Introduction

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No one should expect the proceedings of a conference to bring together a complete survey and analysis of its announced subject. The often accidental and in some respects arbitrary conference arrangements of time and place, as well as the prior commitments of potential contributors, make such expectations illusory at the outset. Nonetheless, with much good will and persistent effort, it is possible to assemble a company of scholars – some seasoned and accomplished representatives of their fields, others at the early stages of their careers eager to bring their work to our attention – who will succeed in introducing us to recent scholarship on the announced subject. While not necessarily representative, such an effort can be sufficiently wide-ranging in its topics and varied in its approaches to permit a reasonably comprehensive and exemplary presentation.

The conference on German influences on American education was convened jointly by the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies in Madison, Wisconsin, and the School of Education of the University of Wisconsin – Madison. The sponsors and the editors of this volume hope that they have been successful in bringing together a group of essays that provide an overview of recent scholarship and permit us to arrive at insights and conclusions that deserve more extended discussion. The volume will have served its purpose if it stimulates and advances future work on intercultural influences in education.

As the essays amply demonstrate, a definition of the word “influence” is not without its perils. Does it refer to the mere appearance or presence of an actor or agency in an environment different from that of its origin? Does that presence have to remain visible for a particular length of time before we acknowledge it as such? And, most important, how effective does such a presence have to be or become in order to be recognized as influence? To what degree will the agent have to change its new environment, and
over how long a time will that effectiveness have to continue? And does influence always imply a positive action on the part of the imported actor, or may it be detected by the passive adaptation of the previously existing environment to the new presence in its midst?

Readers of this volume will discover that the editors did not demand of their contributors adherence to any one particular definition. Their expectations were that scholars, having detected the presence of German contributions to American educational institutions and practices, would inquire just what these contributions have been and what difference they made when they were added to or integrated into the American educational experience. Our authors were encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions in evaluating the significance of these items or episodes of cultural transfer from one society to another.

Why, it may be asked, did this conference concern itself with influences on American education? The current revival of historical studies in education is the major reason for this choice. Throughout the last three decades, the history of education has undergone a renaissance that has placed it at the center of some of the most active scholarship in social and intellectual history. As particularly the late Lawrence Cremin has shown so magnificently in his massive three-volume opus on American Education, the history of education is no longer restricted to the history of the school. On both sides of the Atlantic, educational historians have come to claim large areas as legitimate targets of exploration. They have investigated childhood and adolescence, family and gender, science and popular entertainment, and their studies have enriched the existing historical literature. The essays in this volume reflect these developments, as did the conference itself.

Readers of this volume should also keep in mind that the conference organizers decided on the history of education as the principal field of scholarship and that they chose educational influences as their central theme. Thus they will not be surprised that the history of ethnicity, language use, and immigration does not receive major attention in this volume. But this is not to say that these topics are absent altogether. Some of the essays add significantly to our understanding of the German element in American culture and society. Jacobi’s “Schoolmarm, Volkszieher, Kantor, and Schulschwester,” for example, speaks directly to some of the questions recently raised in ethnicization history and, in that context, analyzes the different roles played by education in Protestant and Catholic midwestern immigrant

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communities. The contributions by Roeber and Goldberg in the section on “German Schools in America” address topics familiar to students of immigration history and can also be read as case studies in the history of bilingualism.

Most of the other essays, however, and particularly those in Parts One and Four, do not fall in the areas usually covered by the history of immigration or ethnicity. The contributions to Part One concern themselves with visitors traveling in both directions, and those in Part Four deal with higher education and the academic disciplines of theology, the classics, history, and medicine. Although school teachers and educational observers in general may be said to belong to the spheres of both popular and refined culture, the representatives of scholarship deal with matters of concern chiefly to the nation’s cultural elite. Like visiting teachers and observers, they are usually temporary visitors in each other’s country rather than immigrants.

Part of the special interest in the German influence on American education is that it moved on two levels: within and as part of the broad stream of popular immigration and on the more rarified plateau of higher education and elite culture. This, Kathleen Conzen pointed out in a comment on an earlier draft of this introduction, could not be said of French influences on American education. They were restricted primarily to elite culture. French immigrants contributed little to the history of American public schooling. German immigrants, however, did so in many ways, as secular supporters of public schooling or as adherents to confessional education. In addition, in the area of higher education, German immigrants and visitors were joined by American-born intellectuals who contributed their share in bringing German influence to bear on American culture. By the end of the nineteenth century, this twofold nature of German-American cultural relationships had created conditions out of which developed mutual exchanges and stimulation that continue to this day.

In this volume, we first turn to what German or American visitors had to say about the schools in each other’s country. This literature, well known

4. For an example concerning teacher education, see “The Atlantic Community of Wings” in my And Sadly Teach (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 32–56.
to comparative educationists, joins the observational acumen of experienced educators with information on the host country’s schools, thus bridging, as it were, the worlds of elite and popular culture. In the first essay, Jeismann evaluates the well-known and often discussed reports of Alexander Dallas Bache, Henry Barnard, and Horace Mann from a German point of view, asking what may be learned from them about the history of German education that has not usually been noted in the German historical literature on the subject. Günther finds the significance of the exodus of German liberal educators in the wake of the unsuccessful 1848 revolutions to have been less in their effect on education in the United States than in the reports about democratic practices they sent back to Germany. Günther doubts that American schools were much influenced by German immigrants. He suggests that we take a closer look at the impact of the emigrants’ reports on colleagues they left behind. Turning his attention to the closing decades of the century, Wegner tells us that admiration for and eagerness to learn from German models remained a powerful motive. He also notes a growing ambivalence of the American reporters toward the assumption that such intercultural learning could remain a one-way street. Eagerness to learn from Germany, he suggests, was restrained by caution. Linton’s contribution, finally, moves us into the prewar years of the twentieth century, when the American interest in vocational education led to the adoption of the German system of continuation schools. Linton tells us how the Munich superintendent Georg Kerschensteiner succeeded, directly and indirectly, in providing a model for American vocational education, despite the many differences between the social and industrial structures of the two countries.

Whether the reporters discussed were Americans, as in Jeismann’s, Wegner’s, and Linton’s essays, or Germans, as in Günther’s, they intended their reports as ammunition in their efforts to reform the schools in their respective home countries. Thus Jeismann states that the first and direct result of Mann’s reports in Massachusetts was to involve him in his quarrel with the Boston schoolmasters, and Günther finds that his protagonists aided the cause of liberal reform in Prussia. The passage of time did not alter this approach. Near the end of the century, Parsons and Prince, as Wegner relates, were sent by their respective state authorities in New York and Massachusetts to investigate German educational innovations for their possible introduction at home. Linton’s essay on Kerschensteiner makes clear

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that the Munich model of industrial education was used to unify contending parties in the American debate over vocational education.

This is, I suppose, what one should expect. Our reporters were not intent on evaluating impartially the advantages and liabilities of what they observed. They did not hesitate to express disapproval as well as admiration, and they made few attempts to analyze and weigh the reasons for their reactions. They were men of practice, little inclined to contemplation and philosophical reflection. School organization and classroom management were their concerns. Thus, in their investigations, they tended to see what they were looking for and to ignore what did not fit into their preconceptions. Jeismann relates a good example of this when he tells us of Bache’s approval of curricular differentiation in the German Bügelschulen and of his criticism of the Humboldtian Latin-based general education offered in the same schools.

Reform of American schools was their primary concern. The fact that they thought reform was possible by selective adoption and adaptation of foreign models and practices reveals their assumption of what Jeismann calls the “relative autonomy” of an educational system. The reporters believed that an exemplary progressive educational system could exist within a politically backward society. How else could they have reconciled in their minds the existence of an educational system they admired within a political order they rejected? How else could they have conceived its transferability from one society to another?

Viewing themselves as champions of reform and having become advocates of a cause that borrowed heavily from a foreign example, they tended, despite their disapproval of aspects of the foreign system, to ignore or never perceive that the Prussian system itself was far from united in support of the reforms the observers had come to endorse. Thus Jeismann points out that the observers appeared to be oblivious to the conservative–liberal struggle in Prussia and failed to note or to report the poverty of German teachers and their desperate struggle to free themselves from clerical oversight. I am not sure whether that obliviousness to German shortcomings entitles them to be cited, as Jeismann does, for their “unbiased judgment” in their advocacy of Prussian examples for American reforms. Selective adaptation does not necessarily imply objectivity.

We get very much the same picture, but with the two sides reversed, when we read what Günther has to tell us of German teachers and travelers in the United States after the failed revolution of 1848. The German visitors, being liberals for the most part and committed to their ideals, wrote glow-
ingly of the American schools as possible examples for German liberals. But whether their picture of American schools corresponded to reality, and whether the liberals can be accepted as representatives of German influences on the American school system, are quite different questions not addressed in Günther’s essay.

The German teachers described by Günther by and large neither intended nor saw much reason to reform American schools. They frequently were aghast at what they considered American pedagogical backwardness, but they ascribed that situation to the relatively undeveloped state of the country. Rather than seeking to introduce improvements, they turned toward their fellow countrymen and taught in German schools. Being liberals, they fully endorsed such American practices as the separation of state and church, the emphasis in the public schools on knowledge rather than faith, coeducation, and the granting of equal rights to all children. Those like Diesterweg who visited for brief periods only wrote glowing reports on the achievements of schools in a republican society and described them as examples to be imitated back home in Germany. In this case, too, the reformers’ concerns outshone any attempt at impartial reporting.

The essays by Wegner and Linton present much the same picture of Americans, seeking now to come to grips with the impact of industrialization, looking to Germany for suggestions on how the public schools might cope. Wegner’s protagonists, not unlike Bache before them, look for curricula and schools that offer manual and industrial training in the elementary schools and vocational education in continuation schools. Their reports, published in the early 1890s, would eventually be vindicated in the Smith–Hughes Act on vocational education of 1917. As Linton then points out, by that time the influence of the Munich Superintendent Kerschensteiner’s system of industrial continuation schools had served to join and harmonize conflicting interests of American educators, industrialists, and representatives of the labor movement. In this case, as Linton puts it, the German model became an institution of choice in the United States.

The question, then, of whether institutions and practices are transferable from one society to another admits of no unqualified answer. We have to remember that institutions do not transfer themselves. The key to the answer lies in the intentions and needs of those who propagate the transfer. Their needs and intentions shape the transferred and transformed institutions. Involved in every case has been a process of selection and adaptation.

The essays in Part Two focus on the person and role of the teacher involved in the transatlantic educational relationships. Jacobi’s and Allen’s essays both
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document, in different ways, the cultural tensions produced by the German tradition of teaching as a male profession and the American tendency to prefer women as teachers in schools for the young. Jacobi describes the German traditions of school teaching as an occupation for males when she writes of the German teachers of the 1848 generation. They were, by and large, liberals and freethinkers and belonged to the same circles reported on by Günther in his essay. Although they believed in bilingual education and the preservation of their native culture and language, they were at the same time intent on educating their students to become free American citizens. Eventually, these men, much like many of their English-speaking colleagues in the public schools, left their classrooms for administrative offices or positions in business. Their counterparts in parochial schooling were the Lutheran Klostere, who arrived in larger numbers a decade later. They sought to join a parochial and academic education, training teachers and pastors for the Lutheran churches.

The women teachers described by Jacobi also fall into two groups, secular and religious. When young German immigrant women decided to teach, they seem to have joined their English-speaking sisters and gone to work in the public schools. Jacobi speaks of them as “Americanized.” It is not very clear whether they were not readily hired in the German immigrant schools, or whether they preferred the public schools for reasons of their own. It is, however, the members of Catholic religious orders – Franciscans, Dominicans, and Sisters of Notre Dame – who could be considered professional teachers, making teacher training their main business, and establishing themselves as professionals working outside the traditional family setting. Their expulsion from Prussia in the 1870s established them as an important influence on women’s education in the United States. Here again, we know little of what they accomplished and to what extent their teaching constituted a German influence on American education.

The issue of German education having a significant and positive influence on women’s education in the United States is far more easily detectable in the case of the kindergarten and its champions. Allen focuses her essay on the Americanization of the kindergarten on the women teachers involved in this process, a process that was most significantly characterized by an ongoing dialogue between the two cultures. American women teachers were less drawn to the kindergarten as another classroom or playroom in which to teach and more attracted by the opportunities it offered to capitalize on their intellectual potential. Whether William Torrey Harris saw and advocated the kindergarten in the spirit of Hegelianism as a means of
synthesizing American individualism and German social responsibility, or whether G. Stanley Hall used it as a forum in which to introduce science and child study, women teachers blended in their own professional advancement in science, social work, feminism, pacifism, and women’s suffrage. As Allen points out, American women were eminently successful in making an impact on teaching and social work, thereby establishing the kindergarten as an accepted institution in American society. That happened at a time when, in Germany, the male-dominated professions held the kindergarten to be suspect and officially shunned. It also became quite apparent that by the turn of the century few new ideas concerning the kindergarten continued to come from Germany, and one-way German influences gave way to a transatlantic discourse.

Kohlstedt’s essay on the natural history museums and Olesko’s essay on the physics teachers highlight the subtle dialectic between German and American conceptions of science teaching. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans took German museums and their educational practices as their examples. By the end of the century, it appeared that American educational museum exhibits had begun to overtake their German models. Similarly, the education of physics teachers for American secondary schools had by 1900 reached a level of complexity in a German-American dialogue that, not unlike the one between the devotees of the kindergarten, replaced earlier influences that had moved from Germany to the United States.

As Olesko makes clear, throughout most of the nineteenth century, German teacher training in physics had focused on disciplinary instruction and precision measurements. In the United States, the emphasis on precision was valued less for the training it provided in exact research techniques than for the ethics of work and efficiency that it was expected to convey. When toward the end of the century the improvements in instrumentation made such measurements routine and mechanical, American teacher training began to emphasize hypotheses, observations, experiment, induction, and efficient production as objectives of physics instruction. The German model, on the other hand, continued to involve to a far larger extent mathematical and deductive approaches. This shift from precision measurement to inductive procedures in high school teaching went hand in hand with high school teachers taking a dominant role in curricular decisions and limiting the influence of the universities over the school curriculum. To the extent that university influence has been associated with the German approach, by 1910 it remained in the United States only symbolically – like the Cheshire cat’s smile, writes Olesko.
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For the most direct impact of German culture on education in America, we have to look at the schools opened by German immigrants in the United States. It is in them and in the churches with which they were often, but not necessarily, associated that German culture and the German language initially gained their most tenacious hold. Bilingualism and bicultural education found a home in the German-American schools of Philadelphia, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Louisville, and Baltimore. Roeber and Goldberg introduce us to the issues raised by these schools in their essays on German religious and educational efforts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In Part Three, Roeber describes how, in Philadelphia, Christian Helmuth (1745–1825) had fought to preserve his German Lutheran heritage in school and church. As pastor of St. Michael’s and Zion, the largest German-speaking congregation of its time in North America, he organized a parish school, a Latin academy, and the von Mosheim Society for German adult literacy education. In 1812 he published the Evangelisches Magazin to urge all German settlers, regardless of confession, to teach the German language to their children. Alas, by the mid-1920s, his efforts had come to naught.

Roeber’s account shows us that it is difficult to disentangle and ascribe degrees of responsibility to the various factors contributing to Helmuth’s failure. At heart, surely, Helmuth failed because he clung to the past and refused to adapt to the changing conditions of life in Pennsylvania. He closed his mind to the rationalist strains of thought of the Enlightenment. His dogmatic adherence to Pietist Lutheran theology and church practice ill disposed him to seek conversations and cooperation with fellow German Reformed and Lutheran groups, let alone with English-speaking Methodists and Baptists. His singleminded concern for the transmission of the German language and his firm conviction of the superiority of private over public schooling prevented him from working with German- as well as English-speaking countrymen who sought to promote public education. Last, but not least, his political views made him appear as a last-ditch defender of the old Federalism in a state with growing Republican sympathies.

Pennsylvania, the asylum of Europe’s poor, served as an early stage for the development of ethnic and religious pluralism in America. Although German settlements and congregations could be found almost anywhere in the state, the political leadership, whether Quaker, Anglican, Deist, or Republican, was firmly in the hands of English-speaking people, whose language and culture became and remained dominant. Helmuth, as spokesman for a traditional German Lutheranism harking back to the Pietists of Halle, lost touch with the majority of Pennsylvanians. His case shows that, as the
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eighteenth century drew to its close, traditional ethnic-confessional ways could neither serve as ultimate authority for human relations in a multi-cultural society nor preserve and transmit a specific confessional and linguistic heritage to even its own members.

Goldberg’s essay on Milwaukee shows us a quite different story. Though the founders of the German-English Academy, established in 1851, were strong believers in secular public education, they nonetheless created a private school because they were repelled by the strong Protestant influence over Milwaukee’s public schools. The German-English Academy was to be bilingual, and its operation was to serve as a model for the city’s public schools. Six similar schools were subsequently founded, until by the 1870s their number began to dwindle when Milwaukee’s public schools introduced German instruction into their curriculum. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the demand for bilingual instruction waned, the German-English Academy was transformed into a university preparatory school, and by the late 1920s it ceased to offer German in the elementary grades.

In Milwaukee’s German-English Academy, we observe the appearance of a bilingual private school spurred by the desire of German immigrants to offer alternatives to the existing low-quality parochial or public schools. Quite obviously, these German immigrants were dissatisfied with the state of American schooling, whether parochial or public. But they also were concerned about the preservation of German language and culture. Their intent and hope was to use their bilingual schools to offer their children the best of two worlds: an introduction to the English-language world of business of their neighbors, and a grounding in their own cultural and linguistic heritage. Milwaukee’s German-American pedagogues were also intensely concerned with promoting knowledge and spreading information about the best available knowledge on education. They introduced a school museum and a kindergarten, and in 1878 sponsored the National German-American Teachers’ Seminary. Their success spurred the opening of bilingual public schools, whose graduates appear to have furnished a disproportionately large number of high school students.

Although World War I brought the official termination of German instruction in the public schools of Milwaukee, neither the war nor its accompanying anti-German hysteria was responsible for the decline of the bilingual schools. Attitudes of the German-American population in the city had begun to change earlier. Although many German-American educators had seen in the teaching of the German language a means of preserving ethnic awareness and identity, it had become obvious that that aim had not been uppermost in the minds of most German-American parents and ed-