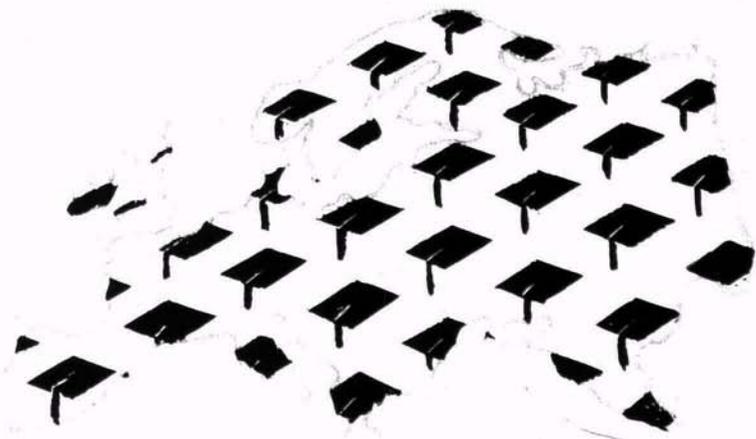


# Educational Change in Europe



BRIAN HOLMES \*

**E**VEN before World War II many educationists were disturbed with some aspects of educational provision in Europe. Primary schools for all had been established, but secondary education was restricted to a relatively small proportion of children, many of whom came from upper and middle class families. The school systems of Europe were in fact closely linked with the social class structure of the countries they served. Reformers wanted to provide secondary education for all and greater equality of opportunity.

These hopes gained wider acceptance during the war. European ministers of education in exile worked out policies for the post-war world. In England the 1944 Education Act was a landmark in the evolution of English education. During the war a commission was set up in Algiers to study the reform of French education. One outcome was a report (1947) known as the Langevan-Wallon Report, which has been the basis of French reform policies ever since. In Sweden, a country not involved in the war, major research programs were initiated in the 1940's. The outcome of this research was a period of experimentation in the 1950's, and a radical reform of the Swedish school system in the 1960's. During the last two decades major educational legislation has been enacted in many European countries, for example, The Netherlands, Austria, France, and Denmark, expressing new goals for education.

Details of policy differ from one country

to another, but the reformers have shared certain important aspirations. In the first place, they have wished to extend educational opportunities to all young people by extending the age of compulsory attendance, so that in England the school leaving age was raised to 15 and will soon be raised to 16. In France the 1959 reforms extended compulsory education, for those about to enter school, to the age of 16; while in other countries at least nine years of schooling are now regarded as essential. This is part of a movement toward the achievement of lifelong education.

The next hope was that children would be given greater access to secondary education, and the opportunities to go to the best schools would not be closely related to parental wealth and social position. Equal access to secondary education reflects one of the highest hopes of Europeans since World War II. The claims were on the grounds of social justice and egalitarianism within welfare states. These trends have involved policies designed to change the traditional methods of selection, and, for the most part, fees to secondary schools have been abolished.

Higher education, too, has expanded. The Robbins Committee, an important group in England, recommended expansion and development of more universities. Enrollments in the universities of Europe have risen

\* Brian Holmes, *Reader in Comparative Education*. University of London Institute of Education. London. England

sharply, sometimes contributing, when facilities have not expanded at the same rate, to student unrest. Nevertheless, at all stages of education more students have been drawn in from a wider range of social classes. A consequential hope entertained by the reformers of education has been that secondary and higher education would meet the needs and abilities not only of a small and elite group destined for university studies and subsequently the professions, but also of the majority of children.

Two closely related movements may be mentioned in this connection. One has been to create comprehensive schools, meeting the educational needs of all children from a particular community. Legislation in Sweden and Norway created in the 1960's nine-year comprehensive schools, followed by academic secondary schools at a higher level. In England a variety of models have been established. In London a number of comprehensive schools enroll all children of all abilities from the age of 11, and provide them with an education up to the age of 18 or 19 if they wish to stay on beyond the age of compulsory education. This has been only one of several developments in this field of secondary school reorganization.

French policy has been to postpone selection of children at the age of 11 for one of several very different kinds of second-stage schooling by introducing a period of orientation and guidance after children leave primary school. In 1959 a two-year period was proposed which has been extended to four years, so that French reformers hope in the near future that all children will go to the same kind of secondary school from the age of 11 to about 15 or 16. In other countries similar policies of postponing selection and differentiation have been followed, in the hope that the interests and abilities of children will have matured before their educational future is decided.

### **Achievement of Aspirations**

Reformers have intended to democratize the system of education by bringing young people together in the same educational en-

vironment, so that their social education might be improved. Where these policies have succeeded, immediate pressure has been brought to bear on the curriculum. Courses of study for members of an elite, with clear goals, are not necessarily suitable for all children. Emphasis on classical languages in Europe, though still strong in some countries, has been changed in several of them. Modern foreign languages have received more attention.

Attempts have also been made to raise the prestige of science and technology, and to give them greater support. The introduction of social studies into the curriculum in both England and Sweden has received considerable attention. Nevertheless, curriculum reform has been rather slow, and ways of meeting future manpower needs and providing children with enriching socializing experiences in accordance with their needs and interests have not been easy to reconcile.

The achievement of some aspirations has been checked by the explosion of population. In the late 'forties and early 'fifties efforts had to be made to find places for a vastly greater number of children of primary school age. Then this post-war boom passed into the second stage. Now higher education is receiving the pressure of an increased demand for places. Everywhere in Europe there have been more applicants than places in the universities. In England and in France new technological institutions have been created to meet manpower needs. Many educationists have hoped to break down the barriers between the training of teachers for elementary schools and the education of teachers for the academic secondary schools. Within the field of teacher education, policies of unification have been pressed at a time when more and more teachers are needed.

In European countries with communist governments, the same processes of expansion and democratization have been followed. The Soviet model of a 10-year common school for all has been taken as an example, though not necessarily followed, in most of the Eastern European countries.

In Western Europe, each country has followed its own policies of reform, but there

has been a growing recognition of common interests and the unity of educational and cultural institutions. The Common Market countries have set up International Schools, attended by children of bureaucrats and technocrats working within the European Community. International schools bringing together children from different countries exist in France, Germany, Switzerland, and other nations. These experiments in international living represent a commitment on the part of many Europeans to reduce the political tensions which have existed in Europe for many centuries. These schools hope to build a European spirit which not only will facilitate economic and political collaboration but, in addition, will establish a greater measure of understanding among the peoples of the European nations. The movement of such people in search of both work and pleasure has increased enormously. Tourism is a major industry, and many workers, for example, now leave their own countries to find opportunities in the thriving industries of Sweden, The Netherlands, and West Germany.

Europeanism has not prevented educationists from looking outward to the world. It should be noted that although colonialism is virtually a thing of the past, the European nations still make major contributions, either as a result of bilateral agreements or through international collaboration, to the developing countries. Regional organizations, such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Western European Union, while concerned principally with European problems, have nevertheless taken an interest in the developing countries. Many technical assistance programs are provided by the nations of Europe, and among them are included educational activities. The English language is taught in a great many countries of the world,

as is French; and the influence of these two countries persists in Africa and Asia.

Thus within each country groups of people are pressing to humanize education and to make it more democratic. Work is done to modify courses, textbooks, and syllabi which impair international understanding. The Scandinavian countries collaborate to ensure that school material will in a positive manner promote understanding between the nations of this part of Europe. Important centers in West Germany scrutinize history books with the intention of removing material which will give rise to undesirable national prejudices. Schools such as Odenwaldschule in Oberhambach, The Berlin-Kennedy School, and the Berlin-Gatow Experimental School in Germany, and many others are experimenting in the development of international understanding. They promote bilingualism and a world outlook.

Attempts are also being made to establish equivalence among national examinations. New examinations are also being developed to meet regional needs. Again, attempts to internationalize the teaching profession are evident. In international schools are found teachers of many nationalities. There is also a World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Professions (WCOTP) which undoubtedly is developing international attitudes among teachers. Increasingly, both outside and inside the schools of Europe, attention is paid to the work of world and regional international agencies.

In these ways many Europeans are attempting in their schools to improve their own systems, to develop a sense of European community, and to encourage the younger generation to look out into the world, understand it better, and help to promote greater fellowship among peoples of the world. □



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