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March 2, 1961

Background Information

THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

A paper presented by

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INTRODUCTION

On July 8, 1960, the second European school-leaving certificate examination (1) was held at the European School at Luxembourg. Thirty-two candidates presented themselves for examination by a body of examiners consisting of two representatives from each of the six countries of the European Community, presided over by a University teacher. Twenty-six candidates passed the tests, and the gold medal was awarded to an Italian girl who had made an average of 90, highest in the class.

In 1959, 23 out of the 24 candidates passed the first European school-leaving certificate examination. They have taken up their studies at 17 universities in the six countries and in Austria, where the European certificate is also recognized. The first results obtained in University examinations by former pupils of the European School are on the whole very satisfactory and in some cases even brilliant.

The bold common educational experiment undertaken in Luxembourg in October 1953 has proved a complete success.

Today, it provides suitable primary and secondary education for children of all nationalities, especially from the Europe of the Six. Studies are based on a harmonized syllabus to fit fundamental requirements of each country and to enable the student to embark on a successful course of higher education in any university.

This result is the more remarkable when it is remembered how individual education is in each country and how difficult - indeed impossible - it has long been to bring the systems and methods of the various countries closer together.

Exceptional circumstances were undoubtedly required to bring this result about.

THE ORIGIN OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL

The origin of the European School is linked with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in Luxembourg in August 1952. The officials of the ECSC, appointed in increasing number from the six countries, were soon faced with the problem of the education of their children. Luxembourg has nothing to offer but its national schools and "lycées" which, while they are perfectly attuned to the spirit and the languages of their country, are founded upon curricula and methods very different from those to which these children were accustomed

(1) This examination has no direct equivalent in the United States but may be compared with the secondary-school diploma.

in their own countries. The families were faced with the choice of either leaving their children behind in their home country or placing them in schools about which they felt some misgivings. The Government of Luxembourg showed considerable understanding in this delicate matter and at the request of the ECSC agreed that a "private" primary school, devised and run by a parents' association, could be opened in October 1953.

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THE PRIMARY COURSE

The private primary school opened with 72 pupils and six teachers, each of whom came from a different country. From the first year, the school provided joint lessons for children of different nationalities and languages in order to bring them together and to impart to them the rudiments of a second language. In the course of time these lessons - known as "European lessons" - became one of the characteristic features of the school. Each day during the last two hours of the morning, the children all take singing, handicrafts, gymnastics, and the first elements of the second language.

This second language - known as the working language - plays a special role in secondary education, because the students must master it sufficiently to be able to take their instruction in it.

All the 14 children who took the examination at the end of the first year were successful. This encouraged the parents to ask for the introduction of secondary education. The necessary steps were taken, and as a result the European School was established.

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THE SECONDARY COURSE

The establishment of a secondary course involved special responsibility. A parents' association alone could not shoulder it. The European Coal and Steel Community, whose objectives are clearly defined by Treaty, could provide moral support and financial assistance, but it had no powers in the educational field. The Common Assembly could give its political backing, but it was obviously up to the governments to assume the fundamental responsibilities. These related mainly to establishment of a syllabus, directives, the provision of teachers, the supervision of studies, and the issue of certificates.

The Directors-General of Secondary Education and those responsible for cultural relations in the six countries were invited by the High Authority to hold a first meeting in Luxembourg in June 1954. There they agreed to open the first two classes of the secondary course in October of that year.

At this meeting, which lasted two days, these senior government officials reached agreement on a harmonized syllabus, qualifications to be required of teachers and to take on the responsibility for inspection of the teaching. As the Board of Governors these officials had the task of guiding and observing the experiment until the end of the course, which was to be gradually extended up to university entrance level. These delegates settled on methods to combine the syllabuses which differ so greatly from country to country and to devise a system of teaching which would meet the minimum requirements of each and lead to the issue of a certificate showing the successful completion of a secondary education.

During 1955, the syllabuses were planned to the end of the course - a difficult task. By comparing the syllabuses in the various countries it was possible to find where they coincided and where they differed. Major concessions were made

by all - with regard to the classical languages, mathematics, philosophy, modern languages, natural sciences, history and geography - in order to work out a syllabus which, while balanced, is a heavy one, since it involves 33 to 36 lessons per week.

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THE LEGAL STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL

Meanwhile, the school was developing rapidly. Despite the increasing part taken on by the governments, it still remained a "private" school run by the parents' association. It became necessary to find a solution if the school hoped to receive official recognition and accreditation.

The governments decided in favor of a European solution, which was to establish jointly the first official intergovernmental school. A convention was signed in Luxembourg on April 12, 1957, on the "Charter of the European School". Its annex on the "European School-Leaving Certificate" was signed on July 15, 1957.

The European School in Luxembourg entered the 1960-61 school year with 910 pupils at the same time, the need for new schools of the same type had arisen at the seat of the new European Communities in Brussels and at the nuclear research centers of Euratom. Established in September 1958, the European School of Brussels ended its second year with 545 pupils and began its third with 850. Last September two new schools were founded, one at Mol, Belgium, and one at Ispra-Varese, Italy.

Thus the private initiative taken in 1953 had led to fertile cooperation between the six countries. These schools are a new manifestation of cultural relations between European countries since each of them contributes its national character and, by common experience, benefits from the cultural values of the others.

THE PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION

The principles underlying instruction at the European Schools are set out in Article 4 of the Charter of the European Schools.

1. The fundamental principle is that basic instruction shall be given in the child's native language - German, French, Italian or Dutch, official languages of the Community. Consequently, basic instruction is given in each of these languages throughout the course of study.

Basic instruction covers those subjects which lend themselves with difficulty to teaching in a second language - for example the mother tongue, Latin, Greek, mathematics and philosophy.

2. But the schedules and the syllabus are uniform for each of the four language sections and are approved by the Board of Governors.

3. Certain subjects are taught jointly to classes of the same level "in order to promote the unity of the school and closer cultural contact between pupils of the various language sections". These subjects are taught in the so-called "working language", or second language, which each pupil must acquire in addition to this mother tongue. Two of the four languages have been chosen for this purpose - German and French. This means that in practice French-speaking pupils must take German as their second language and German-speaking pupils must take French. Those whose mother tongue is Italian or Dutch can choose between French and German as their working language.

4. The European School, however, wishes to go even further, and its Charter requires that a special effort be made to provide a thorough knowledge of living languages. For this reason English has been made a further compulsory language from the third year of the secondary course.

5. The Charter of the school unequivocally lays down the further principle that "in education and instruction the conscience and the conviction of the individual shall be respected". On this point the governments have agreed that religious or moral instruction shall be an obligatory part of the curriculum and that the ministers of religion shall be accorded every facility to give their instruction in the most favorable conditions;

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ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES

The European School comprises the kindergarten, a five-year course of primary and a seven-year course of secondary instruction. Despite difference of opinion, the Board of Governors has decided on a 12-year course and not on the 14-years which are the rule in some of the countries.

The primary section has only five years; because the first year of the secondary is regarded as a year of transition. Instruction is given during this year by teachers of the secondary stage, but it does not include, for instance, Latin. It is a year devoted mainly to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the mother tongue and of arithmetic, and to intensive instruction in the second language (seven lessons per week) which is used for instruction after the first year in the secondary section.

The secondary instruction in itself consists of a "common course" and four years of specialization. During the last two years of this common course, the study of Latin is compulsory for all pupils. After completion of the common course, students choose three specialized courses: classics; Latin, mathematics and science; modern studies, mathematics and science.

The experiment with the common course has been a very positive element in the concept of the European School. It has been found to be in the interest of all pupils to follow the two-year course of Latin, and it has also been found to be easier and more appropriate to offer the children a chance of specialization not at the age of ten and a half or 11, but at about 14 years.

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CONCLUSIONS BASED ON EXPERIENCE

1. Collaboration between families of different nationalities

The school in Luxembourg was established in 1953 on the initiative of the European Coal and Steel Community's staff. In this school they hoped to give their children an education imbued with the spirit of cooperation and understanding found in their own day-to-day work.

Most of the members of the ECSC staff had not in fact had any special training for this type of collaboration. They had, however, come to Luxembourg to make their contribution to the integration of Europe, and this spirit went far beyond the mere work required for the implementation of a Treaty.

Through their administrative and social contacts, these officials have become aware of the differences in the concepts entertained by the various nationalities. Obviously, these concepts vary with the traditions of each country, and the differences are no doubt accentuated by the political nationalism which has for far too long narrowed horizons, by the lack of knowledge of foreign languages which makes contact so difficult, and by so many other historical causes.

The education which everyone receives in his own country, from the primary school up to the university, is another major cause of differences. In too many countries education has deliberately been given a nationalist slant. In far too many universities with all their traditions, the increasingly technical aspect of the material taught has pushed into the background the human and universal character which should be found in this training, and has established watertight divisions between the faculties.

This is all keenly felt by the European officials who soon came to realize that the differences in the forms of behavior and thought are only a veil behind which one can find complete identity of views on the basic principles and ideas: identity in a philosophic concept of life, i.e. the Christian concept, identity in social aspirations, and identity in the aims pursued.

It was natural that the officials from different countries who work side by side in this favorable atmosphere of mutual respect should wish their children to grow in it from the earliest age and should want them to be educated together.

2. Collaboration between governments

While the initiative for the foundation of the European School originated with the parents, the political and moral support indispensable for its achievement came first from ECSC. The Treaty setting up the ECSC obviously did not provide for this development. In other words, the international cooperation begun in such a decisive and thorough manner under the Schuman Plan has had multiple and unexpected repercussions in fields which are very different from those forming the object of the Treaty.

But the European School did not necessarily have to be conceived as an "official" school, based on a convention submitted for ratification. It could have existed as a private school, whose diplomas would have obtained some form of recognition in each country.

Thanks to the political climate and the specially favorable conditions under which the negotiations with the six governments were begun, it has been possible to fit the European Schools into the common cultural policy.

The establishment of the European school-leaving certificate which gives its holders the right to be admitted "to any university within the territory of the Contracting Parties" (the six member countries) irrespective of nationality and "with the same rights as nationals with equivalent diplomas" (article 5 (2b) of the Statutes) is of considerable importance.

This school certificate has certainly meant a great step toward the solution of the difficult problem of the equal standing of diplomas.

It will doubtless be possible to invoke it as a precedent, since, in a concrete case, it has found a practical solution to numerous problems of principle.

In establishing syllabuses for the European School which would correspond to the minimum requirements of each country, government officials have achieved great success. It may be the prelude to a general approximation of studies and teaching methods in the six countries.

In this respect the inspection of the European School, which is carried out by a panel of inspectors from the six countries, may have favorable consequences repercussions.

Another important point is the practical necessity for the European Schools publish their own textbooks. Existing books no longer fit the joint syllabuses. task will doubtless be a long one and will need to be undertaken with care and dence by the teachers of the European School. Planning will have to be from a inite international angle. The diffusion of these textbooks in the six countries result in fruitful contacts and be the prelude to further developments.

If this is done, the European School will be a "pedagogical laboratory" for governments who have taken the bold step of setting it up -an experiment from

which all those who are engaged in education and teaching will be able to derive ideas and which will benefit boys and girls in all parts of Europe.

3. Collaboration between members of the teaching staff

The final success of the European Schools will largely depend on the teaching staff supplied by the governments.

When they arrive at the European School, teachers must be able to set aside their personal notions of teaching. They must be able to re-think their teaching method based on the syllabuses and attitudes of their own country and relate it to a different syllabus and a European spirit.

An open mind, much tact, understanding, and tolerance are indispensable for this. Every day they rub shoulders with colleagues of other nationalities; often they have, for the first time, pupils of different origins; they themselves must resolve language difficulties. The preparation of lessons calls for a great personal effort since textbooks are lacking, and the teachers must have the courage to compare their methods with those of their colleagues without preconceived ideas.

The experience of numerous contacts and many teachers' conferences must in the end bring out a common concept; otherwise the European School will fail in its aim. There is a genuine danger that the European School may develop into four juxtaposed schools - with subsections - according to the linguistic divisions or the nationality of the teachers.

The very rapid growth of each school, the establishment of new schools, the addition of further teachers and masters each year, the pressures of daily tasks and, finally, the tendency to be easy-going and complacent are all traps to be avoided carefully and firmly if success is to be achieved in defining and consolidating the particular type, style and character - the spirit - of the European Schools.

The European School must also enrich the teaching body. Each of its members will bear its imprint when, after a few years, he is called upon to resume his work as teacher, inspector or headmaster in his own country.

No doubt these teachers will contribute to the spread of the basic ideas on which the European School is founded, and in time wider and wider circles of teachers and pupils will benefit from the concrete contribution made by the European School to education in the international spirit.

4. Collaboration between pupils

From the beginning, the European Schools have endeavored to avoid being exclusive schools. Naturally, they were primarily intended for the children of the officials of the European Communities, but the governments have been wise enough to open them to children of the nationals of the six countries and, under certain conditions, also to children of other nationalities when places are available.

In Luxembourg, for instance, roughly one third of the pupils entered have no connection with ECSC, and among this third there is a large group who are children of foreign nationals working in the Grand Duchy.

Thus despite the selected family environment, the special attention given to the pupils, visits to the schools and classes and the spotlight of public opinion, the children have not fallen victims to a certain snobbery which represented a danger to them. Here, we should emphasize how much the parents' association has contributed to maintaining this healthy climate and leaving the teaching body free to shoulder its own responsibilities.

Students observe and comment in their way on the differences which they note in behavior, dress, games, physical and moral development according to countries of origin. It may be considered that all this constitutes an enriching factor from which the pupils profit. It is certain that these young boys and girls will retain for ever the imprint of their education in an international environment.

And we believe that the faith and hope of the founders, expressed in the document sealed into the foundation stone of the building of the European School in Luxembourg on May 15, 1956, will be vindicated. Let me quote from it:

"Sharing in the same games, grouped in common classes, boys and girls of various languages and nationalities will learn to know and value each other and to live together.

"Being brought up in contact with each other and freed at an early age from the prejudices which divide, initiated into the beauties and values of the various cultures, they will as they grow up become conscious of their solidarity. While retaining love for and pride in their country, they will become in spirit Europeans well prepared to complete and consolidate the work undertaken by their fathers to establish a prosperous and united Europe."

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