

Kasperová, Dana

Reflections on the focus of education in the Theresienstadt ghetto based on reports by Theresienstadt's educators

Studia paedagogica. 2013, vol. 18, iss. 4, pp. [37]-56

ISSN 1803-7437 (print); ISSN 2336-4521 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/SP2013-4-3>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/129767>

Access Date: 18. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FOCUS OF EDUCATION IN THE THERESIENSTADT GHETTO BASED ON REPORTS BY THERESIENSTADT'S EDUCATORS

DANA KASPEROVÁ

Abstract

This article deals with issues of the focus of education under the extreme living conditions that occurred in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Based on surviving reports by Theresienstadt's educators, the main subjects under observation are the educational focus and goals in Theresienstadt and ideological directions of the efforts of Theresienstadt's educators, issues of education in and for community, and education for collective responsibility and individual development.

Keywords

final solution to the Jewish question, Theresienstadt ghetto, Theresienstadt's education, Theresienstadt's educators, Department of Care for Children and Young People

Introduction

When the question of good and evil in education is discussed, it is impossible to avoid its embedding in issues of educational theory and practice. On one hand, the problem of good and evil in education is related to educational practice, but on the other it is a subject central to the educational theory.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Czech discourse in general education emphasised that the theory of education should be superior to educational practice and the art of education. This approach is found in representative works by František Drtina and Otakar Kádner, Josef Hendrich, Otokar Chlup and Jan Uher. At the same time, stress on the theoretical aspects of questions of education did not mean that there was disdain for educational practice. Educational practice was considered a world on its own which contributed significantly to the educational discussion but was unable to give theoretical reasoning for the basic problems of general education or answer the question of whether it was correct for educational theory to highlight the support of good in education as one of its goals.

At the level of educational theory, the question of good was also discussed as a question of values in educational science, or in other words, as a question of the theoretical definition of the educational goal or educational ideal and options for its fulfillment. In this respect, it is evident that two basic approaches have developed ever since the Enlightenment, representing concepts which immanently assume that they would either lead to the realisation of good in education or, contrarily, avoid criteria of evaluation by taking a strictly scientific view of educational actions and situations.

Educational discourse thus clashed over the basic question of its purpose or mission. Nevertheless, the main point has always been the thematisation of the pronounceable, a thematisation shaped by the discourse in “this world of education.” The middle of the 20th century witnessed a substantial cultural and civilisational break (Adorno, 1970). The assumption of the Enlightenment that man as a naturally free citizen is civilised through education, the institutionalisation of which was guaranteed by modern states, was liquidated by the aggressive Nazi ideology which, on its way to the “new world” and the “new man,” violated all hitherto known cultural standards and patterns.

Due to the “civilizational failure” of the conflict of the 2nd World War, we are confronted with education and schooling which does not come from “this world” although it took place here. It is shocking, fateful and extraordinary everyday life in a world behind walls or barbed wire, under the unspeakable conditions of the evil of concentration camps and ghettos (Arendt, 1989). The strength of Nazi barbarism wiped out and blew up the hitherto inviolable boundary stones of civilisation relatively quickly. First,

a part of the population was singled out and removed from society, based on the anti-Jewish Nazi ideology. Then these people were imprisoned in ghettos without walls, and in the final stage they were transported to ghettos and camps to be rendered extinct systematically.

If we follow these facts from the point of view of education and schooling in the Czech lands, it is evident that here too Jewish children were excluded from compulsory schooling and transported to ghettos. Then, in their terrible situation, they were deprived of human dignity and, finally, their lives.

This tragic scenario was the destiny of the 9,500 Jewish children in Theresienstadt and the eastern extermination camps of whom only 636 survived the war (Chládková, 1992). In spite of this, people in the Theresienstadt ghetto¹ managed to maintain a basic responsibility for the future of the younger generation and keep to a course of education and illegal teaching under the apocalyptic horror of the ghetto. Theresienstadt's prisoners took up the task of education and schooling and decided to resist by having a say in the misery of the ghetto, showing no hesitation in caring for the souls of children dragged into a life-denying mechanism. The educators did not resign under the difficult and inhuman conditions of Theresienstadt and as leading figures they urged the best possible solutions to problems, not only material but generally human and educational, in the everyday life of the ghetto.

Thematic definition

The present study is an analysis of the goals, ideological focus and selected educational means characteristic of educational work in the ghetto of Theresienstadt between the summers of 1942 and 1943. It is not a reconstruction of everyday educational life in the Theresienstadt ghetto, a task which would require another study, but an analysis of how the leaders of the Jewish self-government and the Department of Care for Children and Young People reflected on questions of educational focus and efforts.

¹ Starting from November 1941, Theresienstadt served as a ghetto for the Jewish population from not only the Protectorate but other European countries such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. Most prisoners were transported from there to eastern extermination or concentration camps, where they died. Despite that, in the years 1942–1944, when the Nazi occupying power used the ghetto of Theresienstadt for propagandistic demonstrations of the non-existence of the “final solution,” the camp witnessed remarkable and absolutely unique efforts for the care and education of Jewish children and young people.

The study is based on unique surviving primary sources: reports by educators and carers of children and young people in the Theresienstadt ghetto. These reports were presented in the summer of 1943 when the first “anniversary” of the foundation of children’s and young people’s homes in Theresienstadt was commemorated. On this occasion, 34 evaluating, reflecting and summarising reports on the life of Theresienstadt’s child prisoners and educators were presented. Most of them have been preserved and are kept in the Jewish Museum in Prague. This primary source is put in a wider context of questions of education in the ghetto of Theresienstadt, with other important primary sources and publications relating to the life of children and young people in the ghetto. One of them is the diary of Egon Redlich, leader of the Department of Care for Children and Young People, entitled *Zítřa jedeme, synu, pojedeme transportem* (Redlich, 1995). Another source is the anthology of texts written by Theresienstadt’s child prisoners *Je mojí vlastní bradba ghetta?* (Křížková, Kotouč, & Ornest, 1995). A unique source is the children’s magazine *Vedem*, written by boys of Home One, or home L417.² As for diary records, parts of children’s diaries published in the book *Deníky dětí* (Hořec, 1961) were studied. For questions of the origin of children’s homes, an authentic report by Otto Zucker, deputy of the Jewish Elder Jakob Edelstein, entitled *Dějiny tereziánského ghetta 1941–1943* (undated, unpaginated) was used.

So how can the selected reports of Theresienstadt’s educators, carers of children and young people and, in some cases, physicians be understood? The reason they are so unique is that they were not meant as sources for a summarising report for the Nazi leaders of the camp. They originated because of the motivation of individual educators and carers to comment on the educational focus in the ghetto and consider possibilities for further guidance in education and care for children in the extreme situation of the ghetto. These reports did therefore not originate intentionally but spontaneously for the occasion of the educators’ meeting on the anniversary of the foundation of children’s homes in the Theresienstadt ghetto, particularly the boys’ home L417.

The reports served for the Jewish self-government, or more precisely its Department of Care for Children and Young People, to reflect on the life of children and young people in the ghetto and continue the work of the Department. They were presented, for instance, by Leo Janowitz, who was head of the secretariat of Jakob Edelstein, the Jewish Elder, Egon Redlich as the leader of the Department of Care for Children and Young People (*Jugendfürsorge*), Ota Klein as head of home L417, Otto Zucker as deputy Elder,

² In this respect, Vol. 2 dated December 1942 is important.

Rosa Engländer as head of the L410 girls' home and Fredy Hirsch as Egon Redlich's deputy. An important part of the 34 reports is formed by accounts given by the educators and carers who shared the everyday lives of the imprisoned children and young people. These testimonies do not solve problems of ideological focus of education in the ghetto nor any systemic questions of leadership of children and young people from the viewpoint of the Jewish self-government, but they outline a picture of the everyday course of education in the Theresienstadt ghetto. It is clear that these educational reports offer a representative sample, commenting broadly on questions of education in the ghetto before the middle of the year 1943, i.e., before the 1943 autumn deportations to Auschwitz. When these deportations started the ghetto's educational life deteriorated significantly as many important people were deported. The activities they had pursued and the tasks they had fulfilled were strongly related to their own engagement and personal conviction.

For the sake of educational systemic analysis, the surviving reports can be analysed mainly for educational goals and the means of education applied. The reports do not explicitly thematise the results of educational efforts but refer to educational contents and the category of educational factors. With respect of educational goals, written accounts may be analysed from the viewpoint of the explicitly mentioned target categories and their frequency in particular reports or sets of reports. If the authors do not mention target categories explicitly, they may be reconstructed on the basis of a systemic view of education. Within this procedure explicitly expressed educational categories are centralised and relations at the level of educational goals, or other educational categories, are sought. From the systemic educational viewpoint, the analysis concentrates mainly on relations between stipulated educational goals and recommended educational means of their achievement, taking into consideration the positions of the educator and the educated in the extreme situation of the ghetto.

We ask whether educational goals in the reality of the Theresienstadt *Lager* were formulated at all or whether education was rather shaped by everyday needs, randomness and current necessity. If the educators and carers really did consider questions of educational goals and focus, what was the content of these goals and how were they influenced by the living conditions of the ghetto? Is it at all possible to think that educational goals were not based on the everyday life of the *Lager* but on a quest for the sense of life in the extreme situation of the ghetto, in the spirit of Viktor Emil Frankl (Frankl, 1996)? How, then, did the educators and carers cope with the fateful nature of life in the ghetto?

An important point of our systemic educational analysis will be the question of education in the context of respect to individual particularities of

the educated and of the necessary integration of individuals into society. In this aspect, however, there is the problem of the non-existence of any free or natural society behind the walls of the ghetto. Did this feature of Theresienstadt's education mean that there was some free space for an ultimately individualistic approach to education, or did the educators rather urge an alternative concept, taking into account the question of the community and the spiritual overlap of an individual? Was education focused on religious objectives or rather on the development of an autonomous community? We also have to ask how Theresienstadt's educators related their educational concept to the prospect of life after liberation, or in other words, whether this factor played any role in their pedagogical thinking, and if so, which role it was.

We also ask what kind of relation there was between the defined goals and the actors in education: the educators and the educated. In this respect, of primary interest is whether the role of the educator is thematised in the reports of Theresienstadt, how it is constructed and which tasks are to be fulfilled by educators in such a situation.

Limits of education in the Theresienstadt ghetto

In regard to the "final solution of the Jewish question," the ghetto was given various functions by Nazi representatives. Theresienstadt served as a temporary transit camp (Lagus & Polák, 1964, pp. 18–19),³ it was a ghetto for the old (Klein, 2006),⁴ a place of decimation (33,430 prisoners lost their lives there, 23.9 % of the total number of those who went through the ghetto; Polák, 1994, p. 22) and a tool of propaganda. These functions were interconnected, sometimes coinciding and often acting in contradiction.

The Theresienstadt ghetto was to play a propagandist role for the representatives of the International Red Cross who visited the ghetto on 23 June 1944 and were shown the ghetto on a route which had been prepared beforehand. Yet before that, more than 17,000 prisoners had been transported to the extermination camp at Auschwitz, in autumn 1943 and spring 1944.

³ The function of transit camp was fulfilled by Theresienstadt almost from the beginning of its existence. Transports to eastern concentration camps started as soon as 9 January 1942, six weeks after the ghetto was established, and went on continuously until 28 October 1944. 86,934 prisoners were deported, of whom over 83,000 did not survive the war.

⁴ In his report, Klein presents a highly knowledgeable analysis of historical facts and documents guiding him to the opinion that ghetto is a more suitable term for the phenomenon of Theresienstadt than concentration camp.

In this connection, nevertheless, forms of life pretending to be signs of a “free world” were allowed in the horrible reality of Theresienstadt. This paradox of the ghetto was accurately captured in the diary of Eva Roubíčková: “Every day there are concerts here, lectures, theatre performances and even revues, while German Jews are dying of hunger in the barracks” (Kárný, 1991, p. 104). Theresienstadt’s child prisoners took part in this “cultural life” as both spectators and actors (Křížková, Kotouč, & Ornest, 1995). In the end, the deputation from the International Red Cross produced a positive statement about the conditions in the ghetto. Unfortunately, the sufferings and systematic deportations to extermination camps remained unknown to the world public.

A specific feature of Theresienstadt was the question of the Jewish self-government (Adler, 2003, pp. 61–67). Its position in the functioning and governing of the ghetto is not unambiguous. On one hand, members of the Jewish self-government supervised the course of life in the ghetto, but on the other they did not decide about essential affairs as they were subordinate to the Nazi commanders of the camp.

The self-government of Theresienstadt was headed by the Jewish leader of the ghetto, the so-called Jewish Elder (*Judenältester*)⁵ and the Council of Elders (*Ältestenrat*). The Jewish Elder was fully responsible to the Nazi commanders, with whom he was in everyday contact, presenting daily reports about the situation in the ghetto and receiving orders. The Council of Elders was an advisory body of the Jewish Elder, entrusted with questions of the everyday functioning of the ghetto, its internal administration and the life of the imprisoned. Administration was carried out by a large bureaucratic machine consisting of a few central departments further divided into numerous sub-departments and sections. The most important departments were the Transport Department and the Department of Central Records,

⁵ The Jewish self-government in the Theresienstadt ghetto was led by the Jewish Elders. The first of them was Jakob Edelstein, former deputy chairman of the Jewish Religious Community, who had participated in the construction of the ghetto since December 1941 and consolidated especially the positions of younger prisoners from the territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Edelstein was removed from his position by an order of the commander of the camp, Seidel, dated 27 January 1943, and replaced by a new Jewish Elder, Paul Eppstein, previously chairman of the Reich Association of the Jews, who supported the positions of German Jews in the ghetto, often aged prisoners. He held the position until 27 September 1944, when he was executed in the Small Fortress. Also the fate of Jakob Edelstein was tragic: he was deported on the December 1943 transport to Auschwitz, where he was shot dead after witnessing the death of his wife and only son. The last Jewish Elder, until 5 May 1945, was Benjamin Murmelstein.

in which official records of all Theresienstadt's prisoners were filed. Other departments were of economy and internal administration, a technical and a financial department, departments of health, care for young people, leisure, and a working centre. The Nazi command transferred all the work and agenda connected with the functioning of the camp to the Jewish self-government of prisoners, albeit under strict supervision and command.

Up until the end of September 1944, the self-government, or more precisely its Transport Department, produced transport lists of those to be deported from Theresienstadt on the orders of the command. How difficult it was for some members of the self-government to make decisions about the inclusion of particular persons on the list or their removal from it is often mentioned in Redlich's diary:

There's a lot of nepotism here. Every clerk, even if he's just a servant in the department, tries to cross out [of the transport] all the people he knows, and in most cases he succeeds ... Nepotism, nepotism ... In important affairs such as removals it shouldn't be like this. There are things which are a burden to us, and I'm afraid one day we'll be called to account. Children and the old are sent away; there are so many cases of nepotism that each list must be drawn up several times. (1995, p. 103)

Starting in autumn 1944, all the competence for the making of transport lists was taken over by the ghetto's Nazi commanders, who put eminent persons, members of the Council of Elders and higher clerks of the self-government in these liquidation transports. In this outline, however, it is necessary to understand correctly the expression *self-government* of the ghetto.

One of the departments of the Jewish self-government was that of care for children and young people, which saw to the educational and social care of Theresienstadt's child prisoners, especially after 1 July 1942, i.e., the so-called opening of the ghetto.⁶ The department cared for children and young people aged 4 to 16 or, in some periods, to 18. In terms of organisation it was divided into four sub-departments. One of these represented the leaders (*Leitung*), whose responsibility was the everyday functioning of the department and the register of children. Another sub-department was of educational

⁶ Before 1 July 1942, Theresienstadt was divided into a part where civilians lived and the ghetto. In the ghetto most children under 12 lived with one of their parents in men's or women's barracks. Children and young people aged 12 to 16 lived in *Kinderbeime*, children's homes. In the beginning, rooms were appropriated for children and young people of the same sex. Boys' homes were founded earlier as children in the women's homes faced a scarlet fever epidemic. Children were thus left unsupervised and without controlled activity when adults left for work. After 1 July 1942, when civilians left the town and the whole of Theresienstadt became a ghetto into which transports of Jews were streaming, children's homes were established in separate buildings.

care (*Erziehungsbetreuung*), which organised the daily life of the children, their leisure activities and work deployment (e.g., in field labor). The sub-department of social care (*Sozialbetreuung*) was responsible for social support (sufficient nutrition, clothing). Another sub-department was of care for homes (*Heimbetreuung*), administrating the barracks in which most of Theresienstadt's child prisoners were accommodated.

The head of the Department of Care for Children and Young People was a distinctive personality in the life of Theresienstadt, Egon (Gonda) Redlich.⁷ He was a supporter of the Zionist movement, which strongly affected his attitude to the purpose of education in Theresienstadt and, simultaneously, caused one of the big conflicts in Theresienstadt's education. Another important figure in the leadership of the Department of Care for Children and Young People, starting from mid-1942, was Alfred Hirsch,⁸ who emigrated to Czechoslovakia from Berlin in the 1930s. Alfred (Fredy) Hirsch was also a young Zionist. In this connection it seems justified for Hans Günther Adler (1955, p. 544) to claim that the department was led by educators who were too young. On the other hand, Adler's reproach that the department was of a predominantly Zionist nature is not so easily confirmed. It is true that the focus of Theresienstadt's education was a subject of lively discussion in all the children's homes, but these debates certainly did not mean that most homes were led in a Zionist spirit,⁹ as the leaders of the department would

⁷ Egon Redlich, born on 13 October 1916, was transported to Theresienstadt as a member of Edelstein's team on 4 December 1941. A student of law at that time, he was a supporter of the Zionist movement, which provided him with a distinctive opinion on Theresienstadt's education. On 23 October 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz together with his wife and their half-a-year-old son. They were killed on 24 October in the gas chamber.

⁸ Alfred (Fredy) Hirsch was born on 11 February 1916 in Aachen. He was transported to Theresienstadt on 4 December 1941 and deported to Auschwitz on 6 September 1943. He allegedly committed suicide on 8 March 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Fredy Hirsch tried to organise the life of children in the extreme situation of the so-called family camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Brod, Kárný, & Kárná, 1994).

⁹ The Theresienstadt ghetto was not the first place to consider education in the spirit of Zionism. As an important line of education it was already known in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, education in a Zionist spirit was emphasised much more in the ghetto. Its supporters thought that historical events had confirmed their supposition that Jewish assimilation in the majority population had failed and the only correct solution was an emphasis on special characteristics of Jewish culture and religion. It intended to be influential in the field of politics as well, by the creation of an independent Jewish state. Education in the spirit of Zionism (Drachmann, 1936) was focused on the knowledge of Jewish cultural values, an awareness and sense of solidarity, and understanding of the position in society as related to other nations. Zionist educators were afraid of the dissolution of the Jewish tradition and culture in the European and global cultural heritage.

perhaps have wished. On the contrary, in terms of ideological anchoring, Theresienstadt's education was very much dependent on who was head of a particular home. These leading educators determined the focus of education in Theresienstadt more than did the wishes or ideas of department leaders. Redlich himself (1995, p. 120) noted in his diary that it was more valuable for young people to be guided in the spirit of good non-Zionist education than bad Zionist education. This development led to the Agreement on Apolitical Education, which confirmed the free leadership of children's homes by particular educators. The homes therefore varied greatly in terms of both ideology and everyday operation and had their own distinctive profiles.

Educational focus in the picture of the reports of Theresienstadt's educators

The surviving reports can be divided into three main categories. The first and the second are very much connected to each other and deal with the ideological focus or the focus of education and educators in Theresienstadt and with general educational basics, objectives and means.¹⁰ In contrast, the third category of these reports provides a look at specific social and sanitary conditions of Theresienstadt's homes.

The analysis of the reports of educators as well as of the self-government representatives underlines the importance given to educational care and shows that the question of the objectives of Theresienstadt's education was a very important problem of educational thinking. Evidently the educators were not overburdened with everyday routines but maintained a distance from them in order to plan their work, reflect on it and assess it in wider contexts. Also, the focus of educational goals emerged from the educators' own beliefs.

¹⁰ The reports do not comment on teaching in the ghetto. This was illegal. The ban on teaching Jewish children in the Protectorate was published in July 1942 and in effect in the ghetto. So teaching was going on secretly within the daily or so-called cultural programme. No records about its course have been preserved, so what we know about it is only through diary records of children and adults or recollections of those who survived. Teaching was done in children's homes. For those who worked it was in afternoon hours. According to available opportunities, general subjects were taught: a native language, a foreign language, national and international history and geography and mathematics. The question of obligatory classes in Hebrew was very problematic, requiring a lot of prudence. It was always agreed on beforehand in which activity children would immerse themselves if they received a prearranged signal from the children's watch for the room where teaching took place. Those who taught were in great danger if their activities were revealed.

When questioning educational objectives within an educational system, we also have to ask how these objectives are related to the society in which the education takes place and to which the educated are introduced. Theresienstadt's education, however, found itself in a situation in which neither children nor their educators faced a community young people could be educated for. Instead of a community, Theresienstadt's prisoners faced a makeshift state of affairs, in both the everyday material sense and that of a spiritual stopgap. As a member of Edelstein's secretariat, Leo Janowitz¹¹ says in his report that this was reflected by the chaotic coming together of various educational views and opinions with little depth (*A report of Leo Janowitz*, undated, unpaginated). A similar problem is found by Franz Kahn¹² in his report, which points out that education in modern times is not derived from traditions and the spirit of communities but very much from the needs and functions of society and the contradiction between the needs of a free individual and the claims of society (*A report from Dr. Franz Kahn*, undated, unpaginated). In fact, not only was the free existence of an individual impossible in Theresienstadt but there was no naturally developing modern society there. Kahn, too, finds that the view of the world from Theresienstadt is a makeshift situation with no ability to legitimise any educational claims and procedures.

So what were the goals of education in the ghetto? How could they be legitimised? As pointed out in connection with the ideological attitudes of the leaders of the Department of Care for Children and Young People, one of the main directions of educational efforts in Theresienstadt was education for Jewishness. Israel Kestenbaum's report *Jewish Education (Jüdische Erziehung)*¹³ refers to this, as does the report of the department's head, Egon Redlich, *Three kinds of tasks of care for young people*. Although education for Jewishness was a strong focus, as education for the community it was not superior to other educational goals or concepts. Theresienstadt witnessed the co-existence of a large variety of concepts, some very different in terms of theology: in the ghetto children were educated in the spirit of socialism, Zionism, as Boy Scouts, as *Sokols*, in the spirit of Jewish assimilation and of Jewishness. In this respect it is necessary to understand the importance of the Agreement on Apolitical Education, which was adopted in summer 1943.

¹¹ Dr. Leo Janowitz, born on 8 December 1911, arrived in Theresienstadt with a staff transport on 4 December 1941. Deported to Auschwitz on 6 March 1943, he died there on 8 March 1943.

¹² Dr. Franz Kahn, born on 13 January 1895, was transported to Theresienstadt on 28 January 1943. Deported to Auschwitz on 4 October 1944, he died there.

¹³ No biographical data identified.

This agreement confirmed pluralism and liberty in the choice of educational procedures and goals. Therefore the main basis of education was the personality, pedagogical experience and world view of each individual educator.

Getting back to the question of Jewish education in the reports, it may also be stated that despite underlining the importance of Jewish education, the Jewish element was probably well balanced with education for collective responsibility¹⁴ and conceptual openness. As an exemplary attitude to the question of the non-overestimation of Jewish education, Ota Klein's¹⁵ report *On the so-called political education of youth* refers to the fact that any kind of ideologically or religiously focused education in the ghetto would inevitably fail because the composition of children's groups was so heterogeneous that a single ideological focus of education was impossible. If education were focused in a Zionist way only, the assimilative nature of many imprisoned children would be ignored and the result would be a "brief superficial mediation of Jewish education" only (*A report from Ota Klein*, undated, unpaginated).

Otto Zucker's¹⁶ report *A year of L417 (Ein Jahr L417)* is also important in this respect. In it, the origin and development of children's homes in Theresienstadt is reflected on from the viewpoint of one of the most important members of the Jewish self-government, the deputy of the Jewish Elder, emphasising the question of education for collective responsibility and identifying questions of education for the community for analysis.

As can be seen, despite their makeshift nature the homes were to become a community anchored in common values, respect and love between educators and children. Education in the homes was community-focused, providing, in fact, its main educational pillar (Zucker, undated, unpaginated). In such

¹⁴ The question of the importance of community in Theresienstadt's education was studied elaborately by Valtr Eisinger, head of Home One, or L417, who worked in the spirit of education for the community. He derived the ideology for his community-based thinking from his socialist principles. Education thematising the positive impact of the group on the individual is found in many articles of the magazine *Vedem*, published by Eisinger himself and many boys from Home One.

¹⁵ Ota Klein was born on 21 February 1921. He was transported to Theresienstadt on 4 December 1941 and deported on 28 September 1944 to Auschwitz, where he was liberated, although some sources state Buchenwald as the place of his liberation. After the war he worked as sociologist for the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. He died in Paris in 1968.

¹⁶ Otto Zucker, born on 3 October 1892, transported to Theresienstadt as a staff member on 4 December 1941. Deported to Auschwitz on 28 September 1944, killed in the gas chamber on the same day.

a concept a stress on more than just everyday reality can be seen; there is also a search for the sense of life. This was the manner in which the self-government, members of the Department of Care for Children and Young People and educators struggled to withstand the cruel conditions of the ghetto and the harsh realities of omnipresent death, hunger and starvation. Even under such terrible conditions, the homes for children and young people were meant to be places where rules adopted jointly would remain valid and mutual respect would help *Lager* prisoners to bear their lives.

A similar mission is present in two reports thematising the discrepancy between the makeshift nature of Theresienstadt's education and the necessity not to surrender to this in spite of all the difficulties and the unparalleled conditions there. One of them is Gertrud Bäuml's¹⁷ *On positive education (A report from Dr. Gertrud Bäuml, undated, unpaginated)*, the other a report by Fredy Hirsch, an important educator in Theresienstadt and a member of the Department of Care for Children and Young People, with the title *Our youth in Theresienstadt*. These reports are true testimonies of how Theresienstadt's educators faced the inevitability of the difficult living conditions in the ghetto and how they responded to the troubles of non-material existence of people in the ghetto and, especially, problems of the spiritual life of imprisoned children and educators.

An answer to the question of the relation between goals and conditions in Theresienstadt's education is offered by the report by Bäuml, who describes its basic features with the word *despite*: "All our work in Theresienstadt is done despite. Educational work in all its particularities and tasks is also done despite" (*A report from Dr. Gertrud Bäuml, undated, unpaginated*). Bäuml does not pretend that there is not definiteness in Theresienstadt's education; she does not describe it as an ideal of educational thinking or as an educational goal. Yet at the same time she does not surrender to the actual state of things and knows that it is the basis of the special nature of Theresienstadt's educational efforts. These efforts could not be based on freely adopted rules and order. There was still the model of the educator: his or her actions in this curtailed world represented an islet of certainty on which the children could rely. Of course, such an attitude was very difficult for an educator who lived in the fateful circumstances of the ghetto to maintain, but she was not allowed to give up and had to be as strong a personality as possible in order to act firmly and exemplarily in this situation, to be followed and to show natural authority.

¹⁷ Dr. Gertrud Bäuml, born on 29 September 1898, transported to Theresienstadt on 2 July 1942 and to Auschwitz on 23 October 1944. She died in Auschwitz.

The educator carried a huge educational responsibility in the extreme situation of the ghetto. The educator could not sink into the reality of the *Lager* but had to focus on the higher spheres in his or her educational thinking and efforts and strive for the forming of young people for life after the war, so that they could again be integrated in a community (*A report from Dr. Gertrud Bäuml*, undated, unpaginated). It is evident that the motive of living in a liberated society after the war played an important role in reflections about the focus of education in the ghetto. Education should lead to the search for the sense of man's existence, not surrender to the current determinateness of the ghetto. The search for sense was based on a belief in both the spiritual overlap of human life and the existence of a future society in which individuals would again be responsible for their own lives and participate in the shaping of the community to which they belonged.

Obviously there is the question of whether such responsibility should be attributed to an educator and whether the educator could be expected to bear and fulfill it in the everyday battle for life. It is interesting and admirable that Theresienstadt's educators did not ask themselves this question. They certainly had to overcome these difficulties every day, but still they were not discouraged, did not give up their responsibility for the shaping of future generations and complied with their educational duty in the misery of the ghetto. In fact it is not only admirable but essential, as it concerns the existential duty of education in human community, even under the curtailing of the attributes of humanity and freedom: "Since renunciation [of education, D. K.] would mean the end and decay of a generation, our programme remains the same, despite" (*A report from Dr. Gertrud Bäuml*, undated, unpaginated).

Fredy Hirsch's educational reflections in his report *Our youth in Theresienstadt* is similar (*A report from Fredy Hirsch*, undated, unpaginated). He also finds Theresienstadt's educational activities a big "despite." Yet Hirsch still finds a moral task in them, in spite of Theresienstadt being not only a place of suffering and inhumanity but also a setting in which many people deal with their desperate situation by losing respect for the old or ill. Hirsch claims that education should not make concessions to moral principles and that educators should always show a moral example and follow it in the daily life of the homes. Educators should provide a moral contrast to the makeshift nature of Theresienstadt. A value-based community should be both the objective and the means of education, not least in the struggle to educate a morally strong and steadfast man. For this, Hirsch counts with the benefit of physical training, which he understands not only as a means of cultivation of the body but as a balance of physical firmness and moral strength: "It would be terrible if Theresienstadt meant a continuous, irremediable spiritual and physical slump for our youth. They would never again be able to assert themselves in the world, for they would follow the repugnant example

of unscrupulous people and never have contempt for them” (*A report from Fredy Hirsch*, undated, unpaginated).

In the spirit of Frankl’s appeal, an imprisoned man should not surrender to the everyday but look for a more profound sense of life, even if this life is full of suffering. Even under the conditions of the *Lager*, people should contemplate the “why” of life and think of what is still to come and which tasks remain to be fulfilled, so as not to lose the sense of existence: “He who sees the why in life can stand every how in it” (Frankl, 1996, p. 75). Inner power and the fixing of one’s mind on a specific goal related to the future formed one of the miracles of survival under the inhuman conditions of concentration camps. A man who had realised the responsibility for his work or a beloved person was not able to “lose” his life. He who was aware of the why of existence could also bear every how (Frankl, 1996, p. 77). As the surviving reports show, educators in Theresienstadt did not lose the strength to seek the meaning of life in the misery and they passed this strength on to child prisoners.

While the previous reports emphasised questions of collective responsibility, moral maturity and education development *in* and *for* community, reports written by two important female educators in Theresienstadt stressed the fact that continuous attention must be paid to the individual characteristics of children. In brief, these reports represent an application of the ideas of reformatory education behind the walls of the ghetto. The author of the first of these reports was head of Girls’ Home L410, Rosa Engländer.¹⁸ The report is entitled *Unsere Aufgabe – Unser Weg* (*A report from Rosa Engländer*, undated, unpaginated). The second report was submitted by Berta Freund¹⁹ under the title *Erziehung ist Kunst – Kunst ist Erziehung* (*A report from Berta Freund*, undated, unpaginated).

Engländer was well aware that the objective of education is self-education within which the child deals with the requirements and situations of a free world. Yet this was denied by the reality of Theresienstadt, so a free world could only be present in a mediated way, through images and educators’ ideas. At the same time it should not be an imposition of an image of the world or society *from* the educator *to* the child. The border of the child’s free creation

¹⁸ Rosa Engländer was born on 25 May 1897. She was transported to Theresienstadt with her husband and daughter on 30 January 1942 and liberated in Theresienstadt on 8 May 1945. She died in Prague in 1984.

¹⁹ Berta Freund was born on 19 August 1902. She was transported from Brno to Theresienstadt on 2 December 1941 and to Auschwitz on 9 October 1944. She did not survive.

of an image of the world and a man's position in it should not be violated even in Theresienstadt. The duality of the needs of an individual and those of society should not be answered by subordination to external authorities or even blind following, no matter whether out of fear, ignorance, oppression or habit (Rosa Engländer's report, undated). Engländer presents the concept of Rousseau's negative education in the misery of the ghetto, saying that education in Theresienstadt should "help the child to develop its positive features in letting suitable influences take effect and having bad and unsuitable conditions removed" (*A report from Rosa Engländer*, undated, unpaginated).

Although it may seem beyond the powers of educators to remove bad influences from educational situations in Theresienstadt, Engländer does not forget this maxim. How should we then understand this requirement? We should probably not interpret it as efforts to remove the negative impact of *Lager* life in Theresienstadt's educational situation. This would obviously be impossible. Engländer's efforts are to be understood rather as an appeal that, even under the extreme conditions of the ghetto, educators should continue to meet the demand to help and create educational situations in which exemplary acts and support for the development of children's positive personal features is possible.

Berta Freund's report also urges respect for the unique individuality of a child's character, remarking that education should not only take this uniqueness into account but also support its development—even under the conditions of the ghetto. Theresienstadt's education should offer the child enough experience and enjoyment in the arts, which is important for the development of spirituality and the psyche. The fact of art education in Theresienstadt (children's drawings, a performance of the children's opera *Brundibár*, drama performances etc.) is considered today an extraordinary demonstration and result of Theresienstadt's educational and schooling activities. Not only was it important because it allowed inmates to forget the horrors of the surrounding world, at least for a while, or to come to terms with it in a manner which was, at least partially, free. Theresienstadt's artistic activities were also based on the ideas outlined above of respect for the individuality of the child and his or her free expression in an extreme life situation (*A report from Berta Freund*, undated, unpaginated).

The picture of Theresienstadt's education would not be complete if we did not mention the reports dealing with the everyday operation of children's homes from the viewpoint of social workers, physicians and carers. It is not surprising that these reports provide information on the bleak situation in the ghetto, but in this context a question is always asked: how could the prisoners with these professions provide for the life of young people, to at least the extent in which it was going on, under the difficult *Lager* conditions? After all, the daily routine was determined by a lack of food

and clothing, disastrous sanitary conditions, illnesses and epidemics, not to mention non-existent intimacy and space for oneself. The physicians did not fight illnesses and epidemics only, although this was their main job, but also the overall weakness of the children, which caused outbreaks of scarlet fever, typhus and dangerous influenza epidemics in Theresienstadt. According to the physician of home L417, Dr. Rudolf Klein,²⁰ the waves of the sick included up to 35 % children (Klein, undated, unpaginated). As illustrative evidence, the report by Luisa Fischer,²¹ head of social care in home L417 (*A report from Luisa Fischer*; undated, unpaginated), states:

After the first wave of transports and a scarlet fever epidemic, transport C arrives with dozens of children from a Prague orphanage, then we fight hepatitis, then there are other transports to and from Theresienstadt, and in February they carry dozens of children to the typhus department, of which eleven have neither father nor mother in Theresienstadt.

Despite the incredibly difficult material situation of Theresienstadt's prisoners and all the shortages in the life of the *Lager*, members of the Department of Care for Children and Young People succeeded in overcoming the initial chaos and stabilised the course and functioning of the children's homes. They managed to establish a repair service for clothing, introduce a system of food distribution for children and arrange card files based on the so-called children's social cards which recorded their lives in Theresienstadt and everything about their situation as well as things they were given, so that there was enough evidence about the "justifiability" of a child's demands. The impact on children of the makeshift nature of the Theresienstadt *Lager* could partly be eased. However, this was happening only thanks to great exertion on the part of educators, carers and social workers (*A report from Luisa Fischer*, undated, unpaginated):

The inflow and outflow of children, scared, often dirty and ill. Uncertainty and restlessness. First of all it was necessary to nurse the numerous sick in the barracks. The sickroom and nurses appointed from health institutions were not sufficient. It was necessary to put the incessant flow of new arrivals to bed, fix and wash their clothes, replenish the equipment of those who were forced to continue on their way. We started with bare hands and our work was guided by what the children needed most.

²⁰ Dr. Rudolf Klein was born on 20 October 1886. He was transported to Theresienstadt on 8 February 1942 and to Auschwitz, where he died, on 23 October 1944.

²¹ Luisa Fischer was born on 6 June 1905. She was secretary of the Czechoslovak Red Cross. She was transported to Theresienstadt on 2 July 1942 and to Auschwitz, where she died, on 16 October 1944.

Conclusion

As the analysis of the reports of Theresienstadt's educators, social workers and physicians shows, education in Theresienstadt was exposed to extreme conditions of *Lager* misery which cannot be described in commonplace language. The extraordinariness of Theresienstadt's everyday situation makes it impossible for us to thematise life behind the walls of the ghetto in accessible language which is "from this world." The world of Theresienstadt was, and still is, beyond the common reality in which educational situations take place. The *Lager* life of Theresienstadt could not be regarded as a standard which would shape the development of child prisoners. In spite of this, it was necessary to prepare Theresienstadt's children for the moment in which they would again win their long-desired freedom, of which those who took care of them were convinced. It was therefore necessary to say *despite* to Theresienstadt's reality and, regardless of its fateful nature, not abandon the need to prepare children for life in a community of the future. What this would be like, nobody knew; the pressures of Theresienstadt's reality did not allow for long debates about the future. All energies were concentrated on the overcoming the depressing everyday life. Educators supported each other so as not to surrender to Theresienstadt's misery or accept its written or unwritten rules. On the contrary, they helped each other to withstand the difficulties and be an example for the children, even in such an extreme situation. At the same time, the stress on solidarity was not allowed to suppress the individual and spoil the variety of attitudes to the educational programme shown by the educators. Despite the frequent relation of Theresienstadt's education to Jewish education or education conducted in the Zionist spirit, there was no dominant educational direction in the homes. The variety of educational goals had much to do with various educational opinions held by particular educators in the homes. The dispute about the so-called ideological focus of Theresienstadt's education was solved by the requirement for apolitical education and the liberty granted to educators in the leadership of the homes. So the ideas of Zionist education, education in traditional Jewish values including the Jewish faith, as well as education based on modern ideological and social streams were applied.

There is no doubt that despite all the limitations of Theresienstadt's education, the educators did not renounce their educational duty and responsibility for the condition of future generations.

References

- Adler, H. G. (1955). *Theresienstadt 1941–45. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft: Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie*. Tübingen: JCB Mohr.
- Adler, H. G. (2003). *Terezín 1941–1945. Tvář nuceného společenství* [Theresienstadt 1941–The Face of Forced Fellowship]. Praha: Barrister–Principal.
- Adorno, T. (1970). Erziehung nach Auschwitz. In T. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (pp. 92–109). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Arendt, H. (1989). *Nach Auschwitz*. Berlin: Edition Tiamat.
- Brod, T., Kárný, M., & Kárná, M. (Eds.). (1994). *Terezínský rodinný tábor v Osvětimi-Birkenau* [Theresienstadt: a Family Camp in Osvětim-Birkenau]. Praha: Melantrich.
- Drachmann, E. (1936). *K otázkám židovského školství* [On the Questions of Jewish Education]. Brno: Spolek Židovská škola.
- Frankl, V. E. (1996). *A přesto říci životu ano* [Say Yes to Life in Spite of Everything]. Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství.
- Chládková, L. (1992). *Terezínské děti – bilance* [The Children of Theresienstadt: a Summary]. In M. Kárný & V. Blodig (Eds.), *Terezín v konečném řešení židovské otázky* [Theresienstadt and Its Role in the Final Solution of the Jewish Question] (pp. 144–148). Praha: Logos.
- Kasperová, D. (2005). Theresienstädter Erziehung. Versuch einer pädagogischen Untersuchung. In S. Höhne, M. Mekula, M. Tvrđík, & I. Cvrkal (Eds.), *Brücken* (pp. 269–290). Praha: Lidové noviny.
- Kasperová, D. (2010). *Výchova a vzdělávání židovských dětí v protektorátu a v ghettu Terezín* [Education of Jewish Children in the Protectorate and the Theresienstadt Ghetto]. Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze.
- Kárný, M. (1991). „Konečné řešení“. *Genocida českých židů v německé protektorátní politice* [‘Final Solution’: The Genocide of Czech Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia]. Praha: Academia.
- Kárný, M., & Blodig, V. (Eds.) (1992). *Terezín v konečném řešení židovské otázky* [Theresienstadt and Its Role in the Final Solution of the Jewish Question]. Praha: Logos.
- Klein, P. (2006). Terezín: ghetto, nebo koncentrační tábor? [Theresienstadt: ghetto or a concentration camp?] In M. Kárný, M. Kárná, & E. Lorencová, *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2006* [Theresienstadt’s studies and documents 2006] (pp. 100–111). Praha: Academia.
- Lagus, K., & Polák, J. (1964). *Město za mřížemi* [The City Behind Bars]. Praha: Naše vojsko.
- Polák, E. (1994). *Terezín v „konečném řešení židovské otázky“* [Theresienstadt and its Role in the ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’]. In T. Brod, M. Kárný, & M. Kárná (Eds.), *Terezínský rodinný tábor v Osvětimi-Birkenau* [Theresienstadt: a Family Camp in Osvětim-Birkenau] (pp. 15–35). Praha: Melantrich.

Archival Sources

- A report from Dr. Gertrud Bäuml. Über positive Erziehung*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Rosa Engländer. Unsere Aufgabe – unser Weg*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.

- A report from Luisa Fischer. Social Care in L 417*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Berta Freund. Erziehung ist Kunst – Kunst ist Erziehung*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Fredy Hirsch. Our Youth in Terezín*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Dr. Leo Janowitz. No title*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Dr. Franz Kahn. Das Paradox der jüdischen Erziehungin*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Israel Kestenbaum. Jüdische Erziehung*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Ota Klein. O takzvané politické výchově mládeže On the So-called Political Education of the Young*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from MUDr. Rudolf Klein. No title*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Egon Redlich. The Three Tasks in Caring for the Young*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- A report from Ing. Otto Zucker. Ein Jahr L 417*, no. 304. The Jewish Museum in Prague, Collection Theresienstadt.
- Vedem, Vol. 2, K 6A*, no. 1317. Terezín Memorial.
- Zucker, O. (undated). *Dějiny terezínského ghetta 1941–43* [History of the Theresienstadt Ghetto 1941–43]. A 5250 – K 17.

Editions of primary source texts

- Hořec, J. (Ed.) (1961). *Deníky dětí. Deníky a zápisky z koncentračních táborů* [Diaries of Children. Diaries and Logs from Concentration Camps]. Praha: Naše vojsko.
- Křížová, R., Kotouč, K. J., & Ornest, Z. (Eds.) (1995). *Je mojí vlastní hradba ghett?* [Is My Homeland a Barrier of Ghettos?]. Praha: Aventinum.
- Redlich, E. (1995). *Zítřka jedeme, synu, pojedeme transportem* [We Shall Go Tomorrow, Son, Go on the Transport]. Brno: Doplněk.

Corresponding author

Dana Kasperová

Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Faculty of Sciences, Humanities and Education,
 Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic
 E-mail: dana.kasperova@tul.cz