

Educating Little Children

In the past when kindergartens were few, the system was different. We had practically no home work. All the learning was done in school. Dr Maria Montessori's methodology was being applied in city schools and eventually in educational institutions in other urban centres by 'experts' who imbibed the method during the later part of 1950s. In reality, we ourselves acquired knowledge in kindergarten according to the individual brilliance of our teachers. No particular procedure was strictly followed.

The Montessori method in brief comprises the use of experimentally devised apparatus suited to the child's creative growth in various fields. The teacher guides mental accomplishments on one side and proper grasp of school subjects on the other. Montessori, an Italian lady with a doctorate degree, believed human beings, undergoing several sensitive periods and development during this time, under judicious guidance, can grow into an all round individual.

The first sensitive period is the one to six years of age when children have a fantastic capacity to acquire mastery over a language with all its labyrinths of grammar and pronunciation. Research and observation of how children perform this extraordinary feat just by 'living' beyond the powers of an adult have led to innovations where adults can learn a foreign language as a child acquires expertise in its mother tongue. Of course, all children do not display such

Jamal Arsalan

ability or have the opportunity. Montessori stumbled on this discovery when teaching children of lesser ability, who caught up with brighter pupils by following her method. When she worked with bright students, they excelled beyond any previous expectation!

Kindergarten is a German word meaning: a children's garden. Froebel, the founder, was an educationist holding similar ideas as Montessori's. The task of the teacher is to clear the way for natural forces to work freely. The child's own ability is stimulated and di-

rights as of their own. Such kindergartens often pay their teachers badly, and even when their terms are acceptable, the benefit does not reach the pupil. For the last two decades or more we find students being loaded with homework as in high schools.

These kindergartens should be discouraged from practices that harm the students. At present mothers have to be alert to chase their children off to school before 8 am, unfed or fed on confectionery food. Like breast-feeding, we

right direction. The mother should be free to scold or beat the child to enforce discipline.

Only when punishment, mental or physical, verges on cruelty should someone else take charge. Radio and TV programmes can popularise this aspect of education.

Up to six years of age, the child must be entertained as well: a visit to a zoo, a botanical or amusement park, a museum or a factory — whether using traditional or current technology. The time allotted must be theirs not to the adult's choosing. The children's stay must be long enough to give contentment, not disappointment.

If children have to spend their time at home on homework, they are better off studying at home. Food is no problem and they do not have to undergo the harrowing experience of transportation and the traffic rush. They can also enjoy many programmes on radio and TV designed specifically for them which they usually miss otherwise. After the age of three, children should learn not only the alphabet but numerals as well as drawing and painting. Reading a newspaper is another must. A family must keep at least one newspaper. Children learning to write or doing their sums put the date on top of the page. They can be taught to look up the day, month and year according to the Bangla and English calendars from the particular place reserved for such data in the newspaper.

The first sensitive period is the one to six years of age when children have a fantastic capacity to acquire mastery over a language with all its labyrinths of grammar and pronunciation.

reeted without interfering in any way — a dictum not at all easy to implement. The temptation to tell the child to do this or not to do that can be overwhelming. But as instructors have found, inquisitive children who will not listen, pay heed after they have been 'burnt'! A fall from a chair teaches a toddler to leave chairs and sofas alone.

Modern-day kindergartens flourish in most urban centres but they generally perform the reverse of what either Maria Montessori or Froebel intended. The majority of children are not exactly a picture of joy, or expressive, self-disciplined and aware of others'

know now that home-cooked food is best. Variety in diet and taste can be provided by bringing in food from outside after choosing that particular eating place with care. Some prefer to visit a friend or relative, specially if the cook, whether a hired help or the mistress of the house, is a culinary expert. Not all friends or relatives provide or can afford/manage food that satisfies. As far as a tiny pupil is concerned, without a sound body how can one have a keen mind?

Children taught at home from age three fare better in the world. The mother should be the first teacher: psychologically it sets the mind in the

A Feared But Necessary Reform in Education

BEHIND the grumbling of numerous students, teachers and parents lies the great fear of young people: a morrow without a future. It also brings out a major fact of society: the opening up of the upper secondary school and then the university to the great majority whereas previously these had only been accessible to a minority.

In 1985, 45% of people under 20 were students. In 1990, there were 60%. The success rate in the baccalaureat higher person in twenty held this certificate. In 1970, it was one in five and, in 1991,

pressive machine dispensing knowledge to 13 million students, which is nearly a quarter of the population. This tasks falls to the 300,000 primary school teachers and the 350,000 lower secondary school teachers in the 60,000 primary schools, 5,000 lower secondary schools and 2,600 lycées (offering training up to

tionale". (In France, teachers have the status of civil servants).

France has made the education of its citizens "a national

The world of schools had been in turmoil for a year. People were worried about the consequences of the "Jospin reform" in France (named after the Minister of Education), although everybody agrees that the educational system needs to be overhauled.

primary school teachers and the 350,000 lower secondary school teachers in the 60,000 primary schools, 5,000 lower secondary schools and 2,600 lycées (offering training up to

priority" and it is devoting a budget of 263 billion francs to this in 1992. In four years, this amount has increased by 50% and 7,000 teaching posts have been created. In the same pe-

sonalized university institutes has made it possible to double the number of places. With the "University 2,000" plan, 32 billion francs have been devoted, by the state and local authorities, to revamping higher education.

With sky-rocketing figures and a cumbersome mechanism, the French educational system needs to be modernized. Hence "these common sense measures", advocated by the minister in order to foster increased success through a faster course of study while, at the same time, aiming at an equality of chances and respecting the value of diplomas.

He intended to tackle the major problem that universities suffered from: the large scale failure in the DEUG (diplôme d'études universitaires générales) exam taken after the first two years of university studies. Nearly half of the students fail this exam.

The ministerial project proposed: — to lighten the timetable, to renew the syllabus and to review and extend the different categories of the baccalaureat. — to close down certain "dead-end" areas of study which acted as "factories for unemployment".

He also intended to create a corps of "tutors" to give support to small groups of students. Their pedagogical contribution would come on top of the actual teaching provided by the lecturers.

The "Jospin reform" has caused doubt and uncertainty among some and resistance and nervousness in others. This is because the "Education Nationale" has suffered from too many other reforms in the last quarter of a century. They were announced with a lot of gusto but did not improve or barely improved the system.

Protesters increased their action to fight the minister's projects. They criticized their "make-shift" aspect and the lack of concertation with those concerned.

Minister Lionel Jospin's departure last spring and his replacement by Jack Lang, the popular Minister of Culture, has quietened things down. Without calling into question the necessity and the main lines of the reform undertaken, the latter has decided to extend and deepen the indispensable concertation of all those concerned.

The problems remain and it will, indeed, one day prove necessary to bring about changes in the system, but how will it be possible to find democratic solutions with so many different partners with such contradictory interests?

However, a basic consensus does exist allowing for hope. Polls reveal that, of all their institutions, education inspires the most confidence in the French and they are prepared to make many sacrifices for its sake. — L'Actualité En France



Education going through a metamorphosis in France.

— Photo: L'Actualité en France

one in two. The objective of Minister Lionel Jospin was to "lead 100% of a generation to training and a qualification". Today, the "Education Nationale" is a complex and im-

the baccalaureat). Together with higher education, administration and technical staff, more than 1,300,000 civil servants dependent on the "Education Na-

tion, universities took in 280,000 more students and gave out 100,000 extra grants. **University 2,000** — The creation of 28 profes-

The Great Onrush into Higher Education Continues

GERMAN universities and Fachhochschulen (FH) are about to experience a dramatic development. Because of the still unsolved financial problems, the unabated surge into higher education is becoming a matter of great concern for the FH principals and the education ministers of the 16 Bundesländer. Together with leading representatives of science and the economy, they have appealed to the finance ministers for improved financial support.

A survey carried out by the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) revealed that, as a result of the reduced length of compulsory military service and the increased desire to study in eastern Germany, the number of first-year students in the whole of Germany rose once more by 11.5 per cent in the autumn of last year. In western Germany, the number of first-year students increased by 10.1 per cent, in eastern Germany by 22.3 per cent. Almost every third person in the younger agegroups (30.1 per cent) is aiming for a higher

education qualification. There are currently 1.71 million students registered at the 343 universities and colleges in Germany; 4.5 per cent more than last year.

Going on the latest KMK forecasts, Prof Hans-Uwe Erichsen (Monster University), president of the University Principals Conference (HRK), assumes that as much as 40 per cent of a yeargroup will soon be following study courses. Addressing the assembled German university principals at their annual meeting in Frankfurt/Main, he called for a marked change of course in higher education finance. If, sometime soon, 40 per cent of a year-group would be engaged in studies, higher education institutions could not go on being financed as if it were only 20 per cent he argued.

270,000 first-year students annually

Erichsen went on to point out that, in the old Bundesländer alone, the number of first-year students had risen from an annual 160,000 in 1977 to 270,000 today.

Instead of the 900,000 students in 1977, there were now 1.6 million in the old Bundesländer, without a corresponding increased allocation of state funds. Whereas a share of 1.3 per cent of the GNP was devoted to the financing of higher education in 1977, this figure had dropped to a bare 1.0 per cent today.

It was against this background, Erichsen complained, that the German university ideal, the teaching and learning community conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt, was being sacrificed to the mass university and an austerity policy. In 1977, a lecturer had to look after 10 students; today this figure has grown to 16. The ratio at Fachhochschulen is much higher: 1:33.

Other eminent university representatives at the annual forum likewise complained that, in view of the massive influx of students and the severe austerity policy in recent years, education had a raw deal at higher education institutions. Specialization and vocational training, pure and simple, had ousted the German educational ideal.

Appeals were being made to university teaching staff not only to teach students specialized knowledge; they should also educate students to be socially critical. The important and essential task of teaching special knowledge aside, this also implies that students must not only assume responsibility for themselves; the must also do so for society and the community.

Prof Hinrich Seidel (Hanover University), president of the European University Principals Conference, pointed out that more and more vocational sectors were being stamped by academically trained persons, both in the Federal Republic of Germany and in neighbouring European countries.

It was essential for universities to take a closer look at the working world. This, however, also called for global knowledge, not just specialized training. If universities were to become places of critical reflection once more, then the politicians would have to put them in the position to do so financially.

Reform Inescapable

Meanwhile the education ministers of the Länder are seeking solutions to cope with the anticipated student surge. In the estimation of the education ministers of both the SPD and Union Länder, higher education institutions will have to go on adapting themselves to overcrowded conditions and a continued economy policy for some years to come. "We must say goodbye to the lie about overload, to the finance ministers' illusion of being able to drive a tunnel through the student mountain," said Hans Zehetmair, Bavaria's education minister.

The "overload" is becoming a "permanent load," he warned. Politics "must summon up the courage to mobilize existing reserves and carry out reforms." These remarks triggered violent criticism among the university principals.

Whilst on this subject, Zehetmair also criticized the behaviour of some professors who "shirk their responsibility of teaching naive students at all costs and seek refuge in research activity". Dieter Breitenbach, the spokesman for the SPD-led Bundesländer in the Education Ministers Conference and the Saarland's science minister, also considers university reform inevitable.

In this context, Anke Brunn, Northrhine-Westphalia's science minister, has presented a "Teaching Quality Action Programme" which is designed to reduce the length of time spent on studies at higher education institutions in the largest Bundesländer, and to organize university teaching on more effective lines.

It plans pastoral care by tutors in students' first semester, the completion of questionnaires, in which students will be asked to assess the teaching performance of their professors, financial rewards for attractive lectures, and the attempt to split the MA studies course into a six semester basic segment, culminating in a BA degree

(Baccalaureus Artium/ Bachelor of Arts) and second segment, culminating in an MA degree (Magister Artium/Master of Arts).

To quote Frau Brunn, the action programme is not intended to be a "reprimand for professors" or an "admonishing finger for students". Shorter study courses are not an end in themselves. Anyone spending a few semesters abroad, or a would-be physicist attending arts lectures, does not study longer. On the other hand anyone "experiencing his higher education institution as a labyrinth, in which he cannot fathom the technical intricacies for semesters on end" really does lose time.

Bonuses for successful professors

The programme plans to subject university teaching staff to "routine student criticism of lectures". To this end, students will be given questionnaires during a trial period and asked to express their opinion, for example, on the arrangement of lecture matter, its comprehensibility and presentation, lecture style or the lecturer's readiness to indulge in discussion with the students. The questionnaires are to be evaluated by the higher education institutions themselves.

In future, five prizes, worth Dm 25,000 each, will be offered annually to professors with the best teaching standards. In addition, there are to be further bonuses, preferential approval of materials, special leave and sabbatical semesters for professor whose teaching programmes prove particularly successful. In this connection, Frau Brunn states: "So far, teaching staff have sensed little of their popularity or rejection. This will soon change."

According to the lady minister, the Magisterstudium (master of arts course) is in a "sad state". Up to 75 per cent of Students break off their courses prematurely; average length of studies comes to

18.5 percent. A joint commission for studies reform, set up by the ministry, has suggested streamlining the courses, building in greater reference to the working world and "separating basic segment and subsequent consolidation after six semesters through a career-qualifying sortie." Relative pilot study courses are to be set up at several higher education institutions in Northrhine-Westphalia.

Streamlining the teaching programme

Klaus von Trotha, Baden-Württemberg's science minister, intends to place greater emphasis on the pedagogical and didactical abilities of university teaching staff. They are to be given greater consideration in the appointment of professors in future.

The minister likewise favours the regular questioning of students about the quality of the teaching they are offered. In view of the feared further growth in the student population, von Trotha advocates a streamlining of the teaching programme and greater con-

centration on the essentials. Inter alia an up-to-date analysis prepared by the Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) — which confirms that the trend towards longer periods of study in the Federal Republic of Germany continues unabated — constitutes the background for diverse deliberations in the individual Bundesländer.

Three years ago, the KMK agreed on various recommendations, which planned, in particular, better information and counselling on study courses, the publication of comparative data on the length of studies per discipline at different universities, details on the importance of shorter lengths of study on the employment market, improved use of seminars and libraries and better organization of examinations. Positive effects of these recommendations are still not ascertainable, the analysis states.

In the opinion of the education ministers, the traditionally liberal and open studies system in West Germany has been largely instrumental in

the steady increase in the average length of studies in the last few years. Attention is drawn to the fact that, compared with other countries, where there is greater "schoolification" of university studies, study courses take longer in Germany.

Action programme to reduce length of studies

The Donors Association for Promoting Arts and Sciences in Germany intends to step up the discussion of length of study courses in Germany. These patrons from German industry and commerce are raising Dm 1 million annually to support their action programme, initiated a year ago.

Under the terms of this programme, each of the "twelve fastest faculties" in the old Bundesländer is to be awarded money prizes for the first ten graduates completing their courses in the shortest time.

The extent to which universities can, without problem, guarantee students laboratory and practical training places, is also of crucial importance. — IN Press

New Bundesländer Desired professional further training

Out of every 100 working persons with this qualification

Master craftsman, Technician



Higher Education



Technical School



Semi-skilled workers



are interested in vocational qualification courses

Skilled workers



Unskilled workers

