

Curriculum Planning for Extended Education in Europe

A UNESCO Institute looks beyond the horizon.

PLANNING to implement new educational policies is always a test of one's beliefs about the processes of curriculum development. How does one develop a program when suddenly 80 percent (for example) of the 15-year-olds want to attend schools that enrolled only 40 percent of their brothers and sisters?

At this time a number of European countries are seeking to establish programs that will implement recently legislated extensions of the compulsory period of school attendance. Paradox of paradoxes, while America is treated to a rash of journalistic proposals to limit extended education to the intellectual elite, European countries seek to "Americanize" their offerings. The primary program which terminated schooling for 90 percent of the children at 14 years of age is being reconsidered by several governments. Some countries have already legislated a compulsory ninth grade (15-year-olds); a few have set target dates for 16-year-olds as well.

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The writer was fortunate enough to attend a conference April 25-30, 1960, in Hamburg, sponsored by the UNESCO Institute for Education. The Conference was organized to study "Implications of the Extension of Compulsory Schooling for the Curriculum and Content of Education." Educators came on invitation from Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany (the Federal Republic), Hungary, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The director of the Institute, Saul B. Robinson, is an Israeli, and the observer representing UNESCO headquarters in Paris is Canadian. Representatives of these 14 countries were participating as individuals. The fifteenth, from the Soviet Union, had sent materials but at the last minute was prevented by illness from attending.

The "Planned" Program

Perhaps the most striking feature to an American is the emphasis on *planning*, of orderly, deliberate development. This may seem an odd thing to say. Yet, as we look at many elements in American education, it is painfully apparent that, like Topsy, they "just growed." In general, both the public and the profession were gratified to see elementary education become almost universal by

World War I and secondary education achieve the same goal in the depression years before World War II. The economics of the situation made full time attendance possible—in a series of slow progressions. School districts *gradually* adopted extended attendance requirements in excess of the state laws, and gradually state laws came in line.

The result of this "natural," gradual development was to gather the children in, and *then*, to plan for them. Egalitarianism is an important ingredient in our democratic heritage. In egalitarian style, we make facile assumptions that the new school population is as "good" as the previous scholars. First we try out the traditional program on them. Only after this program fails do we seek to find out what is wrong.

Thus, the planning of programs in advance of actual need strikes the American observer almost as a happy departure. Certain factors on the European scene make this planning simpler than it would be on the western shores of the Atlantic. Whether this makes for more effective planning or more effective education is another issue.

Effect of Separate School System

One of the factors that simplified the task of the men and women assembled in Hamburg last April is the tradition of separatism in secondary education in Europe. In America our problem is vastly complicated by the need to provide for young people with great differences in their career aspirations. The writer believes that the values of the comprehensive high school justify the difficulties that are involved. In Europe, however, certain advantages in planning accrue from the separate organization. European participants in the conference, oddly

enough, could snap their fingers at tradition far more freely than we can in the United States. They were not concerned with the five or ten percent of young people chosen as the academic elite. These are the 15- and 16-year-olds for whom formal schooling has always been provided. The conference addressed itself to the fifteen's and sixteen's who currently finish the seven or eight years of their countries' primary schools without plans to enter the vocational schools for the skilled trades or the secondary schools leading to the university.¹

Since the new ninth and tenth grades are not expected to enroll future university students, they are free—more than in the United States—to develop a program with a strong functional bias. They ask what the needs of the student may be and what are the needs of the society, but the needs of academic tradition are irrelevant.

At this time, as a matter of fact, the European planners are not even limited by an organizational structure. Decisions have yet to be made as to the administrative patterns that will be set up. The ninth and tenth grades could be set up within the "secondary modern" schools that are found in England and Sweden. These schools approach the American comprehensive high school except that the academic elite have in general been siphoned off. At present they are in large part voluntary. It is likely that they attract students who are academically more able than present non-attenders. The additional grades could also be set up

¹ Except for the Soviet countries, of course, the primary school graduate is not eligible to move into the secondary school, since such decisions are made earlier (at age ten) for them. After the fourth grade, the secondary "stream" flows away, and the remaining majority continue on their way through the upper primary school grades.

within the framework of existing vocational schools.

Who Plans the Curriculum?

This emphasis on organizing a plan in advance appears to be one of the outstanding features of the curricular approach as exemplified in Hamburg. Significant, too, was the make-up of the planning group. All of the representatives came from ministries of education or professional schools of education. A publisher, a labor union representative, and a staff member of the International Labor Organization in Geneva attended as observers. Implicit in the deliberations of the conference was the assumption that curriculum decisions are a professional matter. There was no question raised about community compliance, about going to lay boards for direction or approval, about consulting parents (not even organized parents as in a State Congress of Parents and Teachers).

To the visitor from overseas, the apparent channels of communication and action were these: the legislature or executive makes a broad policy decision (extending compulsory education); the ministry of education implements the legislation or decree by developing a program; individual schools carry out instructions from the ministry. In developing the program, the ministry utilizes expert opinion from the Pedagogical Institutes and similar research agencies. It also makes a careful study of programs operated in other countries.

Planning would seem to take place from the central administrative agency out toward the schools. The centralized planning seemed to have the advantage of more careful, organized, systematic planning than is customary in the United States. It seemed to draw more systemati-

cally upon research and experience in other places. Most of the Conference participants seemed well aware of experimental programs in other countries; many had met each other at other meetings or had mutual acquaintances as a result of intervisiting. The central agencies they represented seemed to have more authority to initiate and change programs on their own judgment than is true in the United States.

The reader, of course, will recognize virtues of efficiency in such arrangements which are negated by shortcomings which Americans regard as serious. We should be more concerned with the value of lay participation in keeping schools close to the public; motivation for change which comes with broad professional participation in planning; and the contribution of multiple, as compared with monolithic, approaches to solution of curriculum problems.

One result of central planning may be the stricter stratification of function which is apparent in Europe. Research and experimentation would seem limited to the authorities in the central office. The teacher tends to his business in the classroom. From the ideal to the real is often a long step; yet the American ideal gives the teacher a role in experimentation. The teacher is represented on committees. Curriculum development is seen not as exclusively a central office function, but in George Sharp's words, curriculum development is represented as "reeducation of the teacher."

Part of the difference in point of view may stem from the different preparation of American and European teachers. The European secondary school teacher is a university graduate and recognized as a person of professional substance. The teacher of the common school program, however, remains a person of limited

background. His training falls short of university level, is limited to a counterpart of the old normal school program. One may well question whether the teacher with such training is viewed truly as a professional; the fact that he does not participate in professional research and policy formation confirms such doubts.

New Directions in Secondary Education

These animadversions on methods of curriculum development apart, the conference was for the writer intensely thought-provoking. A more detailed description of the actual transactions of the conference may be found in an article appearing in May 1961 in *Educational Forum*. Conference participants felt committed not to impose "more of the same" upon the new school population. They appeared equally immune to tradition as the only argument for a program. They could address themselves to "education for life" rather than education as a preparation for another educational institution.

Looking at promising frontiers for their prospective population, they investigated the possibilities and the limitations of work experience as a major channel for education of 15- and 16-year-olds. They exchanged experiences on the organization and conduct of vocational orientation and vocational guidance. A profound interest asserted itself in economic and civic education of adolescents. Testifying to Europe's traditional neglect of the social sciences, participants were eager to set out important objectives in education of the citizen, the producer and consumer.

Other main foci of the conference were the industrial arts ("handicrafts") and

foreign languages. Interest in languages was focused on developing skill in oral communication, not on building skill in literary analysis. A single foreign language, studied over a long period of time, was the recommendation of the group. Industrial arts were regarded from a non-vocational point of view. Consumer values, home maintenance, self-expression, recreation, even therapy were the main concerns in teaching the crafts.

The UNESCO Institute

In terms of curriculum development, the operation of the UNESCO Institute for Education is itself significant. Since Germany could not participate as a member of the United Nations, concern developed over its possible cultural isolation. The Institute was organized as one of three cultural agencies in Germany soon after the war in order to ensure continuing cultural contact with the rest of the world. The Institute has an international governing board, the American member being Karl Bigelow of Teachers College, Columbia University. Support for the agency comes largely from UNESCO, but the Federal Republic (West Germany) and the Hamburg city-state contribute funds and facilities as well. Some seven or eight seminars are conducted each year on educational topics that are of local and international concern. These run the gamut from psychological testing to teacher education. Typically countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain participate. An effort is made to bring in one person from overseas.

Prior to the seminar a prospectus is sent to participants and with it a questionnaire which asks for detailed information that is organized into a working

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paper of some weight and length. This paper assures some knowledge by participants of the situation in all countries represented. In addition, participants are invited to submit brief papers and duplicated material to be read in advance or as extracurricular concomitants of the conference. At the conference itself, long speeches and presentations are tabu. The full time is given to discussion, to searching questions and thoughtful responses. The only limiting factor is language.

The role of these seminars in curriculum development is of considerable interest. The Institute serves as a host to identify problems of broad interest, to prepare excellent materials in order to make a short meeting fruitful, to assemble persons who are knowledgeable and generally in positions of responsible leadership, to provide personnel services and facilities during the conference, to draw public attention in Hamburg and West Germany to the proceedings. While UNESCO has to concern itself with complete representation and diplomatic protocol, the Institute can proceed informally and invite participants as individuals rather than as official representatives of their governments. In this way the Institute is able to serve as a disinterested party except for its devotion to the advancement of education.

As an adjunct to curriculum development, to building of theory and to comparison of practice, this Institute with international horizons appears to be making a highly valuable contribution. Its tangential contribution to international understanding is not the less effective because it is "subliminal." The periodic meeting of educators from many countries will probably do much to stimulate increased interest in comparative education and pluralistic approaches to problems of curriculum development.

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