

EMERALD STUDIES IN TEACHER PREPARATION
IN NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS



Historical Development of Teacher Education in Finland

JUSSI VÄLIMAA

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Author

Jussi Välimaa is a Professor Emeritus. He has worked at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä as both a Professor and a Director. During his career, he has been a visiting Professor and a researcher in Japan and the United States and has worked as an editor and an editor-in-chief of scholarly journals. Professor Välimaa has published over 200 books, articles and other publications to date. Trained as a historian and social scientist, Professor Välimaa has a solid expertise in social and historical research in higher education. Throughout his career, Professor Välimaa has been interested in the relationship between higher education and society and in the internal dynamics of higher education institutions.

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Preface

The process of writing this historical synthesis was a research journey into both the history and diversity of Finnish teacher education. I hope that the outcome of this research journey will be useful to fellow citizens and academic colleagues interested in teacher education.

This journey also helped me to understand the educational path of two of my aunts who have been teachers. The research also provided perspectives on issues that I have discussed with my wife, Dr. Raili Välimaa, senior lecturer at the university, and issues that I have encountered while acting as a mentor for pedagogical studies for adult educators.

DeepL Translation was a significant help in writing this study in English. However, any linguistic or other errors are my responsibility.

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Abstract

This book analyses teacher preparation and teacher education in Finland from the 19th century to the early 21st century. The study focuses in particular on the 1863–1971 seminariums for folk school teachers, which have had a profound impact on all Finnish teacher education. At the same time, the teacher training provided by the seminariums has strongly shaped perceptions of what a good teacher should be. The influence of this teacher ideal extends to the present day. The book also describes the history of secondary teacher education, teacher education for kindergarten teachers, special education, and vocational teacher education from their beginnings. It also looks at the history of folk education, whose challenges and reforms have had a major impact on changes in teacher preparation and teacher education. The theoretical starting point is that teacher education is a social phenomenon, and therefore, the values, norms and resources of society have influenced its functioning and organisation. At the same time, teacher education has had a significant impact on society from the 19th century to the 21st century. Teacher education is therefore contextualized in the events of Finnish political history, as the transformation from the Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian Empire (1809–1917) to an independent, democratic republic (1917–) through the Civil War and after the Second World War shaped the relationship of teacher education with the state. The book focuses on the history of the organisational structure and organisation of teacher education, and therefore, less attention is paid to pedagogical issues.

Keywords: College; comprehensive school; Finland; folk school; folk school teacher; folk school teachers' preparation seminarium; history; primary school teacher; teacher education

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The chapter discusses the objectives, theoretical and methodological background, and key concepts of the study.

1.1 Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze how teacher preparation (later teacher education, or training) has been organized in Finland from its beginning to the 2010s. The aim is to provide an analytical description on the variety of the forms of teacher training covering the levels of primary and secondary education.

The study is based on two perspectives to the social phenomenon of teacher preparation in Finland. The first one is an empirically based notion that all education, including teacher education, takes place in the social contexts of its society. Therefore, society with its resources and changing needs, expectations, values, and norms influence on the contents of teacher education, on pedagogical approaches preferred, and on the social relationships between students, teacher educators, and society. Due to this societal perspective, the structure of the book follows the main developments of Finnish political history because of the close relationship between teacher preparation and the changes of Finnish society. In addition, the preparation of teachers and the education of the people are closely related processes. Because of this interconnectedness, this study also examines reforms in public education and their relationship to teacher education.

A second starting point for the study is the observation that teacher preparation and training has played a major role in the social status of students since the 19th century (see Välimaa, 2019). However, teacher education is a special case in higher education, as its curricula have always had a strong professional orientation and ethical and normative basis, as discussed below. The research also addresses why different forms of teacher education and folk education have played a central role in the cultural, political, and economic building processes of the Finnish nation and the emerging Finnish nation-state.

Therefore, the study at hand will focus on (1) analyzing the development of teacher education establishments as organizations, (2) reflecting on the socio-economic backgrounds of teacher education students, and (3) analyzing the

relationships between teacher education establishments and the state represented both by the Grand Duchy of Finland (1809–1917) and the Republic of Finland (1917–).

1.2 On Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

This study aims to provide a balanced historical synthesis on the development of Finnish teacher preparation and teacher education and training. It is based on critical analyses of existing research literature on Finnish teacher education. Methodologically, the study follows the principles of historical research acknowledging that a theoretical perspective in historical studies can mean either reflections on the philosophy of history or a theory as an interpretative frame as Gottesman put it (Gottesman, 2019, p. 67). This study is not based on a single sociological or historical theory even though it will discuss with the theories related to new institutionalism.

As for the philosophy of history, there is a need to discuss both ontological and epistemological questions about the nature of history. Ontologically, it is relevant to ask how the social world is structured and how it works? What are the roles of institutions, nation-states, human agency, and ideas in mitigating and shaping historical dynamics in each case (see Gottesman, 2019)?

The study of the history of teacher education is a special field of historical research in the sense that education has both an organizational dimension and a social institution dimension. The organizational dimension focuses on the way in which the educational system (schools, vocational training institutions, universities, and other higher education institutions) is organized and by whom. In other words, why and according to what principles and with what aims teacher preparation and education organizations have been set up, regulated, and financed. *The social institution*, for its part, is a multidimensional concept. What the different views seem to have in common, however, is that organizations and social institutions are different but often overlapping entities. Miller (2024) defines social institutions as “complex social forms that reproduce themselves.” Streeck and Thelen (2005, p. 9) state that “institutions are the building blocks of social order.” Furthermore, “because such roles are central and important to society, they tend to be long-lasting ones; thus, institutions are typically trans-generational” (Miller, 2024). In teacher education as a social institution, what is interesting is how and in what ways the educational role is performed in this transgenerational social institution. In other words, what has been taught, why, and how?

This study focuses mainly on the organizational dimension of teacher education. For this reason, each chapter will begin by contextualizing it with events in political history, since the history of teacher education is closely linked to the political history of Finland. Indeed, teacher education has been, and still is, closely linked to the perceptions of those in power at the time about the aims of education. This study deals with the continuities and discontinuities in Finnish teacher education from the early 19th century to the 2010s, i.e. which things have changed and which did not, and the relationship between them. However, the

main focus is on the period from the 1860s to the 1990s, as this is when the greatest organizational changes were experienced. In contrast, this study does not focus on how the role of teacher education as a social institution has changed in Finland. Therefore, this study will focus more narrowly on what pedagogical approach has been used in different periods. This methodological choice is also influenced by the fact that it is difficult to say with certainty what kind of pedagogy was put into practice, even if one knows what kind of pedagogical textbooks were used in teacher education at the time.

Epistemologically, a crucial question is to ask: “How does a researcher know the social world?” In other words, what is the relationship between a researcher and the object of research? This perspective is an important one in historical synthesis such as this one that is based on previous historical, sociological, and educational research. When writing a historical synthesis one needs to ask: What was the agenda, or the intellectual aim of the scholar concerned? This questions help to contextualize both past and contemporary studies in the analysis of the history of Finnish teacher education.

1.3 Definition of Key Concepts

This study analyzes how teacher preparation for primary level schools, i.e. folk schools, has been organized in different periods and discusses how this teacher education has influenced all Finnish teacher education since the 19th century.

However, it is challenging to use the terminology of the Finnish school system in English. One of the reasons for this is the fact that Finnish school system has derived its basic concepts from the German-speaking region, with which the Finnish system also has had structural similarities (see, for example, Nurmi, 1964). The conceptualizations have also come in and through Sweden, because Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom for over 700 years. For example, the term *kansakoulu* is a direct translation from the German (*die Volksschule*). However, this term has a special meaning in Finland, as nation (*kansa*) can refer to both a people and a nation. The term “folk school” therefore refers to the education of both the people and the nation. For this reason, the concepts of “folk” and “school” have been politically and culturally charged concepts in Finland. Furthermore, *Kansakoulunopettaja* (folk school teacher) is in turn a direct translation from the German (*der Volksschullehrer, die Volksschullehrerin*). Another key concept is *ylioppilas* or *abiturientti* (*der Abiturient or die Abiturientin* in German), which refers to a pupil who has completed secondary education and passed the secondary school matriculation examination.

However, seminarium (*das Seminar*) or folk school teachers’ preparation seminarium (*das Schullehrer-seminar*) is the key term for this study. The Finnish concept of folk school teachers’ seminarium (*kansakoulunopettajaseminaari*) cannot be properly translated into English as “teacher training college,” as this concept lacks its connection with the education of the people and the nation. In fact, this was one of the main reasons for the creation of the folk school teachers’ preparation system in Finland as will be shown below. In addition, the concept of

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a seminarium has also been used in other Nordic countries (*seminarium för grundskollärare* in Swedish), which are Finland's closest cultural reference point. Furthermore, historically speaking, college is a misleading term, since there have been no colleges in Finland, only universities and other institutions of higher education called as *korkeakoulu* (*die hochschule* in German), which nevertheless have had a lower status than a university (see Välimaa, 2019).¹

For these reasons, the term folk school teachers' preparation seminarium (abbreviated as folk school teachers' seminarium) will be used from now on in this study, also because it respects the Finnish tradition according to which these educational establishments were called teacher seminaries from the 1860s until the 1970s.² Furthermore, the concept of the spirit of seminarium (*seminaarihenki*) has been used to describe the mentality and pedagogical practices of teacher seminaries until the 1970s (see Chapter 3.8).³

In addition to the education system, the structure of the Finnish education administration and the names of its various bodies have changed over the course of history. For the sake of clarity, this study will use the name National Agency for Education, which refers to the unit within the Ministry of Education (or equivalent authority) that has been responsible for the supervision and guidance of both basic education and teacher training.⁴

1.4 Previous Research Literature

There has been a considerable amount of research in Finland on folk schools, the preparation of folk school teachers, and the social role of folk school teachers. The large number of these studies shows in itself how important teacher education has been in Finland. A basic work on the history of folk schools is Aimo Halila's vividly written two-volume history of the folk school system (Halila, 1949a, 1949b). Halila's work not only focuses on the history of folk education and folk

¹Finnish researchers who have not been familiar with higher education research tradition have used all the concepts mentioned above. Veli Nurmi like many other Finnish scholars has used the concept of teacher training college without problematizing this concept (see Nurmi, 1995).

²The only exception will be the Jyväskylä College of Education, which was established in 1934. It was the first higher education institution specialized on teacher education in the Nordic countries.

³The concept of teacher preparation seminarium was used in Finland from the 1860s to 1971 (see Hykkö, 2006, p. 44; Nurmi, 1995, pp. 13–14).

⁴Originally, this agency was called Supreme School Board (*Koulutoimen ylihallitus* or *Kouluylhallitus* (1871–1918) or *Kouluhallitus* (1918–1991). It took its current title (*Opetushallitus*) in 1991. Organizationally, it was under Church Administration until 1918 after which it has been under the Ministry of Education. Indifferent of the name, this administrative agency has been responsible for controlling and steering the system of education from preprimary to secondary education including teacher preparation seminaries.

schools but also describes teachers, teaching, and teacher preparation both before and during the establishment of folk schools.

The basis for the history of Finnish seminariums for elementary school teachers is Veli Nurmi's extensive *History of Folk School Teachers' Seminariums* (Nurmi, 1995). The strength of this study is its systematic approach based on original sources. At the same time, it is a weakness, as this study lacks a more detailed analysis of the specific features of the seminariums and almost entirely fails to compare them with other countries. The nationalist perspective of the work may, however, have been influenced by the fact that it was published by a teachers' trade union. In addition to this work, Nurmi has also published an important work on the history of temporary teacher training colleges (Nurmi, 1990) and a thorough study of Uno Cygnaeus (Nurmi, 1988).

Over the years, there have also been many, but uneven, seminarium histories or matrices written about seminariums. Those written before the Second World War are usually highly biased accounts of the glorious days of the seminariums. Among the seminarium histories, one can mention in particular Reijo Heikkinen's (2000) excellent history of the Kajaani seminarium. Tuula Hyyrö's study on lower folk school teacher seminariums is a thorough, scholarly analysis of this educational institution, which was overshadowed by folk school teacher seminariums (Hyyrö, 2006).

Critical research on teacher education is represented in particular by the studies of Risto Rinne and Hannu Simola, in which Rinne has analyzed, for example, sociologically the social background of folk school and elementary school teachers (Rinne, 1986, 1989). Simola, for his part, has critically examined, for example, the role of teachers in Finnish political discourse (Simola, 1995, 2014) and analyzed the Finnish education system (Simola, 2014). Traditional conceptions of teacher education have been renewed by Heli Valtonen (2009a), for example, by studying the Jyväskylä Teachers' College as a social community, and Kaisa Ylikotila by analyzing the functioning of seminariums through the concept of the model citizen (Ylikotila, 2021). Jukka Rantala has studied, for example, the phases of folk school teachers during the Finnish Civil War (Rantala, 2002) and the everyday life of folk school teachers (Rantala, 2005). Finnish-language research articles on the phases of teacher preparation and teacher training can also be found in the periodicals *Kasvatus* (since 1970), *Koulu ja menneisyys* (since 1935), and *Kasvatus ja Aika* (since 2007).

The above studies are examples of studies on teacher training in primary education. In contrast, relatively little has been written about nonprimary teacher education. In the field of vocational teacher education and training, the most useful for this study are Tiilikkala's study on the development of vocational teacher education and Mutka and Turpeinen's in-depth study on the history of one, i.e. Vocational Teacher Education College of Jyväskylä (Mutka & Turpeinen, 2022; Tiilikkala, 2004). Through it, the institutional history of vocational teacher education is well illuminated. Hänninen and Valli's work (Hänninen & Valli, 1986), on the other hand, provides an excellent account of the preparation of kindergarten teachers from its early stages until the 1980s. What these works have in common is that the authors have been practitioners, which is why they

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know their research subjects well. At the same time, this strength may be methodologically problematic, as the works may lack a critical historical perspective on the source materials.

In contrast, the comprehensive history of special education teacher training is largely unwritten, as the only historical work that touches on the topic is Tuunainen and Nevala's general description of the stages of special education (Tuunainen & Nevala, 1989).

Chapter 2

Early Stages of Teacher Preparation in Finland up to the 1860s

2.1 Finland Between Western and Eastern Europe

Finland has been located between two strong political entities of Sweden and Russia from the Middle Ages to the present day. This geopolitical location has been not only a political border between the two great powers of the North but also a cultural and social dividing line. Finns have lived with the differences in worldviews and mindsets and mentalities of Western Europe and Eastern Europe throughout their history (see Alapuro, 1988). This geopolitical reality has shaped Finnish history culturally, politically, and economically over time.

Culturally speaking, Finland was connected with the Western cultural sphere in the 12th century when Western parts of Finland and later most of the country was conquered by Swedish kings and consequently integrated with the Roman Catholic Church. The influence of the Roman Catholic Church was extremely significant because it was the channel through which literary culture and Western worldview gradually spread over Finland. The Catholic Church together with Franciscan and Dominican orders established first schools in Finland as in many countries in Europe (Hanska & Lahtinen, 2010; Välimaa, 2019). Education was a crucial part of the integration of Finland into the Western world because the Catholic Church sent Finnish students to European universities (especially to Paris) from the Middle Ages to the time of Reformation in the 16th century. With the university students traveled Western European pedagogical values and ideas back to Finland. The process of adaptation to Western societies also helped the integration of the Finnish cultural elite into Western cultural values and conception of the world. However, the political and cultural elite and the population of the coastal regions were Swedish-speaking, while the inland population was Finnish-speaking. This language difference became extremely significant in the 19th century with the rise of Finnish nationalism (see Engman, 2009; Meinander, 2020; Välimaa, 2019).

Politically, Eastern provinces (*Österlandet* as Finland also was called) were an important part of the Swedish Kingdom for almost 700 years (from the 12th century to 1809). One of the important consequences of this close relationship was

the acceptance of Western juridical tradition emphasizing the rule of law, whereas according to Russian juridical tradition, the emperor was the law. The difference of these traditions grew important when Finland became connected to the Russian Empire in the 19th century as an Autonomous Grand Duchy (1809–1917). Thus, the difference between Swedish Kingdom and Russia was not only religious – Sweden being a Roman Catholic country and Russia an orthodox one – but it was related to different political traditions as well. Geopolitical conflict between Sweden and Russia was a permanent one, and it led to a number of wars from the 12th to the 19th century. Finland was often the battlefield in these wars (see Meinander, 2020, cf. Klinge, 2000).

Economically, Finland was and has been connected to the European mainland, especially to Germany, via the Baltic Sea. In addition, Finns living in the Western coastline have had tight economic relationships with Sweden via the Gulf of Bothnia, whereas eastern parts of Finland were oriented toward trade with Russia (see Engman, 2009).

2.2 Historical Context of Finland From the Middle Ages to the 19th Century

According to historians, the end of the Middle Ages took place in Sweden at the time of the Reformation in the 1520s. Reformation was not only a religious revolution that ended the domination of the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden (and Finland), but more importantly it was a political revolution that marked the beginning of modernization of the Swedish Kingdom under the reign of King Gustav I Vasa who confiscated the property of the Catholic Church after the Diet of Västerås in 1527. However, the Reformation was not a popular bottom-up movement as it was in Germany, but a top-down process initiated by a group of scholars educated in Protestant universities and supported by the King who benefited both economically and politically from the lost power of the Catholic Church (see Karonen, 2014).

After the Reformation, the Kingdom of Sweden was drawn more tightly with European politics and the battle over the domination of the Baltic Sea. This led to wars against Russia, Poland, and Denmark. Sweden was victorious in its military campaigns and reached a dominant position in the Baltic Sea that lasted about hundred years (from the 1630s to the 1720s) (see Karonen, 2014; Meinander, 2020).

Finland was an integral part of the Kingdom of Sweden politically, economically, and culturally. Politically, the connection between Finland and Swedish decision-making took place through participation of Finnish delegates in the Diet of Sweden. Economically, the Kingdom of Sweden both regulated taxes and determined, among other things, which cities had the right to engage in foreign trade. The Finns also paid their taxes to Stockholm, the capital of the Kingdom, from the Middle Ages until 1809 when Finland was separated from the Kingdom of Sweden. Culturally, Finns shared not only the same religion but also the same values and social structures of society as Sweden. The role of the Lutheran Church was crucially important in this regard because the church was responsible