



History Education in Luxembourg's Secondary Schools in the 1950s–1970s: Ideas and Experiments

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Luxembourg is one of the smallest countries in Europe. Its territory has been referred to as an ‘intermediate space’; the ‘intermediate’, as Philipp Ther explained, ‘is not only to be understood in a geographical sense as a location between core areas, i.e., on the edge of nations and states [...] The regions are linguistic, cultural and ethnic transition areas in which different influences cross and often mix’ (Ther 2003: XI). A specific characteristic of Luxembourg lies in the fact that the country has come to understand itself as a nation-state, yet without ever relinquishing its rootedness in the culture of its neighbours. Approaching its status through the concept of a ‘nationalised intermediate space’ enables researchers to offer analyses reaching beyond dichotomic juxtapositions such as periphery/centre or majority/minority (Spirinelli 2020: 75). Luxembourg can be

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seen as both a nationalised and an intermediate space, in which nation-building initiatives have been deeply embedded in cultural influences from neighbouring countries, and tensions between multiple identifications have been inherent.

This chapter brings the reader as close as possible to an understanding of how history was taught in history classrooms in the intermediate nationalised space of Luxembourg in the years following the Second World War. Given the absence of a research infrastructure in Luxembourg (Meyer 2009), as well as a lack of descriptions of how teachers performed in history classrooms in the Luxembourgian teachers' journal,¹ the analytical lens here focuses on the pedagogical theses submitted by trainee history teachers in order to receive a Luxembourg teaching accreditation after they had obtained a university qualification abroad and completed a two-year internship in a Luxembourg school.² The 21 theses written between the 1950s and 1970s that are preserved in the Luxembourg National Archives shed new light on how history teaching in Luxembourg was researched and discussed by students.³ These theses offer the only historical insight into how history was taught, as well as showing how newcomers to the profession thought and experimented with how it should be taught.

The theses demonstrate that trainee teachers formulated innovative ideas and experimental approaches when it came to history teaching in Luxembourg. This is a new observation that runs counter to the silence on history methodology that prevailed in the country's leading teachers' journal at the time, a silence that prompted Thill to characterise the years after the Second World War as a time bereft of innovation (followed by a period of crisis after the history curriculum was downsized as a result of a law voted in 1968) (1994: 119). Rohstock and Lenz, on the other hand, called these years an 'incubation period' for a more courageous educational policy which arrived at the beginning of the 1970s (2012: 126), as the Ministry of Education invested its efforts in adapting international influences in mathematics education 'to a national framework of

¹ Journal des Professeurs (Association des Professeurs).

² This system is still in place: Règlement grand-ducal du 7 juin 2015 concernant la formation théorique et pratique ainsi que la période probatoire des enseignants de l'enseignement postprimaire (<https://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/rgd/2015/06/07/n9/jo>).

³ Before 1969, trainee teachers also had to write an academic thesis and defend it in front of an examination board in Luxembourg. Afterwards, the theses that trainee teachers had already written and defended at universities abroad were accepted in Luxembourg.

justification that invoked tradition, in the interests of political legitimacy' (2012: 109). This article is the first to demonstrate how these international influences also had an impact on the way in which trainee teachers thought about history teaching. Although their attempts to internationalise history education in Luxembourg did not result in short-term policy changes in the 1950s and 1960s, some of their ideas and experiments had a major impact on the way in which the history curriculum was restructured in the 1970s.

INTRODUCTION

In many European countries, the nineteenth-century process of nation-building was accompanied by a desire for cultural homogeneity through the promotion of one standardised language and the invention of an imagined community based on a long-shared history (Barbour and Carmichael 2007: 44–82). In the small Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, however, bilingualism was firmly rooted in the country's constitution, and nationalism became defined as a unique mixed culture (*Mischkultur*) prompted by multifaceted historical contacts with neighbouring countries (Gardin et al. 2015: 541). As in many other countries, history education was used in Luxembourg as a means to create and legitimise the nation and its assumed identity. At the same time, the practical organisation of history education in Luxembourg was highly dependent on foreign infrastructures. Until the late twentieth century, most history textbooks in use had been published in neighbouring countries, and before the establishment of the University of Luxembourg in 2003, these countries were also where history teachers received their university training. Moreover, there was a general consensus concerning the place of Luxembourgish history and the Luxembourgish language in secondary school education. Although opinions on the extent to which Luxembourgish history should be included in the school curriculum continue to vary, there has never been an attempt to grant it more than a fraction of the teaching hours within the history curriculum. In addition, the increased use of the Luxembourg vernacular in history education after the Second World War was never meant to undermine the aim of secondary schools to educate pupils to be perfectly bilingual in German and French (Spirinelli 2020: 467).

The first law regulating education in Luxembourg already prescribed both German and French as mandatory languages (Trausch 2003: 215). Nevertheless, historically rooted norms of language use in social

interactions among inhabitants informed the composition of the secondary school curriculum. Whereas French was traditionally understood as the *lingua franca* among the adult elite, Luxembourgish, ‘a West Central German dialect of Moselle Franconian origin’, was the tongue in which ordinary people and children interacted with each other (Gardin et al. 2015: 540). Motivated by the country’s occupation by Germany during the Second World War, teachers in the early post-war period started to express themselves in Luxembourgish instead of German, although the language did not have a standardised orthography and was not recognised as an official language in the Constitution (Schreiber 2015: 166).⁴ At the end of 1948, the Minister of Education issued a circular in which he stressed that ‘German remains the only language that every Luxembourger can read fluently and manages to write fairly correctly’.⁵ Spirinelli recently noted that ‘for all the scepticism and aversion professed against German, the cultural and political elites did not want to abandon the bilingual status of the country’ (2020: 472). It remained clear to the Minister of Education that Luxembourgish was not in a position to supplant German as ‘a great written cultural language’ and that it should only be used if of ‘pedagogical value for pupils’.⁶ To ensure that pupils of Luxembourg’s conventional humanities-based curriculum left secondary education with advanced German and French language skills, the seven-year curriculum was composed of three lower years of education mainly in German, followed by four years in French (Rohstock and Lenz 2012: 63). As a result, the history curriculum followed a two-cycle approach, in which for two or two and a half hours a week a chronological approach from ancient history to the present was adopted; instruction was in German in the lower years of secondary education and was repeated and consolidated in French in the higher years of secondary education (Thill 1994: 119).

A variety of textbooks were in use. A difference was recognised between what was referred to as ‘universal’ history, traditionally taught on the basis of textbooks published in Germany, France or Belgium, and ‘national

⁴In 1964, Luxembourgish was added to the curriculum. In 1984, Luxembourgish joined French and German as an official language in the Constitution. The ongoing constitutional reform elevated Luxembourgish to the level of ‘national language’, while still respecting the principle of multilingualism (Chambre des Députés Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2022: 4).

⁵Ministry of National Education (Luxembourg), ANLux, MEN-0003, Circulaire du 22 décembre 1948 au personnel enseignant sur l’emploi de l’allemand comme langue véhiculaire dans l’enseignement primaire par Pierre Frieden.

⁶Ibid.

history', for which textbooks were produced in Luxembourg. However, as the German occupation with its national-socialist agenda for history teaching had undermined confidence in German textbooks, after the Second World War, a textbook for 'universal' history was also produced in German in Luxembourg (Probst 1946; Koch and Meyers 1947; Meyers 1946; Franck 1950). These textbooks were accompanied by a textbook in German about Luxembourgish history for the lower years of the curriculum (Meyers 1939). For the higher years, foreign textbooks were combined with a locally published textbook in French (Herchen 1947).⁷ Arthur Herchen's book, initially published in 1918, remained the most influential textbook for Luxembourgish history until it was replaced by a new set of textbooks in 1972.⁸

In the aftermath of the First World War, royalist Arthur Herchen published his 'Manuel d'histoire nationale'. He aimed to spread the message that Luxembourgers would no longer have to submit to foreign powers and that the sovereignty of the people was securely guaranteed by the monarchy. During the First World War, the Luxembourg national authorities had decided to steer a neutral course, but in practice the country was occupied by German troops. After the Armistice, following accusations of collaborationism with the German occupier from both the country's neighbours and a significant minority of Luxembourg people, Grand Duchess Marie-Adelaide ceded the throne to her sister Charlotte. The continued existence of monarchic rule and national independence was acknowledged in a referendum in 1919 (Pauly 2011: 82–85). The upheavals led Grand Duchess Charlotte and her entourage to stress their connection with Luxembourg history more explicitly than before (Péporté et al. 2010: 91). Charlotte belonged to the House of Nassau, which had ruled the Grand Duchy since the establishment of a personal union following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, but her ancestors no longer held any lasting connection with the territory. The personal union ceased to exist after the death of William III in 1890, when the thrones of the Netherlands and Luxembourg passed to different branches of the royal family.

Although revisions of Herchen's book occurred over time, the overall structure of the text in four main parts did not change. 'Ancient times' covered historical events before what was presented as the establishment

⁷ For an English translation, see Herchen et al. (1950).

⁸ Meyers' handbook published in German supported Herchen's national narrative of the Luxembourgish past (Schoentgen 2007: 540).

of Luxembourg. A second part focused on Count Siegfried, who built a castle in 963—which later provided the country with its name—and launched a glorious period for the region. Herchen's third period is referred to as 'foreign dominations', starting in 1443 with the rule of the Burgundians, who were later followed by the Spanish, French and Austrians. The most contemporary period in Herchen's book starts in 1815, after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, when, as the narrative goes, Luxembourg rose up again. It received the status of a Grand Duchy and was united in a personal union with the Netherlands under the monarchic rule of William I. In 1839, the splitting of Luxembourg into an eastern part (today's Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) and a western part (now the Belgian province of Luxembourg) was portrayed as a 'dismemberment' of the Grand Duchy (Herchen 1947: 175–176).

We know little about how history textbooks were used in the classroom. The only existing report in which the Ministry of Education spoke about methodology reads: 'the solid acquisition of facts, dates and names must be instrumental knowledge through which young people must acquire the skills of reflection, reasoning and judgment', but offers no specific instructions.⁹ Through an analysis of 21 pedagogical theses written by trainee history teachers during the 1950s and 1970s, this chapter investigates what could metaphorically be referred to as a methodological laboratory of ideas and experiments involving trainee and established teachers as well as school pupils.

Having introduced the Luxembourg school system as well as the use of languages and textbooks in history education, this chapter will now discuss three aspects: the ideas formulated by trainee teachers in the 1950s on how to teach what was juxtaposed as 'universal' and 'national' history together, while using textbooks printed in different countries; pupils' and teachers' evaluations of (and proposals for changing) history teaching expressed in the 1960s; and trainee teachers' experiments combining history teaching with civic education as developed in the 1970s. An interesting group of figures, encompassing the period from the 1950s to the 1970s can be identified: among the first trainee teachers writing their critical theses in the post-war period were Paul Margue (1923–2019) and Gilbert Trausch (1931–2018), historians who played a leading role in the writing of new history textbooks in the early 1970s. Absent from both the

⁹ Ministry of National Education. *Horaires et Programmes* (1953/1954), Luxembourg, 1953, unpagged (mentioned in Thill 1994: 122).

corpus of theses and the new textbooks is an analysis of diversity among pupils in Luxembourg schools. The fact that the proportion of foreigners in Luxembourg rose from 10% in 1947 to 30% in 1993, the majority being blue-collar workers, seems to have gone unnoticed by the authors under study (Scuto 2010: 14).¹⁰ Only later studies revealed that children's performance at school is linked to the educational background of their parents (Chauvel and Schiele 2022: 171).

IDEAS OF TRAINEE TEACHERS IN THE 1950s

In Luxembourg, the topic of 'national history' always received less attention in the school curriculum than in its neighbouring countries. Non-German history was usually only included in the content of German textbooks if it related to historical events that had taken place on German territory (Dierkes 2005: 84). Although representatives of the *Annales* school were able to include their long-term 'history of civilisations' approach in the French history curriculum, that curriculum remained embedded in a 'traditional political and national history fostered by successive French governments in order to revive national consciousness amid national crisis after the Second World War' (Otto 2019: 234). The situation perhaps most comparable to that of Luxembourg can be identified in Belgium. It offered a history teaching curriculum that, although 'mainly characterised by imparting patriotism', never dedicated more than one-third of teaching time to the study of the Belgian past (Van Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 5).

Before the Second World War, the teaching of what was called 'national history' in Luxembourg was limited to part of the history curriculum in the fourth year of secondary education. A debate on the importance of 'national history' in the Luxembourg curriculum emerged in the late 1930s, with history teachers proposing that 'universal history should be seen through the perspective of Luxembourg' (Biermann 1937) and that 'national history' should be taught in tandem with 'universal history' (Koch 1938). After the end of the Second World War, 'national history' was introduced in the three lower years of secondary education, but it remained in the shadow of 'universal history' (Engel 1952: 21). A ministerial guideline from 1950 also introduced 'national history' in the higher

¹⁰The proportion of foreigners in Luxembourg increased to 43% in 2010, or a total of 217,000 people (Scuto 2010: 14).

years and intended for it to be included in the curriculum of ‘universal history’; in the end, it made up approximately a quarter of the hours of the history curriculum (Thill 1954: 17).

The Ministry of Education offered no methodological recommendations on how to teach history (Tausch 1958: 6).¹¹ The lack of ministerial guidelines prompted trainee teachers to research for themselves how ‘universal’ and ‘national history’ could be included in history teaching. They were interested in the recommendations put forward by a UNESCO committee that had researched the content of history textbooks in 43 countries and revealed that national history had received the lion’s share of attention (UNESCO 1951). As a founding member of UNESCO in 1945, Luxembourg had set up a standing National Commission for Cooperation in 1949 and became especially active in UNESCO’s effort to revise the content of mathematics and geography textbooks in the 1960s (Rohstock and Lenz 2018: 112–114).¹² In their theses, all the trainee teachers were critical of history teaching in Luxembourg. They considered three UNESCO guidelines useful for improving the situation.

One guideline the trainee teachers addressed was the study of history with national content within a wider spatial framework (UNESCO 1951: 123). The most relevant question for students was indeed how to compose what they referred to as a ‘national history curriculum’ within the existing curriculum of ‘universal history’ (Vesque 1952: 4). The main answer put forward was that it should be done through integration; one of those who held this view was Gilbert Tausch, who would become the most well-known historian of his generation (Thill 1954: 16; Leytem 1952; Beck-Mathekowitsch 1952). Tausch weighed up two options: ‘Separated from major historical events, Luxembourgish history appears as a regional history with limited interest, although almost the entire development of Europe is reflected in it’ (1958: 55). On the other hand, he noticed: ‘The desire to put it on the same level as the national history of France or Germany and to give it the same treatment would in practice be an absolute exaggeration of a local history’ (1958: 4). ‘Its actual meaning’, Tausch concluded, ‘is only gained from the perspective of European

¹¹ Ministerial Guideline of 23.02.1950 mentioned in: Ministry of National Education. ‘Horaires et Programmes’ (1953/1954), Luxembourg, 1953, unpagéd.

¹² ‘Arrêté Grand-Ducal du 3.5.1949 portant constitution d’une Commission Nationale pour la Coopération avec l’Organisation des Nations-Unies pour l’Education, la Science et la Culture’, Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg no. 22 (27 May 1949): 519–520.

history' (1958: 55). Another trainee teacher proposed 'leading pupils to the history of their people' by encouraging them to 'look around at their immediate surroundings from the platform acquired through the study of universal history' (Vesque 1952: 39).

Two other recommendations, to 'emphasise the interdependence that exists between the world's nations through culture' and 'the orientation of school curricula towards international understanding' (UNESCO 1951: 124), also met with approval among trainee teachers (Thill 1954: 11; Leytem 1952: 38; Beck-Mathekowitsch 1952: 40). Only Paul Margue warned of the 'danger of modern dictatorship' and stressed that 'history cannot be steered towards any goal other than its own, otherwise it ceases to be history' (Margue 1951: 53). In order to compensate for the predominance of political history, some students suggested shifting the focus to 'economic, social and cultural development' (Engel 1952: 46; Hoffmann 1956). Emphasising the mutual contacts between nations and people in order to foster tolerance and peace was to be achieved by presenting Luxembourg as 'a crossroads where races and civilisations were intertwined. Imbued by this idea, the pupil will be warned against the excesses of egocentric nationalism' (Thill 1954: 20). Trainee teacher Thill found inspiration in a French textbook in which, inspired by the *Annales* school tradition to focus on a history of civilisations and to criticise a predominantly political depiction of historical events, the depiction of the French-German war of 1870 and the First World War included testimonies from both sides in order to enhance objectivity through comparison (Thill 50; Alba and Isaac 1930: 272, 678, 747; Otto 2019: 234). Vesque, in turn, defended a more complex depiction of what he still called 'feudal times' by asking pupils to compare Spanish and French periods of rule instead of military encounters and to pay attention to the multiple consequences for the local population, who received more privileges 'under Spanish rule' than 'under French authoritarianism', but economically enjoyed more prosperity 'under' the French (Vesque 1952: 40–44).

PUPIL AND TEACHER IDEAS IN THE 1960S

Political interest in education was lacking in the 1950s and thus the ideas of trainee teachers did not generate immediate changes in the history curriculum. A decade later, however, Luxembourg witnessed the same 'widespread demand for radical social and cultural reform in schools inspired by a democratisation paradigm' as its neighbouring countries (Van

Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 5). Intense debates about schooling led to a rise in government spending with the aim of improving Luxembourg's position near the bottom of UNESCO's ranking of school systems and promised changes to the curriculum through scientification and individualisation to meet the demands of the modern era.¹³ Since the new law governing secondary education was only adopted in 1968, these debates had no influence on teaching in the history classroom throughout most of the 1960s (Rohstock and Lenz 2012: 117). Trainee teachers, however, saw themselves as meaningful contributors to the debate as they researched the concerns and experiences of pupils and teachers.

In their theses, trainee teachers either tried to adopt the perspective of pupils or teachers or asked them about their experiences. The Luxembourg curriculum offering history education in French in the higher years meant that pupils needed to learn 'universal history' from French textbooks, which in the 1960s had started to include more contemporary history in their content but continued to teach events and conflicts taking place specifically within France and considered relevant for French pupils (Otto 2019: 234). Zimmer described how difficult it was for pupils to learn about the early years of Belgian independence from Aimond's French textbook, which made absolutely no reference to Luxembourg, and explained how the pupils had to return to the period 1830–1839 in their 'national history' class a few months later in order to understand how Luxembourg was partitioned and partly granted to Belgium in 1839 (Zimmer 1963: 69–70; Aimond 1939). Fonck strongly criticised the overall aim of the Luxembourg school system to train perfectly bilingual pupils, which prevented history teachers from putting the acquisition of historical knowledge first (1968: 35). Emile Haag, who would later become an important Luxembourgish historian, compared the recommendations of a Belgian school inspector advocating for pedagogical innovation—a phenomenon that existed but was not widespread in Belgium at the time—with the practice of history teaching in Luxembourg (Van Santbergen 1968; Van Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 5). If pupils were to attain analytical skills, critical thinking and the ability to contextualise historical events, teachers had to

¹³Luxembourg Parliament, *Projet de loi concernant le budget des recettes et des dépenses de l'Etat pour l'exercice 1962*, No. 885. Adoption des sections 47 à 52 à l'exception des articles 694 et 721. Discussion du chapitre de l'éducation nationale, 48^{me} séance (12 April 1962): 1791–1856.

encourage them to abandon ‘their old habits of passive listening’ and to ‘participate actively in the course’, Haag concluded (1968: 30).

The questionnaire was a new research method introduced in five trainee teacher theses. Hansen offered pupils a list of important events and people from the last 30 years and observed to his own astonishment that the six best-known facts belonged to ‘universal history’—most pupils knew who Adolf Hitler was—and that the date of the country’s liberation (10 September 1944, excluding the Ardennes Offensive which later hit the country) was a lesser-known fact (1962: 19). As his research also revealed that pupils received their historical knowledge only partly from textbooks (Illustration 1), he advised teachers: ‘it would not be illogical to enquire about the sources of young people’s historical knowledge and to partially adapt to them’ (1962: 35). Wolff-Wegener discovered that history ranked sixth or lower in the list of favourite subjects of girls attending the lower years of secondary school because they failed to identify with the content; they wanted to hear about the fortress in Luxembourg rather than the French Revolution (Wolff-Wegener 1963: 21).¹⁴ Schmit’s thesis was written out of a conviction that history teaching needed to explain the contemporary world. She discovered that girls expected to know more about humanitarian topics such as ‘the negro (sic) problem in the USA, the position of women in India’, instead of ‘abstract’ and ‘dry’ politics or economics (Schmit 1966: 34).¹⁵

When talking to pupils and teachers about ‘national’ history, Goedert found that most of the 158 pupils he researched had the feeling they ‘had to be interested’, instead of being intrinsically motivated, and most of the 24 history teachers he spoke to considered that Herchen’s textbook was chauvinistic and ‘unduly promote(d) national sentiments’ (1965: 17). Goedert concluded that a more nuanced depiction was needed in order to overcome pupils’ ‘instinctive defensive attitude’ (1965: 51). Only seven teachers considered Herchen’s textbook suitable, and ‘when asked about the advantages, the seventeen naysayers sometimes made ironic remarks, such as: “good sheets of paper”’ (Goedert 1965: 46). Teachers criticised the glorification of the House of Nassau, for example, and suggested that not enough attention was paid to the intense debates between the grand ducal family and the Luxembourg parliament in the years preceding the

¹⁴The former fortifications of Luxembourg City were gradually built over nine centuries and dismantled in 1867.

¹⁵See also Schreiber (2018).

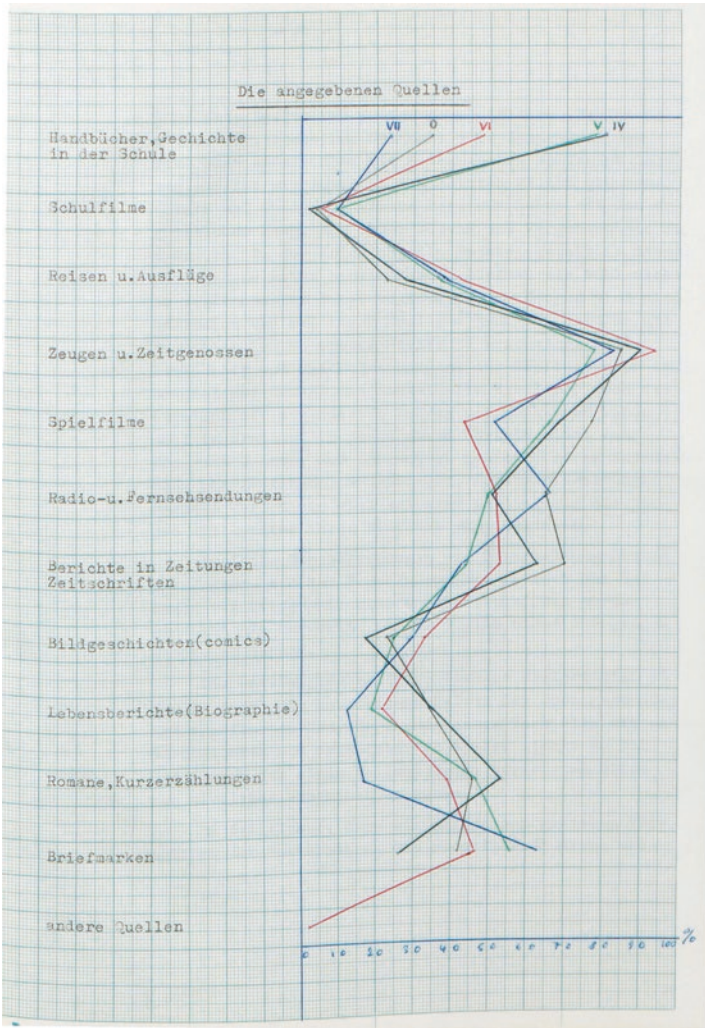


Illustration 1 ‘The indicated sources’ is a graph depicting the answers given by pupils from the four lower years of secondary education (the seventh to the fourth grade) to the question of where they received their historical knowledge. In 1962, eyewitnesses were a more important source of information than history textbooks. Other contributors were movies, newspaper/magazine articles, novels and stamps (Hansen 1962: 23)

year 1867 (a period that has been referred to as ‘the Luxembourg crisis’). Later, when the German Confederation (to which Luxembourg belonged) was abolished, the independence of the Grand Duchy was recognised at the London Conference (Goedert 1965: 48). Continuing the research tradition, Weber investigated the knowledge of history of pupils in their final year of school, as well as the pedagogical value of the French textbook recommended by the Ministry of Education in 1974 (Bonifacio 1966). Acknowledging a mismatch between the limited knowledge of pupils and the detailed explanations in the book, he advised teachers to begin by making a list of central figures and topics discussed in the book, such as ‘Charlemagne’ and the ‘Industrial Revolution’, and to dedicate a lesson to each of these. Pupils could then deepen their knowledge by reading history textbooks intended for lower years. Instead of recommending the German-language textbooks published in Luxembourg that were currently in use, he advised a German textbook because of its thematic approach (Kunze and Wolff 1966). German textbooks (more than those published in France, Belgium or Luxembourg) had started to offer teaching content in the form of thematic entities in an attempt to move away from a predominant display of political national history (Dierkes 2005: 82). Only afterwards, Weber was convinced, would pupils benefit from a ‘meaningful discussion’ about contemporary history on the basis of their textbook published in France (Weber 1974: 55). A former pupil recalled having never encountered a dialogic approach; the main focus of history education was on learning historical facts by heart.¹⁶

EXPERIMENTS BY TRAINEE TEACHERS IN THE 1970S

The late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s were characterised by two major developments in history teaching in Luxembourg. Following the law on secondary education of 1968, which offered pupils the opportunity to specialise their schooling in the higher years, the time spent on history teaching was reduced: the half-hour of ‘national history’ on offer in the final year of school was discontinued and history was removed from the curriculum of scientific sections in the higher years (Muller 1989).¹⁷ On the other hand, civic education was now offered earlier in the curriculum

¹⁶ Conversation with Renée Wagener on 12 April 2022.

¹⁷ ‘Loi du 10.5.1968 portant réforme de l’enseignement’ Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg series A no. 23 (25 May 1968): 435–438.

(in the fourth instead of the final year) and was changed from an elementary introduction to law to a course aimed at preparing pupils for their lives as politically active citizens (Schoentgen 2007: 542; Engel-Heftrich 1972: 4). Another development was the publication of a set of new textbooks for teaching Luxembourg history, no longer focused on dynasties and reigns but using socio-economic changes and intellectual developments as building blocks for the narration (Thill 1973; Margue 1974; Trausch 1975; Trausch 1977). Two important authors, Paul Margue and Gilbert Trausch, who had pleaded for an internationalisation of Luxembourgish history in their trainee teacher theses in the 1950s, now played a major role in setting the standard for interpreting the country's past. The books were applauded for their more scientific approach at the time, but researchers later considered the narrative of the Luxembourg past included in the textbooks as 'a "facelift" rather than a revolution' (Péporté et al. 2010: 120). In any case, trainee history teachers stopped complaining about the quality of Luxembourgish history textbooks in their theses and turned their attention to experimenting with student-centred participatory learning and interdisciplinarity.

The context was similar to that in Belgium, for example, where civic education was 'expected to provide a better understanding of contemporary society' than history teaching (Lobbes and Wils 2019: 103). Already in 1967, Loersch proposed linking history teaching to civic education in order to remain relevant (1967: 40). Engel-Heftrich responded to the constitutional reform lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 and a debate in parliament criticising the insufficient role schools had played in shaping responsible citizens in January 1972 with a project-based pedagogical experiment (Engel-Heftrich 1972: 2).¹⁸ Her approach shows a pupil-centred teaching method that includes group work, classroom debates and enquiry learning designed to prepare pupils to become engaged citizens of the world (Arthur et al. 2001). Engel-Heftrich encouraged fourth-year pupils to prepare oral presentations about the struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland and Bloody Sunday and connected these events to the historical development of human rights, incorporating compulsory teaching about the American Wars of Independence and the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.¹⁹ This was followed by a detailed analysis of the relevant items in the Luxembourg Constitution:

¹⁸ *Luxemburger Wort* 14.01.1972 p. 1. Verfassungsreform.

¹⁹ On the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement and Bloody Sunday see Walsh (2000).

'For example, can one speak of equality for all if a woman is considered a minor as soon as she marries?' (Engel-Heftrich 1972: 12). In order to encourage critical thinking among future citizens, Theves started his experimental interdisciplinary course with an explanation of ancient democracy on the basis of translated sources (Theves 1973: 8). Felten saw a solution in the development of a pupils' parliament (Felten 1971: 45). Another experiment taught pupils about different forms of statehood using historical or contemporary examples, such as 'absolutism (France), the establishment of parliamentarism (England), the birth of the modern state (USA) and parliamentary democracy (Luxembourg)', in order to convince pupils of the relevance of studying history (Diederich 1979: 25).

These experiments did not enjoy widespread approval among more established history teachers (Thill 1989: 13), who generally felt that the history curriculum had lost its autonomy and been transformed into what their Belgian colleagues also considered as a 'presentist, sometimes even anachronistic approach of history, in which moral judgment prevailed over historical understanding' (Van Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 5). In 1980, a 'Pedagogical innovation and research service' (Service d'innovation et de recherche pédagogiques—SIRP) was established, one of its tasks being to develop a new history curriculum, but it soon became merely a passive body that failed to take any real action (Thill 1989: 249). The late 1980s saw a new focus on the development of science and culture in Luxembourg and resulted in the establishment of a coordination service for pedagogical and technological research and innovation (Service de coordination de la recherche et de l'innovation pédagogiques et technologiques) in the Ministry of Education in 1993 (Meyer 2009), as well as the establishment of the University of Luxembourg in 2003 (Pit-Ten Cate et al. 2021).

Today, as a result of the democratisation of education and increasing immigration, more pupils are following the secondary school curriculum. They receive a set of history textbooks published and regularly updated by the Ministry of Education throughout their schooling. These books foster an analytical understanding of social, political, economic and cultural history and include information about Luxembourg's history, including the latest research findings (Ministère de l'éducation nationale 2002). For example, they refute the idea that Siegfried was the founding father of Luxembourg, pointing to the lesser relevance of his castle and questioning the accuracy of the date 963 and the fact that most of those who were deemed foreign rulers were at the time 'legitimate princely heirs' (Péporté

et al. 2010: 5, 122). The question of how intensively teachers use the contemporary handbooks in order to instruct Luxembourgish history remains to be answered.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that trainee teachers understood the role of history teaching in giving meaning to the intermediate nationalised space of Luxembourg. In the 1950s–1970s, trainee teachers turned Luxembourg’s history classrooms into a metaphorical laboratory, generating new ideas and experiments on how to teach the history of their nation. They considered the nation-building narrative included in Herchen’s manual (the main textbook for Luxembourgish history at the time) to be unsuitable for the linguistic and cultural transition area they inhabited. They agreed that both the historical events to be taught and the way they needed to be taught were deeply embedded in historical and cultural influences from neighbouring countries. As Fanny Beck-Mathekowitsch explained in the thesis she wrote in 1952 to receive her history teaching qualification (1952: 12): ‘We don’t like over-emphasised patriotism; our national experience is simply more reserved than that of our larger neighbours. Since we do not see ourselves as playing a significant part in big developments, unlike France and Germany, for example, we are forced from the outset to assume a certain modesty’.

In the 1950s, trainee teachers embraced UNESCO’s supranational pacifist understanding of history as a replacement for Herchen’s dominant national narrative of the past. In the 1960s, they borrowed research methodologies from neighbouring countries to analyse daily practices in the history classroom, where a combination of history textbooks published in Luxembourg and abroad, in German and French, were used. Trainee teachers hoped to contribute to the political debate on modernising the history curriculum, but it was not until the 1970s that some of the trainee teachers of the 1950s became authors themselves, adapting, rather than rewriting, the dominant understanding of Luxembourg’s past. In the 1970s, a new cohort of trainee teachers were satisfied with the content of this new set of history textbooks and switched their attention to experiments linking history teaching with civic education in order to educate politically active citizens. These experiments were considered by the members of an innovation and research commission set up in the 1980s, but they did not have a lasting impact in the history classroom, and the innovative theses of the 21 trainee teachers were soon forgotten.

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