

THE LITHUANIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Development of Education

The history of the educational system of independent Lithuania began after the First World War. The Lithuanian people previously had experienced the expansionist desires of their mighty neighbors and had lived through the short and long occupations of their country. Each one of these occupations was a disaster to the country not only because she lost her political independence and fell under a foreign rule, but even more because it suppressed her cultural development. One power after another seized the country, and immediately tried to colonize her, denationalize the Lithuanians, and destroy her national culture. The Russians before the First World War, and the Germans during the first and second World Wars, brutally attacked the normal evolution of Lithuania's culture and tried to incorporate their educational systems, which were designed to prevent the Lithuanians from becoming educated, suppress their nationalistic feelings, falsify their history, and raise a generation more sympathetic to their views. With each occupation, the fight against the occupants became a fight to retain her own culture.

When, at the close of the 18th century, Russia occupied Lithuania, she tried with every means available to inculcate the Russian way of life on the people. She closed every existing Lithuanian school, starting with the University in Vilnius and ending with the elementary schools. In their places, Russian secondary schools and elementary schools were established to indoctrinate the Lithuanian people. The Germans occupied Lithuania during the First World War; they too brought their educational system with them, according to which, in a short time, the Lithuanians were to become German. Lithuania had unlimited opportunity to develop her educational system only after the Germans lost the war and Lithuania regained her independence. Having regained her political freedom, Lithuania was able independently to establish educational objectives fitting to her people.

The established Lithuanian Republic inherited a very meager and inadequate educational system. Much had to be started anew. The frequently pressed desire of the people to send their children to school helped the government and the other organizations interested in education to overcome all the difficulties. During the first year of her independence, more elementary and secondary schools were established in Lithuania than had existed before the war. The schools were organized by the parents themselves; the local governments; and the organizations interested in education — all encouraged and supervised by the Department of Education, which coordinated and regulated the various schools. Education became one of the country's greatest concerns. Even during the times when Lithuania had to fight off the ever-attack-ing Bolsheviks, Germans, and Poles, teachers and students were exempt from military service. In the later years, schools were expanded and improved and new ones were established, whenever and where-ever they were necessary. Thus, the Lithuanian educational system was gradually established and improved until it included every type and level of school that the country needed.

Educational Objectives and Direction

At first, the Lithuanian schools were modeled after the Russian schools, for the majority of the educated Lithuanians had graduated from Russian schools. But soon Lithuania looked to Western Europe. During the years of her independence, many promising students were sent to universities and other schools of higher education in middle and Western Europe. When these students finished their studies, they returned and spread the Western ideologies. The Department of Education studied the various European educational systems and searched for ideas which could be incorporated into the Lithuanian educational system. Gradually, the Lithuanian schools adopted Western Europe's advanced teaching methods, but molded them to fit the nation's objectives and tendencies. This studying of the various educational systems helped to bring the much respected principle of objectivity into the Lithuanian system. This principle made itself evident while the

school program was being outlined. The tendency was to follow Western Europe's leading traditional teaching methods; however, equal attention was being paid to newer teaching methods, and their leading principles and many of the winning points emphasized by these methods were to supplement the traditional lines. The school programs were designed to help the growing person fit into the social culture and to teach him the basic principles of man's culture. Equally, the school had to teach him the modern sciences and give him a wide understanding of the biological sciences. She had to acquaint the youth with the classical culture and teach them about its creative works; however, the youth also had to learn about their own national culture and learn about the things the people of their own country had created. Lithuania's schools had many theoretical subjects; however, next to the theoretical were a whole line of practical subjects in order to satisfy the individual's practical needs and the nation's aspirations. In this way, the Lithuanian school system joined together classical culture and modern advancement, realistic and humanitarian subjects, international tendencies and national aspirations, and theoretical orderliness and practical everyday needs. The general trend of the school program was cultural, similar to that of Western Europe's. It was often suggested that Lithuanian education ought to present a synthesis between the Christian culture and the national values.

Because Lithuania was surrounded by such large nations, it was soon understood that the Lithuanian nation would not be able to survive by means of military strength and material goods, but only through her inhabitants' understanding and high moral development. Consequently, the Lithuanians strived, through education, for the goals they hoped would help them survive future international conflicts. As Lithuania was not a large nation, she made every effort to make her educational system equal to that of other nations; such as Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and other European nations; which are important, not because of their military strength, but because they have reached a very high level of cultural development and because they are a great part of Western culture itself. With these objectives in mind, the philosophers drafted the Lithuanian educational system. Such was also the orientation of many educators.

The Organization and the Administration

A large majority of all the schools, except kindergarten, were under the government's administration and were supported by funds from the government treasury. The government-operated schools, as well as the private schools, were under the control of the Department of Education. The schools had to meet certain standards set forth by the Department. In order to teach, the teachers had to have the education prescribed by the Department of Education, and they were assigned to their jobs by the Department. The private schools, however, chose their own faculties, and the Department of Education only checked each teacher's ability to teach the particular subject. Public school teachers had the same rights as other government employees at comparable levels. After teaching for twenty-five years, they received government pensions. Private schools had to pay their teachers the same salaries as the public schools. Many of the schools received government aid in order to pay the salaries. The schools were administered by appointees of the Department of Education who were called the directors. However, the most important group in the school was the faculty board, which admitted and expelled students, promoted them to higher classes, and took care of all other educational, disciplinary, and school matters.

The standards in all the schools had to be the same. So that the graduation certificates of private schools would be valid, inspectors from the Department of Education were present at their graduation examinations, and thus their diplomas were verified by the Department.

Pre-School Education

The pre-school age was from three to six. The children of these ages were taught in the kindergartens. In Lithuania, the kindergartens were supported by government, interested organizations, and by individual teachers. These organizations also operated schools to prepare kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten attendance was not compulsory, and the kindergartens were attended mostly by city and town children.

The Elementary School

At first, after regaining her independence, the elementary school period consisted of four years with compulsory attendance. But, eventually, the duration of elementary school training became eight years. During the first four years, all the schools taught the same type of general education, which every one had to have completed in order to attend the first class of the secondary school, or gymnasium. The higher grades offered more practical education, such as commerce subjects in the city schools and agricultural subjects in the farm areas. The higher grades in the elementary schools differed from the lower grades in the secondary schools in that the beginning grades of the secondary schools taught one foreign language and taught more theoretical subjects. Almost all of the elementary schools were public.

Gymnasium or Secondary School

At first, there were a few different types of secondary schools — some stressing humanitarian subjects, others mathematical and biological subjects. Some private schools stressed ancient languages, some commerce, and some still other subjects. Later these differences disappeared; and, after the reforms of 1937, they completely vanished.

All Lithuanian "gymnasiums", as other such schools throughout Western Europe, had the same basic teaching plans, and all of the subjects taught in the schools were compulsory. The subjects covered, according to year are, explained in this illustration:

Number of hours according to classes

| Subject | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII |
|------------------------------------|---|----|-----|----|---|----|-----|------|
| Religion | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Lithuanian language and literature | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| First foreign language | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Second foreign language | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Latin | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Mathematics | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Biology | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | 2 | - |
| Physics | - | - | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Chemistry | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | - |
| Geography | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | 2 | - |
| History | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Sociology | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| Introduction to philosophy | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| Art | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - |
| Music and Singing | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - |
| Handwork and home economics | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - |
| Physical education | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

The teaching of religion was required in all Lithuanian elementary and secondary schools. However, parents could, if they desired, have their children exempted from the religious courses. The different religions were taught by their own spiritual leaders (priests and ministers), who had equal rights with the other faculty members. In the Christian religions the subject matter consisted of: the general principles of religion, a summary of Biblical events, the history of the different religions, dogma, apologetics, and the religious ethics. The teaching of the Lithuanian language consisted of that language's morphology, phonetics, syntax, history, a dialect study, and theme writing. The subject matter covered in the literature classes consisted of the country's literature, systematized folklore courses, and historical and qualitative world history. The first foreign language taught used to be French or English, but later it was changed to German. The Latin courses consisted of not only learning the language, but also of studying the works of such authors ?s Caesar, Cicero, and Ovid. The mathematics taught consisted of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and analytical geometry. The Geography courses consisted of teaching the youth of good knowledge of their own country, as well as the geography of the entire world; studied according to regions, nationalities, and countries. Physical geography was also included. The Biology courses covered systematized botany, zoology, the anatomy of man, and an understanding of the basic philosophical problems in biology. Physics was covered in six years, and chemistry was covered in two years. History consisted of ancient history, the medieval, and current histories of western cultures, and the evolution of western societies, as well as the study of their own country's past history. Beginning philosophy was an introduction into psychology and philosophy and their basic principles. The art and music programs were not only theoretical and practical subject courses, but they also taught the history of the two subjects and their evolution. All of these subjects were chosen by the Department of Education. However, the faculty board, when the need arose, was permitted to change the program somewhat and was also allowed to change the methods of fulfillment. However, these changes were not to alter the main objectives — to systematically and objectively educate the young people in all fields and produce youth who would be intelligent representatives and good citizens of their country, the schools attempted to give the student" stand their cultural inheritance, by introducing them to modern educational advancements, by giving them a good background in mathematics, and by acquainting them with the creative works of other nations and especially those of their own country ,the schools attempted to give the students an objective understanding of all the fields, which would be enough of a background to enable them to specialize in some field of higher education and which would be enough of a balance between his newly obtained specialization and his general education to prevent onesidedness. This type of education was supposed to brand the youth an intelligent person, ignite a feeling of respect in him towards spiritual values, and induce him to abide by ethica', social ,and moral standards.

The Education of Professionals

In the Lithuanian educational system, there were all types and degrees of professional schools. There were lower ones, attended by students who had finished only four years of elementary school, and medium level ones, attended by students who had completed four years of secondary work or who had finished the lower professional schools. Most of these schools taught agriculture, practical arts, technical skills, marketing, and home economics. The higher professional schools were normal schools, seminaries, academies, and agricultural, technical, forestry, art, music, police, nursing ,and

veterinary schools. The courses in these school took from two to seven years. In these professional training schools, the students were not only taught their chosen fields but also some more general education courses to guard them against onesidedness, a pitfall of specialization, and to further their general education. In these schools 2/5 of the time was devoted to general education subjects and 3/5 to their majors.

The School of Highest Education

The schools of highest education were those whose students had all finished the secondary schools, i.e., the eight years. Of these schools of highest education Lithuania had two universities, a veterinary academy, an agricultural academy, a conservatory, two art institutes, an institute for teachers, a commerce institute, and an institute of physical education. The courses in these universities took from four to five years. However, the study of medicine took seven years and the technical fields took six years. Upon finishing the work at these schools, students received only their diploma. The degree of doctor could be issued only by the two universities, and the veterinary and agricultural academies. This degree was issued after further study and after having passed the doctors examinations.

Adult Education

There were two types of schools for adults: 1) adult secondary schools and 2) courses and lectures for adults. In Lithuania there were three secondary schools for adults; which adults who wished to receive secondary school diplomas attended in the evening. These schools were supported by private organizations and private individuals. In order to provide education for a wide variety of the population, certain centers, called folk universities, were operated. These universities would sponsor various elementary school buildings and enlisting the help of the teachers. The teaching of agriculture was vested in government agronomers, whose assignment was to help raise the standards of agriculture. There were a few of these schools in each area. Likewise, the government assigned some specialists in home economics to each area. These specialists had, themselves finished the schools of higher education. The specialists, usually girls, constantly changed places and organized cooking, baking, home caring and etiquette classes for the farm girls. The increasing numbers of farm youth were organized into Youth Farm Groups, which were supervised by the local teachers and agronomers, and, in this way, learned about farming and furthered their general education.

The Preparation of Teachers

The teachers were prepared by a few kinds of schools. The majority of the elementary school teachers finished the teachers' seminary. This was a four year school attended by those who had four years of secondary school. The first two years were spent getting a general education and the next two were spent studying psychology, the art of teachers, and the teaching of different subjects. After two years of successful work, the person now became a teacher. The rest of the elementary school teachers were prepared by the Teachers' Institute. Of the 350 teachers required each year, 220 were prepared by the teachers' seminaries and about 130 by the Teachers' Institute.

The secondary and special school teachers were prepared by the universities and other higher schools. Most of the secondary school teachers studied the science of teaching as well as the methods, but also specialized in some particular subject. The physical education teachers were trained by the Physical Culture Institute, music teachers by the Conservatory, art teachers by the art institutes, and home economics teachers by the Agricultural Academy. Only those who had graduated from a university or other highest school and who had also completed a special course in education could teach in the Secondary Schools. At the schools, they could teach only the subject they had majored in.

Education Destroyed...

During the chaos of the Second World War, Lithuania fell under Russian occupation. The schools became a place of propaganda. The goals of education were changed. Under the constant surveillance of spies and the constant threat of being deported to Siberia, the teacher is forced to teach lies and, against his will, help develop an extremely one-sided individual, blind one-idea fanatic. All the subjects, not exempting mathematics, have been condensed to serve one purpose — to develop a loyal subject for Russia, a fanatical fighting communist, who has to destroy the remaining capitalist nations and, having achieved the world revolution, make Moscow the world capital. In order to accomplish this task, the teacher is forced, against his beliefs, to teach lies and falsify well-known facts, even though he can see that his students do not believe him. I doubt if this can be called education at all.