

Innovation in German Schools

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WHAT is going on in German education today? In every state in West Germany, the most conservative as well as the most progressive, a reexamination of the educational needs of the people in the light of a rapidly changing economic, cultural, and social order is taking place. Parents in all parts of Germany are demanding greater educational opportunities for their children. All levels of the economy are crying for better educated workers and leaders for the greatly diversified and rapidly growing industrial and technological developments.

I will not pretend that the road to change is without difficulty. Traditional status-positions are not abandoned easily. There are those who perceive philosophical and organizational changes in schools as a fate to be shunned. Opposition is relentless. Those who would preserve caste and class continue to gather their forces and make their stands. However, in examining more than a hundred newspaper clippings dating back to 1960, I could not help but be impressed by the support for the new school programs, new forms of school organization, and new forms of cooperative efforts between and among parent groups, local communities,

teacher organizations, government, business and industry, political parties, and state ministries of education. This togetherness of purpose holds the promise of giving more and more children a chance for economic, social and personal survival in the world of today and tomorrow through improved educational opportunities.

Middlepoint School

Reform in the educational offerings for children in the small rural villages has wrought the most widespread of all organizational changes in the postwar period through the establishment of the middlepoint school. One must visualize rural Germany to appreciate the situation and the logic of the concept of the middlepoint school (Mittlepunktsschule) as an agent of educational change. Rural villages in Germany are, for the most part, residential nests for the

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farmers who work the fields surrounding the villages. Sometimes two, three, five, or more villages lie within easy walking distance, or, at most, a drive of a few kilometers from each other.

Although many of the villages had no school at all (e.g., 71 in the state of Hessen), most German villages have had, historically, a one-, two-, three-, or four-room school about which they were very possessive. The individual village school, no matter how inadequate, was jealously guarded because it was a possession of the people of the village. As the tempo of economic and technological changes increased, more and more parents and teachers became aware that the "Dorfeigeneschool" (village-own-school) was not adequate to meet the educational needs of rural children. The wisdom of consolidating resources of individual villages with those of other nearby villages became increasingly clear.

A growing shortage of teachers, coupled with rising enrollments and stepped-up demands for a better chance for rural children in a changing environment, brought changes in educational law which made the middlepoint school possible. Using the state of Hessen as an example, one can make the need for school consolidation abundantly clear.

Hessen began a drive for rural school reform in 1959. Although Hessen is known for heavy industry in the area along the Rhine and the Main rivers and in the north in Kassel, it is still generally a rurally oriented state. Of the 2,705 large and small communities, 29.4 percent have populations of less than 500. As of October 5, 1967, 2,259 of these communities have taken advantage of new laws and new promises

of financial support from the state and have formed 351 consolidated or middlepoint school corporations.

Since 1957 when 36.4 percent of all of the schools in Hessen had only from one to four rooms, the number of such schools has been reduced so that they now represent less than 14 percent. By 1961, forty middlepoint schools were built and equipped with laboratories for science, libraries, gymnasiums, workshops for art, woodwork, and needlework, and a few with community swimming pools. By 1964 there were 112 such schools. On October 5, 1967 the two-hundredth such school, under the guidance of united school corporations with representatives of several communities involved in the planning, was dedicated.

These corporations or boards may serve the needs of as few as two communities or as many as 19 communities. Hessian Minister of Education Dr. Ernst Schuette predicted in his dedication speech that by 1974 the final goal of 400 middlepoint schools would be reached. All of the schools will probably provide nine or ten years of basic education for the children attending them at that time as do most middlepoint schools now. However, it is expected that many of the first 200 middlepoint schools will have been enlarged by that time into some form of unified, comprehensive school (Gesamtschule) and that the final 200 to be built will be larger, more inclusive, and even better than the first 200 middlepoint schools.

Unified Comprehensive School

The unified comprehensive school is seen by Minister Schuette and many

important educators and cultural politicians in all of the German states as the school of the future. To its lasting credit the Hessian State Association of the Union for Education and Science issued at its representative assembly in Darmstadt, Hessen, on April 2, 1965, a strong resolution in support of the integrated unified comprehensive school (Die integrierten Gesamtschule). This resolution, known as the "Darmstaedter Entschliessung," supports what is known as the Greater Hessen Plan for Schools, the plan of the Ministry of Education, and goes beyond it with its own proposal for the development of the schools and the improvement of teaching conditions.

What is a Gesamtschule? In an article published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on October 26, 1967, Brigitte Beer² said, "In the broadest sense, a school which unites several or all kinds of schools in one complex. . . ." The unified comprehensive schools can be organized on either of two patterns. One is called an "Additiven Gesamtschule," additive comprehensive school, in which all of the school types such as

the "Grundschule," "Hauptschule," "Berufs- und Berufsfachschule," "Realschule," and "Gymnasium" exist side by side with limited articulation between them. She uses the oldest "Gesamtschule" in Hessen to illustrate the type.

The second pattern is one in which the same school types exist side by side under the direction of a common administration and in which maximum possibility is provided for the student to change from type to type with relative ease to ensure the most effective educational program for him. This pattern with effective and easy articulation between school tracks is referred to as an "integrierten Gesamtschule," integrated comprehensive school. It is this second and optimal pattern to which most progress-minded German educators are striving. It is also the one against which the strongest opposition is being marshaled.

As Brigitte Beer points out, there are scarcely more than a dozen "Gesamtschule" of any type in all of West Germany and Berlin, public or private.

Real School Reform

There is, to be sure, some magic in the purposeful consolidation of schools. Consolidation has produced a conspicuous upswing in the quality of educational facilities, has increased the demand for improved instructional materials, has brought about important changes in the instructional program, and has enabled a more effective use of the available teacher resources. The changes in law, which have permitted greater participation in decision making at the local level and have brought increased financial help to the commu-

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²Schuldorf Bergstrasse was opened in 1954. The school was designed as an integrated, unified, comprehensive school and was intended to integrate all school types and to consolidate the schools of seven clustered villages. However, because the people were not really ready for the Gesamtschule or Mittelpunktschule idea at that time, it started with a three-village consolidation and an additive type of comprehensive school. Although it has increased its consolidation to include all the villages in the original plan and the articulation between school types has improved throughout its long history, it is still not a truly integrated comprehensive school. Schuldorf Bergstrasse opened the door to the concept of the "educational park." It was the first in Germany or, for that matter, in Western Europe.

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nities willing to join forces with other communities to establish a middlepoint school, have had some magical effects.

The new openness to experience on the part of German educational leaders has taken them into other countries of the world to seek new approaches to the solution of growing educational problems. There is promise in the dialogue which now exists between educators in Germany and educators in such countries as Sweden, Denmark, England, and the United States concerning the development of the unified, comprehensive school. The movement to bring the various types of elementary, intermediate, secondary, vocational, and special schools together in one singly

administered school complex or park to form a unified comprehensive school (Integrierten Gesamtschule) is removing traditional barriers. However, the greatest magic is to be found in the concepts of "perviousness" and "differentiation."

After considerable thought, the word perviousness was chosen as a translation of the German word "Durchlässigkeit." In this country we would normally use the word articulation when we speak of the fluid movement from one level of education to another or between types of educational programs. Literally translated, "Durchlassen" means to let through, transmit, or filter.

Historically, and unfortunately, in too many places in Germany today,



A view from the open-air theater of two of the twenty-four buildings of School Village Bergstrasse. This school was the first school in Hessen to unify all school types from kindergarten through secondary and vocational schools into one unified comprehensive school complex. It serves the villages of Bickenbach, Seeheim, Jugenheim, Malchen, Ober-Beerbach, Stettbach, and Balkhausen.

children are sorted out at the end of the fourth grade and set on educational tracks which determine their vocational and social-status destinies for life. In the developing concept of the integrated "Gesamtschule," perviousness is the key word. Easy mobility from one type of school to another existing side by side in a common complex is foreseen as a key need for appropriate educational programming for the individual learner.

Common learning experiences in core classes for all children under the guidance of teachers who serve several of the school types in the same complex are a growing reality and increase perviousness or permeability. The recurring newspaper and magazine headline "Gesamtschule—Schule der Zukunft" (Comprehensive School—School of the Future) is no longer a question, but a realistic prediction. There is a growing force behind the comprehensive school movement based on the growing needs of the nation and the growing demands of the people to provide an equal chance for all children through providing equalizing educational opportunity.

The middlepoint school reality is a triumph over constricting traditionalism. It is providing the transition between the old and inadequate school and the new and more adequate school. The opportunity for real differentiation within the educational program has increased the potential for meeting the needs of the individual learner.

Early in the postwar period some states extended the period of common schooling from four to six years. During the fifth and sixth school years all children were carefully observed by teachers of the elementary and inter-

mediate schools to determine the kind of educational program best suited to meet their individual needs. In present educational parlance in Germany this is referred to as "die Foerderstufe" (the transitional step). Not only can it be seen as a transitional step for the individual but it is proving to be a transitional step leading to the formation of the integrated intermediate step (grades 7-10) and to the highest levels of pre-university and pre-technical education. Differentiation in terms of internal changes in educational programs implies an ever-increasing number of electives, more core courses, increased opportunity to develop individual talents, skills, and aptitudes. It implies fluidity of movement and flexibility in program which will serve to diminish social and economic stratification.

Perviousness and differentiation within the educational programs of Germany are providing the real school reform. Opposition from certain political, religious, and academic groups to schools which provide this permeability and true differentiation will not die easily. However, more and more people are thinking as Hessian Minister of Education Ernst Schuette did when he wrote ". . . The school of today must change with the changing situation. The manifold demands of the modern work and vocational world require a multiplicity of educational possibilities—or, said in another way: A differentiated society requires a differentiated system of schools."³ ❁

³Ernst Schuette (unter Mitarbeit von Hanna Schlette). *Der Hessische Kultursminister. Schule in Unserer Zeit: Bildungs Wege in Hessen.* Statement translated by Kenneth A. Bateman. Offenbach am Main, Germany: Verlag Bintz-Dohany, 1965. p. 8.

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