

- A reading of this article gives one some basis for comparison between education in Denmark and that in the Philippines.

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF DENMARK

In common with other countries in Europe since World War II, the educational system of Denmark has undergone developments and changes in structure and functions. This is clearly evident, even though Denmark, like England, has been regarded as a "land of tradition." Apparently, the need to modify their school system, in an era of socioeconomic transformation, was convincing to a majority of the Danish leaders and citizens.

In looking at Danish education as a unit, one is conscious of a number of salient developments and trends. A visitor from a democratic-oriented country is at once conscious of the drive toward democracy in Danish school and society. A sincere effort is made to secure for each individual, to the limits of his capacity,

the most thorough and representative type of schooling which will enable him to function happily and satisfactorily within his community and nation. Past barriers to social, economic, and educational advancement have given way to practices which facilitate mobility and flexibility.

All this appears to be to the good and in tune with the current thinking on the extension of educational opportunity. At the same time, it is not proper to overlook the possibility of contraction in some sectors on the educational front. One Danish secondary school teacher has expressed anxiety about "the intellectual elite among the pupils, whose needs have not been considered so much in the new school structure." A teacher shortage exists in Denmark, reflecting to some

extent the enrolment expansion resulting from higher birth rates and increasing educational opportunities. The Government reported in 1962 that the "shortage of teachers has been a serious problem in the Primary School for several years."

There has also been a shortage of school buildings. Even the new construction did not satisfy all the requirements for adequate space. As admitted in a recent Government report "... the need for new premises for instruction in the primary schools is still very great."

Another question which often arises in Denmark is whether centralization of school administration is desirable. In a country with a new or unestablished educational tradition, there is often less objection to centralized school planning, direction, and control. On the other hand, Denmark and the other Scandinavian nations have already proved an interest and competency in educational matters. This leads thoughtful educators to whether a highly centralized system is in-

deed necessary. They believe that a certain degree of leeway and flexibility should be granted to local authorities in the administration of school affairs. To some extent, education on the local level already enjoys freedom without losing sight of the broad national purposes. The central Ministry of Education in Copenhagen plays an overwhelming role, even if benevolent, in the determination of educational policy.

Visitors to Denmark may be surprised to learn that the school-leaving age is 14. Many Danish educators and citizens are concerned about this and have recommended the transformation of the upper elementary grades to increase their holding power for students. Materials and activities appealing to the interest and needs of the non-bookish youngsters have been added to the content of grades 8 and 9. Vigorous planning is now taking place to make grade 10 a meaningful experience to many pupils. The teaching in grades 8-10 "... must arouse the interest of the pupils and be of purpose to them, but it

must also enlarge their elementary knowledge of the subjects inside the primary school curriculum. The teachers must enlarge their intimate knowledge of the tools, the types of work, and the fields of studies necessary for further training." To make the upper grades attractive to pupils, the school authorities have obtained the cooperation of trade and industry. This has resulted in an increase in the number of students who stay beyond the school-leaving age, since they receive the type of training which makes them acceptable to employers in the office and in the factory.

One might have expected that Denmark would raise the compulsory school age to 15 years after World War II, as England did in 1947, but the Danish bill proposed in April 1955 met with little success. It is noteworthy that this bill brought about an agreement between the Social Democrats and the teachers organizations, but even this unusual concession did not effect its passage. Although this proposal was considered "an important

event in the history of Danish education," it failed not only because of the customary reluctance on the part of the agricultural party and rural interests, but because of the opposition on political grounds. As a result, the new school law of 1958 was a compromise, and the school-leaving age in Denmark remained at 14.

This is not to say that the Danes are not sufficiently articulate about the need of extended compulsory education. Many are aware that Denmark lags behind the required schooling in other Scandinavian countries and in Western Europe. Some, indeed, have expressed opinions that the upper age limit of compulsory attendance might be extended to 15 in 1970, and to 16 in 1975, and that "about 70 percent of all persons aged 17 will be in school by 1980." But to one Scandinavian educator the entire situation seems ironic: "In the land of 'free schools,' resistance to compulsion in education beyond the purely childhood years was very strong in certain quarters."

If extended education is not now compulsory, this does not mean that young Danes necessarily suffer from a shortage of school opportunities. For one thing, they may attend school voluntarily after the maximum compulsory age of 14, and many do. For another, the new offerings under the 1958 elementary school act have attracted young persons to school to develop their potentialities in occupations and semiprofessions. Thus, grades 8 and 9, and eventually grade 10, will serve as extensions of the school system, even if attendance remains voluntary. However, unless a law is enacted with a higher specific age limit, it is not likely that Denmark will achieve the goal of having 70 percent of its 17-year-olds in school by 1980.

It is well to note also the growing enrollments in secondary education, even in the gymnasium. According to one experienced educator, writing 1961, "it is expected that the number of pupils in the gymnasium will double within the next decade, both because of the high birth rate

in the 1940's and because a higher percentage of the young people desire a post-primary education."

Preceding pages point out that apart from professional schools in engineering, agriculture, and other fields, Denmark has only two universities at Copenhagen and Aarhus. It took well over four centuries to open a second Danish university, but a notably shorter time for the authorization of a third higher institution. The law of June 16, 1962, for the establishment of a Medical Faculty at Odense, was followed by a proposal to set up a complete "third university" there, and finally by the law of 1964, for establishing a fullfledged university at Odense.

One major strength in Danish education has been the success in the teaching of foreign languages. The linguistic excellence in Denmark has had a long tradition. Rasmus Rask in the 19th and Holger Pedersen in the 20th century have exerted an international influence in developing linguistic science. The name of Otto Jespersen

is also honored universally for his authoritative presentation of English grammar. The general impression of visitors is that foreign languages, especially English, present no obstacles to the Danish people. There are few countries where a foreigner who does not know the native language can feel at home as rapidly as in Denmark, because of the linguistic facility of tradesmen, employees, public functionaries, and others.

It is noteworthy that the schools of Denmark help young people to learn the Norwegian and Swedish languages and literatures in order to unify Scandinavia culturally and economically. The ability to use the Scandinavian languages makes it possible for the Danes to join the Norwegians and Swedes in international conferences and in frequent interchange of visits. This confidence of the Danes in their own linguistic flexibility and competence was one factor in the decision to introduce the study of Russian as an alternative to French on all levels of education. The

achievement of excellence in Russian studies will depend, of course, on an adequate supply of good teachers. Since the study of Russian began in 1963 on a systematic scale, it is too early to assess the results.

The policy of the Danish Government for the linguistic minorities in the country is likewise interesting. Faeroese and Greenlandic are official languages, along with Danish, in the Faeroe Islands and Greenland. South Jutland, in proximity to the border of West Germany, is a small German-speaking community. Denmark's practice is not only to allow the teaching of the minority language, but also to furnish public support for the German schools. In this respect, the Government is fulfilling its policy of providing financial aid to all private, nonprofit schools which are set up to meet particular linguistic, religious, or pedagogical needs. By thus encouraging the minority schools, the school system of Denmark differs from those of Sweden and Norway, which permit minority

schools but do not promise public aid.

By virtue of its geographical position, economic experience, and cultural tradition, Denmark has been committed for a long time to educational and intellectual cooperation with other Scandinavian peoples in coordinating their educational efforts, clearing up misunderstandings in textbooks, and exchanging persons and ideas. Denmark has also been active in the cultural projects of the United Nations, UNESCO, and other international bodies. For example, Denmark has been a founder-member of the extended program of technical aid of the United Nations since 1949, and its contribution to this program "has been for many years the largest per capita

of all member countries and still is."

In putting the 1958 education act into operation, guidelines for the teaching of history in the elementary school stressed the values of equality of peoples, the global nature of the past, and international cooperation. In 1961, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with UNESCO, inaugurated a 4-year project for a better understanding of Oriental cultures (e.g., Indonesian and Philippine) on all levels of education — elementary, secondary, and higher, including professional teacher training. Future syllabuses and textbooks will likely contain more material than heretofore on the cultures of the East. — *Prof. William W. Brickman, in Denmark's Education System and Problems.*