

spent together we have established close friendships.

As representatives of various countries give talks on their own education systems, we get a chance to compare our own with those of other countries. We rejoice in hearing of the progress they have made in their school systems; and, at the same time, when their current problems are brought out, we try to work out the solutions jointly. We are not only interested in trying to help each other in striving toward greater success in each country; but we are discussing on a world-wide basis how to promote international understanding. We are here trying to find out the best ways of extending educational opportunities for such understanding. Every-

one is trying his level best to contribute some ideas in order to reach the desired goal. Here we are having the opportunity to suggest and to discuss so that we reach a common decision. The main success of this whole seminar lies in the fact that we have understood each other and that we have established bonds of friendship.

This is one instance of the advantages of having conferences of educators of other lands. Exchange of personnel in many fields is one way to overcome the differences and misunderstandings that exist among various countries. It will contribute to a healthy international relationship which is bound to lead to international understanding and peace.

We Can Learn from Austria

E. BOYD GRAVES

A specialist in elementary education, E. Boyd Graves writes from Austria some observations he has made in the school systems there, and describes briefly some sound Austrian practices. Mr. Graves is on leave from Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

THE VIEW that educational problems in Austria may be solved by substituting American practices for European ones is, in my opinion, only partially correct. The judicious adoption of some characteristics of Austrian education would improve our own programs. Other characteristics, of course, we should eye with suspicion and discourage their development in our schools.

Customs Based on Courtesy

One favorable impression of Austrian ways occurred on my first visit to the office of a superintendent of schools.

When I entered his office, he arose from his desk in the corner and, after exchanging greetings, motioned me to be seated at a table at one side of the room. Surrounding it were three upholstered chairs and a small sofa. I noticed that the table was small and round and held a convenient ash tray. I was also aware of an informal, conversational atmosphere.

Later, when I discovered that this was standard Austrian office practice, I learned that the round table is used because it has no head or foot, and that the custom is based on courtesy. Although I have visited the offices of many Austrian officials since that time, I have

not yet faced the light and talked across a desk. The same courtesy is evident in the "Grüss Gott" chorused by pupils when a visitor enters a classroom, and it is in the tone of voice the teacher uses with his pupils.

Factual Learning Comes First

In the area of the three R's, school children in Austria are unquestionably more proficient than their American counterparts. After three or four months in school they are able to read as well as children of second-grade level in the United States. Among the many reasons that may be given for this are the phonetic nature of the German language, which greatly simplifies learning to read and spell, and the fact that parents, pupils, and teachers view scholastic achievement with uniform seriousness, so that children spend a large proportion of their time outside of school in concentrated study. This seriousness of purpose accounts for the negligible amount of truancy in Austria. It also explains in large measure the comparatively few cases of non-promotion. From careful questioning of principals and teachers, supplemented by spot surveys in approximately one hundred classrooms, it appears that retardation is well below five percent in the provinces and less than three percent in Vienna.

By U. S. standards the amount and variety of instructional supplies are woefully inadequate, but teachers are expert in the fullest utilization of what they have. Maps, charts, natural science specimens, and the like become "centers of interest" around which the teacher develops a lesson or series of lessons that may cut across many fields of knowledge. The careful manner in which such

instructional supplies are used, preserved, and stored in the school makes frequent replacement unnecessary.

Teachers take pride in the thoroughness with which they prepare detailed lesson plans, which include numerous drawings that are repeated in chalk on the small blackboard at the proper point in the discussion. They frequently have two sets of plans—one in the official plan book required by the administration and one in a personal notebook which is kept and improved upon from year to year. Drawing is a required course in teacher-education institutions, and the excellent examples I have observed on blackboards and in *Lehrpläne* testify to the quality of this instruction.

Factors in the Learning Situation

In the area of teacher-pupil relations there is often evident a warmth and sincerity suggestive of the best parent-child relationship in the home. Although this relationship has its basis in the authoritative philosophy characteristic of European school tradition and culture, it appears to give children an important element of security. The teacher's obvious eagerness to help the pupil, the readiness to stop and patiently repeat or elaborate details, the encouragement for pupils to interrupt the lesson by making a comment or asking a question, and the teacher's expression of pride when understanding occurs or a good contribution is made, lead the observer to feel that he is in the midst of a good learning situation.

Of course, the fact that the pupil spends almost the entire day on a bench participating in lessons is hardly in keeping with present knowledge of child development. But teachers in the U. S.

who schedule a portion of the school day for drills, practice, workbook exercises, and similar activities with the view to teaching skills might find a suggestion for refining their lesson techniques. The striking proficiency in the three R's in Austrian schools is achieved without workbooks, printed tests, school libraries, or varied activities. It seems to be achieved through superior teaching, plus a "cultural directive" for everyone to view such proficiency with the utmost seriousness. The teacher considers his work an art and, like the musician, strives for virtuosity through refining his techniques.

These Are Representative

Austrian education has many interesting characteristics that can be mentioned only briefly here. In the provinces many schools have followed the practice for several years of advancing the teacher with his pupils into the next grade. Professional attitude is very strong, and the teacher is generally treated with dignity and respect by the public. The use of field trips is a traditional part of the school program, beginning in the kindergartens. In the teacher-education institutions the program includes one or two weeks each year at a ski resort for winter sports. Public kindergartens and day-care centers for children from three months to fourteen years of age are a boon to working mothers. In Vienna 12,000 (fifty-five percent) of the children of working mothers are in these institutions from 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Teachers consider marks and grades one of their chief problems and ask many questions about U. S. practices. (Their system is similar to that used in the traditional U. S. school.)

Old Patterns Remain

The necessity in 1945 of re-establishing their educational programs gave to Austrian school officials the opportunity to reorganize the curriculum and to modify teaching methods along more democratic lines than had been followed during the period 1928 to 1938. The fact that they chose to return to the old pattern rather than to improve upon it is both regrettable and understandable. During the Nazi regime, Austrian educators were almost completely cut off from non-totalitarian countries and could not keep abreast of developments taking place in psychology, philosophy, and other fields affecting educational practice. In addition, the academic tradition supported by Catholicism seemed, all the more desirable after the "experimental" practices of the Nazis.

As a result, the objective of Austrian education was to return to 1937, with little thought of improving the old pattern. In fact, there is evident in 1948 the definite assumption that as far as elementary schools are concerned, the old program leaves little, if anything, to be desired. For example, administrators have not been concerned about the teacher supply in those areas having a teacher load under forty-five or fifty pupils. As soon as the basic textbooks and copybooks were made available, efforts to secure other printed materials virtually ceased. There is as yet no elementary school library in Austria and no interest on the part of teachers or administrators in developing such libraries.

The heart of the matter lies in the Austrian point of view, concerning the function of the elementary school. From the standpoint of the activities in which

pupils engage, this function is to prepare children for the secondary school (*Mittelschule*), despite the fact that this type of school enrolls only five percent of all children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The dedication of the elementary school program to the *Mittelschule* is suggestive of the traditional college preparatory program of U. S. high schools, which has only in the last ten years been modified on a wide scale to make it a better preparation for life.

The methods of instruction in elementary schools conform to the philosophy of their function. The concept of mental discipline, the emphasis upon memorization, and the assumption that

mental development at the expense of physical and emotional growth is justifiable give the background for a rigorous and somewhat formal methodology. The impressive results in terms of factual learning are the pride of teacher and parent alike.

We Can Trade Ideas

It is obvious that a fuller understanding on the part of Austrian and U. S. educators of mutual problems and practices opens the way for the continued improvement of education in both nations. This understanding is growing with an increasing exchange of information, students, and teachers.

The New Education in Japan

HELEN HEFFERNAN

The educational task in Japan today is not one of rebuilding so much as one of change. In this article we see some of the factors contributing to the present situation in education and the long-standing blockades to learning; but, most encouraging, the progress already made in changing attitudes and structures in the educational program. The author, Helen Heffernan, is in charge of elementary education in the State Department of Education, Sacramento, California.

ACTIVITIES UNPRECEDENTED in the history of the world are in progress in Japan. For the first time an army of occupation has come into an overwhelmingly defeated country, not in the spirit of the conqueror but rather to free the people from the oppression of militarism and dictatorship. The Army of Occupation is the agency of all the freedom-loving peoples of the world in removing "all obstacles to the

revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people." These liberators came to work with the Japanese to the end that "freedom of speech, of religion and thought, as well as respect for fundamental human rights" will be established throughout Japan. The slow process by which the potential for freedom and growth in every human being can be realized is now in progress.

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