

EUROPEAN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENTS AT THE SECOND LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Summarized by R. BETTS,
from a Report by URSULA SPRINGER, (New York)

In industrialized countries secondary education is now considered necessary for all young people. Institutions and curricula have therefore begun to change. Attention to the problems of total curricular design is occupying educators. This study project, initiated by the Comparative Education Society in Europe and financed by the Ford Foundation, is based entirely on original data and documents from the countries included, elicited through a uniform approach. The COUNTRIES included are Belgium, Czechoslovakia, England, France, West Germany (the German Federal Republic, represented by West Berlin and North Rhine Westphalia), East Germany (G.D.R.), Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the U.S.S.R. The TOPICAL DIMENSION extends to the aims, procedures and programs of curricular planning. SOURCES are primarily the official curricular programs. INTERVIEWS have taken place at both official and research level. QUESTIONNAIRES have been deployed on a uniform level of depth, dimension and relevance. The METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF RESEARCH for each of the countries were as follows: *descriptive data* were compiled concerning present school structure, the authorities involved in curriculum planning, official policy declarations, the general aims of curriculum programs and subject time allotment; *interpretive elements* were concerned with factors influencing curriculum design and specialized features; *programs of study* were analysed for objectives and contents. Synthesis was achieved through schematic comparisons, illuminating particular points of interest, especially by the use of charts. Conclusions were drawn both at national and international level.

Certain substantive methodological problems were encountered. They arose from linguistic and structural differences, the imbalance in the specificity of the curricular programs and difficulties in the assessment of relationships between socio-economic factors to precise procedural analyses and in the verification of facts. No attempt has been made to establish the exact state of curriculum implementation.

BACKGROUND OF REFORMS

In the past twenty years economic, technological, scientific and political developments have stimulated educational change. Initiative for reforms has come from government officials, politicians, industrialists, trade unionists, scientists, academics (especially educational research experts), teachers and students. Research data produced by social scientists and studies published by international organizations have played an increasingly significant role.

There is a growing interest, in many countries, in broadening their perspectives by examining the experience of other countries. The prevalence of common motivation has increased the general similarity of goals. Main issues appear to be first, the improvement of education for non-academic children through the extension of the compulsory period and of post-compulsory opportunities, also through comprehensivization (which is associated with increased emphasis on differentiation according to ability and interests and with co-ordination of curricular programs at upper secondary level), and secondly, the modernization and improvement of all educational programs and practices. Technological education and orientation are also widely discussed though not generally further applied.

STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Patterns and Functions of the Different Levels

In all the countries the span of years allotted to public schooling below higher education is usually divided into two consecutive phases. The lower phase in half the countries is long. It includes all the years of compulsory education, including the primary school. The term 'basic school' is used to denote the entire course of basic education, which provides common schooling. Diversification of tracks begins late. In the others the lower of the two consecutive phases is shorter. The period of compulsory education overlaps into the second phase. Diversification of tracks begins earlier, and the demarcation between primary and secondary education generally remains. Structural changes, designed to elicit expanded enrolments, have in fact diminished the distinctions between the upper and lower levels of secondary education in all the countries in the past twenty years. The changes are at present most pronounced at the lower level, which in most countries now begins with several years of common schooling. Sharp differences, which have obvious consequences for the curricular program, mark the transition to the upper differentiated phase. Secondary schools of an academic type still operate in the majority of countries, but the character of these schools has been altered by the addition of varying amounts of polytechnical education. Economic and social considerations have given impetus to new developments in technical and pre-professional instruction. Secondary technical schools have increasingly adopted a more general curriculum and established higher academic standards which enable their students to achieve university admission. Vocational schools, still somewhat deficient in prestige, are also adopting more general curricula and provide opportunities for transfer even to higher level secondary schools. Terminal post-primary education and apprenticeship training are dying out.

Trends and Types of Differentiation

Curricular revisions at the secondary stage have occurred in Western countries through comprehensivization and in the socialist countries from a

desire to modify the uniformity of existing curricula. In both, the objectives have been to provide more opportunity for the development of individual abilities and interests and at the same time to strengthen the substance and effectiveness of teaching. Four major types of differentiation exist :

1. *Grouping or streaming by ability (or achievement)* : The advantages this offers for easier teaching and easier adaptation of programs lie behind its adoption in England (even in comprehensive schools) and in the West German Hauptschule, even though the subjective nature of teachers' evaluations creates scepticism.
2. *Tracking or streaming by choices of program* : This involves the selection either of a type of school or of a track or stream within a school. The range of concentrations (on foreign languages or mathematics, science, technical education, etc.) has recently been expanded, especially in France, West Germany and England, and the decisions needed have been postponed to the upper secondary level.
3. *Choosing among required (compulsory) electives* : For the major portions of their program pupils follow the same curriculum but they are required to select supplementary instruction in certain subjects (e.g. mathematics) or extra subjects (e.g. Latin). This system, more flexible than 1 or 2, has been introduced in recent years in most of the countries under consideration.
4. *Choosing of optional supplementary electives* : Pupils have the choice of taking one, several or none from a group of elective subjects which comprise major subjects (e.g. Latin), practical skills, (e.g. typing), cultural subjects and sports. All the countries surveyed (except Italy in its upper secondary schools) include optional electives in their programs.

The grade level at which differentiation sets in was examined. It was discovered that in autumn 1969 fifty per cent of the countries provided fully identical programs in the first six years of school. The period is eight years in the socialist countries and Italy. In West Germany (except West Berlin) the period is four years. Comprehensivization in 1969 was advancing in England. Progress was slower in France and Belgium. Of the subjects employed in differentiation a foreign language appeared most frequently. At the upper level the amount of study in mathematics, science and modern or classical languages marked the differentiation.

MOTIVES AND CONSIDERATIONS GUIDING CURRICULUM REVISIONS

These are of three kinds. *National policies*, which are increasingly similar, call for the expansion of the provision for compulsory and pre-professional education, requiring novel programs for pupils who would formerly have left school; for the equalization of educational opportunities (through comprehensivization, the provision of flexible transfer and the upgrading of

technical education to university preparatory status) ; for the modernization of curricula (especially mathematics and science); and for the preparation of curricula which are more relevant (attempted in the socialist countries by polytechnical education and in the West by increased emphasis on technology and practical orientation). National, social and ideological attitudes determine the emphasis on particular policies. In all countries *pedagogical considerations* have led to the introduction or increase of elective subjects, in the West to do justice to individual differences and in the socialist countries to develop optimal individual attainments. The principle of combining theoretical studies with practical learning has been re-interpreted in the West where it has been extended even in academic programs. In the socialist countries the concept of 'production' has been broadened to include laboratory work in schools so that work in industry or agriculture has been reduced. *Co-ordination of programs* has affected the design of recent curricular revisions. Vertical co-ordination (of different school levels) has been instituted to avoid repetition, omission and inconsistency, and has resulted either in the amalgamation of the primary stage and the lower secondary level or in the adjustment of instructional programs at the primary stage. Transition from the primary stage to lower secondary level and from lower secondary to upper secondary level has been facilitated by combining teachers of different training and experience. Horizontal Co-ordination (between parallel school types) aims at the provision of common educational foundations and flexibility of transfer. Its achievement is so far limited except where both types of school (for example, the general and secondary technical schools in Czechoslovakia and Poland) take students to the same level of qualification.

PROCEDURES IN CURRICULUM PLANNING

In all the countries studied, except England, responsibility for curriculum planning rests with the Ministry of Education. A trend exists towards increased co-ordination of planning among the commissions and sub-committees to whom the task is delegated. Such commissions are becoming more diversified. *Participants in planning procedures* include, in all cases, ministerial officials, school administrators and teachers. Teacher training experts have also participated. To these have been added university professors and occasionally social scientists. Political figures have been consulted, notably in Belgium. Advice has also been sought from religious bodies, social workers, physicians and, especially for vocational and technical institutions, industrial experts. Parents' opinions were invited only in Sweden, France and West Berlin ; those of students themselves only in Sweden. *Strategy of planning procedures* also varied. Public reaction to plans was obtained through public debate in Czechoslovakia, the G.D.R. and Sweden when the plans were complete. In France, however, public debate actually shaped the finished product. Economic forecasts were given more attention when related to structure and enrolment than in curriculum planning. Relevant research

studies have been concerned with teaching methodology (the most widely undertaken), differentiation of teaching (pursued in particular detail in Sweden), the relationship between curriculum and social class (England, West Germany), and goals of curricula (East and West Germany, Sweden). The structure of curriculum programs (sequential distribution, time allotment of subjects and selection of content within subjects) has so far been neglected.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM REFORMS

This includes a series of measures undertaken to facilitate the process. *Pilot projects* have been arranged in almost all countries. New practices as well as changes in programs underwent experimentation and evaluation. Guidance experiments have taken place in Belgium, France and some West German Länder. Pilot comprehensive schools have operated in West Berlin and Hamburg. Electives at upper secondary level and a reduction in the primary stage in the Soviet Union, the polytechnical system in the G.D.R. and comprehensivization in Sweden were all introduced experimentally. *Preparation of new teaching materials*, the slow supply of which was one of the chief problems in implementing curricular programs, was usually a function of pilot classes. *Preparation of teachers* is of paramount importance for the successful implementation of reforms. In-service courses and conferences, voluntary in most countries surveyed, have tended to attract teachers who favour reforms. Support for old-style structures has been voiced by secondary teachers' organizations in France, Italy, West Germany and England. No large-scale provisions for re-training have been introduced, but in Sweden peripatetic consultants, enjoying high prestige have been recruited from the teaching profession to disseminate professional knowledge and experience. *Orientation of parents and public* has become more necessary as educational opportunities have diversified. It has previously been considerable in socialist countries, England, and those countries involved in religious problems. Educational authorities employ news media and public meetings to inform parents who have been bewildered by the new multiple school types introduced into Western Europe. Guidance provision in schools has helped to clarify the situation. *Evaluation of new programs* on a systematic basis remains a problem still widely unresolved, bases and instruments for such research having been developed only in East and West Germany, England and Sweden.

THE PRESENTATION OF CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

Programs which are written to inform teachers about the content, objectives and recommended approaches of instruction in their subjects reveal interesting differences in *format and composition*. The socialist countries tend to present highly elaborate programs and guidelines; those of France and Italy are brief. Some program books are arranged by subject (Belgium, West Germany, Czechoslovakia); some by school type (Italy, Poland, Sweden). In several countries all programs for all school types are combined in one publication

(as in the U.S.S.R.). The term 'syllabus' is rarely found in any of the publications. Specific guidelines regarding concepts, emphases, approaches and methods are now important, especially where subject innovation occurs. In analysis it proved difficult to distinguish between guidelines and goals for the specific units. Guidelines usually contain a combination of programmatic, didactic and pragmatic elements. The nature of the programmatic elements depends on the ideological orientation of the curriculum as a whole. In socialist countries the programmatic-ideological elements pervade the entire text. Methodological elements occupy the largest space in the guidelines of most countries. The teacher is left a certain amount of freedom and suggestions become sparser at the higher levels of academic schools. Several countries, among them the U.S.S.R., the G.D.R. and Poland, include in their plans for certain subjects the exact distribution of hours to be spent on each topic. Comparisons of time allocations for the various subjects give relevant indications of the importance accorded to the subjects.

CURRICULAR PROGRAM SCHEDULES

Comparisons are possible between the parallel school types within a country as well as among analogous school types in different countries : countries can be grouped by the number of years which are spent at the secondary stage in each case. Also the number of hours allotted weekly to the subjects for the several years can be converted into yearly averages of weekly hours per subject. Sharp differences in hours devoted to science and classical language are revealed. Italy's *liceo scientifico* devotes less than half the amount of hours to science than the comparable type of school offers in Czechoslovakia. The Italian science student still has 3.6 hours of Latin per week while his Czechoslovak counterpart has none. All the socialist countries have a high number of hours devoted to the national language. West Germany, Italy and Sweden have a low number. Surprising differences exist in time allocated for mathematics. The average number of hours of mathematics taken per week by all students in the U.S.S.R. is 5.7. This figure is higher than the average number of hours taken even by students in the mathematics tracks in all the other countries. The modern foreign languages also show considerable variation in the weekly hours allotted to them. East Germany, West Germany, Belgium and Sweden include a large number of foreign language hours on their schedules : Italy and the U.S.S.R. include much less. One subject area in which the weekly hours (on average) show relatively minor variations is that of social studies (combining geography, history and civics).

An analysis of selected subject programs is confined in this paper to two major subject areas, native language and social studies (geography, history and civics). The traditional treatment of the *national language* has emphasized grammar and style, so that self-expression in writing has been sacrificed in the interests of exercises in formal prose technique. Literature courses have tended to concentrate on chronological surveys, often foreshortened to