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Published in the Slovak Republic  
European Journal of Contemporary Education  
E-ISSN 2305-6746  
2019, 8(1): 222-228  
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2019.1.222  
[www.ejournal1.com](http://www.ejournal1.com)

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## Teacher Training for the System of Primary Education in Switzerland in the mid-nineteenth century

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### Abstract

The paper deals with primary education in Switzerland in the middle of the nineteenth century with a particular focus on the primary school organization in various cantons. It also reviews the training process of primary school teachers in Swiss teacher seminars.

The materials used include specialist literature on the research topic. The methods of research were the principles of objectivity, historicism, systemic, complex consideration of social subjectivity in the subject of study, the maximum possible neutrality of the researcher towards the interpretation and evaluation of the actual material was assumed. The use of these methods allowed the authors to consider the system of singing training in educational institutions in retrospect and in historical sequence.

Summarizing the discussion, the authors concluded that the government turned its attention to talent training for primary schools almost as soon as primary education was introduced in Switzerland in the 1830s. Such training entirely fell on the so-called normal schools – seminars preparing teaching staff, which were divided into two types – men's and women's institutions. Despite the existing diversity of teaching formats in different cantons in Switzerland, the Confederation government made considerable efforts to unify education in the country. On the other hand, in competing with other cantons, independent cantons were committed to bringing only best practices into the public education system.

**Keywords:** teacher seminars, Switzerland, primary education system, mid-nineteenth century.

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## **1. Introduction**

The formative years of public education has its distinctive and characteristic features in different European countries. The rise of teaching profession, as a rule, was influenced by a country's geographical location that further brought about economic and demographic factors. By the mid-nineteenth century, Switzerland was one of these countries. By this period, Switzerland had been able to accumulate sufficient expertise in education and held a leading position in Europe, based on a number of indicators (Belyavskii, 1897: 1). In the paper, we aim to consider the peculiarities of teacher training for the Swiss primary school.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The materials used include specialist literature on the research topic. The methods of research were the principles of objectivity, historicism, systemic, complex consideration of social subjectivity in the subject of study, the maximum possible neutrality of the researcher towards the interpretation and evaluation of the actual material was assumed. The use of these methods allowed the authors to consider the system of singing training in educational institutions in retrospect and in historical sequence.

## **3. Discussion**

Historically, the subject of primary education in the nineteenth century, both in Europe and in Russia, was interesting to a wide academic and pedagogical community. The search for new teaching formats and methods, transition to compulsory education and other challenges were often hotly debated on the pages of scholarly periodicals. That is why pedagogical journals and academic monographs placed great emphasis on the dedicated experience and insights gained (Shevchenko et al., 2018: 226-228). One of these topics referred to Switzerland's public education system. First publications on the topic began to appear in the 1860s. For example, the "Journal of the Ministry of Public Education" published two works by V. Varentsov (Varentsov, 1863) and a short commentary on public education in Switzerland (Narodnoe obrazovanie, 1862).

In the late nineteenth century, public education was highlighted by N.N. Belyavskii (Belyavskii, 1897) and I. Berlin (Berlin, 1898). At the end of the Soviet era, the topic of literary links between Russia and Switzerland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was explored by R.D. Danilevskii (Danilevskii, 1984).

The post-Soviet period witnessed a range of researchers, such as Yu.S. Kukushkin (Kukushkin, 1995), L.G. Berezovaya (Berezovaya, 2012) and O.V. Kozlov (Kozlov, 2013) turning their attention to the subject.

## **4. Results**

Before proceeding to the description of Switzerland-specific features of public education development, it is necessary to clarify that administratively the territory of Switzerland was divided into 22 sovereign cantons. Moreover, almost every canton had its own rules regarding public education (Kozlov, 2013: 113). For this reason, the Swiss government paid great attention to projects to unify education and find new optimum solutions.

The rapid spread of primary education in Switzerland was driven by the association of sovereign cantons into a single union in 1832–33. All cantons, except for Geneva, Valais and three minor mountain cantons on Lake Lucerne with a very small population, where it was not possible to establish a significant number of schools, adopted compulsory education. According to the law, all parents were required to send children aged from 6 to 14 to schools. In a number of communities, teachers received lists of all children in their wards, and checked pupils against the lists every morning; if a child was absent, they recorded the appropriate reason for the absence in the lists. The lists of pupils were regularly audited by inspectors who were granted the right to levy a fine for each day of absence on the parents of the absent child if no valid reason was provided. However, the law was not strictly enforced everywhere. There were even localities that did not require to unquestioningly obey the law at all.

Each canton in Switzerland was divided into communities or parishes, and it was mandatory for each parish to have a school in place to teach their children, as well as a salary and home for a teacher. Parishes which had more 20 children aged from 6 were supposed to establish a school. If the number of pupils reached 50–60 people, it was required to open a second school and so on.

Boys and girls often studied at the same school. Although parishes were not obliged to establish schools for young children, the government still recommended to launch them and provided financial support ([Narodnoe obrazovanie, 1862: 40](#)).

In most cases parish schools were under the management of teachers belonging to the largest religious group in the parish. If it was necessary to establish more than one school for different religious groups in the parish, one school was a responsibility of a teacher from one religious group, and another of a teacher from another group. The children of the parents who did not followed the same religion with a school teacher were permitted not to attend the Law of God lessons but they had to learn the rules of faith from a priest of their confession.

Parish schools taught the following subjects:

1. Law of God;
2. Reading;
3. Writing;
4. Linear Drawing;
5. Spelling and Grammar;
6. Arithmetic and Accounting;
7. Singing;
8. General Geography and Geography of Switzerland;
9. History of Switzerland;
10. Fundamentals of Natural Philosophy with its Practical Application;
11. Rhetoric Exercises;
12. Rules on the rights and duties of a citizen ([Narodnoe obrazovanie, 1862: 40-41](#)).

Parish schools were supervised in each canton by the Council of Inspectors or the General Council for Public Education, chaired by the Minister. The inspector was responsible for visiting all cantonal schools at least once a year and reporting to the government on the state of the schools, pupil progress, teaching methods, degree of control over diligent attendance of schools by children in each parish.

Besides this general council of inspectors, each community also had a private council of inspectors in place, elected annually from the clergy and the community's educated people; they, in turn, inspected parish schools, at least once a year and made all details on pupils' successes known to the Minister of Public Education.

Many cantons ran one teacher seminar to train teaching staff. By the 1860s, there had been 20 such seminars in Switzerland (15 for male teachers and 5 for female teachers) ([Varentsov, 1863: 15](#)). The study period was 2 or 3 years at a teacher seminar. There were cases when one canton was unable to cover the cost of operating such a seminar, and in this situation other cantons came to its help. The school regulations in each canton required that a teacher had a certificate of a standard form for the right to private tuition. Examinations for this certificate were carried out by the Central Council for Public Education. Those awarded the teacher's certificate received employment only based on competition, and, therefore, had to pass secondary exams. The secondary exams were carried out by the local school committee. At the exam, the teacher was expected to demonstrate not only the knowledge of the subject, but also their skills to transfer their knowledge to pupils ([Narodnoe obrazovanie, 1862: 42](#)).

Importantly, the idea of establishing teacher seminars in Switzerland was put forward for the first time already in the late eighteenth century. For example, a decree of 1798 on public education voiced the idea but for political reasons the initiative was shelved until better days. The law of May 28, 1806, ratified to open an institute for teachers, and even the operation regulations for the new institute were approved in 1811. Nevertheless, the initiative was never put into practice. On September 1, 1833, the first teacher's seminar was launched in Lausanne. A similar seminar for female teachers was set up on January 1, 1837. The training program at the men's seminar consisted of three years, and at the women's one – of two years.

Students were enrolled in teacher seminars once a year, before the start of educational courses. The Council for Public Education announced via newspapers the day of entrance examinations at least one month in advance. Applicants were to notify the seminar director in writing of their intention ten days prior to the examination. In addition to the application, the seminar entrant had to submit certificates of birth, rank and morality. Moreover, some cantons

required to submit a medical certificate that the candidate did not have any contagious diseases and organic deficiencies.

On the appointed day, candidates underwent examinations. In the canton of Vaud, they were examined by a special commission of four experts appointed by the Council for Public Education, chaired by the seminar director. The exams were held in the following subjects: Reading, Spelling, Grammar, Arithmetic and Geography. In addition, the commission made sure that the candidate had a fine ear for music. After the examination is completed, the commission submits a report to the Council for Public Education with their opinion and comments on the abilities of each candidate.

The Council finally makes a decision on admission. Applicants had an opportunity to enter directly the second or third (senior) grade. Such admission only required to pass the exam on the subjects that were studied in previous years.

Here is a list of disciplines included in the training program for teacher seminars:

**Law of God.** The content was distributed across grades in the following way: the first year was devoted to the sacred history; the second one was a systematic course including dogmatic and moral theology; the third one covered the reading of books of the Old and New Testament with historical and geographical explanations. Each grade had three lessons per week. A similar curriculum was introduced for a women's seminar with the course sub-divided into two rather than three years.

**French Language,** 5 lessons per week, and the senior grade at the men's seminar had 4 lessons. The first year curriculum included the following: the Grammar course – General Principles of Language and Etymology; Logical and Grammatical Analysis, Spelling Course; Reading and Writing; the second year – Syntax, Grammatical Analysis, Compositions, Reading by Heart. The third year curriculum for the men's seminar comprised: a more detailed Syntax, Theory of Synonyms and Tropes, Recitation; Written and Oral Presentation of Ideas; Pedagogical Exercises.

**Arithmetic.** At the men's seminar, Arithmetic was taught four, three and three lessons per week per year correspondingly, at the women's one – four lessons in each year; in addition, at the men's seminar, they taught geometry two lessons in all three grades. In the first year, students learned how to conduct mathematical operations with integers, vulgar and decimal fractions, rule of three, mental calculations; in the second year – rules of relationship, mixing, percentages, bills discounting, rules of divisibility by 2, 3, etc., keeping accounting books; in addition, at the men's seminar: in the same year, general algebraic concepts; in the third year – raising to the power and square and cubic root generation, progressions, logarithms, various numbering systems, double-entry bookkeeping.

**Geometry** is taught only at the men's seminar: in the first year – Longimetry and Elements of Plane Geometry, in the second – End of Plane Geometry, in the third – Solid Geometry. This course studied Surveying and Plan Drawing.

**Geography** has three lessons per week; the Geography course was distributed as follows: at the women's seminar, in the first year – General Concepts of Mathematical and Physical Geography; in the second year – Political Geography of Europe and Major States in Other Parts of the World, Political Geography of Switzerland. At the men's seminar, in the first year – Physical Geography and Elements of Mathematical Geography; in the second year – End of Mathematical Geography and Political Geography of Europe and Roman Cantons of Switzerland; in the third year – Political Geography of Other Parts of the World and German Switzerland. All grades included lessons on drawing geographical maps.

**History.** History was taught two hours per week in each grade. Students at the women's seminar had only History of Switzerland: in the first year – the period before the Reformation, in the second year – period up to modern times; afterwards they studied the history of their canton. At the men's seminar, they studied Ancient and Medieval History in the first year; in the second year – Modern History followed by History of Switzerland before the Reformation; in the third year – End of History of Switzerland and the history of their canton.

The course of sciences was delivered three hours per week in the two first grades at the men's seminar, and two hours per week in the rest. The women's seminar offered Physics and Meteorology in the first year; Botany and Zoology – in the second year. In addition to these two

courses, the men's seminars gave mineralogy, geology and chemistry in the third year (Varentsov, 1863: 26).

**Pedagogy** was taught starting from the second year. The women's seminar allocated for the course 4 hours per week; the training program was designed to explain general principles of upbringing, concepts of physical and moral upbringing; education; teaching arts and sciences; various teaching methods; school organization and management. At the men's seminar, this course was taught at the senior grade; it was preceded by Anthropology that was delivered twice a week in the second year. In addition, students at the men's seminar also received two Logic lessons twice per week at the end the last sixth semester.

**Jurisprudence** was delivered at two lessons per week in the last semester at the women's seminar; at the men's seminar – one lesson in the fifth semester and two lessons in the sixth one. The course outlined general notions of rights and obligations; conditions of public life, supreme power, laws, public guarantees, personal service, taxes; notions of the Constitution and historical development of Swiss constitutions; description of rights and obligations as defined by the latest effective Constitution.

Presentations on all the subjects were given both from a theoretical and from a practical point of view for various applications. Teachers' task was to test the knowledge of seminarians by asking many questions and give them pedagogical problems to solve, each in their own branch of teaching.

The women's seminar added housekeeping lessons to these subjects in the amount two hours per week in the senior grade. The course considered general housekeeping concepts; conditions of good housekeeping; nursing; house management, furniture, tableware, kitchenware and utensils, dress, linen, provisions: firewood, wine, vinegar, oil, candles, soap, tea, coffee, seasonings, flour, garden vegetables and various ways of cooking them.

The course of Music was broken up into theoretical and practical lessons; it included both church and secular music, but only one vocal sub-course that had five lessons per week at the first grade and four in further years.

The seminar curriculum also included calligraphy: it comprised various types of writing and handwriting, methods of dressing quills, holding them in hand and various methods and techniques of teaching. The number of lessons at the men's seminar was four, four and two; at the women's one – three and two.

Drawing was delivered in four, four and two lessons at the men's seminar, and at the women's one – two in each grade. These included: first year – drawing, second year – sample drawing, and final year – life drawing.

Gymnastics was allocated three hours per week at the men's seminar, and two hours at the women's seminar. Classes at the seminar could be combined for lessons in Music, Drawing, Calligraphy and Gymnastics. At the women's seminar, this also practiced for needlework lessons which were run 8 hours per week in the first grade and 6 hours in the senior grade.

The course at Lausanne seminars lasted from May 20 to April 20, divided into two semesters. In addition to holidays, the seminars were closed for two weeks after spring exams, for five weeks in the harvest time and for three weeks in the vintage period. The number of lessons per week was required not to exceed 42 in summer and 39 in winter; each lesson lasted 1 hour, and Drawing could take two consecutive hours. Lessons started at 7 a.m. in summer and at 8 in winter; after lunch studies lasted from 14 to 17 p.m., excluding Saturdays when there were no afternoon classes (Varentsov, 1863: 26).

The responsibility of managing seminars was placed on directors who were also supposed to teach students: the director had to deliver Pedagogy and Jurisprudence but not more than 14 hours per week. As part of their job duties, directors were expected to ensure the appropriate unification in methods and lines of teaching, the director gave each teacher a free hand in choosing techniques and practices. The director was present, where possible, in classrooms at lessons to make sure that the academic hours allocated by the program were actually devoted to the designated subject, as well as to form their own estimate of the teacher's skills and abilities, students' classes and their academic performance. At a number of seminars, directors were obliged to conduct practical classes, attend neighboring vocational schools and supervise internal processes and procedures.

In addition to the director, seminars employed a number of teachers and their assistants who were accountable to the director and followed their orders; taken all together, they constituted a



pedagogical council that discussed relevant issues at monthly meetings; under special circumstances, the meetings could take place more often; meeting dates were proposed by the director or three teachers. The council developed a teaching plan, daily lesson schedule at the seminar, an extra-curriculum program and disciplinary rules; decided on the issues of imposing special corrective actions; on the dates and start of holidays, and also determined, at the director's proposal, what books, devices and training aids should be purchased. In addition, the director evaluated students based on their academic successes and behavior, formulated a proposal on the final admission and dismissal of seminarians and made decisions on all matters relating to the seminar.

All lessons were designed to achieve not only learning objectives but also educative goals. The progress of seminarians was assessed at annual examinations that determined whether the student was eligible for the next grade or stayed for the second year to repeat the same courses. At the end of the full course, the council set the date for an examination for the teacher's diploma. The event was public and was carried out by a commission chaired by a member of the Council for Public Education. The examination report was submitted to the Council for Public Education, which eventually issued diplomas. Candidates were qualified to receive the diploma provided they had only satisfactory marks.

However, it was not enough to have the diploma to get a teacher's position in a community school. The community, which was to open the appropriate vacancy, announced the competition terms in advance and provided a detailed description of the teacher's duties and salary. The competition could be entered either by those who had a teacher's diploma, or by those who was 23 years old and had at least 5 years of experience as an assistant teacher. After all official procedures were observed, the public exam began attended by experts. As soon as the exam ended, the commission chose a candidate by a simple majority. (Varentsov, 1863: 31).

## 5. Conclusion

Summing up the above points, we can say that the government turned its attention to talent training for primary schools almost as soon as primary education was introduced in Switzerland in the 1830s. Such training entirely fell on the so-called normal schools – seminars preparing teaching staff, which were divided into two types – men's and women's institutions. Although forms of teaching varied in different cantons in Switzerland, the federal government made considerable efforts to unify education in the country. On the other hand, in the context of competition with other cantons, sovereign cantons were committed to bringing only best practices into the system of public education.

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