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## The History of Education

### The System of Popular Education in Denmark in the 19th and Early 20th centuries: Some Specific Aspects

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#### Abstract

The paper reviews the system of popular education in Denmark in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Emphasis is made on the conservative and liberal trends in European education.

Scientific and specialized literature on the research topic was used as materials.

Methodological basis of the study consisted of the traditional historiography principles, historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency. Methods used in the course of work are as follows: comparative method. It enabled a comparison of the Danish popular education system with similar experiences in other countries. It also helped identify general European trends in education and highlight local features.

In conclusion, the authors note that Denmark's system of popular education experienced a dynamic transformational journey in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This period marked ups and downs, such as confrontation among followers of the liberal and conservative concepts in European pedagogy, which culminated in productive activity based on regional conditions.

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An important note should be made that Denmark was very close to the Russian Empire in areas related to popular education, because both countries were dominated by the German pedagogical system and were about to introduce universal primary education.

**Key words:** system of popular education, Denmark, comparative pedagogy, Europe, Russia, 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **1. Introduction**

Denmark's system of popular education in the 19th and early 20th centuries made a great journey, having assimilated many elements from Europe's general pedagogical practice and on the other hand retaining its own authentic features. The system was close to the system of popular education, adopted in the Russian Empire, in many respects – even a large number of similar measures were ratified almost at the same time. In other words, in matters concerning popular education, Denmark gave consideration to diverse experiences of developed countries and made significant efforts to keep high levels of education in the country.

### **2. Materials and methods**

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### **3. Discussion**

Historiography on the subject can be divided into works on the history of Danish popular education proper and works on the history of general European mass education.

The first group, to our mind, should include works published in the “Journal of the Ministry of Public Education” (*Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniya*) in the period from 1856 to 1917. For example, the first short article on public education in Denmark was published there in 1856 ([O narodnom., 1856](#)). In the early 20th century, the area was explored by such researchers as N. Yegorov and S.S. Zakusev. For example, N. Yegorov examined Denmark's education both from inside ([Egorov, 1915](#)) and outside ([Egorov, 1917](#); [Egorov, 1917a](#)) school curriculum.

As for the second group of works, it is important to note studies on the history of German popular education, carried out by A.M. Mamadaliev et al. ([Mamadaliev et al., 2019](#); [Mamadaliev et al., 2019a](#); [Mamadaliev et al., 2019b](#)). Primary education in Serbia was addressed by G. Rajović et al. ([Rajović et al., 2018](#); [Rajović et al., 2018a](#)). Numerous attempts were made to review the Russian system of popular education ([Cherkasov, 2011](#); [Natolochnaya et al., 2021](#); [Magsumov, 2015](#); [Cherkasov et al., 2020](#)). The Swiss model of popular education was spotlighted by A.M. Mamadaliev et al. ([Mamadaliev et al., 2018](#)).

### **4. Results**

In Denmark, the organization of public schooling was initiated by the School Act of 1814, which laid foundation for further development of the school, focused on teacher training, stipulated education as a compulsory obligation, determined a school's structure of expenditure and set forth teachers' salaries and pensions.

At the time, the school curriculum included the Law of God, native language, penmanship, arithmetic, singing and gymnastics (for boys only) and, if possible, subject-matter lessons and fundamentals of history and geography. To optimize costs, the old position of the Küster\* was charged with a new duty of teaching. However, the enthusiasm for mass schooling quickly dwindled as the country moved into economic recession. Key reasons behind the situation were low pays received by teachers and poor school supplies. A note should be made that such leaps characterized not only Denmark, but Russia as well (particularly following the abolition of serfdom

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\* Küster is a steward clergyman. In Christianity, since ancient times, a Küster (sexton) was responsible for managing church housekeeping matters.

– Cherkasov et al., 2020: 660), and even Germany (Mamadaliyev et al., 2019). In addition, teaching methods featured little novelty because mutual instruction was widely used. Certain success was notched only in gymnastics teaching methods.

After the 1830s, the area of schooling showed significant buoyancy. Teachers began to form basic professional associations, journals on pedagogy were established (Russia's first pedagogical journal "Journal of the Ministry of Public Education"\* also appeared at this time) and dedicated congresses brought together teachers to discuss educational reforms. All these enabled teachers to start putting forward their proposals at estate assemblies for consideration.

With the urge to set up higher levels of education, the opening of advanced type city schools, which delivered programs on natural science and new languages, was initiated in 1838. In 1844, radical transformation changed schools in the country's capital, Copenhagen (Zakusev, 1911: 10-11).

In the middle of the 19th century, European pedagogy was dominated by two pedagogical trends, liberal and conservative one. A prominent figure in Denmark's conservative pedagogy was a Danish priest, writer and philosopher Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig

Grundtvig was committed to reforming schools and revitalizing popular life mainly through the knowledge of the Danish language and history, and he eventually gave birth to a separate movement in Danish schooling. Of course, Grundtvig paid much attention to schools for young people. His criticism of the school's callosity and sermon "Schools for Life" produced a direct impact on popular schooling.

In 1848, the entire school system was subordinated to the Ministry of Church and Popular Education. However, the school reform, which was enthusiastically debated in the press, faced with misunderstanding in the parliament as members plunged into disputes on to what extent the state and public self-administrations should interfere with school affairs.

It was not until 1856 that the School Act was ratified to enable a rise in the teacher's pay, empower community administrations to invite teachers to available vacancies, and ensure that a significant portion of the school system's funding was provided by the state (Zakusev, 1911: 11). At the same time, the system of teacher training seminaries was reformed, exams set up to qualify for the rank of female teacher and new pedagogical courses for teachers established. The increasing number of teachers, employed certified female teachers, launched preparatory schools for children

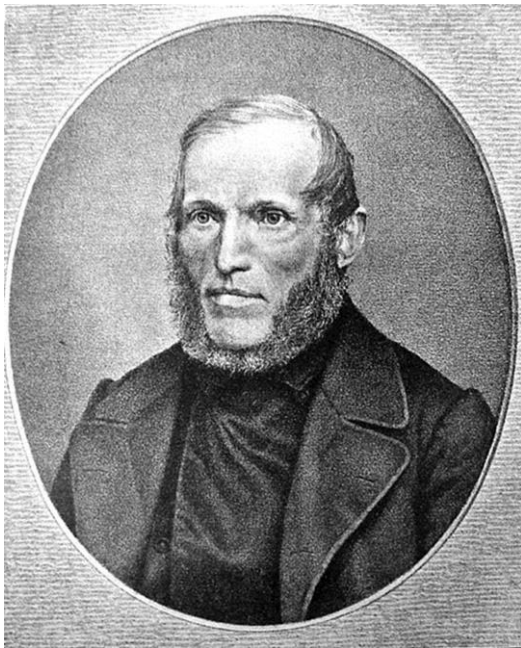
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\*The journal was founded in 1834 and existed until 1917. The journal resumed operation in 2014 and is currently published in Bratislava.

under 10, expanded curricula and the instituted title of head teacher – all added major improvements to schooling.

The period also introduced teachers' congresses that markedly kindled interest in school issues. The internal structure of the pedagogical process was also redefined – oral instruction gained momentum, biblical history was given priority over catechism, and school discipline became much less harsh. However, teachers were charged with clear goals of educating children in the ways that would foster the national spirit.

1870 marked the start of all-Scandinavian pedagogical congresses that considerably lessened Germany's previous pedagogical impact on Denmark. All the change was the result of extended civil rights and growing patriotic sentiments in society, and another driver was the influence of Grundtvigian ideas. Grundtvig's pedagogical ideas were put to practice thanks to a Danish teacher, Christen Mikkelsen Kold (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** Christen Mikkelsen Kold (1816–1870)

Ch. Kold advocated the right of parents to provide education for their children in line with their personal convictions, and his initiative facilitated the launch of several independent schools for children. The independent schools specifically sought to develop imagination and emotional intelligence in children, with a focus on singing, history, Danish poetry and biblical history (Zakusev, 1911: 12). According to Kold's design, such a school should predominantly use the 'living word' instead of official textbooks, and most lessons should include congregational singing.

Despite all its one-sidedness, the movement generated an extremely beneficial effect, as it aroused a sense of responsibility in parents and brought friendly methods of teaching, fresh outlook and renewal to Danish schools. Freedom of independent education was codified by the 1855 Act. The law made compulsory school attendance exempt only for the children of those parents who could guarantee proper education for their children outside community schools.

Kold's followers actively worked to modernize all community schools in line with their ideas, but the endeavor run into considerable resistance by various stakeholders. For this reason, disputes over the merits of state and free schools long were the most important item in all debates on the issues of the popular school. The confrontation, aggravated by political uncertainty, long remained an obstacle to implementing the required reforms. Repeated legislative initiatives in the period from 1872 to 1885 yielded no result. Only local parliaments of major cities, led by Copenhagen, chose to carry out thorough school reforms. Fundamental differences patched up over time. This allowed resuming a constructive dialog. In 1899, following a lengthy debate in the Rigsdag, a new act was approved, which, together with the amendments of 1904 and 1908 improved the teacher's

pay, reduced class sizes, extended curricula and increased government spending on school needs (Zakusev, 1911: 13).

In addition, the quality of teacher training, which was greatly reduced as a result of uncontrolled independent education, was significantly enhanced by the 1894 Act. Along with this, the 1903 Act on general secondary educational institutions connected the secondary school with the folk school, and the former obtained a new meaning – the basic school. Fresh legislative initiatives further increased the role of public administrations and private individuals in school affairs, which soon produced a positive impact on the school system.

From a pedagogical perspective, specialized literature and numerous congresses of teachers and educators were crucial. Their efforts helped expand school programs on history, contributed to a wider use of the principle of visual demonstration, conferred more rights on natural history, and created a new activity with the introduction of manual labor and home economics. At the same time, increasing emphasis was placed on improving the school's exterior experience and better school health teaching. Larger local governments began to provide free meals for students with economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools were now equipped with school bathing facilities (baths and showers). Some schools even began to invite school physicians. Finally, up to 20,000 Copenhagen schoolchildren were offered an opportunity to spend 2 or 3 weeks in the countryside.

A note should also be made that teacher training seminaries were set up in Denmark at the turn of the 19th century, and there were 7 such seminaries in Denmark as early as by the 1850s. These seminaries were supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Popular Education. Each seminary had its own director who was also the first professor, as well as 3 or 4 professors. The number of students varied from 30 to 80 people who studied for 2 or 3 years (O narodnom..., 1856: 6).

Beginning already in the 1870s, teachers started to form networks. In addition to several mutual societies, the Danish Union of Teachers was founded in 1874, which actively worked towards better conditions for folk teachers, promotion of teachers' congresses, dissemination of the best textbooks and maintenance of teachers' widows. In 1886, the Society of Danish Free Schools and the Danish School Society were created.

All the developments raised the teacher on the social ladder to a higher level – while retaining the traditional forms, schooling was given the new content that, in turn, brought about transformation in the teacher too.

In the early 20th century, the lower popular education had the following arrangement in Denmark. Compulsory schooling began at the age of 7 and ended when the child reached the age of 14. In the same way as before, home schooling was also allowed, provided that academic performance was necessarily assessed by a local school commission. At the beginning of the century, community schools were attended by: 91 % of children in rural areas, 80 % in cities and 76% in the capital (Zakusev, 1911: 14). Fines were imposed on parents whose child missed school without a legitimate reason. However, school absences decreased each year in the first decade of the 20th century. A key factor that contributed to irregular schooling was the engagement of children in family or factory work or sending children to the town, and agricultural labor in rural areas. However, it should be in fairness noted that, excluding absences due to illness, other reasons led to only 0.5 % of school days missed in the capital, from 1 to 2 % in cities and up to 5 % in villages (Zakusev, 1911: 15).

In each community, schools were divided into school districts according to the number of schools and were managed: by parish councils in villages and by city councils in cities. Schools were supervised by school commissions that consisted of a local pastor and several members. The activity of school commissions was under the control of school directorates. In the early 1910s, there were 73 school directorates in total in Denmark based on the number of rural dean's districts. All directorates of one district constituted a district directorate, and there were 18 such units in the country. All district directorates, in turn, reported to the Ministry of Church and Popular Education. The ministry approved all curricula, the size of the teacher's pay, handled dismissals of teachers and interpreted laws.

The Ministry received annual reports from school directorates that executed their reports using reports of school commissions. In addition, bishops, priests, gymnastics and singing inspectors reported annually to the ministry about their observations during their visits to schools.

Considering the reports, the Ministry, if applicable, initiated formal discussion with local authorities on matters related to schooling improvements.

As of 1908, in Denmark, there were 3,218 community schools in villages where education took place from 7 to 14 years old, 733 preparatory schools where education took place up to the age of 10, and, in addition, part of school-age children attended free and state educational institutions (lower and secondary schools) whose number in villages was 488. Overall, 253,000 children studied in villages, of which 233,000 attended community schools. At that time, 5,052 teachers worked in community schools (3,735 men and 1,317 women). In the period, the number of schoolchildren in cities reached 154,000, of which 112,000 attended community schools. City schools had 3,593 teachers (1,793 men and 1,800 women) (Zakusev, 1911: 17).

In the countryside, there were preparatory schools for children younger than 10 in addition to folk schools. In areas with sparse population, there were “mobile schools”, and therefore, one teacher could work in two schools (in the main one and additional one). There were 68 such schools in 1908 (Zakusev, 1911: 17).

Interestingly, in the countryside, everyone had the right to engage in private education, without taking a required examination for teacher qualification. In villages, schools had in most cases less than 100 students, on the average, in cities nearly 1,000, and in the capital – over 1,500. Hence, the number of classes varied from school to school: in villages, the average number of classes was around 2, in cities – 13, and in the capital – 43.

Classes in different regions were characterized by important variations in their size. For example, the number of students per class was limited to 30 children in Copenhagen (in the capital). Until 1900, laws permitted to accept 50 students per class. By 1910, however, the number was set to the maximum of 35 students in cities and 37 in villages. By the way, in the Russian Empire, the number of students per teacher was 50 since 1908.

A brief description should also be provided for compulsory subjects in folk schools. For example, the compulsory scope covered: Law of God, Danish language, penmanship, arithmetic, history, geography, singing, gymnastics for boys; in cities, the list additionally included drawing as well as gymnastics and handicrafts for girls. Optional subjects were natural science and manual labor, as well as gymnastics and home economics for girls.

Preparatory schools taught reading, writing, counting and singing. Their curriculum also included the fundamentals of the Law of God. A distinguishing feature of Danish folk schools was their religious nature. Teachers’ duty was to introduce children into the Law of God based on the Evangelical Lutheran teaching.

The period of schooling, which lasted from the age of 7 to 14, was divided into three levels: the junior level was three years, the middle and senior levels were 2 years each. Preparatory schools were covered at the junior level.

Table 1 shows lessons broken down by levels in city schools.

**Table 1.** Minimum number of lessons in city schools per level (Zakusev, 1911: 28)

Subjects	1st level	2nd level	3d level
Law of God	4/2	3	3
Danish language and penmanship	9	8	9
Arithmetic	6/2	3	4
History			
Subject-matter lessons, geography and natural science	4/2	4	4
Singing	2/2	1	1
Total	18	21	24

**Table 2.** Minimum number of lessons in rural schools per level (Zakusev, 1911: 28)

Subjects	1st level	2nd level	3d level
Law of God	4/2	3	8
Danish language and penmanship	9	8	3
Arithmetic	6/2	3	4
History, subject-matter lessons, geography and natural science	6/2	3	3
Singing	2/2	1	1
Total	18	18	18

As for textbooks and libraries, city schools had large libraries, while schools in rural communities received little funding for these needs. However, almost all communities provided children from low-income families with free textbooks and teaching aids. In Copenhagen and many other cities, schools also had teacher libraries in addition to student ones. A note should be made that gymnasiums in the Russian Empire also had student and teacher (fundamental) libraries (Molchanova et al., 2020: 92). Libraries, which enjoyed state funding, were required to compile their collections in compliance with the ministerial catalog of approved books.

As it was the case in the Russian Empire, there were evening supplementary schools operating in Denmark. Former graduates could continue their education in the facilities in the evening. References to the schools began to appear as early as 1814, but the practice never came into use on a significant scale. In 1910, 879 evening supplementary schools existed. The schools offered the following curriculum: the native language, penmanship, arithmetic, natural science and history. Two-hour classes took place at least two evenings per week and were arranged only in winter.

## 5. Conclusion

Summing up the results, an important note should be made that Denmark's system of popular education experienced a dynamic transformational journey in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This period marked ups and downs, such as confrontation among followers of the liberal and conservative concepts in European pedagogy, which culminated in productive activity based on regional conditions. An important note should be made that Denmark was very close to the Russian Empire in areas related to popular education, because both countries were dominated by the German pedagogical system and were about to introduce universal primary education.

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