DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 779 PS 004 126

AUTHOR Blackstone, Tessa
TITLE Pre-School Education in Europe.
INSTITUTION Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France). Council for Cultural Cooperation.
PUB DATE Apr 70
NOTE 43p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Class Size, *Comparative Education, Curriculum, *Educational Practice, *Educational Programs, *Foreign Countries, Government Role, Instructional Staff, Nursery Schools, Parent Participation, *Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS England, France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Wales

ABSTRACT

The extent and nature of preschool education in Europe is discussed, with reference to England and Wales, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Reports on preschool education in these countries give examples of both an early and a late start to compulsory education, very extensive and very limited preschool provision, and the effects of private and state support. Educational provision is made for very small numbers of children under three years of age, if at all. In most of the countries primary education is separate from preschool education and contacts between the two systems are usually limited. Countries are compared on such matters as preschool staffing, curriculum, class size, and parent involvement. Lack of resources and conflicting values are considered the main reasons for the slow growth of nursery, (or preschool) education in Europe. Suggestions are made about the policies that governments should adopt in this sphere, and about the important roles that parents and teachers should take as partners in the educational process. NH)

STUDIES ON PERMANENT EDUCATION

No. 13/1970

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN EUROPE

by

Dr. Tessa BLACKSTONE

DECS 3/DECS 6

STRASBOURG, APRIL 1970

Introduction

At present most educational systems in Europe fail to provide pre-school education for more than a small proportion of children in the relevant age group. By pre-school education is meant regular attendance at an educational institution outside the child's home before reaching the age of compulsory school attendance. The terms nursery education and pre-primary education will be used interchangeably with pre-school education in this report. Strictly speaking this definition excludes institutions primarily intended to care for children, rather than educate them, because for one reason or another their parents are unable to look after them at home. However, although the report concentrates on educational institutions, frequent reference will be made to day nurseries or day care centres, because their role is inextricably bound up with educational institutions for children in the same age group. One of the biggest problems faced by anyone wishing to make comparisons between different countries with respect to nursery education is that the age of the start of compulsory schooling varies from country to country. Thus it is impossible to define a precise age range for pre-school education: at its widest it can range from 0 to 7 years; at its narrowest from three to five years, or four to six years.

So far the concept of permanent education or life-long education has been applied largely to post-school or adult education, with an emphasis on the need for provision beyond that provided by the formal education systems at present. Any series of studies, which wishes to attempt to define and develop the concept of life-long education must include a recognition of the educational needs of the youngest members of the community, whom many define as unready for education, as well as older members of the community, whom others define as "past educating". It is paradoxical that for the period of life during which, most evidence suggests, the most rapid intellectual growth takes place, that is the first five years, there is not universal educational provision. Some explanations for this situation are suggested later. It suffices here to stress that permanent education must include pre-school education, in order to remain true to the tenets implicit in the concept - those of continuing education throughout people's lives, and equal opportunities to benefit from it.

Unlike most of the other studies in this series, which concentrate on education in a single country, this report covers five countries. They were selected to represent the member countries of the Council of Europe, and to provide a

./.

basis for generalisations about the present structure and the likely future of pre-school education in Europe as a whole. The first part of the report consists of a general discussion of the nature of pre-school education based indirectly on material gathered from these countries, although in concluding occasional reference will also be made to the situation in other countries including Eastern Europe. The second half of the report consists of a more direct discussion of the existing system in the five countries. This will serve to illustrate the general trends described in part I and to show the ways in which individual countries differ from these trends. This will be followed by the concluding pages which attempt to make some predictions about the future and to suggest some policies for pre-school education as part of permanent education.

The countries were chosen partly on grounds of expediency and partly to obtain the most representative group possible of different types of pre-primary systems. Those included were England and Wales, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. These countries include examples of an early and a late start to compulsory education, of very extensive pre-school provision and of very limited provision, of extensive private or independent provision and of an almost complete monopoly by the state.

./.

PART I

The need for pre-school education is not recognised only by a few enlightened or eccentric educationalists in various countries. There is great demand for provision of this kind in every country in Europe and as in the case of adult education this demand is imperfectly met. The precise extent of the demand is unknown but there is evidence to suggest that a high proportion of parents would either like their children to start primary education earlier or would like them to have the opportunity of attending nursery schools or classes from an early age. The gap between the supply of pre-school education and the demand for it varies from country to country, and the way the supply varies will be described later.

The structure of nursery education also varies, and in comparing the forms it takes in the different countries, the following factors must be taken into account: the relationships between the pre-primary system and the primary system; the extent of private as against public provision; the role of central and local government in the planning and administration of pre-school education; the methods of financing it, including whether charges to users are made; the way the institutions are staffed and the status of the teachers involved; pupil-teacher ratios; the relationship between educational provision and case provision, and the role that the proportion of mothers working plays; the degree to which parents are involved in the educational process; the age of the children attending and the number of hours for which they attend; the distribution of provision between rural and urban areas; the distribution of places among middle class and working class children; and the current rates of expansion.

About some of these questions it is impossible to generalise for Europe, about others some broad generalisations can be made. For example few generalisations can be made about the length of the day for children in nursery schools: in some countries it is only part-time provision, in others full-time provision is made identical in length to that provided in the primary schools. There are also variations with respect to this within countries. The only generalisation that can be made about age is that educational provision is made for only very small numbers of children under three years of age, if at all. In most countries primary education is quite separate from pre-school education and the contacts between the two systems are frequently limited. How far central government is involved is largely dependent on how centralised the government of education as a whole is. In most countries charges to users are either non-existent or

./.

represent only a small proportion of the total costs although it is common to make much larger charges for places in day nurseries. In all countries some supplementary day care provision exists, but its level of development and relation to the educational system varies in part according to how extensive is the structure of educational facilities for young children. All countries staff their nursery schools primarily with trained teachers, but the status of these teachers varies according to whether they receive the same training and/or salaries as teachers in primary schools. Even where this is the case there seems to be a tendency in all countries for teachers at the pre-school stage to feel that their status is less high than teachers of older children. In some countries the view is taken that it is important to have a higher ratio of staff to pupils with young children than with older children. However, although this is the most common view, it is not universal, and in some countries the opposite view is taken. Finally there are two points about which generalisations can be made with confidence. In all countries rural areas are less well provided than urban areas. Secondly, the provision of pre-school education is expanding and is the subject of considerable public debate in all countries.

Not only is the desirable level of provision and the most appropriate organisation of nursery education under discussion. The present content and aims of nursery education are also being questioned. The content of pre-school education has traditionally been informal and instructured with no laid down curricula and little attempt to teach children the formal skills of reading, writing or arithmetic. This is broadly true of the system in all the countries discussed below, and to my knowledge elsewhere too. The emphasis is on learning through play, on creativity, and on waiting till the child is ready to learn rather than on devising methods of getting him to learn. The aims of nursery education as normally expressed tend to be diffuse and ill-defined and often place more stress on encouraging the social physical and emotional development of the child than on its intellectual development. Thus it is aimed to encourage independence in children, and one of the ways this may be done is to provide the child with adults with whom he may identify, other than his parents. Social training includes teaching the child to control his agressive impulses and to mix with other children successfully which also involves the sponsoring of social contacts for the withdrawn child. Indeed not only the withdrawn child but many other children are believed to lack sufficient opportunity for mixing with other children, a gap which nursery education aims to fill. A strongly held belief is that social adjustment can be promoted by teaching children to function together in a group. It also aims to provide an environment in which a number of activities can be pursued, which would be difficult or even impossible in many modern homes.

./.

These activities range from playing with various kinds of material such as sand, clay or water to various physical activities such as climbing on frames or dancing. The school day is rarely divided up according to even a loosely-structured timetable. The emphasis is on spontaneity and it is often stressed that there should be as little direct guidance as possible from the teacher. Underlying this is a child centred philosophy emphasising the free development of the individual who must learn through discovery during free play. Thus many different activities may be going on in a classroom at one time, some involving groups of children playing together, others involving children quite on their own. Usually children are united as a class from time to time to listen to a story for example or to sing. Physical education which is aimed to stimulate motor control also takes an organised form sometimes, involving the whole class in gymnastics, dancing or eurhythmics, but more often it involves non-guided play in the play-ground. In most countries the case of plants and animals is given a prominent place in pre-school education. This traditional emphasis on learning about plant and animal life is almost certainly derived from Froebel and the nature school before him. The degree to which music and the development of rhythm and melody is given an important place seems to vary according to the individual school or teacher but it forms a part of the content in all countries. Painting, modelling, drawing and the use of other materials to make various objects or to portray images are universally a central part of the day, and possibly take up more time than anything else. This is seen as a fundamental method of getting the child to express himself and to perceive his environment.

The other way through which a young child expresses himself is language, and in spite of its enormous importance as a means of expression by comparison with painting for example, it is not until fairly recently that a great deal of explicit attention has been given to the need for language development in young children and the role of pre-school education in promoting it. Nursery school teachers have always spent some time in helping children to develop their speech, both in the sense of enabling the child to enunciate clearly and express himself in a grammatically correct fashion, and in the sense of developing new vocabulary. However, this has not usually been systematised nor has the role of language in cognitive development been much recognised in the sense that it has been translated into practical schemes within the classroom. Finally, attempts are usually made to develop an awareness of the concepts of number, shape and size, and the interrelationships between parts and a whole.

./.

Another aim of pre-school education which has not been mentioned so far is the education of parents. In most countries this is regarded as an important function of this stage of the educational system. Unique opportunities are presented for contacts with parents since children need to be brought to school and fetched from it at this age. There is also some evidence that while the protective role of parents is still very important it is easier to involve them in the education of their children than later. However, very often little more than lip-service is paid to the ideal of parental education, or to the belief that parents should be involved in the education of their children and have the right to participate in decisions about their educational future. Parents are rarely given the opportunity to spend a day in the classroom and thereby gain some insight into the educational process, nor are they usually given places on the governing bodies of schools. However, it is possible that this may change as a result of spontaneous developments outside the formal educational system. In some countries when the shortage in the supply of nursery education has been acute, parents, in particular mothers, have gathered together to form their own play-groups as an alternative to state run nursery schools. Although many of these groups are desperately short of resources and often inadequately housed and equipped, they are one of the best examples of genuine community effort to fill up the lacunae left by the state. In that the parents run and organise such groups themselves they gain experience which the state system never gives them a chance to have. It is possible that this may help to give more parents the confidence needed to challenge the formal school system in this respect. Although voluntary efforts of this kind outside the established system may give rise to concern, sometimes justified, about the standards that can be achieved by people without formal qualifications, they may have other unforeseen and often unacknowledged benefits which could bring about innovation within the formal educational system.

Before going on to discuss in more detail the way the system is working in the various countries it will be useful to consider the causes of the high demand for nursery education and the reasons for the failure to meet this demand. Much has been written about the changing structure and functions of the family with the advance of industrialisation. The well known changes, which the family has undergone during the last sixty years, need not be discussed, nor the extent to which these are directly attributable to the process of industrialisation, or the degree of universality of such changes. Although there has been a tendency to explain these changes, by simply sticking these all-embracing labels on them, we still do not know precisely where the impact of industrialisation on the family occurs. For example, we know there has been a weakening of role obligations

./.

in the family, although no one has shown precisely why this weakening takes place. But one of its consequences has been the growth of outside agencies as aids in the socialisation of the young child. The preceding discussion on the content of nursery education indicates that pre-school provision is more concerned with the process of socialisation, than with that of education, in the narrower sense of instructing the child. Although many of those directly involved, such as the teachers of young children might not admit it, largely because they would refuse to make the distinction, the role of pre-school provision is primarily to socialise children and secondarily to educate them. The constant reiteration in every country of the nursery school's role in encouraging self-reliance, co-operation and independence is evidence of this.

The demand for nursery education has grown because the family cannot meet the requirements for the socialisation of young children. There are various reasons for this. The standards demanded of parents have grown as knowledge about the importance of the early years for children's later emotional and intellectual development has spread. Thus even in ideal material conditions mothers may feel unable to meet these standards, which require the devotion of energy, patience and initiative, to the care, education and entertainment of their young children. In many cases, material conditions, using the term in its widest sense, are of course not ideal. First and most important, mothers may not be available to carry out these tasks because they have jobs outside their homes. The reasons why they work vary from financial necessity to a desire to use whatever special skills they possess. The first reason is most likely to be applicable to unskilled manual groups with low incomes; the second to middle class professional groups. Between these extremes there are a range of positions, many of which combine elements of each extreme. Whatever their reasons for working, mothers must make arrangements for the care of their children. These are not always adequate, and even when they are, there is evidence to show that mothers would prefer arrangements which provide education as well as care (1).

The second material factor is the difficulty created by the physical environment of urban living. Housing conditions in our cities are frequently not conducive to high standards in rearing young children. This is true both of substandard old houses and the high blocks of flats which are replacing them. The next factor concerns the structure of families in terms of size and spacing of children. There may be only one child or, where there is more than one, the age difference may be such that siblings would provide little companionship for each other during the pre-school years. This leads parents to seek nursery schools

./.

(1) Florence Rudermann, The Day Care of Children, Child Welfare League of America, 1968. Care must of course be taken in applying American evidence to Europe. But it seems safe to assume from circumstantial evidence that the findings would be similar.

or playgroups for their children, partly because they believe such companionship is important for their children's development and partly because the task of amusing and occupying one child alone may be more difficult than with two or more children. Other aspects of the structure of the family are significant, in particular the decreasing opportunity for relying on female relatives for regular help. A woman's mother or sister may be at work herself or live too far away to be able to relieve her of her children from time to time. Finally, the emancipation of women has thrown open many doors that were previously closed to them with respect to education and job opportunities. They are more aware of the alternatives to housekeeping and child-rearing and many of them find these alternatives more attractive, since they offer financial reward, companionship, and even social status, all of which are lacking in the role of housewife.

The chief reason why provision has developed so slowly is that nursery education is seen as a potential threat to the family, whose fundamental role is the socialisation of the young. In a climate in which many people believe that the institution of the family has been undermined in a serious way, any innovation which might be interpreted as removing responsibility from parents for their children has been suspect. The availability of resources for the social services in general and for education in particular has also been vital in determining the levels of expansion that nursery education has achieved. But it is necessary to look beyond this and consider what shapes priorities in spending. Traditional values and attitudes concerning the family command a powerful adherence and act as a barrier to the acceptance of the need for universal pre-school education, and have led to the low priority given to expenditure on nursery education in most countries.

In the competition for scarce resources there is a tendency for governments to believe that they must give the compulsory sectors of education precedence over the needs of children or young people for whom they do not have a statutory responsibility. Another reason why pre-school education in particular has tended to suffer when resources are allocated is that education is increasingly seen as an investment towards greater productivity, and it would be difficult to measure the value of nursery education in such terms. Its products are many years away from the labour force and it therefore has no obvious and easily measured rewards. It is perhaps this kind of situation that Titmuss envisaged when he said: "Generalising from historical experience we may believe that we can produce a technical elite without any great improvement in the social foundations of education just as in the past we produced an administrative elite without bothering our heads overmuch about the education of the masses" (1).

To summarise lack of resources and conflicting values have been the major reasons for the slow growth of nursery education. The lack of normative consensus can be seen in the fact that in the past in every series of correspondence in the press making a plea for more nursery schools there is a sprinkling

./.

(1) Forward to John Vaisey, The Costs of Education, Allen & Unwin, London, 1958, p. 9.

of letters deprecating their development. The reason usually given is that children under five should remain at home in the care of their mothers. Theories of maternal deprivation have provided ammunition for this attack. Bowlby's work on children in institutions, whom he found suffered long-term effects on their personalities as a result of maternal separation and deprivation of maternal love, has become widely known. However, it has been much misunderstood, and vulgarised by the popular press, women's magazines and journals on child care. Conclusions about children in institutions have been applied to children living at home with their parents in a totally different environment. This has led to the belief that the child should not be separated from its mother before it is five. More extreme arguments have been advanced against the provision of nursery schools. For example nursery schools will encourage more mothers to go out to work and thus contribute to an increase in juvenile delinquency.

This analysis clearly over-simplifies the situation. In arguing that pressures on the family, particularly those concerning the performance of maternal roles, have been the prime motivating factors in the demand for nursery education, other important causative factors may have been neglected. For example, the demand for nursery education may be more closely related to a gradual increase in parents' aspirations for social mobility on behalf of their children, than to a demand based more directly on the frustrating experience of attempting to reach high standards in socialising children at home. There is a common view among parents that nursery education will give their children a start over their contemporaries in preparing them for primary school. However, the rationale that nursery education will increase educational attainment and thereby enhance the chances of upward mobility does not undermine the earlier argument, because it also rests on the belief that extra familial agencies can perform the necessary tasks more effectively. The difference is that it relies more on pull factors relating to the good qualities of the extra-familial institution and less on push factors relating to the undesirable qualities of the family for the performance of certain roles. Unfortunately, there is no evidence enabling one to weigh satisfactorily these possible underlying causes. For example, has the decline in domestic service for the middle-classes been more or less important than increased opportunities for the employment of married women? Is the growth of high flat living in urban areas more or less important than reduced contact with kin? Although it would not provide all the necessary evidence, a survey of attitudes among parents of pre-school age children would make possible more conclusive statements.

./.

The role of various ideas has also been influential in the growing demand for pre-school education. Thus the growth of a more humanitarian outlook towards the child and its physical development, (in most countries the original nursery schools were founded primarily to improve the health of young children rather than to educate them), and more recently its psychological and social development are important. These ideas are not autonomous, however, but closely related to some of the structural changes described above, such as smaller families, and the influence they exert is determined by other issues, such as the availability of resources or the economic need for nursery education. Nevertheless the work on child development of Susan Isaacs, Arnold Gesell and others has been influential in stressing the need for young children to spend time with others. More directly the psychologists' work on group dynamics with reference to small children usually showed gains in sociability and maturity among children attending nursery schools.

More recently, the study of educational deprivation has had an important influence on the provision of pre-school education. The rediscovery of poverty in the affluent society, and of child poverty in particular, and the dilemmas created by immigrant or minority groups, which are under-privileged and culturally disadvantaged, has led to a search for methods to alleviate these problems. Nursery education has been one of the remedies prescribed and because it is able to attack the problems "before it is too late", it has received widespread support recently from those anxious to deal with such difficulties. In the United States it has been implemented on a large scale as part of the Poverty Programme. The Office of Economic Opportunity has distributed federal funds to Operation Headstart, a nation-wide programme designed to bring so-called disadvantaged children into the schools before starting compulsory schooling at six. Although initially designed primarily for under-privileged minority groups such as negroes and Puerto Ricans, entrance is normally based on the size of the family income, so that any child from a family whose income falls below a certain level qualifies. Most of the early programmes were confined to six weeks during the summer before the child entered the elementary school. Since then, many of these have been extended to run throughout the year and further attempts are being made to extend some of these to two or even three year programmes. They are also being slowly extended upwards into the elementary schools, where follow-through projects are being undertaken. Projects of this kind are now being implemented in Europe, and some of them will be described briefly in the discussion of the individual countries

./.

In the last five years educational research has shown consistently that various characteristics of children's home environment, particularly parental attitudes, strongly influence children's achievement at school. Such variables as parental aspirations have been found to be better predictors of attainment than variables related to the school such as size of class or teacher's qualifications. This has led to the belief that in order to equalise opportunity it is essential that some children should be given extra help, which will counteract the failings of their homes, before they start elementary schooling. New research on the development of intelligence has indicated that the early years are vitally important in determining later test scores, in that the growth of intelligence is much more rapid at this stage than later, and that not surprisingly the effects of deprivation were found to be greatest during the period of most rapid growth. This also has influenced policy makers and their advisers to consider the expansion of nursery education more seriously than at any other time during the last twenty years.

./.

PART II

1. France

There is a tradition of providing educational institutions for children under school age which goes back to the late nineteenth century. When primary education was reorganised in 1881, a recognised place was given to the "école maternelle" or nursery school. In 1887 the nursery school was defined as a place "where children can receive the care necessary for their physical, moral and intellectual development", and this definition has been retained up to the present day. At the turn of the century large numbers of écoles maternelles were maintained by religious orders, which is still the situation in the catholic countries of Southern Europe and in the Netherlands. But in 1904 a law was passed prohibiting religious orders from teaching and by 1910 the number of nursery schools maintained by the orders had fallen from 4,000 in 1900 to only 120. The development of an established position for nursery schools within the state educational system was furthered by the Decrét of 1921, which included a code and regulations, involving a plan for the education of children aged two to six. This laid down standards for staffing, curricula and buildings. For example, teachers were to have the same qualifications as those in primary schools. Provision was to be made for children in the country as well as the towns, by setting up "classes enfantines" or nursery classes attached to the elementary schools where necessary. The early development of pre-school education is an important determinant of the nature and extent of present provision.

French nursery education is unlike that of most other European countries in three respects: first it has more extensive provision from an early age; second it has a relatively homogeneous structure without an extensive private sector and without a system of day nurseries alongside the educational institutions; third it undertakes more formal instruction. The following figures illustrate the extent of provision. In 1967-68 the proportions of each age group obtaining pre-school education were as follows:

Age in years	2	3	4	5	6
Percentage of children at nursery schools	13.5	50.9	79.3	89.3	1.9

./.

Most of the provision is in nursery schools, and there are few nursery classes in urban areas. Where they have been set up in rural areas, it is on grounds of expedience since schools could not be established in sparsely populated regions. Children are admitted at two years old and move on to the primary schools when they reach the age of six. In 1967-68, approximately 15% of children receiving nursery education were attending private schools. The school day is a comparatively long one lasting from 8.30 a.m. or 9 a.m. until 4 or 4.30 p.m. usually and the children of working mothers are cared for in "garderies" or "centres de loisir" at the schools until their mothers are able to fetch them in the evening and on Thursday afternoons and Saturdays and during the holidays. The establishment of nursery schools in the 1880s which were able to perform day care functions meant that alternative institutions for children whose mothers could not look after them were only required for children under two years. These crèches come under the Department of Social Affairs.

There are in 1970-71 an estimated 1,832,000 places in maintained nursery schools, as well as well over 300,000 places in private schools. The total child population between two and six years of age is approximately 3,200,000 children, so it is necessary to provide over a million places before there is universal nursery education in France for all children from two to six. The rate of expansion over the last eight years has been phenomenal and if it continues at this rate without large increases in population, the French could have all children at school from the age of two years by the mid-1980s. The 1970-71 provisional figures show approximately a 38% increase over the 1962-63 figures. This represents an average percentage increase of 4.8% per annum, and increases in absolute numbers ranging from 43,000 in the lowest year to 145,000 in the highest year.

Year	1962-63	1965-66	1968-69	1970-71
No. of places in public nursery schools	1,310,000	1,489,000	1,731,000	1,832,000

./.

The major shortage of places is for children aged 2 - 4, and it is concentrated in the centre of the big cities and the remote rural areas, small towns and suburban areas usually being able to meet the demand. The following figures show the proportion of total places going to each year group:

Age in years	2	3	4	5	6	Total (100)
No. of places as percentage of total places	6	22	34	37	1	1,990,083

The major constraint on expanding more quickly is the shortage of appropriate sites for building in the centre of the major cities, and it is in these areas that waiting lists have developed. Where these occur priorities are given to working mothers and large families but it is unusual to have to wait for a place for more than a few months.

Another characteristic which marks off French nursery education from other European systems are the relatively low costs per pupil. This is achieved largely as a result of a higher pupil teacher ratio than elsewhere. There are 45 registered pupils per class with one teacher and no assistants, apart from the "femmes de service", who are domestic staff, but who do help with the younger children at meal times, rest times and when they are dressing to go outside. A new class is opened when there are 50 children on the register, although the inspectorate are hoping to lower this to 40.

In the primary schools there are 45 children per class. In practice there appears to be some flexibility with regard to class size, the younger children frequently being in slightly smaller classes, the older children sometimes being in larger classes to compensate for this. Most schools have five or six classes, and this is the preferred number, although some only have two or three and others have as many as ten. The relatively adverse ratio of staff to children is not, however, accompanied by limited space. All new nursery schools have to have separate cloakrooms, a dining room, a rest room and a hall or games room, and some schools even have a separate kitchen for the children to cook in. It is surprising that the allocation of rooms is so lavish, in a situation where shortage of accommodation is a major constraint on expansion, yet that staffing should be so ungenerous at a time when there is apparently no shortage of teachers.

./.

Nursery school teachers have the same pay and training as elementary school teachers. The training can take two forms: after obtaining the baccalaureat the student may enter an école normale or college of education, or do a practical training under the direction of the local inspector, which involves working in a nursery school and attending classes. Both methods take two years. Due to the shortage of places in the colleges of education, most nursery school teachers are trained by the second method. Many head teachers appear to favour this method as they believe the new teacher is better prepared for the exacting practical problems involved in handling and teaching young children.

By comparison with the rest of the French educational system, the curricula and methods of teaching in nursery schools are informal, unstructured and free. In spite of this, the emphasis is on more structured work than in nursery education in other European countries. There is more effort put into the explicit teaching of certain techniques, in painting or design for example. Children receive more instruction, since there is a belief that the child's mind cannot be developed without the child acquiring knowledge. The 4 - 6 year olds start learning to read and write, and to understand numbers, although the younger children in this age group are taught informally and concentrate on pre-reading schemes, for example, rather than being instructed specifically to read.

Contacts with parents are encouraged, and attempts are being made to increase parental involvement, and to explain to parents who tend to demand a greater emphasis on formal learning of the "three Rs" in the spirit of the French elementary school the different educational goals of nursery schools. French parents appear to be ambitious for their children and wish them to begin learning as early as possible. There is also an increasing realisation that the social and intellectual experience, which nursery education offers, is important to their children's development, and it has been suggested that this is a more important factor in the growing demand for nursery education than increasing numbers of married women at work. Nevertheless, the high proportion of French women in the labour force has undoubtedly been an important factor in the rapid expansion since the war.

./.

Since the école maternelle is an established part of the state educational system, no charges are made to parents, although they may have to pay a small amount if they attend the "garderie" after school is over. Nursery education is financed in the same way as elementary education: the teachers are paid by the central government but other current costs are borne by the local authorities. The ministry contributes to the capital costs, the extent of this varying from 50% to 95%, depending on the resources of the local authority. The private schools may receive subsidies in the form of the payment of salaries by the state, and they then become subject to inspection.

The only major controversial issue to be discussed recently has been the question of how to staff nursery schools. The Ministry of Education recently proposed that a cheaper category of staff, such as what in Britain are known as nursery assistants, should be employed instead of fully trained teachers, to have responsibility for the 2 - 4 year olds. This provoked a storm of protest from the teachers, who were supported by the National Association of Parents of Pupils. They argued that it was just as important for the younger children to be taught by trained teachers, since there was a need to intervene in their education rather than simply let them develop. No moves have been made to implement the proposal.

The inspectorate and others who are knowledgeable about nursery education mention a number of faults in the present system and the need for improvements. The first concerns the transfer of children from nursery to primary schools. This is not defined as a problem by all commentators, but a number of people believe that the completely different climate of the primary school, and the formal, functional attitude towards teaching, can involve serious difficulties of adjustment for some children. These may be enhanced by decisions to make the final year of nursery education less structured, by for example abandoning the arrangement of desks in rows to a system of tables and chairs and various activity corners. Unless the lower classes of the primary schools also become less formal, the gap between the two could become greater. Some experimental work is under way in Paris, whereby nursery school teachers follow their children into the primary schools and continue to teach them there. This type of scheme may help to close the gap between the two sectors.

./.

There is a desire to improve the content of the education of young children; many of the programmes were originally developed in 1887 and need revising. It has been suggested that more use of the mass media should be made, and new methods of teaching reading, language development, and the new mathematics should all be introduced in nursery schools. It is stressed that innovations such as these are dependent on high staff, and that it may be necessary to extend the teacher's training to three years and that more in-service training is required.

There is a growing movement to use nursery schools as a means of diagnosing special educational problems early, but this is also dependent on highly-trained staff. At present, 12% to 15% of children spend time in special "waiting classes" because they are unable to start primary schooling due to various problems, which have become evident before starting school. Special observation classes have been set up in some Paris nursery schools to watch children with difficulties, with the aim of intervening earlier than in the past and avoiding the "waiting classes". Many of the children have language difficulties derived from their social background, but there are many other kinds of handicaps too, and the emphasis is on the concept of the handicapped child rather than the disadvantaged child. The special problems of lower working class children have been given little consideration, although very recently there has been recognition of the compensatory role of nursery education. Some of those working with families in poor areas have criticised the schools for failing to adjust to the needs of poverty-stricken and disorganised families. For example, few concessions are made about erratic attendance or the time at which children must arrive at school and be collected. Voluntary organisations are now starting to set up alternative and more flexible provision in a few places where the most underprivileged children are to be found, such as the "cités d'urgence" and the "bidonvilles" around the outskirts of Paris. But the contribution of these organisations such as Aide à toute Détresse is still very small.

There is no disagreement about the need to go ahead still faster with the building of new schools so that half the 3 year olds and 85% of the 2 year olds, who are at present without places can be accommodated. Two is not regarded as too young to start school by the teaching profession and there seems to be little opposition from elsewhere and work has been done on the use of pre-reading schemes with children of this

./.

age. The argument that 2 year olds should stay at home with their mothers is regarded as a reactionary political view. Some teachers hope that the new schools will be smaller than in the past, and a number of them also believe that the "garderies" should not be in the schools, although there have been no suggestions of workable alternatives.

Finally, there is a surprising lack of research on nursery education in France, apart from curriculum development at the Institut Pédagogique National. There is little research in other European countries but even less in France, which has a much more developed system of nursery education than elsewhere. It is perhaps because it is so well established with an accepted structure and accepted methods and curricula that no major inquiries have been instigated. But there is a growing awareness of the danger of resting on laurels, and it seems likely that in the future there will be further attempts to undertake systematic research to evaluate various aspects of the present system.

./.

2. Netherlands

The system of preschool education in the Netherlands is more a-typical than that of any other European country, in the sense that it provides the exception to the rule more often than any other. Thus a number of the generalisations in the first half of this paper do not apply to the Netherlands. To understand most of the differences between it and the rest of Europe would require a detailed analysis of the history and development of pre-school education there which is not possible in this study. The chief ways in which it differs from the system existing in most other countries are as follows: 75% of Dutch nursery schools come under the auspices of the church rather than the state; schools in the independent sector receive 100% subsidies; until recently there has been an over-supply of teachers; and there is almost universal provision for all children whose parents want it in the nursery age range as presently defined. Thus unlike most other countries a shortage of places is not the key problem facing the system.

As in France there has been a rapid expansion in the provision of nursery education since the war: 85% of all nursery schools have been built since 1945, and over the last six years the number of schools has expanded by 25%; approximately 1,400 new schools were opened. This is in part due to a large housing programme, involving many new developments for which new schools are built. In 1968 80% of 4 year olds, 94% of 5 year olds and 25% of 6 year olds were in nursery schools. The remaining 6 year olds were at elementary schools, which is the normal age of transfer, and children may enter nursery schools as soon as they are 4, a new intake coming into the schools each month. In 1968 there were 488,819 places, 40% of these were for 4 year olds, 47% for 5 year olds and 13% for 6 year olds. In the same year there were 5,959 schools, 4,521 of which were independent mostly run by the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, and 1,438 of which were maintained schools run by the municipalities. There are also some totally private schools which receive no government subsidies, but there are no figures available on them. Their numbers are believed to be insignificant. Provision takes the form of autonomous nursery schools, most of which are quite small in size, and comprised of three classes. The average size of schools was 84 in 1967, although they tend to be larger in the cities. There are a few nursery classes attached to primary

./.

schools. As in France the school day is quite long usually lasting from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., and nearly all children attend full-time, but a midday meal is not normally provided and children return to their homes at midday for up to two hours. Some attempt is being made to alter this and to provide meals in the rural areas where the proportion of 4 year olds attending school is much lower due to the distances they must travel. In the towns the average proportion of 4 year olds at school is now about 90%.

Day nursery provision in the Netherlands is very limited. Mothers who are unable to care for their children below the age of 4 only have a small number of crèches, which make high charges, to fall back on. These come under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Welfare. There are also a few day nurseries run by voluntary organisations, which run in the mornings only. The proportion of women working in the Netherlands is remarkably low in comparison with other highly industrialised countries, and the view that women with children should not do so is held with strong conviction by most people. This is probably an important reason for the lack of day care facilities. It has been suggested that the extent of pre-school education is closely related to the degree to which the labour force is dependent on women. High provision during wartime and in countries such as the USSR can be cited to support this. The Netherlands are a clear exception, having few women at work and most children in nursery schools.

With so many new nursery schools most of which are purpose-built the capital costs are high in the Netherlands, but current costs are low and as in France this is due to the pupil teacher ratio. There are forty children per class (39 in primary schools), with one teacher, and assistants are employed rarely. In 1968 there were 14,675 teachers and only 342 assistants. At present there is a small excess supply of nursery teachers although shortages are forecast since it has been estimated that by 1980 26,000 will be needed. The intention is to cut class sizes to 38 children which will increase the demand for teachers, whilst during the last few years the supply has contracted as a result of the closure of colleges of education and the discouragement of potential recruits, so that by 1968 96% of those leaving the colleges were able to get teaching

./.

posts compared with 45% in 1959. The training of nursery school teachers is at present completely separate from that of elementary school teachers, although both courses last for three years with a fourth year for those hoping to become head teachers, and there is a considerable difference in the salaries of the two groups, the starting salary of the latter is 75% higher. This enhances the status differences between the two groups.

The financing of nursery education in the Netherlands and the methods of setting up new schools are unusual. There is no overall planning by the central government as to the allocation of resources to nursery education, and the siting of new schools. Instead applications are made to the government for a subsidy from the local area concerned when it can be shown that there are between 40 and 50 children whose parents want nursery education for them. The application may come from the municipality, a religious organisation or even a private individual. The schools then receive a 100% subsidy regardless of the origin of the application. A small charge set by law is made in municipal schools, the religious schools are free to charge what they like and normally charge more. Because of the central importance of the religious question in Dutch politics, it is particularly important to grant aid to the religious organisations. A refusal to give a grant would tend to lead to a political row. By the mechanism described above the social demand for nursery education is automatically met, hence the higher provision in the Netherlands than elsewhere.

The content of nursery education is very informal, since it is commonly felt that the main functions of nursery schools are to provide social contacts and play facilities. Children should be allowed to develop their own personalities and they should not be instructed from above, instead their desire to learn should be allowed to develop naturally. It is chiefly in this respect that criticisms are being made of the present system. There is little attempt to prepare children for the work they will be doing in the elementary schools, and no co-ordination whatsoever between the two stages of education. There is a negative attitude towards all directed activities, and attempts to structure the programmes are regarded with suspicion by the teachers. One study found that in only 5% of their time did children have verbal contact with their teacher. Most of their time was spent in perceptually

./.

oriented tasks with small groups of other children, and many teachers seemed to be dominated by the need to develop an instrumental approach to how to deal with forty children in a class.

Critics of the system commonly blame the quality of teacher training, and even those who defend the present curricula would like to see changes in the organisation of teacher training. The most important reform advocated is a common training for primary and nursery school teachers with specialisation on one or the other in the third year. The rejection of any preparation in the "three Rs" by teachers in nursery schools might then disappear, and links between work in the two stages be fostered.

The other major controversy at present is whether the age-range for nursery education should be widened. There is at present much pressure to lower the age of entry to three years, but this will require a change in the law. The Labour Party has included in its educational programme compulsory nursery education for all children from four and places for all three year olds, whose parents want to send their children to school as well as more central planning and co-ordination by the government. Some advocate the possibility for part-time attendance and were the age of entry to be lowered they would press for this. An earlier start is believed to be important by those who regard nursery education as an important method of alleviating deprivation. So far comparatively few people have become interested in its role in this respect. However one of the few major pieces of research on pre-school education in the Netherlands is the University of Utrecht's project on compensation, whose main aim is to develop and evaluate a pre-school programme for children from the lowest socio-economic groups, which will improve the motivation and school achievement of such children. Experimental work centred in Amsterdam is also underway on observing emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded children in nursery schools rather than sending them immediately to special schools. In both projects early intervention is a central goal.

./.

3. Norway

The Norwegian system is similar to that of Sweden. As in Sweden primary education does not begin until seven, and pre-school provision is limited. The problems for the education of young children created by such a sparsely populated country and a long winter are even greater than for Sweden. The major difference between Sweden and Norway is that there is rather less pressure for expansion in the latter country. This may be related to the much smaller proportion of married women working in Norway, towards which there has been strong opposition. However this is beginning to break down, and pressure for expansion is growing. The other important distinguishing characteristic of the Norwegian system is that there is an increasing tendency to combine nursery schools with a day nursery. In Oslo, for example, which has far more provision than elsewhere, there were twelve combined institutions in 1967 and the number has increased since then. Whereas in Norway only 2% of children between 0 and 7 years were receiving day care or pre-school education, in Oslo the proportion was 12%. The main way in which provision is supplemented is not by parent-run play groups as in Britain, nor by supervised child minding in family homes as in Sweden, although this has been introduced, but by play-parks subsidised by the municipalities and staffed by women who have undergone a six-week training course. Their major drawback is that they are at the mercy of the weather, since the shelters provided are not considered adequate when the temperature drops below 10 centigrade and the group must then close.

In 1968 there were 338 nurseries in Norway providing places for about eleven thousand children. This represents the following proportion of each age group.

	Age				
Proportion of child population in nurseries	2 and under 0.5	3 2	4 3	5 4	6 5

Approximately 60% of the total were nursery schools only, 34% day nurseries only, and the rest combined institutions. The only major difference between the two types of institution is in terms of the hours they are open, children with special need and those of working mothers being given priority in both instances. For this reason they have not been distinguished in the overall proportion given above.

./.

Those children needing day care may attend from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the children in the nursery schools attend from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. or 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. About half the children fall into the latter category. Places for children under three are hard to come by. 10% of the total are for this category, 12% for 3 year olds, 20% for 4 year olds, 27% for five year olds, and 31% for 6 year olds. There are only a few completely private, that is non-subsidised schools and the co-operative private organisations are discouraged, because it is felt that pre-school education should be the responsibility of the municipalities. Women's organisations put pressure on them to start new schools, and the municipality then writes in to the Ministry of Family Affairs for a grant. However many applications still come directly from private groups, who initially raise money to build a school and then get state financed help, but continue to maintain their private status with their own boards to run the school. About three quarters of the institutions fall into this category, as in the Netherlands. There is some pressure on the municipalities to take them over, but most of them are reluctant to do so because of the extra costs they would incur. This will be given automatically as long as the local area adheres to the regulations concerning building, staffing and pupil-teacher ratios. A set sum is given towards capital costs, which only covers about a quarter of the total, and a further grant towards current costs is given varying from 30% to 85% of the total according to the economic status of the community. Increased grants from the central government recently have helped bring about considerable expansion in the last few years. But as would be expected in a country where only a quarter of the child population live in towns, a further quarter in rural areas, and nearly half in sparsely populated areas, the distribution is uneven.

Children in nurseries are divided into groups according to age, and the size of the group is dependent on this. In the separate nursery schools for children aged 4 to 7 there are twenty in a group, with one teacher and one assistant, who is fulfilling preliminary training requirements before going on to a college. In the day nurseries the groups are slightly smaller and have the same staff, although those for children under three are much smaller having eight children, and two nursery nurses per group. The teachers undergo a two-year training, which is separate from that of teachers of older children, as in the Netherlands and Sweden, and is

./.

preceded by 18 months in-service training, six months in nursery schools, six months' children's nursing and six months domestic science. The academic requirements are ten years schooling, although about half the recruits have twelve years, and their school leaving examination which is a qualification for higher education. In spite of this their salaries are between 20 and 25% less than teachers in primary schools. In 1945 they were paid the same, but there are no laws governing their pay and training, and they were not members of the teachers' union until 1965, so that during the period their position was gradually eroded, to the extent that from 1945-65 they received no pay rises. Their position improved somewhat last year when they went on strike and the result was a 15% rise. In the face of this situation it is hardly surprising that there is a shortage of nursery teachers. As in the Netherlands there is pressure for identical training for nursery and primary teachers with specialisation only in the third year. Some of the staffing anomalies may be ironed out by a committee now sitting to develop a law for day nurseries, but which is covering all aspects of pre-school education.

Pre-school education is not free in Norway and charges to users of nursery schools are higher than in the other countries discussed. The level is set by the municipality within limits set by the central government, which are 50 - 130 krone for nursery schools, and 50 - 200 krone for day nurseries. In Oslo the fees are nearer to the maximum than the bottom end of the scale, although a few free places are offered on a means-tested basis. Norway does avoid the anomaly of the British system, which makes relatively high charges for day nurseries and provides nursery education free, but the quite high fixed charges made by most authorities may prevent some low income families from applying for places.

There are two large research projects on nursery education in Norway, both of which involve a similar experimental programme, but with slightly different emphasis. The first of these began on a small scale in Oslo in 1965 with the aim of solving the educational and social problems of 6 year olds, who have no opportunity of going to school. The study can be regarded as a pilot on the problem of lowering the age range of primary schooling and it is concentrating on the administrative and organisational problems that such a change would involve. Fourteen groups of 6 year olds have been established in six Oslo primary

./.

schools, in each case one group attending in the morning and one in the afternoon. Teachers have been following the children through several years of primary education, which is formal as in France and Sweden, with short hours and a good deal of reliance placed on homework, since children are only at school for three hours a day or even less during the first term. It is hoped that the classes will link the pre-school system with the primary system and curricula are being developed to help achieve this. The law has recently been changed to make such classes legal, and there is a possibility that the Oslo administration will take over the existing classes and expand their numbers considerably. The parallel project has similar classes scattered throughout the country, and is concentrating more on the evaluation of a programme for the experimental groups, but as in Oslo, this programme is unstructured.

There is mounting criticism in Norway of the late start to primary education and adverse comparisons are made with the British and French systems. Whilst in Sweden this problem seems most likely to be answered by compulsory pre-school education, in Norway there is some discussion on lowering the age of entrance to primary schools to $6\frac{1}{2}$ years, and this is being tried out on an experimental basis in a few schools in Oslo. But there is still strong resistance from many quarters to an earlier start to compulsory education, because children should be allowed to remain children for as long as possible. Inherent in this philosophy is a view that the school is alien to the child's needs. In some cases this may be so, but there is no reason why it should be.

Both staffing and accommodation in pre-school education in Norway are luxurious in comparison with the Netherlands and France with reference to pupil-teacher ratios, and in comparison with England and Wales with reference to buildings and equipment and space per child. As in the case of Sweden whether such standards could be sustained in the face of a large-scale expansion is a question those concerned with education in Norway must consider.

./.

4. Sweden

Many people have pre-conceptions about Swedish social services and Swedish education, which lead them to expect that there will be a highly developed, progressive system of nursery education in Sweden, the envy of many other countries. This is not the case: the proportion of children obtaining pre-school education is one of the lowest in Europe's industrial democracies. Scandinavia as a whole is well behind the rest of Europe in providing education for young children, a fact of which many people in Sweden are well aware, which has led to the setting up of a Royal Commission on nursery education and day care facilities. It may recommend radical changes, which will alter the situation, but even if this happens they will presumably take some years to implement.

The nature of pre-school education in Sweden cannot be discussed adequately without first briefly describing the structure of primary education. Children do not start attending primary schools until they are seven years old. Even then they only attend on what in other countries would be described as a part-time basis from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. By the time they are ten they are attending from 8 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. The content and methods of teaching are completely formal and there are no free activities between lessons nor is there much time spent on physical education, painting, music or craft work. The main reason for the delayed start to compulsory education is a historical one going back to the nineteenth century and relates to the long distances which children had to travel to school in a sparsely populated country with limited transport. In some parts of Sweden this remains a major problem, and clearly acts as a constraint on the development of pre-school education too.

In 1968 only 2% of 4 year olds, 11% of 5 year olds and 43% of 6 year olds were receiving pre-school education. A further 2.5% of 3 and 4 year olds and 3.5% of 5 and 6 year olds were attending day nurseries, which also provide places for about 2% of the child population aged 2 and under. There were approximately 19,000 places in day nurseries and 61,000 places in nursery schools. Before the war there was practically no provision of the latter variety and few day nurseries. Thus although these figures appear low they represent considerable expansion. Between 1950-64 the number of places in nursery

./.

schools increased by 140% but in day nurseries by only 14%, and between 1965-68 there have been further increases particularly in the number of 6 year olds in the nursery schools, which was only 57% at the earlier date. By 1974 it is planned to increase the number of nursery school places by one third to 93,000, and to have nearly four times as many day nursery places, 72,500 over the 1968 figures.

Most of the expansion will be in the day nurseries in the next few years, largely because of the growth in the number of mothers working. In 1970 the proportion of married women working was 43% and it is estimated that by 1980 it will be 55%. At present only 11% of children under seven whose mothers are working can obtain places in day nurseries. Large numbers of children attend private childminders, but from 1969 a state scheme of subsidised childminders has been set up to supplement the day nurseries.

The distribution of places in both types of institution is uneven. There are many areas with no provision at all and others with a large number of places. The three major cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö are better provided than other areas. In day nurseries, for example, there are more places for children under four in the three major towns than in the whole of the rest of Sweden, although areas outside the main cities have more places for older children. These differences are partly a function of the way the schools are administered and financed. Both the day nurseries and the nursery schools come under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Welfare although there is pressure from various quarters to transfer them to the Ministry of Education, and a few authorities have in fact done this at the local level. Another authority has set up a special separate board for the administration of child centres, including all pre-school provision and facilities for the care of older children after school. Decisions to set up a new school rest with the local authority which clearly makes for more variation, since some authorities will give this type of service less priority than others. The nursery schools do not receive any financial help from the central government. A recent innovation has made it possible for day nurseries which accept children for at least five hours per day to receive a grant which covers between approximately 35% - 45% of their capital cost, the proportion depending on the nature of the building and a

./.

low-interest loan amounting to a further 30% - 35% of the costs. In the rare case where nursery schools meet the hours condition they are also eligible. One fifth of current costs are covered as long as at least two-thirds of the places are utilised for five hours or more per day. Central government grants take this form because the state is primarily concerned with providing for the children of working mothers. Nursery school education in Sweden is not free, a set charge of 20 krone per month is made except in cases of special need. In the day nurseries much higher charges are made on a means test basis.

Most of the institutions receiving state subsidies are run by local authorities, but there are also a few run by firms and private associations such as voluntary organisations, and these are included in all the figures given so far. There are also increasing numbers of private play groups run by the churches or by parents where local authorities have failed to provide them and some commentators believe that this has reduced the initiative of the local authorities. There are no accurate figures on these since there is no law governing their activities and the authorities have little control over them.

The demand for places in both day nurseries and nursery schools is very high, therefore some method has to be devised to allocate places. In the schools children are admitted on the basis of a waiting list with priority sometimes given to children with various behavioural problems or to only children. Priorities given in day nurseries vary from city to city but usually top priority is given to single mothers followed by cases of illness and disablement in the family, and mothers who are studying. Children at the day nurseries are more likely to come from low income groups, whereas those in the nursery schools are more likely to be middle class.

Swedish nursery schools are on average smaller than in most other European countries, many of them being one-teacher institutions, which take one group of children for three hours in the morning and a second group for three hours in the afternoon. The maximum size of the group is dependent on the ages of the children: for 5 and 6 year olds it is 20, and for 3 and 4 year olds it is 15. In 1968, 75% of the children in the schools were aged 6, 20% aged 5, 4.7% aged 4 and only 0.3% aged 3. Often the teacher is assisted by one or two students who are being trained as nursery school teachers.

./.

Although the total number of children in the institution is usually larger, the size of the groups in the day nurseries is even smaller, 15 for the 5 and 6 year olds, 12 for the 3 and 4 year olds and even fewer for the younger children. These are staffed by nursery school teachers too, but children's nurses are also employed where teachers are not available. There is one staff member to every five children.

The training of nursery school teachers lasts for two years and involves some preliminary practical work in the schools prior to entrance. Candidates must have passed the secondary school leaving examinations. It takes place in special colleges, which are separate from the colleges training primary school teachers, where the courses last two and a half years. The salary scale for nursery school teachers is lower than for primary school teachers, the starting salary of the latter being at present 35% higher, but the differential is not as great as in the Netherlands. Nursery nurses have a shorter course lasting about eight months, and including practical training. There is a shortage of teachers at present since there are not enough of them to work with children under three in the day nurseries. But plans for continuing the expansion of the training colleges even faster are under way. In spite of this, a shortage of between 5,000 and 6,000 teachers is expected by the mid 1970s.

The content of nursery education in Sweden is extremely informal as in the Netherlands, but the generous staffing ratios allow for a more child-centred approach with more contact between the individual child and the teacher, and when a child appears mature enough he may be given the opportunity to do some pre-number and pre-reading work. But this is only undertaken occasionally with children who ask for it, and elementary school teachers often resent it. But because nursery school teachers in Sweden are anxious to be regarded as teachers rather than minders many are becoming open to suggestions as to how to introduce more structured work with the aim of cognitive development. Nevertheless, some research by Stukat at the University of Gothenburg, who asked a small sample of teachers what the content of nursery education should be, confirms the general impression that this aim is unimportant. The following items are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned by teachers:

./.

Teachers:	No. of teachers mentioning item
Teaching children to work in groups	31
Emotional maturity and the reduction of nervous habits	26
Routine tasks, e.g. dressing, etc.	26
Moral standards, awareness of right and wrong	25
Respect for rules	24
Training to concentrate and listen	23
Manual dexterity	20
Language development	19
.....	
Preparing them for school (1)	13

The informal nature of nursery education and the formal system in the elementary schools means there is a big gap between pre-school and elementary education. In Malmö the local school board is experimenting with the attachment of nursery classes to the elementary schools in an attempt to narrow the gap.

There are a few research projects going on which are either directly or indirectly concerned with pre-school education. In Gothenburg under Stukat there is a project which is developing and trying out a programme for pre-school children. The programme attempts to identify objectives then to analyse these, creating sub-goals, after which tasks are specified to achieve these goals. Language skills, social training, number concepts and science are the areas covered by the programme, and the experimental group will be compared with control groups at home and in an ordinary nursery school class. The Royal Commission is doing some research into the use of a structured programme, which stresses intellectual development, in day nurseries. This will be tried out on younger children than in the Gothenburg project. There are a number of projects at the Institute of Educational Research in Stockholm either already begun or at the planning stage. One of these is looking at methods of evaluating the effects of programmes and is particularly concerned with very young children. One of the planned projects concerns the use of pre-school education for emotionally disturbed children, and the degree to which behaviour therapy in a nursery school can be used instead of individual psychotherapy.

./.

(1) Several other items intervened between this and language development.

The most important criticism to be made about pre-school education in Sweden is the lack of it. While the quantitative deficiencies are so great it becomes a luxury to spend a great deal of time worrying about the quality of nursery education. But there is concern about both problems, for example, the one class schools which leave the teacher isolated from colleagues are under attack. The question of quantity has become an important political issue in Swedish education. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education have stated their desire to expand nursery education rapidly on the grounds that without this, equality of opportunity for all children will not be possible. The major trade unions have been pressing for more provision and the largest white collar union has put forward a proposal for two years of compulsory nursery education for children from five to seven. This policy is also advocated by the Social Democratic Party. The fact that so much pressure comes from the unions is partly because the debate about expansion has been closely linked with the question of equality between men and women, and the unions have seen the issue in terms of the protection of their women workers, as well as in terms of equality of opportunity for all children. The Labour Market Board which is concerned with manpower planning is also pressing for an increase in the number of day nurseries.

Future developments depend a good deal on the report of the Royal Commission and the way it is received. There is little doubt that it will recommend a major expansion of pre-school education, possibly making it compulsory for 6 year olds. This is believed to be preferable to lowering the age of starting primary schooling, because of its formality. It seems likely that it will recommend a reformed curricula, with the introduction of some of the work done in the first three years of primary education into the nursery school and day nursery. It may recommend the integration of these two forms of provision, which is already happening in some places on an experimental basis. There are more opportunities for this innovation in Sweden than elsewhere because they have the same staff and come under the auspices of the same government department. A major expansion must also surely be accompanied by changes in the ratio of staff to pupils, but the commission will meet stormy opposition from the teachers to any reduction in staff numbers.

./.

5. United Kingdom (England and Wales)

Whereas Sweden and Norway are characterised by a late start to primary education, the system in England and Wales is characterised by an early start at five years old. In many areas children are admitted to school at about four years nine months and sometimes younger, since they may start at the beginning of the school term in which they become five. The period covered by pre-school education is therefore short, lasting for the two years from age three to five, but in spite of this or perhaps because of it the numbers of children receiving pre-school education are small. The other important distinguishing factors about the English system are that most state provision is in nursery classes attached to primary school rather than separate nursery schools, and there is a growing pre-school play-group movement run on a voluntary basis by parents and other organisations to supplement the state system.

There was a great expansion of nursery provision in Britain during the second world war, because of the need for women in the labour force. The 1944 Education Act made it mandatory for local education authorities to provide nursery education for all children whose parents desired it. However, this clause of the Act has not been implemented and since the war there has been little or no expansion of nursery education until very recently. The central government has prevented local authorities from expanding it on the grounds that the shortage of teachers for five to seven year old children in the primary schools was so great that none could be spared for the non-compulsory sector. During the earlier part of the post-war period there was also a major shortage of school buildings and again the compulsory sector took precedence. More recently the embargo on expansion has been slightly lifted, and classes may be established where they release married women teachers with young children to return to work. Even more recently new classes have been established under a programme to help deprived urban areas. But the rate of increase due to these policies has been small.

There is a similar division between nursery education and day care to that in Scandinavia, with separate day nurseries for children from six weeks to five years. The distinction between them is much greater, however, than in Scandinavia since they come under separate departments (Health and education) and they have different staff, the day nurseries employing nursery nurses and nursery assistants rather than teachers. Nor are the two types of institution ever combined into one organisation

./.

as occurs in Scandinavia sometimes. There are less than 500 day nurseries, and they are only able to cater for a small percentage of the total number of working women's children. Indeed the fact that a woman is working rarely justifies the allocation of a place to her child, since all places are usually taken up by priority cases, such as unmarried mothers, families where there is long-term sickness and large, disorganised, low income families where the mother cannot cope. Since the two types of institution are completely separate in England and Wales, the rest of this section will concentrate on nursery education.

The statistics on pre-school education are inadequate for various reasons, therefore it is necessary to give figures for a somewhat earlier date than for the other countries discussed in this report. But the changes between 1965 and 1968 were insignificant. In 1965 the following proportion of children were at state schools.

	Age		
Proportion of children in maintained schools	2	3	4
	0.3%	3%	28%

Most of the 4 year olds were early entrants to the primary schools, and only 6% of three and four year old children were in state nursery schools and 4% in private institutions. Unfortunately it is impossible to discover how the places were distributed between 3 and 4 year olds, but it is clear that a large majority of them went to the older year group. 68% of the state places were in nursery classes attached to the primary schools and the rest were in nursery schools. Most of the places in state schools are full-time from 9 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. as in the primary schools, although there is a growing trend to move towards part-time provision and thus provide places for more children and most private provision tends to be part-time. No fees are charged in the state schools. The distribution of provision is uneven, a few areas having places for as many as 25% of their child population, many others having no places at all. Whether an area is well provided for or not is dependent on whether the authority was prepared to expand at certain key periods in the past, and whether it resisted the temptation to cut back nursery provision at times when expenditure on education was being cut.

Most nursery schools are small with about eighty pupils but there is considerable variation in this respect. The size of a group in a nursery school also varies but it is usually about twenty with one nursery school teacher and one nursery assistant per group. The maximum size of a nursery class is

./.

thirty, and the staff usually consists of one nursery teacher and one assistant. (In primary schools the maximum class size is forty children.) The nursery assistant has a two year training, part of which is practical, and is paid a lower salary than the teacher, whose training lasts three years and takes place in the same colleges of education as those attended by teachers of older children. Many of the nursery teachers have taken a course training them to teach the younger children in primary schools and nursery age children, and their salaries are the same as other non-graduate teachers. Teachers may therefore move from pre-school education to primary education and back again without any difficulty. This and the fact that a great deal of nursery education takes place within the primary schools means that there is little conflict between the two sectors and the type of education provided in them.

This is strengthened by the informal nature of the early years of primary schooling in Britain. During the first year of compulsory schooling there is a generous allocation of time to free play, and children are free to select the activities in which they are interested. Formal teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic takes up a minority of the teacher's time, and this is done as far as possible on an individual or group basis rather than to the whole class simultaneously. Many of the activities of the nursery school are continued, and sometimes primary school work is begun in the nursery, although this is rare. The content of nursery education is similar to that of the Netherlands and Scandinavia, although English teachers seem a little more prepared to structure work with the older children and use pre-number and pre-reading schemes.

Because it is so difficult to obtain a place for a child in a state nursery class or school, since the early sixties parents have started to co-operate in providing their own pre-school education in the form of play-groups, which are held in private houses, church halls, community rooms and similar accommodation. The play-groups are usually staffed and run by the mothers themselves, some of whom may be qualified teachers or nurses, although occasionally trained staff may be hired. In 1970 there are thought to be several thousand playgroups, which vary considerably in size and in quality. The movement has a national executive, which along with several other pressure groups has been pressing both for an expansion of nursery education, and for state subsidies for play-groups. A small grant is given by the central government to the organisation, and a few local authorities are subsidising play-groups, but this is still on a small scale. Play-groups are not the only form of private provision. There are also private nursery schools run on a profit-making basis, but as in most other countries these form only a small fraction of the total.

./.

One of the criticisms of play-groups is that they tend to be predominantly middle class with the exception of those run by voluntary organisations in overcrowded urban areas Since places in nursery schools and classes are allocated according to length of time on the waiting list, these too may take a higher proportion of middle class children than would be expected from their numbers in the total population, because middle class parents are more aware of the need to put their children onto the waiting list early. Where the play-groups have an advantage over the schools and classes at present is in their ability to involve parents in the education of their children. Many play-groups expect mothers to help in running the group if they can, and where this is not the case mothers are nearly always encouraged to participate in any other way they may wish. Although there is probably more co-operation between parents and teachers at the pre-school level in the state schools than later, it is still only limited in the sense that parents are not directly involved for example as helpers at meal times or aids in the classroom.

However the major criticism made about nursery education in England and Wales is the shortage of places in the face of widespread demand. In 1967 a government committee on primary education recommended that by 1980 there should be universal, but not compulsory nursery education for all children. Since then the National Union of Teachers and organisations such as the Fabian Society, which is concerned with social and economic reform, have given the implementation of this proposal the highest priority in their proposals for education in the seventies. So far the government has taken little action with regard to the implementation of these proposals, although the present minister has on numerous occasions committed the government to a major expansion, and discussions are now under way as to how this might be achieved.

One of the unresolved dilemmas in such discussions is whether to face some possible deterioration in standards by expanding quickly and more cheaply or whether to keep to the present position, which entails high costs, and would inevitably mean a slower rate of expansion. Nursery education is financed in the same way as the other levels, out of the block grant paid by the government to local authorities, which covers slightly more than half of their expenditure, and out of the rates. High costs are largely due to the employment of highly trained staff (their training is longer than in any of the other countries discussed so far), in a generous ratio of teachers to pupils, with additional nursery assistants to

./.

support them, which makes the ratio of trained adults to pupils higher than in any other country. The suggestion that nursery assistants should be used much more widely instead of teachers has been better received than in France, although the teaching profession is opposed to this.

Research into nursery education as elsewhere is negligible, although there are a few projects underway, such as a pilot study financed by the School's Council on "good practice" in nursery education, which is attempting to isolate those aspects of the present content which deserve expanding and implementing on a wider scale. Another project run from Oxford University is testing the use of a structured language programme for pre-school children in poor areas, which have been designated as educational priority areas. This is an action-research project and involves the establishment of play groups as well as the evaluation of the programme in existing schools. This study reflects the growing interest in the role of pre-school education in enhancing the educational chances of the lower working class child in slum areas. It also reflects the concern felt by some critics of conventional nursery education about the highly unstructured nature of teaching at present and the concomitant failure to give enough attention to language development.

The pressure for expansion is now so great that a major change in government policy, allowing local authorities to expand where possible, seems certain in the near future. The next step will be for the government to take more positive action and enforce the 1944 Act, providing for a substantial building programme to make this possible.

./.

CONCLUSION

These five case studies have served to illustrate the general comments about the present state of pre-school education made in Part I. They highlight the similarities between the present systems in various European countries and point to some of the differences. In the remaining pages some suggestions will be made about policies that governments should adopt in this sphere, and the direction which this type of education should follow in the future.

Nearly all children are endowed with an amazing potential in terms of imagination, creativity, ability to innovate and intellectual powers of reasoning and understanding. Few children have this potential developed to its fullest either in their homes or in the present educational system. From the earliest age this potential must be exploited, rather than neglected or crushed. At present we neglect it by failing to give our children the opportunity to attend school until several years after they are ready to start benefitting from it, and as the child grows older within the school system we crush it by the use of repressive methods and irrelevant curricula. To meet the first criticism a policy of universal pre-school education must be implemented. The principle of free education, which is accepted for older children, should apply and charges should not be made. All children should be able to start attending school sometime between their second and third birthdays and attendance should become compulsory when they are five. Sometime in the more distant future it may be necessary to lower this to four, in order to ensure that the small proportion of children, whose parents do not send them to school voluntarily, get the education which they need. The argument that pre-school education is unnecessary, because the educational environment provided by the home is improving and can be further improved by special measures, is not valid. The school and the home should be complementary not substitutes for each other, and we should do all we can to improve both. It is unreasonable to expect that the home, that is the mother in most cases, can provide adequately for all the child's needs.

It would not be sensible to dictate a universal form for pre-school education, since this should vary according to local conditions. However a few lessons about the optimal structure can be drawn from the survey of nursery education in five countries. First it is clear that rising proportions of

./.

married women with children are obtaining jobs outside the home and all governments, although reluctantly, are having to consider ways of providing for the children of working mothers, as well as for those children who cannot be cared for in their own homes for other reasons. These children should not be placed in separate institutions outside the educational system, because the hours they need to be away from home make it more expedient. The system of day-care and nursery education should be unified, and special arrangements made for those children, who need to spend longer at school. Secondly, there are advantages in provision taking the form of nursery classes attached to primary schools rather than separate nursery schools, since this is the easiest way of forging the vital links between pre-school and primary education, which are missing in most countries today. Classes have other advantages in that they avoid what for some children can be a disruptive change of school at an age when a secure environment is of high value. Thirdly, central governments must take some responsibility for the planning and finance of pre-school education. The history of nursery education in Europe indicates that it is not enough to rely on the goodwill of local authorities to set up schools, whilst support from the government is inadequate. Nor should the public authorities rely on voluntary organizations to make places available. It is their responsibility and unless they accept this, universal provision of a high standard will not be achieved.

It is essential that the first stage of education should have well-qualified staff whose status is as high as that of other teachers. Their jobs are as responsible and exacting as teachers of older children and require, in just as high a measure, qualities such as patience, imagination, judgment and intelligence. But there is a strong case for providing supporting staff to work with the teacher in the classroom, who should be trained in a shorter length of time, and whose major responsibility would be day to day work with the children, but who would not be expected to plan activities, assess children with social or other handicaps, or take responsibility for communication with parents. Supporting staff of this kind would make possible an improved ratio of adults to children in countries such as France and the Netherlands, and would free the teacher for the more demanding aspects of her role. It would make possible larger groups of children, and thus allow faster expansion in countries where the pupil-teacher ratio is low.

./.

It is essential that parents and teachers should be partners in the educational process. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many schools were built like fortresses, as if designed to prevent their inmates from escaping into the outside world, and the outside world from looking in or entering. For many parents schools are still forbidding places and the formal educational system does little to make them feel otherwise. One of the most important contributions nursery education can make is to break down these barriers. When parents bring their children to school and fetch them they should be encouraged into the classrooms, and the teachers should regularly discuss a child's progress with his parents on an informal basis. Discussion groups should be established on the education of young children so that parents are fully informed about their children's activities at school, and receive advice about how to help them at home. There should also be opportunities for parents to do some voluntary work in the schools, such as helping at meal times.

With respect to the content of pre-school education, it is of the utmost importance that its creativity and freedom should be preserved. The child should be encouraged to develop the ability to think for himself and the ideal of individual autonomy must be cherished. The stifling of creative ability by role-learning and other rigid ways of inculcating knowledge, common in many traditional school systems, have never been practised in nursery education. On the other hand there has been a tendency to over-react to these unfortunate characteristics of the formal school system and to become so unstructured in the nursery schools that all sense of purpose is lost. It is essential that teachers of young children should have clear goals and a clear idea of the methods by which they can attain various goals. To provide sand, water, paint, bricks and various other materials, allowing the child to move from one to the next in the hope that this is providing a stimulating environment is not enough. Programmes can be structured without being over formal and they can allow individual children to proceed at their own rate. There is a need for such programmes particularly in teaching language, which should cover concept development, linguistic enrichment and speech training. Cuisenaire rods and other similar techniques used in the first year of primary schooling when teaching children number work and measurement can be adapted for use in nursery schools. Learning to read can be started more frequently than at present at the pre-school stage, without sacrificing creative self-expression, for reading should not be regarded as a passive and uncreative activity, and until the child can read there are major limitations on how much he can learn on his own.

./.

In its respect for each individual child and an accompanying belief that no child should be pushed beyond what he is able to do, nursery education again provides a worthy model for the rest of the system. But in this respect too, there may have been an over-reaction, so that maturational factors are now over-stressed with reference to the introduction of training tasks. Care should be taken to give the more advanced children the stimulation they need independent of the general maturity of the group. In conjunction with this there should be more flexibility in the age of transfer of children from pre-school to primary education, allowing some children the opportunity of entering their primary school earlier than is usual.

Nursery education also has an important role to play in helping the handicapped child adjust to the school situation, and in providing the intellectually stimulating environment that is lacking in some disorganised lower working class homes. Special help should be given to both types of children at this stage, since the later it is left the more difficult it becomes to make up for the disadvantages from which the child suffers. In areas where there are a high proportion of children in this category there should be extra staff, so that they can receive more individual help.

In future it will be necessary to sponsor much more research on the education of young children. We need to know more about the fundamental processes of cognitive development, and social and emotional maturing. We also need more experimentation in the schools on what is taught and how it is taught. Our knowledge is still scanty and our methods haphazard. The growth of educational technology gives rise to many new opportunities to extend conventional approaches to teaching. The use of the mass media and special types of equipment such as the talking typewriter to teach children to read has hardly begun. Some of this, such as the typewriter, involves such high capital investment, that at present there is little chance of implementing it on a large scale. But some new equipment such as closed circuit TV can be introduced at lower cost. It is also necessary to try and evaluate existing programmes more rigorously than in the past. There are major research difficulties in doing this, but it should be possible to overcome some of these. Care should be taken to avoid evaluations based solely on formal criteria such as I.Q. gains, and ways must be found of measuring social and emotional maturity, learning motivation, and parental satisfaction.

./.

To conclude, most European countries are groping towards at least some of the policies described here. But in terms of the extent of provision they lie behind countries in the Soviet bloc, where the need for women in the labour market and ideals about the equality of women have both speeded up the establishment of nursery education, and in terms of research on early childhood education, they lie behind the USA. There is a need for a rapid acceleration in both spheres if the ideals of permanent education are to be realised. While we fail to provide all children with the opportunity to benefit from schooling at this crucial stage in their development, we fail to meet the maxims of equality of opportunity and the chance for life-long education.

A P P E N D I X

Acknowledgements

This study involved visiting the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and France in order to gather material about pre-school education in these countries. I should like to thank Bernard Trouillot of the International Institute for Educational Research in Frankfurt for providing me with a number of contacts in these countries, and to take the opportunity here of mentioning his book "Die Vorschulerziehung in neun Europäischen Ländern", which provides a great deal of invaluable information about the structure of nursery education in various countries. I should also like to thank Kristian Antonsen of OECD for providing me with further contacts. I am most grateful for the help that was given by the following people: Professor Ph. Idenburg for providing me with contacts, Mr. Coudart of the Ministry of Education in The Hague, Dr. A. Wilmink and Miss J. Broere in Amsterdam. Mrs. K. Lambert in Rotterdam, and Dr. J. Teunissen of the University of Utrecht; in Norway Dr. O. Vormeland, Miss B. Haldorsen, Mrs. T. Knutsen, and especially Ellen Gundersen; in Sweden Karl-Axel Sverud of the Institute of Education in Gothenburg, Miss I. William Ullson, Miss Siv Thorsell, and especially Miss Marianne Akerman in Stockholm; in France Father Joseph Wresinski and Miss A. de vos van Steenwijk of "Aide à Toute Détresse", Mrs. R. Sarazanas, Miss Abbadie, and the Directrice, teachers and children of the école maternelle, Avenue Stephen Pichon, in Paris.