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A Look at Education in Scotland

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STUDYING an educational system in another country, particularly when it is the country of one's birth, is an enlightening experience. It enlightens first in the differences and similarities of educational programs when compared with ours; and further enlightens when one realizes that educational programs cannot be compared effectively between countries. Nevertheless, one cannot help making comparisons; so the writer will try to describe the program in Scotland.

Schooling in Scotland begins at approximately age four and continues through the university—all free, if one qualifies. The primary school is for children ages four through eleven or twelve. The grades equivalent to our K-3 are designated the infants' department, and the remaining grades are the primary department. The infants' department has an infants' mistress in charge, and a headmaster has the overall responsibility for the school.

Secondary education begins at age twelve and continues through age eighteen. Education is compulsory to age fifteen, at which time most Scottish children leave school. Those who stay in school beyond fifteen are chosen on the basis of academic ability either by test prior to leaving primary school or by similar criteria.

Those who complete secondary school are eligible to compete for places at the university. Only a small portion of secondary school graduates get university places. University education is a three-year course beyond the secondary school leading to the M. A., the first academic degree in Scotland.

Curriculum

The curriculum in the primary school is very much like the curriculum in most of our elementary schools. That is, the same subjects are taught and the same concern for the individual child is beginning to be evidenced. This is particularly true at the infants' level.

The following quote from a publication of the Aberdeen schools gives evidence

of this trend. Aberdeen, as well as Glasgow and Edinburgh, has a very forward looking school system by our standards.

The time spent by the child in the primary school is no longer seen as a time spent in preparation for secondary education. It must be remembered that only in recent years has secondary education been enjoyed by all children. Previously the only preparation for adult life had to be made in the primary school—or elementary school as it was called. Since the early attempts at secondary education were little more than the housing in another building of children who had reached the age of twelve, it was not unreasonable to regard primary education as a preparation for secondary education.

Furthermore, our knowledge of children has grown. No longer is it possible to think of the child as an adult in miniature. His behavior and his modes of thinking are not to be judged by adult standards. They are different, and the differences must not only be tolerated; they must be freely accepted. Far from being a period of preparation for secondary education, the primary school must have its own distinctive aims. Mathematics and science, for example, are not included in the primary school curriculum as preparation for work at the secondary stage. In the world of today, no educational course which is designed to help the child form concepts could ignore these two activities of the human spirit. But the child has still to become literate. The basic skills are no less important than they ever were.

Education is no longer seen as being the exclusive concern of the school. Home and school are complementary educational agencies and parents must be helped to understand the work of the schools. The teacher for her part must be aware of the conditions in the homes of the children and a knowledge of family relationships will enable her to help the children who are having difficulties in adjustment.

Social education is of great importance. . . . The school is a community and, if it is to be a happy and healthy one, the members—adults and children—must accept certain modes of behavior. The rules that enable a community to maintain civilized living should be understandable and understood. Time given to training of this kind is not time taken from education. Social training is a vital part of education and must receive adequate attention. Although conditions in and out of school are changing rapidly, the old values have not changed. Consideration for others and all that this involves is as necessary today as ever. In a changing world greater emphasis must be laid on the unchanging values.¹

The last two levels of the primary school have tended to be extremely formal in curriculum and instruction. This was brought about as a result of all children being required to take the secondary school examination at age eleven or twelve. Because of this the teacher felt that he must see that all children get the same material so that they would have an equal chance on the examination. Since this examination is no longer required, one can expect to see changes in these levels also.

The Scottish Education Department (the national office which administers educational policy) is encouraging a trend toward flexibility in curriculum development and instructional practices. It is encouraging individual schools and teachers to take a leading role in developing programs in their schools appropriate

¹ Corporation of Aberdeen, Education Committee. *Primary Education*, 1966.

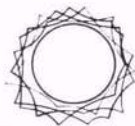
to the needs of the children they serve. This approach is foreign to Scottish teachers because they have been accustomed to curriculum and instructional methods being handed down from above, so progress toward more permissive program development will be slow.

The formality of instruction and discipline—the learning for learning's sake—is still very much in evidence in the secondary school, particularly in the last three years. It is difficult for Scottish secondary teachers, just as it is difficult for some of ours, to have more of a concern for the individual child than the subject they teach.

Some Observations

All Scottish school people, whether they were university professors, headmasters, teachers, or in the Scottish Education Department, received this foreign visitor very graciously and were anxious to explain their programs and show their schools. With several notable exceptions, few were interested in how we do things in the United States or what our schools are like. This is understandable when one knows the Scots; we only misunderstand when we do not know the people with whom we are dealing.

We in the United States seem always to be interested in the foreign visitor's country and schools. In many European countries this is not the case. We need to understand more clearly the social, economic, and geographic conditions which make countries like Scotland and France so fiercely nationalistic.



In the expanding education revolution has someone been forgotten?

"Despite the obvious need, little attention has been given to the young gifted child at the point of school entry or during the early primary years. . . ."

"The planning of curriculum experiences for the child at the earliest school levels is one of the most important efforts to be made in education."

The above quotation is from the author's preface of *Curriculum Enrichment for the Gifted in the Primary Grades* by Ruth A. Martinson of California State College, Dominguez Hills. The book offers numerous specific curriculum suggestions for individualizing instruction of, or within, existing class-room structure. Suggestions and forms for program evaluation provide the teacher with an aid in planning effective future curricula.

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The Scots live in relative isolation from the rest of the world by the very nature of the geographic location of their country, and some parts of the country are more isolated than others. Many foreign visitors know Edinburgh and Glasgow and little else about this neat and beautiful land. Their economic and educational programs have made it virtually impossible for more than a few Scots to reach educational levels that many people in our country reach.

Most of the Scots are solid working class people who rarely leave the boundaries of Scotland (250 miles by 100 miles with a population of five million people). It is natural for them to be concerned with developing an educational program which will meet their own national needs. They have neither the population, the geographic area, nor the economic resources to be concerned with or need an educational program or facilities on a scale such as ours. And to hear about ours apparently makes them feel inferior.

The Scots have a long and noble history as a people. They are today more proud of their Scots ancestry and history than they are of their British ancestry and history. Scotland was one of the first countries in the world to have free public education for all; of this, too, they are justly proud. This all goes to produce a fierce nationalism which they do not want contaminated from the outside, whether it be from the United States or England. Scottish history occupies a major share of the social studies program in the schools.

The last two major world wars, the decline of the British Empire, the rising cost of labor at home and abroad (many items for daily life are imported), and many other minor considerations, both national and foreign but similar in effect, have restricted British economic development, at times drastically, even before the recent devaluation of the pound, and have restricted the potential growth and development of many aspects of the Scottish economy.

The educational development is one of the aspects affected because money has not been made available for salaries, equipment, supplies, or buildings. Therefore, they have not been able to extend their program to more of the population, as they would have liked to do. They have had to restrict their growth by keeping such devices as the examination at the end of the primary school, which really had the effect of denying full secondary education to many able and deserving students.

The new direction of leadership in the Scottish Education Department is toward more flexibility in all aspects of education as well as expansion of educational opportunity to more people. This is evidenced by the raising of the school-leaving age in 1969 to sixteen. One can only speculate what effect the recent devaluation of the British pound will have on these hoped-for expansions. ❧



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