative activities reduce the risk of turning people into workers. Artistic subjects contribute to children being allowed to shape the external world according to their inner conceptions instead of the opposite.¹¹⁵



Pedagogical dance games at the Siljan School

mutually. His 'utopian model home' seems to have functioned as no less of an inspiration for the Siljan School's 'instant home' rhetoric, which can be seen as an extension of Ellen Key's home-schooling ideal.¹¹⁶

Didactically, this thinking has a bearing on a progressive view which binds the Siljan School together with role-models like John Dewey. With the support of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Dewey raises the importance of learning where body and mind are conditioned

115 Bergner Alm & Alm (1944), 25.

116 Arfwedson (2000), 42-43; 199-201, 345-350; Liedman (2010), 292f; Liljas (2016), 69-70.

The Siljan School was characterised by gradual expansion. This culminated during the 1930s and 1940s when the number of courses was increased, and cooperation started with 'Förbundet för folkbildning' (the Education Association). With the name 'Nordisk sommarhögskola' (Nordic summer school), the school profiled itself, as well as being a summer and winter school, with having courses in 'Child and school hygiene', 'Race and family knowledge', and adult education courses in nutrition, decorating, art and music.



Teachers further education with music professor Fritz Jöde at the Siljan School

There was a relatively high rate of participation, which sunk somewhat during the Second World War. There was particular interest in courses in Social hygiene and

Folk music pedagogy. When the 'School' was closed in 1971, close to 6000 people had taken part in the summer courses.¹⁷



Esthetic performing – teachers learn how to reform the history education



Music teachers at one of the summer courses in folk music education

The swansong of the Siljan School played out under the heading ‘School fight in Tällberg’ and was headline news in Sweden in 1957.¹¹⁸ The desperate fight of widower Harald Alm against the school authorities reminds us of a Greek play where the media are the ‘Chorus’. The authority’s demands to validate the school knowledge of their daughter Signe¹¹⁹ can be interpreted as a last straw for the home ideology of the Siljan School and how the fight was lost. The drama which culminated in the taking by the police of Harald Alm’s daughter was preceded by a downward spiral of being rejected by inspectors, lost contributions, and court cases with authorities. Among others, they wanted to classify the Siljan School as a child colony because of the deficiencies they identified.¹²⁰ This down-grading is important for the interpretation of the culture of the Siljan School and as a symbol for how the fight was lost.

Home-schooling for workers and as a middle-class family ideal

Like Ellen Key the Alms spoke for the family as an institution. The split which the working family caused had fundamentally changed the home. Urbanisation had also contributed to the destitution of the countryside and the informal teaching that had taken place within the farming population had tailed off with moral fall as a consequence.¹²¹ According to Bergner’s earlier mentioned inspection of child labour in industry in England it’s clear by Jane Humphries *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* the importance these aspects will have of society

118 Bartholdsson (2017), 138f.

119 Harald Alm remarried and had two more children in the second marriage. When he refused to let them go to regular school, the battle with the school authorities got worse. See further Alm (1969), 213-225.

120 Correspondence between Harald Alm and various authorities. Cuttings collection. The Siljan School archive (SSA). See further Bartholdsson (2017), 153-155.

121 Sundin (1984), 321, 323, 327-333, 344-347, 353.

and education. Bergner's observations correspond in that sense with Humphries illuminating the negligence of the children's condition. Nevertheless, Humphries mapping of home-schooling during the 19th century offer an apprehensive overview of family-schooling, Sunday schools, night schools and schools organized to fit with children's labour in England.¹²² The perspective will encourage Hartman's proposition; if you want to know anything about the history of Education science you must explore home-schooling practice during earlier epochs. The reason is the effect informal teaching will have on the present-day institutions.¹²³ Hence, Hartman make visible the methodological impact of the retroactive forgetfulness. What is central is how the memory reproduce itself through the narrative. Ricoeur claims that the personal witness description will complement the big historical narrative with certain details. Forgotten pieces referrers to a neglected memory domain that nuances the content and he mention especially how the reception of the 'built room and its artefacts' will contribute to our understanding.¹²⁴ Because of their strong references the home-schooling at the Siljan school ideal will be given a wider perspective which include both informal schooling and semiformal variety. Here Hartman points out the significance of women's entry in plain sight illuminating home-schooling in literary salons.¹²⁵

The pedagogical significance of the Siljan School could, from a Swedish perspective, be understood in relation to 'Storgården: a book about a home'.¹²⁶ In the view of Humphries' working-class childhood, 'Storgården' as a physical environment and pedagogical role-model came to have great significance for elementary schooling in the 1900s. Ideologically, this phenomenon had its origins in 'Storgården', the

122 Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (2010).

123 Hartman (2005), 22–24.

124 Ricoeur (2005), 200.

125 Hartman (2005), 22–24.

126 Forsslund,(1900).

author and elementary school icon Karl Erik Forsslund's residence in Dalarna where the cottage was a kind of people's salon. The earlier mentioned elite in Tällberg that took form in Forsslund's 'Storstuga', gives connotations of middle-class salons for which Ellen Key functioned as a cohesive force and muse.¹²⁷ The 'family education model' at the Siljan School will here be reflected in both architectonic and didactical terms. Of special interest is the pedagogical function of 'Storstugan' and the 'question evenings', described by the Alms. The home-schooling model will here be argued with demands from 'the new education era' while concretized as a domestic education domain.

Ideologically, Key referred to earlier eras with a domesticated society. With its inspiration in the radical 19th century salons on the continent, women oriented from a role as qualified hostess with strong features of pedagogy and teaching, towards a career as representatives of private schools.¹²⁸ In the same way, the background is based in school and women's history. The given that women were forbidden to take part in public spaces made more important the value of the networks that could be created in the salons. The middle-class salons manifest, according to Habermas, a phenomenon which points towards modernism and the conditions of modern society.¹²⁹ In this 'waiting room' for women, private education of different kinds was organised. Salons on the continent cannot least be seen through the agency of radical women as embryos of a more organized education of great significance.¹³⁰ Ellen Key

127 Ibid. Cf. Ambjörnsson (2012).

128 Petra Wilhelmy, *Der Berliner Salon in 19. Jahrhundert (1780-1914)* (1989), 15; Scott Sørensen (1998), 40-42; Juvas Marianne Liljas 'The music salon in Falun during the 19th century' in Bo G. Jansson (ed) *The Significance of World heritage: origins, managements, consequences: The future of World Heritage Convention in a Nordic Perspective* (2013), 344-362.

129 Jürgen Habermas, *Borgerlig offentlighet* (1984), 35-49, 50f. Cf. Morawski (2017), 50.

130 Karen Klitgaard Povlsen, 'Den litterære salons historie og genrer' in Anne Scott Sørensen (ed) *Nordisk salonkultur: Et studie i nordiska skönånder og salonsmiljøer 1790-1870* (1998), 18-20, 28-31; Juvas Marianne Liljas, 'Den musikaliska salongen i Falun:

got her inspiration from the feminist manners and salons on the continent where authorities were questioned by leading salonnières. Not least were ‘Nordic’ salons influenced by the older Berlin salons where highly educated ‘Jewish’ women promoted revolutionary modern thoughts about education and teaching.¹³¹

Society motherliness

In the strong spirit of reformist thinking that ruled during the 1920s, both home-schooling and the reforming status of free schools are confirmed. Behind the private pedagogical institutes and free schools which grew up were the female protectors who Hartman calls ‘mothers of learning’.¹³² In this group of mothers of learning, we can also place Signe Bergner Alm. Bergner Alm, who likes to lecture on decoration and the significance of the surrounding environment, is an advocate of personal development in the spirit of Ellen Key.¹³³ What is more, she attacks the women’s movement since she sees that it forces the woman from the home. This theme is central to the book *Not just knowledge: a book about questions of school, home and child-rearing*, which she wrote with her husband Harald Alm in 1944. Just like Ellen Key, she followed the international debate against injustice and women’s right to education, but like Key she was a proponent of the *society motherliness* where

en studie av den borgerliga salongen som pedagogisk miljö’ in Sven-Erik Holgersen et al (eds) *Nordic Research in Music Education* (2012), 47-66; ‘Den munktellska salongen i Falun: en studie i salongens pedagogik under 1800-talet’ in David Sjögren & Johannes Westberg (eds) *Norrlandsfrågan: Erfarenheter av utbildning, bildning och fostran i nationalstatens periferi* (2015), 265-279.

131 Wilhelmy 1989, 25f, 49, 90f; Scott Sørensen (1998), 40-42; Klitgaard Povlsen (1998), 18-20, 28-31.

132 Hartman (2005), 193. See also the term ‘mothers of learning’ with a link to Pestalozzi (22-23).

133 Lengborn, (1977), 109-121; Cf. Alm (1969), 248.

professions would be practiced ‘in a female way’.¹³⁴ Women should not take over the role of men or male behaviour, but should protect the rare ‘female pedagogy’. In the foreground stood the home as the superior environment for personal development with the mother figure at the centre.¹³⁵

The society motherliness which is promoted by Key and which Berger Alm also argues for, is important for creating clarity regarding the reform pedagogical traditions which characterised the Siljan School. The mother as part of the home is the basis of the agrarian peasant culture, ‘Storgården’ and the adult education movement. But society motherliness has its roots in an older culture of personal development, at the same time. In Pestalozzi’s and Froebel’s pedagogical doctrines, there is a clear connection between the mother’s dialogues about personal development and the development of society. The family-based *Wie Gertrud ihre kinder lehrt* (1801) builds on a tender and trusting relationship between mother and child and Key means the book gives good advice for home-schooling in the future.¹³⁶ The learning of key terms is no less the focus (herz, hand, kopf) which can easily be linked to the motto of the Siljan School. The education which the Siljan School champions is based on ‘up-bringing in the home for the home’.¹³⁷ In *Die Menchenerziehung* which Froebel published (1826), the development strategy of Arbeit (Work) Unterrichts (Teaching) und Spiel (Play) is the focus. Froebel’s theories are developed through a comprehensive correspondence with his cousin, Die Muhme Schmidt, with whom he discusses in depth the pedagogical significance of play theory. Here, we find once again the type of outdoor games with singing and movement games which are recommended by the Alms.¹³⁸ The qualities of

134 Hartman (2005), 193. See further about Key’s break with the women’s movement in Forsström (1985), 14-16.

135 Key (1900), 57-58, 69-95.

136 Lengborn (1977), 70.

137 Alm (1931:1), 43.

138 See further Liljas (2017), 120-124.

motherhood are passed on in his 'Kindergarten'. In the pedagogical aim of the book of nursery rhymes *Mutter und- koselieder* (1844), we find the society motherliness that can be later found with Ellen Key. The family song book contrasts with a perspective on society where 'the German mother's up-bringing of her children entails the up-bringing of the German people'.¹³⁹ The society-minded aim should be compared with the society motherliness which explains Ellen Key's and Signe Bergner Alm's view of women. Here, Bergner Alm takes a stand that is very close to that of Ellen Key, and which in important ways links to the national romantic renaissance and protection of the old family-centred values of farming society.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Through references to the growth of free schools, the Siljan School can be related to the older view of home-schooling. In this way, the School places itself as an outpost in education history where private alternative grew because of the drive of creative women. The private alternatives were a mix of philanthropy and schooling where the growing women's movement played a decisive role.¹⁴¹ The 'self-thinking culture' which was cultivated in these circles was taken into free school culture as being part of a neo-Rousseau spirit nurtured the development potential of the individual, and which reached Sweden through salon networks during the 19th century. Personal development in salons can therefore be seen as an explanation of the long line of women who were leading lights in the free school movement.¹⁴²

139 See further Berit Uddén, *Musisk pedagogik med kunskapande barn: Vad Fröbel visste om visan som tolkande medel i barndomens studiedialog*. PhD diss. Skrifter från Centrum för musikpedagogisk forskning (2001), 159.

140 Ambjörnsson (2012), 434-437.

141 Arfwedson (2000), 22.

142 See further Liljas (2012; 2013; 2015).

As a result, the home ideology was based on a paradox where Bergner, as representative of a rare well-educated woman with international references, recommends women's education which lets itself be limited to the home. Consciously or not, we see an anomaly in Bergner's reasoning. The stories of the Siljan School's ideology and crass reality reflect the marks that Ellen Key made on education history.¹⁴³ The apparently backwards-looking home ideology in times of the welfare society building and which was Key's testament, caused the downfall of the Siljan School in the end. In this respect, the article points to a distinct phase in Swedish education history that, characterised by visionary optimism, was forced to give way to the administratively grand thinking of collective education regulated by the State. Hence, the result demonstrates how history criticism works as a method of interpretation when the concept of retroactive forgetfulness is activated.

The driving force of the Alms to tell their story to the future means important messages from the perspective of historical epistemology and methodology. Ricoeur argues that the 'memory bulimia' which is inherent in historical writing, entails that important parts are lost.¹⁴⁴ The conditions that plague the Siljan School would in this case form the key to a deeper understanding of the reform pedagogical enclaves during the 20th century. The advantage of such individual testimonials from a memory theory perspective is a way of rectifying the established collective narrative. In that regard, the Alms are not only giving form to a story of success. The criticism directed towards the Siljan School is protecting something. Here, we see the ability of the Siljan School to reach for the future through the paradoxical of the day. Through the Siljan School, memories are created for the future which point to the view that an archive is not only a static place for storage. The history of the Siljan School is written based on an understanding that historical memories can work as inspiration for constructive thinking within the present-day field of Education Science.

143 Hartman (2005), 199.

144 Ricoeur (2005), 33f, 51ff.

Not least, we find an older debate come back to life about schooling and pedagogy where the arts take a central place. The Alms' fight for the place of the arts becomes clear as well as the space created for reform by protests against urbanization and the growth of modern society. Meta-theoretically, retroactive forgetfulness can be seen in how the couple represent themselves in debates. The scene that the Siljan School forms in its time bears the categorical imperative. The philosophical message of the arts is communicated in relation to the future they wanted to change. Through archive material, the couple have a voice that cannot be silenced, and which argues for values and ideals they thought should not be forgotten. Methodologically, the collection – and the way the couple try to impart their vision – are an example of history-critical hermeneutics based on retroactive forgetfulness, these threat of extinction and the belief in resources of recollection.

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