

A New School in West Berlin

This brief description of a new elementary school building in West Berlin will be of interest to many persons who are concerned with the physical setting for learning.

THE NEW elementary school in Wilmersdorf, West Berlin, Germany, is not at all like the old bombed-out, cold and inadequate buildings of the 1948-1949 days of the Russian Blockade when little could be done to build new schools or even to recondition the old windowless ones. But now, West Berlin has come to life, and the city is glowing with new buildings of all sorts. The beautiful and unusual Wilmersdorf school was constructed under the leadership of Dr.

Alfred Zettl, superintendent of schools in that district.

Dr. Zettl has been for many years, before and since the war, a teacher and leader in the development of more democracy in German public schools. In 1952-1953, he spent several months in the United States under sponsorship of the U. S. international program of exchange of persons, and his daughter spent her senior year in a Michigan high school, while living with an American family.

COURTESY DR. ALFRED ZETTL, BERLIN, GERMANY





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Dr. Zettl writes enthusiastically of his new school:

"In each pavilion there are three classrooms connected with each other like a triplet; a fourth part for toilets, a teachers' room, and a room for instructional materials and equipment. All of the classrooms have extensive window space on two opposite walls, which makes for excellent ventilation. In addition, each classroom ceiling is acoustically treated, and a lawn in front of the windows provides space for classes to be held out of doors in good weather.

"The furniture selected has runners, preventing injuries to students when it is moved in the room or outside. The tops of the two-place tables are made of an especially prepared wood that is ink-resistant and so can always be kept clean and bright.

"The court around which the school is built is quite like a garden, with a fountain surrounding the statue representing an old fairy tale. This emphasizes the garden style. Walks connect all the buildings and are covered with 'Eternit' tiles protecting students and teachers from rain or snow.

"Some of the apparatus in the gym can be let down or put up and thus made

LUCILE ALLARD is coordinator of pupil personnel services, Public Schools, Garden City, New York. The author worked with Dr. Zettl and other superintendents when she was in Berlin during the blockade of Berlin by the Russians. She states, "Dr. Zettl had been a teacher in one of the 'progressive' schools in Germany before the Hitler time, and was trying to do a good educational job in 1949 in spite of all the shortages and handicaps of those days."



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invisible by a kind of trap-door system. This is an all-purpose room and used for an auditorium as well as for social affairs. All of the movable apparatus can be hidden behind a curtain. When the gym is needed for sports, the 400 chairs can be put away under the stage. There are showers and dressing rooms for girls and boys, and nylon curtains of net to protect the windows.

"As separate units, but connected by covered walks, are the kindergarten and a library with attractive modern reading rooms. In front of these buildings there is a 270 by 180 foot field for all sorts of sports; total area of buildings and grounds is seven acres. Altogether the school has 18 classrooms and a kindergarten. Total cost of the buildings (lot not included) was \$420,000, or \$21,400 per classroom, which is exactly the same

amount that is needed for schools with several stories. Therefore this school is not any more expensive than one with a number of stories, but has the great advantage of being all on one floor and being quieter. The people in the school district are unanimously in favor of this type of building, and many visitors come to see and admire it daily."

German elementary schools of the past had neither libraries nor kindergartens as a part of public school units. Also a teachers' room seems to be a desirable modern addition to school building plans. Neighborhood and one-story school buildings are increasing throughout the United States; we seem almost to be taking these for granted. But this Wilmersdorf school building, 110 miles behind the Russian curtain in West Berlin, is an exciting and extraordinary achievement.

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