EDUCATION

Russians Study Dancing

RUSSIAN school children are preparing for ballroom dancing as well as satellite launching.

A recent visitor and critic of the Soviet system of school health, Prof. Jennelle Moorhead, of the Oregon State System of Higher Education, Eugene, said that Russian children in grades five through eight learn folk and ballroom dancing as well as other physical education subjects. In grades four through 11, physical education is taught as a subject twice a week, the researcher reported to the American Public Health Association meeting in Atlantic City, N. J.

The Russian child is bound by law to finish eight years of physical education. This includes gymnastics, track and field, skiing, and swimming (in southern Soviet states). Each school day starts with 20 minutes of gymnastics.

The Russian students, in elementary and secondary school, learn good manners, how to behave in school and in public, and relationships with other persons. These are similar to the subjects which have brought criticism from some United States educators who believe that these courses in U. S. schools are consuming time that can be spent on the three R's.

The students are also taught about the structure and function of the human body.

"I should remind you that Communist doctrine denies the validity of the Mendelian law of heredity, and teaches a theory which holds that environment can alter heredity. On occasion I deliberately mentioned the Mendelian law of heredity to educated Russians, and found they had never heard the theory," Dr. Moorhead told colleagues.

The present school organization in Russia requires that each student attend eight instead of the former seven years of elementary school.

The Russian secondary school is now an 11-year program, instead of the former ten-year one.

The Russians also appear to be expanding in the cultural corner.

They have substantially increased the number of hours of study of a foreign language. The method of teaching has been changed to place emphasis on conversation and reading foreign texts, Dr. Moorhead explained. Furthermore, the Soviets plan to increase the student's exposure to the aesthetics very soon. Drawing is to be taught from the first to the seventh grades, while music and singing will be taught all eight years, two years longer than at present.

Science News Letter, October 31, 1959

PUBLIC HEALTH

Monkey Research Dangers

LABORATORY monkeys may present a more serious public health problem than has been thought.

In the case of one disease—B-virus encephalomyelitis—there is no doubt about the real health hazard presented by infected captive animals.

"Until some practical method of control becomes available, this danger will continue," the scientists told the American Public Health Association meeting, Atlantic City, N. J.

This B-virus has been definitely identified as the cause of human deaths. Although the total number of reported cases of the disease, eight, is small, the scientists pointed out that cases are increasing as monkeys become more widely used for tissue cultured vaccines and other purposes. In monkeys the disease is mild and may not "show," said Drs. James E. Prier and Robert M. Sauer, both of the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, and Lee F. Schuchardt, James M. Sillaman, S. Morton Zulick and Harry C. Fegley of Merck Sharp & Dohme. (An indication of the seriousness of this public health problem is shown by the numbers of men and monkeys involved at the National Institutes of Health. That research facility alone employs more than 3,000 monkeys which are handled by approximately 225 humans.)

So far, they reported, there is no vaccine or other product to immunize humans against the disease. Probably the best way to protect laboratory workers would be to prevent the disease in monkeys, the scientists suggested. Suitable covering and the use of anesthesia for even minor operations involving the live animal will help protect the laboratory worker.

Other diseases, including monkey pox and various bacteria-caused infections, are known to occur in monkeys. In many cases, however, it has not been possible to pinpoint the transfer of the disease from a monkey to a man.

In spite of the lack of specific information on the number of human cases of diseases originating from contact or association with monkeys, there can be no doubt that reservoirs of infection in monkeys are a potential source of human infection, the scientists conclude.

The large number of recently identified viruses with which no diseasess have been associated may be causing diseases in both monkeys and humans. This should be investigated, the scientists indicate.

Science News Letter, October 31, 1959