DISCUSSION:

AFTERNOON SESSION, JUNE 3RD

Report by J. SISLIAN (Hamburg)

A German participant made two observations: (1) in the definition of "curriculum" one important aspect was not mentioned: that was the question of what really happens in the schools and to the children when the curriculum is implemented. A curriculum may fulfil different functions: it may be more or less binding on the teachers; so in some cases it will be closely followed, in others it will be very freely interpreted. This difference is important in making comparisons between countries.

(2) The investigation had used the method of asking the opinion of people who were said to be knowledgeable: but this "reputational method" which has been used also by American studies in political science has the defect that everyone views events through the spectacles of personal experience, educational influences, temperament, etc.; thus the opinion given is, in the Platonic sense, thrice removed from objectivity. This personal bias can be corrected to some extent if we have a large sample of informants; but this was not so in the present case since only two or three informants were used.

Dr. Sprungler replied that some evidence on the first point was given by the style of responses; but it was not the purpose of the investigation to make an empirical study of what goes on in classrooms. The information provided in curricula varies; when it is brief, planners apparently expect teachers to use freedom in teaching the subject, but it is not possible to compare the stringency with which the curriculum is enforced unless other studies are made. The object of the investigation was to study thinking about the curriculum, not the way in which the curriculum was implemented. On the second point, she agreed; she would have liked to have 100 experts. But her report never says that factors were so, in this respect: it states "It was said that . . ."

Returning to the first point, Dr. Sprungler emphasised an idea included in the conclusion of her report, that curriculum development should be the object of a large international study, possibly carried out by Unesco, on the model of the I.E.A. studies which investigate the "products" of the curriculum; there should be a large parallel project on the curricula themselves — the curricula which lead to the measured results already being studied.

A British participant said that a question arose as to the broad nature of this type of enquiry. No desire had been shown to examine other factors in curriculum development, e.g. (a) examinations, (b) the traditions which were powerful within the country. Dr. Sprungler replied that several countries are in fact strongly influenced by examinations: England could give as curriculum only the examination syllabuses for G.C.E., C.S.E., etc.; and these had not been capable of inclusion at all stages of the study. But examinations influence
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more the outcome than the planning of the curriculum, though undoubtedly they are a factor in modifying teachers' implementation of the curriculum planned. Tradition is clearly present in educational systems: but as there was no objective evidence obtainable about it, it was not included in the investigation.

DISCUSSION : SESSION DE L’APRÈS-MIDI, 3 JUIN

par J. SISLIAN (Hambourg)

Un membre Allemand fit remarquer que, dans la définition du terme "programme d'études", il n'avait pas été discuté de la latitude accordée à l'enseignant dans le processus de mise en application. Le Dr. Springer répondit que l'enquête portait sur une étude de la conception du programme d'enseignement et non sur sa mise en application. Elle répète que les produits des programmes d'enseignement devraient faire l'objet d'une grande étude à l'échelle internationale, parallèlement à un vaste projet portant sur les programmes eux-mêmes.

A une seconde question posée par ce membre allemand, qui demandait dans quelle mesure il était conseillé, lors d'une enquête, de prendre l'avis de personnes dites bien informées, le Dr. Springer répondit que, si, effectivement, il vaut mieux recueillir le témoignage d'une centaine d'experts, l'information obtenue ainsi qu'il l'a décrit n'avait, en revanche, jamais été rapportée comme étant un fait irréfutable.

En réponse à des questions concernant les examens et la tradition, en tant que facteurs déterminants dans le programme d'études, elle objecta que les examens influaient sur l'issue du programme d'études plutôt que sur son élaboration. Quant aux facteurs de tradition, comme il n'est pas possible de les évaluer, ils n'ont pas été pris en considération.