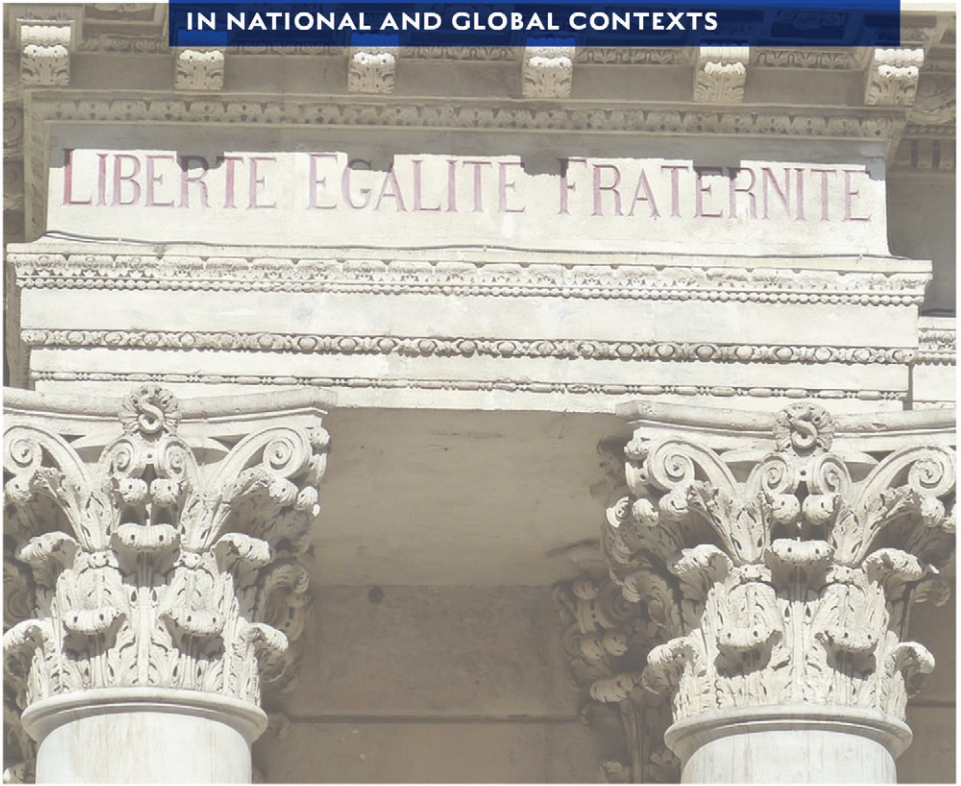


EMERALD STUDIES IN TEACHER PREPARATION
IN NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS



Teacher Preparation in France

A Social and Cultural History

IMELDA ELLIOTT
EWEN LECUIT

Teacher Preparation in France

Imelda Elliott and Ewen Lecuit, through this well-structured and balanced work, retrace the historical evolution of French teacher training from the Ancien Régime to the present day. As a specialist of the history of primary education, I will focus on the chapters dedicated to this subject. Imelda Elliott and Ewen Lecuit rightly emphasise the work of Jules Ferry, which represents a turning point in the history of French schooling, particularly through the impact of secularism on curricula, content, school buildings and staff. They rightly highlight the fact that the Ferry laws are based on the educational reflection begun in the age of Enlightenment (La Chalotais, Diderot, Rousseau) and during the revolutionary period (Condorcet) and above all confirm the previous laws (Guizot, Falloux and Duruy) which enabled an increasing number of boys and girls, during the 19th century, to access schooling. In this sense, the Ferry laws represent more of a qualitative than a quantitative revolution in the history of French primary education.

Moreover, at the dawn of the 21st century, the parts on primary teacher training illustrate the significant progress made since the small schools of the Ancien Régime. The transition from the lay clerk or *magister*, who often possessed only basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills and relied on the old individual teaching method, to the modern primary school teacher, now holding a Master's degree and working collaboratively within the educational community, is particularly noteworthy.

This book is intended for an international audience, particularly English-speaking readers who may struggle to grasp the complexities of the French educational system. Clearly, this book, by virtue of its intrinsic qualities, successfully fulfils this mission.

**—Dr Marc Loison, PhD in History of Education,
Honorary Lecturer in Contemporary History at the University of Artois,
Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques**

Imelda Elliott and Ewen Lecuit's *Teacher Preparation in France – A Social and Cultural History* offers a meticulously researched analysis of the evolution of teacher education in France, from its inception to the contemporary *Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation* (INSPE). This comprehensive volume is an invaluable resource for those interested in the intersection of education, history, and cultural policy. As a French native and teacher, who attended the *Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres* (IUFM), I loved reading this excellent book.

The book is structured chronologically, with chapters that dissect pivotal moments in the development of teacher preparation for both primary and secondary education. The authors delve into the sociopolitical forces that shaped teacher training, from the Church's dominance in early education to the secularisation reforms of the Third Republic. The rich detail provided – ranging from

the establishment of *Écoles Normales* to the controversial IUFM era – illustrates the complexity of balancing pedagogical goals with societal needs, and that is what I found the most fascinating.

A standout feature of this book is its dual focus: the historical narrative is interwoven with cultural and social analysis, shedding light on enduring tensions such as those between Church and State, as well as the gender dynamics in teacher recruitment and training. For instance, the authors poignantly highlight the slower progression of women's access to teacher education, drawing attention to the societal expectations and moral curricula that shaped their roles.

The final chapter, covering the period from 1990 to 2024, addresses modern challenges like the 'masterisation' of teacher training and the integration of INSPE into university structures. The nuanced discussion of reforms, including the debates over pedagogy versus academic excellence, reflects the ongoing struggle to reconcile tradition with innovation in the French education system.

The book's academic rigour is complemented by its accessibility to an international audience, aided by the authors' experience with the Irish and British educational systems. The glossary of French terms and detailed references make this work approachable even for those less familiar with French educational history.

I fully recommend this excellent book.

—Marie-Hélène Fasquel – Erhart,
Professeure agrégée d'anglais (English teacher)
at the Lycée Raoul Dautry, Académie de Limoges,
Adjunct professor of didactics at the INSPE of Limoges,
Finalist of Global Teacher Prize in 2017

The authors have a deep knowledge of the French history of teacher preparation, and they also have experience of the Irish and British systems of education. The volume provides fine detail on the development of the French system and of the efforts to professionalise the education of teachers. Moreover, Elliott and Lecuit also offer valuable insights into French history and culture. They explore with exemplary acuity the historical and continuing tensions between Church and State. Their subtle, informed, accurate account of the role in schooling of the principles of *laïcité* is very welcome. Readers will also be struck by what the authors reveal about the denigration of women, the valorisation of academic ability and the intensely competitive nature of French education at third level. For all the above reasons, I recommend *Teacher Preparation in France – A Social and Cultural History* to those interested in teacher education, the shaping of educational policy and French cultural history.

—Dr Kevin Williams, Senior Research Fellow,
Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection,
School of Policy and Practice, Institute of Education,
Dublin City University

EMERALD STUDIES IN TEACHER PREPARATION IN NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Series Editors: Teresa O'Doherty, Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, Ireland; Judith Harford, University College Dublin, Ireland; Thomas O'Donoghue, University of Western Australia, Australia

Teacher preparation is currently one of the most pressing and topical issue in the field of education research. It deals with questions such as how teachers are prepared, what the content of their programmes of preparation is, how their effectiveness is assessed and what the role of the 'good' teacher is in society. These questions are at the forefront of policy agendas around the world.

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Teacher Preparation in France: A Social and Cultural History

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Michel Sorel

To Prunille, Céleste & Charlie, sur le chemin des écoliers. . .

To our families and friends

*To our colleagues at the
Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale (ULCO)*

*And at the Institut National du Professorat et de l'Education de l'Académie de Lille
Hauts-de-France (INSPE -Lille-HdF)*

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Preface

Training Teachers A Recurrent Challenge for France?

Jean-François Condette
Professor of Contemporary History
University of Lille, IRHiS Research Unit (UMR-CNRS 8529)

But all these efforts, all these sacrifices would be in vain if we failed to provide the public school, thus established, with a capable teacher worthy of the noble mission of being a people's instructor. It cannot be repeated enough, gentlemen: the teacher is as valuable as the school itself [...]. A good teacher is someone who must know much more than what they teach, so they can teach it intelligently and with finesse; someone who must live in a humble sphere, yet possesses an elevated soul to maintain that dignity of sentiment and manners, without which they will never earn the respect and trust of families. They must embody a rare balance of gentleness and firmness, for while they may be subordinate to many in their community, they must never be a degraded servant to anyone; aware of their rights but thinking much more about their duties, setting an example for all, serving as a counsellor to all, and above all, never seeking to rise beyond their station, content with their situation because they do good within it [...]. To create teachers, gentlemen, who come close to such a model is a difficult task; and yet we must succeed, or we will have done nothing for primary education. A bad teacher, like a bad priest or a bad mayor, is a plague upon a community. We are often forced to settle for mediocre teachers, but we must strive to produce good ones, and for that, gentlemen, primary teacher training normal schools are indispensable. (Guizot, 1833)

Thus spoke François Guizot in the justification for his bill on primary education, presented to the Chamber of Deputies on 2 January 1833. The Minister of Public Instruction at the time offered his definition of a good teacher while defending his decision to reject free primary education and asserting the necessary role of the state to prevent primary education from being considered merely a 'simple industry' left to private interests. The influential minister of Louis-Philippe

eventually succeeded in passing the 28 June 1833, law requiring every municipality to open a boys' primary school, even though attendance was not compulsory, as the decision remained with the father of the family. The same law also mandated the establishment of a boys' primary teacher training school in every department, designed to train competent yet humble teachers – the cornerstone of the burgeoning primary education system. As Guizot later wrote in his *Memoirs for the History of My Time* (Guizot, 1860), 'The great problem of modern societies is the governance of minds. It was often said in the last century, and it is still often repeated, that minds should not be governed, that they must be left to their free development, and that society neither needs nor has the right to intervene. Experience has protested against this arrogant and careless solution [. . .]. For progress and for good order in society, a certain governance of minds is always necessary' (Lévy, 1860, pp. 14–15).

In response to the accelerated secularisation of thought and science, schools, while educating students, must also transmit norms and values respectful of established order. Training primary school teachers thus became a matter of state policy (Chapoulie, 2010; Condetto, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), whereas it had long been left to religious communities or private initiatives.

One hundred ninety-two years after the Guizot Law mandated boys' normal schools, teacher training remains a state concern in France. It consistently gives rise to heated debates both in public opinion and the political sphere. Every Minister for Education who takes office (in the Department of Education) on Rue de Grenelle, whether for a short or long tenure, tends to leave their mark through reforms of teacher preparation. This training, constantly criticised and reorganised, appears to some decision-makers as possessing an almost miraculous power that would enable new teachers to effectively meet the growing expectations placed upon them, particularly regarding the imperative of getting all pupils to succeed (Condetto, 2023).

The book highlights the historic difficulties around recruiting teachers which has always been a complex question in France. Some of the *concours* have left some positions vacant. For example, in the 2024 session, the French media notes that 'the *concours* are not fully subscribed; the recruitment crisis continues' (*Le Monde*, 8 July 2024). They report a deficit of over 3,000 positions, including 1,163 in public primary education, particularly in the Créteil, Versailles, Mayotte and Guyana academies. In secondary education, the same year, 12% of positions for external CAPES competitions were unfilled (633 out of 5,122 places), with significant shortages in subjects like mathematics (209 unfilled positions), physics-chemistry (142 unfilled), modern and classical literature (–111) and German (–90) (*AEF Dispatch No. 713821*, 2024). The relatively low starting salary for teachers, the frequent assignment far from home due to complex administrative rules, the challenging work environments, the increasing pressures of the profession and the complexity of pedagogical relationships with students and their families are recurring factors in what is perceived as the 'vocation crisis' (Condetto, 2023), even as new reforms are under consideration.

The book by Imelda Eliot and Ewen Lecuit, based on extensive readings of books, articles, official texts and ministerial statistics, comes at an opportune time

to explain to foreign readers – often somewhat bewildered by the complexity of the French school system – the history and current state of the complex issue of teacher recruitment and training (Condetto, 2007). Its five successive chapters, among their many contributions, highlight some major points that structure these centuries-old developments.

The French Public Education System: A Historical and Structural Overview

The French public education system gradually developed throughout the 19th century through the combined efforts of the state and local authorities (Chapoulie, 2010; Condetto, 2009; Luc et al., 2020). This system was built around two socially segregated tracks.

The ‘people’s school’ was based on primary schools, progressively established through a series of laws: the Guizot Law (1833), the Falloux Law (1850), the Duruy Law (1867) and the Ferry Laws (1881–1882). The March 1882 law made education compulsory for children aged 6–13, later extended to 14 by the Zay Law in 1936. For students wishing to continue their studies, the primary track offered extensions, especially after 1880, through upper primary schools and complementary courses. These institutions provided additional education for pupils after the primary certificate and prepared students for certain competitive exams (e.g., postal service, teacher training colleges) and awarded certificates, though they did not lead to the baccalaureate. This primary track, which also included *salles d’asile* (renamed *écoles maternelles* in 1881), primarily served children from working-class families.

For children from more privileged backgrounds, the secondary track was based on lycées and municipal colleges. Students often entered these institutions at a young age, around 6 or 7, starting in the ‘petites classes’ of secondary school, taught by specialised teachers. These schools later offered classes up to the baccalaureate. It was not until 1880 that public colleges and *lycées* for girls were established. These lengthy studies, centred on classical humanities, remained fee-based until 1927–1933.

After 1945, and particularly after 1959, this two-track system was dismantled in favour of the current structure organised by successive levels. The division between the two tracks had significant implications for the teaching profession, resulting in two distinct worlds of educators. Primary school teachers were trained within the primary track and attended specific teacher training schools (*écoles normales primaires*), as discussed in Chapter 1 of the book by Imelda Elliott and Ewen Lecuit. The rigorous training provided by these schools, including their boarding programmes, the emphasis on secular morality introduced after 1882 in these ‘secular seminaries’ (Condetto, 2012) and the strong pedagogical preparation compensated for the low entry-level qualifications (no baccalaureate, only the Primary Certificates and various *Brevets* [Certificates of Competence]).

Secondary school teachers, on the other hand, attended *lycées* or colleges, held the baccalaureate, and increasingly pursued university studies to obtain a

Bachelor's degree and the *agrégation*. The *agrégés* represented the teaching elite (Verneuil, 2015), as discussed in Chapter 2. For this elite group, the dominant belief was that extensive knowledge sufficed to prepare a teacher, making pedagogical training unnecessary.

A Gradual Convergence of Recruitment and Training Conditions in the Late 20th Century

The two tracks, initially diametrically opposed, began to converge under dual pressures, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the book. On one hand, secondary school teachers (holders of Bachelor's *degrees* or *agrégés*) were slowly subjected to the necessity of pedagogical training. On the other hand, the recruitment of primary school teachers became more aligned with secondary education, involving increasing academic qualifications and university integration.

In response to growing pedagogical challenges faced by secondary school teachers, modest professional training programmes were gradually introduced. These included pedagogy courses for undergraduate students and a requirement for *agrégés* candidates to complete a three-week teaching internship at a *lycée* (from 1906) alongside specific coursework. The massive post-1945 demand for teachers led to the creation of the CAPES competitive examination in 1950, along with other competitive examinations (e.g., PEGC), which diversified the teaching workforce. To address increasing classroom diversity and pedagogical challenges, the Ministry of Education extended training by requiring a practical internship year following the theoretical examination. These internships were organised by Regional Pedagogical Centres (*centres pédagogiques régionaux*, CPR), established by a 1952 decree (Condetto, 2007; Prost, 2014). Meanwhile, vocational teachers had their own training institutions, the *écoles normales nationales d'apprentissage* (ENNA), established in 1945.

Primary school teachers also saw a significant increase in recruitment standards, though the *écoles normales* remained the central training institutions. The Vichy Regime mandated the baccalaureate for teachers in 1940, a requirement maintained after the Liberation. In 1979, the 'DEUG Enseignement' (a two-year university programme) was introduced, followed in 1989 by a Bachelor's degree requirement to take the competitive examination. Between 1951 and 1964, to address the baby boom, the Ministry recruited between 60,000 and 75,000 graduates of normal schools (*normaliens*) but also 80,000–100,000 who had not been trained through the hiring of temporary replacement teachers (Condetto, 2007; Prost, 2014).

A University-Based Training Model Searching for Balance (1989–1991 Onward)

The 1989 Education Reform Act, prepared through numerous earlier reports and reforms that rendered teacher training increasingly complex in the 1980s (Condetto, 2007; Prost, 2014), introduced a unified structure for teacher training. Minister Lionel Jospin created the Post-Graduate School for Teacher Education

(*Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres*, IUFM), replacing primary *écoles normales*, regional pedagogical centres and ENNAs. This ambitious reform aimed to incorporate research (seminars, thesis writing), integrate academic knowledge and provide a gradual introduction to teaching realities while fostering collaboration across different categories of teachers on shared values and cross-disciplinary themes.

Chapter 5 of the book highlights the challenges of this model, including a series of increasingly rapid reforms that disrupted the coherence of teacher training. The introduction of the Master's degree requirement for teacher certification in 2008–2010 further raised academic expectations. However, aligning the academic knowledge required of teachers in their disciplines with general knowledge about the education system, its values and student development, while simultaneously enhancing practical pedagogical skills, remains a complex endeavour.

Inherent Criticisms of Teacher Training

Imelda Elliott and Ewen Lecuit's synthesis raises the question of whether teacher training structures in France have ever experienced a period of stability, legitimacy and widespread approval. Despite their idealised memory, the *écoles normales* were heavily criticised throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Criticisms ranged from producing 'pretentious little rhetoricians' (1849–1852) to accusations of providing insufficient training for children from working-class backgrounds. Similarly, regional pedagogical centres (CPRs), established in 1952, were often criticised for their disconnection from classroom realities. The refrain of inadequacy continued with the IUFM in 1991 and persists with current *École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation* and INSPE institutions. The authors are to be commended for their work on the specifically French aspects of teacher preparation, such as the state's dominant role and the significance of competitive examinations, while also addressing universal tensions within education systems worldwide.

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Introduction

The advantage of living abroad is that, coming in contact with the manners and customs of the people among whom you live, you observe them from the outside and see that they have not the necessity which those who practise them believe. (Maugham, 1915)

What can the French system of teacher education reveal when viewed from an external perspective? What makes the French approach to teacher education so distinctive, and why does it continue to intrigue educators worldwide? France's teacher preparation system is not just about training educators, it reflects the nation's deep-seated cultural, intellectual and political values. This book invites you on a journey through the complex framework of French teacher education, uncovering how historical traditions and modern innovations intertwine to shape the educators who stand at the forefront of the nation's classrooms. At the heart of our exploration lies a fundamental question: How has France managed to balance intellectual excellence with the need to professionalise teaching, all the while reflecting its unique cultural and political heritage? To answer this, we explore how core French values, such as *laïcité* (secularism), republicanism, state centralisation and a strong commitment to public service, have consistently influenced teacher preparation. We also examine the role of competitive examinations for recruiting teachers in shaping the profession. The book traces the historical evolution of teacher education in France, from its roots in the Catholic Church to the modern, state-regulated system. By focusing on primary and secondary education, the mainstay of public debate and policy, it aims to show how France has navigated the tensions between preserving traditional values and adapting to contemporary educational needs.

Initially, education in France was deeply entwined with the Catholic Church, which dominated schooling and teacher training. Future educators were trained within religious communities, blending pedagogy with religious doctrine. The Enlightenment and subsequent French Revolution marked a radical shift towards secular, rational education leading to the concept of an *École Normale* for teacher training. The first *École Normale* opened in Paris in 1795, focusing more on academic subjects than on pedagogy. This institution evolved into the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) in 1808. Secondary teacher education was characterised

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by a profound respect for academic excellence and intellectual achievement. The *Agrégation*, a prestigious competitive examination dating back to the 18th century, became the hallmark of secondary teacher recruitment. This emphasis on subject mastery over pedagogical training reflects a uniquely French value: the high level of intellectual excellence as the cornerstone of secondary education. Institutions like the ENS aimed to cultivate an elite cadre of educators and scholars.

The establishment of *Écoles Normales* for primary teacher training in 1833 marked the state's involvement in primary teacher training. The Third Republic governments (1870–1940) played a pivotal role in transforming primary and secondary teacher education, embedding quintessentially French values into the educational system. Following the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, there was a strong impetus to modernise education and to reinforce the Republic's ideals. Education became the cornerstone of this transformation, reflecting France's commitment to secularism, state authority and the transformative power of education. *Écoles Normales Primaires* (ENPs) were developed to train primary teachers in a secular environment aiming to cultivate informed citizens essential for the nation's progress.

The curriculum in ENPs was comprehensive, blending academic knowledge with moral and civic instruction. Subjects included French language and literature, modern languages, history, geography, mathematics, science and physical education – along with moral and civic instruction, a distinctively French aspect to inculcate Republican values such as justice, duty and national unity. While male and female teachers shared core subjects, the curriculum also reflected societal norms of the time, with additional instruction for men in geometry and agriculture, and for women in domestic skills like hygiene and needlework.

The Third Republic placed strong emphasis on meritocracy through *concours* (competitive examinations) for admission to ENPs and for teacher certification. This approach was chosen to select teachers based on ability and knowledge, aligning with French values of intellectual excellence and equal opportunity. The *Brevet de Capacité* (Certificate of Competence) became obligatory for all primary teachers, marking a significant step towards standardising and raising the level of the teaching profession. The state's central role in organising and administering competitive examinations highlights the importance placed on meritocracy and state oversight, ensuring that those entering the teaching profession were not only knowledgeable but also aligned with national educational standards.

Mid-19th-century reforms under Minister Victor Duruy aimed to democratise education by introducing 'special' secondary education focused on practical skills at the *École Normale de l'Enseignement Secondaire Spécial de Cluny*. Cluny's emphasis on pedagogy faced resistance from those favouring traditional education. Teacher training for women also developed with the founding of the *ENS de Sèvres* and dedicated *Agrégations*. While progress was made in expanding access to education and integrating pedagogy into teacher preparation, long-standing traditions remained the guiding influence on secondary teacher education.

Philosophers and intellectuals such as Gabriel Compayré, Ferdinand Buisson and later Émile Durkheim were instrumental in shaping the curriculum, which focused on educational theory, psychology and, later, sociology. The role of the

science of education and pedagogy in teacher preparation emerged during the late 19th century, heavily influenced by republican ideals and philosophical thought. Political leaders, particularly during the Third Republic, envisioned education not only as a means to professionalise teaching but also as a tool to strengthen the Republic. Courses in the science of education were introduced in ENPs as early as 1881. These courses emphasised moral education and the psychological aspects of pedagogy, aligning with the French value of forming well-rounded citizens who could contribute to the Republic.

Foreign observers in the late 19th century admired France's commitment to educational theory and practice, noting that many French officials contributed to educational literature and reform. This blend of theory and practice, framed within a context of state responsibility, set French teacher education apart, highlighting the state's role in both education and society.

Throughout the evolution of teacher education in France, several uniquely French values are evident:

- **Intellectual Excellence and Academic Achievement:** A persistent focus on deep subject knowledge and intellectual accomplishment highlights the education system's commitment to excellence.
- **State Centralisation and Control:** The government's central role in organising education reflects a belief in state responsibility for cultivating an informed and unified citizenry.
- **Laïcité:** The move away from religiously dominated education towards a secular system embodies France's dedication to separating Church and State, ensuring that education serves all citizens equally.
- **Meritocracy and Competitive Examinations:** The use of rigorous, state-controlled *concours* (competitive examinations) like the *Agrégation*, the *Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second Degré (CAPES)* and the *Concours de Recrutement de Professeurs des Écoles* is believed to emphasise fairness and equal opportunity based on merit. However, it has also been argued by sociologists such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) that this system of *concours* is a key tool for legitimising and maintaining the social hierarchy.
- **Balancing Tradition With Innovation:** France's educational reforms illustrate a careful negotiation between maintaining esteemed traditions and adapting to contemporary needs.

From the Revolution to the modern reforms of the 21st century, France's approach reflects a deep-seated respect for intellectual achievement, a commitment to secular and republican ideals, and the centralisation of educational standards. For international readers, this exploration offers valuable insights into the complexities and unique characteristics of French teacher education. It brings attention to the challenges and triumphs of aligning long-standing traditions with the evolving demands of society. By understanding these nuances, we gain a deeper appreciation for how France continues to navigate the delicate balance between honouring its rich educational heritage and fostering innovation for the future.

The Structure of the Book

This book is structured chronologically and thematically to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of teacher education in France, tracing its development from the early days of informal training to the modern, state-regulated system. Each chapter delves into a distinct historical period and key aspects of teacher training, highlighting the social, political and educational transformations that have shaped the teaching profession.

Chapter 1 sets the historical foundation by examining the early emergence of primary school teacher preparation, starting from the influence of the Catholic Church through to the establishment of state-run teacher training institutions. The chapter explores key reforms in the 19th century, particularly during the Third Republic, when the state took control of education, promoting secularism and professionalising teacher education.

Chapter 2 focuses on secondary teacher preparation from the 18th century to 1939, highlighting the tension between classical academic education and the need for pedagogical training. It outlines the establishment of prestigious institutions such as the ENS and discusses reforms aimed at broadening educational access and integrating practical teaching skills.

Chapter 3 examines primary teacher training from 1940 to 1990, a period marked by significant political changes, including the influence of the Vichy regime during World War II and the post-war restructuring of teacher education. The chapter discusses how these political changes affected the structure of ENPs or Normal Schools and the role of universities, with an emphasis on increasing professional standards, practical experience and the growing feminisation of the teaching profession.

Chapter 4 focuses on secondary teacher training from 1940 to 1990, detailing key developments such as the introduction of the CAPES and the role of the *Centres Pédagogiques Régionaux* (CPR) in providing pedagogical training. It also examines the ongoing evolution of the *Agrégation* and the emergence of new teaching positions like the *Professeurs d'Enseignement Général des Collèges*, reflecting a gradual shift towards balancing academic and pedagogical priorities in secondary education.

Finally, Chapter 5 covers teacher education from 1990 to 2024, detailing reforms such as the establishment of the *Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres*, the *École Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Éducation* and the transition to the current system of Institut National Supérieur du Professorat et de l'Éducation. This chapter examines ongoing debates about the balance between academic knowledge and practical training alongside the State's increasing role in centralising teacher preparation.

Stimulus for Writing the Book

The motivation for the project on which this book is based came from colleagues from English-speaking countries, who explained that they found it very difficult to understand accounts of French education generally and French teacher education

in particular. This book is an attempt to provide an explanation to those international colleagues. The authors chose to focus on the mainstream teacher preparation for the majority of the population at primary and secondary levels. While examining both the preparation of teachers for private schools and for technological institutions is equally important, it was determined from the outset that this could not be addressed in detail within this book and merits a separate future project. In this book, we note that the development of teacher education in France is highly complex and sometimes controversial. Many of the debates around teacher preparation are passionate and full of stereotypes. There is no simple explanation for how teacher education has developed nor for the polemical criticisms of it. The debates often seem more about disagreements on ideologies, politics and social policies than on what actually happens within the institutions of teacher education.

Research Approach

The book is presented in the form of a traditional historical narrative of teacher preparation in France. We used a wide variety of secondary sources including contemporary books and the many books and reports that were produced in the 19th century by French official sources and also by foreigners who were in admiration of what the French Republic had achieved during the *Exposition Universelle* to commemorate the Revolution in 1889. We also used primary sources such as parliamentary debates, ministers' speeches, reports published by the government or other groups and official statistics. The national and local press provided additional insights into events. We also conducted informal interviews with primary and secondary school teachers and teacher educators to fill in gaps in the literature, to understand how the teachers at grassroots level experienced the reforms, to be able to better understand the deeply-ambivalent and contested contemporary perspectives on teacher education institutions.

We are confident that this book on teacher preparation with the perspectives of two experienced teacher educators – one, an Irish professor with a rich background in teacher education in France, Ireland and England as well as diverse experience in the French educational system and the other a native French lecturer with extensive responsibilities in the field of teacher education in France and first-hand experience in the Scottish school system – will offer valuable insights. As regards translations, we prioritised clarity of meaning, choosing terms we believe will resonate with readers in English-speaking countries. Our focus was on clarity of meaning over stylistic fidelity. This book selectively addresses key issues within the topic of teacher preparation in France, acknowledging that a fully exhaustive treatment would extend far beyond the limits of this volume. We hope to inspire researchers to explore this rich field further and to deepen international understanding of French teacher education.

Understanding the evolution of French teacher education is not just a historical exercise; it offers valuable insights into current educational debates worldwide. As nations grapple with questions about standardisation, state control

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and the role of education in society, France's experience provides a compelling case study of how deeply ingrained cultural values shape educational policy and practice. French teacher education is a dynamic field marked by a continuous negotiation between tradition and innovation. The nation's unwavering commitment to intellectual excellence, secularism and state oversight has created a system that is both admired and critiqued. By gaining a deeper understanding of these complexities, we can better appreciate the challenges and triumphs that come with aligning long-standing traditions with the evolving demands of modern society.

Chapter 1

The Emergence of Primary Teacher Preparation

Abstract

Chapter 1 explores the historical roots of teacher education in France, tracing its origins from the dominance of the Catholic Church in schooling to the state's increasing involvement in formal teacher preparation. Early teacher training took place in religious communities, particularly through institutions like the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. His contributions, including a manual for teachers and training schools, laid the groundwork for systematic teacher education. However, lay teachers generally lacked formal preparation, perpetuating traditional teaching methods through informal mentorship. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution introduced a shift towards secular, rational education. The establishment of 'normal schools' for teacher training in 1833, and the creation of the *brevet de capacité* in the late 19th century, marked the beginning of state-led efforts to professionalise teaching, with the aim of ensuring high standards and reducing religious influence.

Reforms under the Third Republic, notably led by Jules Ferry, expanded teacher training, establishing Normal Schools across France that provided rigorous academic and pedagogical instruction. The *brevet de capacité* became a necessary diploma which was important in the professionalisation of primary education. The curriculum combined academic subjects with civic and moral education, aligning with Republican values of *laïcité*, equality and social unity. The state's role in overseeing teacher training became central, aiming to produce well-rounded citizens who could contribute to the nation's progress. This period integrated pedagogical theory, educational psychology and sociology into the curriculum, setting the stage for a unified, secular education system.

Keywords: Jean-Baptiste de La Salle; *École Normale Primaire*; *Brevet de Capacité*; Jules Ferry; Guizot act

The Traditional Role of the Church in Teacher Training

Most books about teacher preparation in France in the 19th and 20th centuries only deal with the period after the French Revolution. Many of the writers during the Third Republic wanted to show how much progress had been made since the Revolution even if in fact there was much debate about teacher education and the role of the teacher during the *Ancien Régime*, or Old Order, from the end of the 16th century to the end of the 18th century. According to Compayré, the 19th century educationist and politician, under the Revolution, the boldest organisers of the national schools, Talleyrand and Condorcet, had not included history in their programmes. This, they explained, was because, in their fervent struggle against the old regime and in their enthusiasm for the new order, the early revolutionists had nearly come to believe that the history of France had begun on 5th May 1789. They questioned why one should recall memories of a past that had been abolished forever, and of what use it was to recount the long history of the French monarchy, as that history had vanished on the night of 4th August 1789, along with the abuses and privileges of that era (Compayré, 1887).

From the earliest times and up to the Revolution in France, the Catholic Church was in charge of most of the education of the people. From the 5th to the 15th century, instruction was confined mainly to the clergy (Arnold, 1861, p. 11). As the Church was in charge of education, teacher preparation took place in the religious communities. The myth that Charlemagne (748–814) invented schools was commonly believed especially from the 19th century to the 1960s as he was thus described in the history of France for primary schools (Audrin et al., 1952; Danton & Baudin, 1966). Charlemagne's actual contribution to education was providing instruction for evangelisation by having two coexisting schools in each cathedral: one for the elite and the other for the general population. Charlemagne did not invent schools but contributed to their development (Darwin, 2011). His reforms were primarily focused on changing religious behaviour through education (Barbero, 2004).

From the 16th century to the 18th century, primary charity elementary schools (*petites écoles*) were developed in parishes especially in the northern half of France (Loison, 2007), while other orders such as the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Benedictines, the Oratorians and the Jesuits educated children from wealthy families in schools called *collèges*. *Collège* has been translated as secondary school but in fact it was an all through school which included primary education (Arnold, 1861, p. 14). Boys attended elementary classes in *collèges* from about the age of 7–8 (Albertini, 2014, p. 12).

The rivalry between the Protestant Reformers and the Catholic revivalists in the 16th century contributed to the development of education for the poor as each side tried to enable the poor to read their catechism and to develop their own movement (Allain, 1881). Teaching Catholics to be able to read the Bible and the catechism was an important aim of education in this period. It was important to find brothers able to explain the biblical texts to children. Denominational schools were the norm. Teachers learned their trade by copying their masters (Gontard, 1962, p. 3). Although the state played no role in training teachers or in organising