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School Architecture as a Pedagogic Problem

by Roland Gross

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The progress that has been achieved in the building of new schools is very considerable: more pleasant facilities, elimination of the teacher's desk, etc., and yet the question can be raised whether the fine results already obtained provide us with the final answer. The happy reforms that have come about have stemmed essentially from architects, without there having been sufficiently concerted teamwork with teachers and educators in general. Our present-day educational system, which is a reflection of the astonishing advances in our knowledge since the 17th century, is perforce encyclopedic and thus highly specialized, the great aspirations of the 18th-century reformers in the field of pedagogy (Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi) not having effectively influenced our conceptions of what constitutes a school. By and large, curricula and divisions into classes are based on the primordial interest accorded to the subject-matter to be taught. Now then, since the end of the 19th century and the opening years of our own century, modern educational science has insisted above all on the necessity of grounding school programmes not on the subject-matter but on the needs of the child. This is the approach adopted in the Montessori method and also, to a certain extent, in the schools influenced by the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, but the state schools of Switzerland have not really been affected by all this. To be sure, there has been grasped the importance of developing teaching methods based on work, group exercises and open-air instruction, and, in view of the impossibility of universal knowledge, the utility of conducting so-called exemplary teaching, which consists in studying thoroughly a given question, with the opportunity being given of applying to concrete projects the general principles acquired. However, our schools as constructed set limits to any development in this sense. It is necessary to invent a different type of school, envisaging a much more flexible utilization making possible classroom work in differentiated groups, the pupils not having to change classes, but with the teachers on a rotating basis. The elimination of special classrooms leads to savings; at the same time each classroom becomes in and for itself a unit capable of future extension.—In a letter addressed to the author, Prof. Schohaus, former director of the Normal School of Kreuzlingen and well known for his educational studies, insists on this truth that should never be lost sight of, namely, that the building of schools ought to be a task in common between architects and educators.

School at Kleinkems

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Architects: Schöning & Türcke, Kleinkems, Baden

Three independent classroom units, each room being a regular pentagon, which allows for great flexibility in use. The second stage will comprise a gymnasium and pool.

An Educator Looks at the Speckweg School, Mannheim

220

Begun in 1962. Architect: Carlfried Mutschler

Elementary section and that for older pupils are separated, but with central hall conceived of as a "school fair". Each class of the upper level has two rooms for group work. The classrooms permit differentiation of instruction in keeping with the abilities and the tastes of the pupils.

Halmerweg School with 24 Classrooms, Bremen

222

Architect: G. Müller-Menckens, Bremen; by Wilhelm Berger

Like any truly modern school, this is a joint achievement of a team consisting of the architect, the educator, the landscape designer, artists and technical men. For the first time, realization of the eight-room pavilion. The school is a community centre for the pupils as well as a cultural centre for the surrounding urban district.

Three-Classroom Primary School at Valestra di Carpineti (Emilia)

224

Architects: Cooperativa Architetti e Ingegneri, Reggio Emilia (Italy)

Principal aim: to provide the child with an environment really scaled to his nature and permitting the introduction of active teaching methods, without jeopardizing the communal spirit of the school.

School at Zuid-Barge

226

Architect: Romke de Vries, The Hague

Since the village is undergoing a steady shrinkage of population through migration, it was possible to design classrooms never intended to accommodate more than 24 pupils. Highly individual instruction.

Primary School at Bilthoven, Holland

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Architect: A. Staal, Amsterdam

Making use of an old telephone exchange, the educator Kees Bocke created an experimental school to which there was later added a school building with six classrooms, the already existing playground and kindergarten being retained intact.

School at Skön

230

1959. Architects: Uhlin & Malm, Stockholm

Six classrooms, each of which is a self-contained unit, with its entrance, its cloakroom, its projects room and its classroom proper.

Sandbäck School at Katrineholm

232

1958. Architects: Uhlin & Malm, Stockholm

For two parallel elementary classes and five parallel intermediate classes. Assembly hall, manual training and sewing shops. The group project rooms are directly connected with the classrooms.

The Cross of Classrooms of the Hamburg Schools

234

Architects: Polensky & Zöllner | P. Thiele, Hamburg

These "cruciform" classrooms, core of the "growing school", have the advantage of allowing for immediate use, before the installation of the adventitious parts of the school building.

School Construction in the Post-War Period in Great Britain

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by Pierre Bussat

In the field of school construction, Great Britain, thanks to its immense and rigorously planned effort in the period after the war, occupies the first rank. The problems were enormous, in view of war destruction and also, in addition to the considerable population increase, of the raising of the school-leaving age to 15 (instead of 14). Thus it was necessary to create 2 million new places for pupils up to 1961. On the plane of actual teaching methods, the new British system, with its principle of active and blended education, has entailed a break with the traditional classroom, which, having as it did a purely administrative existence, has given way to a new unit: the surface unit fixed per pupil (4.20 sq. meters in elementary school, 7.45 sq. meters in secondary school). Within the framework of the rather strict regulations, which even so allow for a certain margin of interpretation, "development groups" (architects, educators, etc.) have contributed in great measure to the over-all programme. Flexibility, polyvalence, interpenetration of structured volumes are characteristics of the projects adopted, with a completely generalized employment of technical rationalization, the whole conceived to be for the greater benefit of town-planning in general, so that it can be said that, growing out of educational needs, British school architecture is in its turn an educational factor.

Binley Park School near Coventry

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1959-1962. Architect: Town-Planning and Building Department of Coventry; direction: A. Ling

Complex of one- or two-storey pavilions, grouped in twos, one block of four floors,—the whole forming a kind of self-contained community.

Monumental Sundial of the Chrüzacker School at Regensdorf

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by Edwin Wenger

Instead of the primitive gnomon or standard inclined type of sundial, Edwin Wenger has adopted a system of vertical slabs, which, set up on a base of white marble, cast shadows indicating the hour. At the same time they constitute a sculptural work of art.

Recent Works of Fritz Wotruba

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by Jorg Lampe

The Austrian sculptor Wotruba, it can be said, tends toward the image of the essential and takes exception to the arabesque of appearance. His art was for a long time a protest against a pseudo-return to "normal" life after the catastrophes of our time, but at the present time it is approaching what this outstanding artist considers the reality of action, and that by way of a self-contained dynamism that is hostile to all mere gesturing.