

POLANYI'S ENVIABLE ALMA MATER PART ONE

Presented by Tamás Bendik

The Hungarian word 'Minta' stands for 'pattern', 'model', 'paragon' depending on the context. Michael Polanyi's alma mater was nicknamed 'Minta' from its very inception. Because it was meant to be and became a model of a new Hungarian teacher training college and high school.

The first teaching day of the school was the 7th of October 1872, with 25 students in two classrooms. 5 years after the compromise with the Habsburgs, the time was ripe for the Hungarian government to proceed to the implementation of its inspired and innovative ideas in the field of public education. The vision of nation-building as well as capitalist industrial production were gaining momentum and required urgent changes in schooling for the people and in training of its teachers and educators. New type schools were badly needed to shape clerks and officers for the independent Hungarian government departments and public offices. Civil engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs were in short supply, too. Even the military career required a so-called 'maturity' certificate of secondary education.

Institutional teacher training and accreditation in Austria meant that after three full university years the undergraduate could stand for a secondary school teacher's qualifying exam, but only in a few designated cities, all in Austrian provinces. The new Hungarian state needed its own system of teacher training centered in Budapest.

The 'Minta' model school was preceded by the teacher-training college of the Pest University's Faculty of Liberal Arts. The college was founded by József Eötvös, minister of public education and reformer of secondary education. He started out from the assumption that the bulk of the contemporary teaching staff were poorly trained in their disciplines and used rigid and soulless methods of teaching. In order to break the Prussian pedagogical tradition, it was necessary to adapt university training in scientific disciplines to the needs of teaching at secondary level and adopt new European trends of teacher training. But conservative university professors opposed both, referring to their professional independence. This allowed Eötvös to convince the government to establish a separate college attached to the faculty to train grammar school teachers, and another one attached to the Polytechnical University for vocational ('Real') school teachers. When building the two colleges, Eötvös and his followers used progressive examples from France and Germany. But unlike the French École

Normale Supérieure, for instance, Eötvös insisted that the ‘Tanárképezde’ (Hungarian word for ‘teacher training college’) be kept within the university structure to maintain a higher standard of scientific education and research for teacher trainees.

The departments of the college corresponded to the mix of school subjects the would-be teachers were supposed to teach. Their functioning was modelled after the German university seminars, but unlike in that country, department heads didn’t act independently from each other. In Budapest they were called ‘pilot teachers’ and acted in a concerted manner, under the guidance of the college director appointed by the minister of education in accordance with the collective recommendation of the staff.

The college’s statute adopted on the 3rd of May 1870 stipulated that all those who intended to become secondary school teachers must undergo thorough training in the chosen disciplines, in methods of their teaching, as well as be motivated for research. The statute also established the five departments of the college, such as:

1. classical languages and literature,
2. history and geography,
3. maths,
4. sciences,
5. educational and teaching studies.

The last one was decided to be launched after the first set of students completed studies at one of the other departments.

In 1871 the then 28 years old Mór Kármán, a protégé of József Eötvös, returned from his studies of philosophy and philology in Vienna and of teacher training in Leipzig. He was entrusted by the first director of the Teacher Training College to work out the concept of its educational department. Kármán’s concept contained the idea of a *grammar school to serve as an internship clinic and test ground for aspiring teachers*. To avoid the opposition of the conservative university management to a daring reform proposal by a young scholar fresh from abroad, Kármán consented that the concept be pushed through the bureaucracy under the name of Antal Bartal, the first college director. He even solved the problem of funding the grammar school, which hadn’t been earlier envisaged by the founders of the college. He argued that the study abroad grants for would-be teachers failed to provide an adequate return, since too many scholarship holders did not acquire adequate practical teaching skills abroad or avoided the teaching career altogether. The argument was found to be valid, and in 1872 the so-called ‘Practice (Demonstration) Grammar School’ was launched. In its mission statement one could read: ‘... to serve as a model of a school life wherein the pupils’ moral and intellectual advancement is the concern of the entire teaching staff, the teacher-trainees find a motivating example to follow and the teachers an inspiring memory to take away when they retire or quit.’

In 1875 legal regulations were adopted to allow for secondary school teachers to be accredited in Budapest, instead of in Vienna. This allowed the college and the Minta demonstration school to fulfill its pioneering vocation.

POLANYI'S ENVIABLE ALMA MATER PART TWO

Presented by Adorján Roknich

Michael Polanyi was not the only student of the Minta, who later became famous. His school, then called Demonstration Grammar School of the Royal Hungarian Teacher Training Institute, was the most outstanding educational institution of the country at the turn of the century.

Here learnt other prominent scientists, such as Kálmán Kandó, who gained success in the field of electrified railway locomotion, or Theodor von Kármán who was later called the 'father of jet-propulsion', or Edward Teller, founder of the H-bomb.

Michael Polanyi entered the Minta in 1900 and left it in 1908. This period of time between the turn of the century and World War I, was among the most prosperous in Hungary's history. The industrial revolution was completed ahead of some neighboring countries. Economy, business, international trade were booming. Budapest was rising as a rival of Vienna in Central Europe, new spectacular architectural complexes were built, such as the Houses of Parliament, the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Applied Arts etc.

Public education, sciences, mass culture, the arts were in unprecedented progress.

If we only mention those whom Michael Polanyi could see in the corridors of the school or in its yard, even then we could name quite a few prominent figures in any branch of science.

Among the philosophers and sociologists the most important is the elder brother of Michael's, Karl Polanyi, who passed his 'maturity exam' in 1904 and a few years later became president of the Galilei circle.

Vilmos Szilasi graduated in 1906 and after World War I, he was the disciple of E. Husserl, later became head of the department of philosophy at the University of Freiburg.

Ambassador Pál Sebestyén, who also left the school in 1906, belongs to the well-known experts of international law, just as István Szászy, a scholar of private law.

Dénes König, after graduating in 1902, became an important mathematician researching the Graf-theory.

The medical science too, received a lot of talented researchers, who learnt in our school. Here belongs István Rusznyák, who was the colleague of Albert

Szentgyörgyi in the 1930s and later was awarded the prestigious Kossuth prize, and between 1949-70 he was the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He passed his 'maturity exam' in 1907, one year before Elemér Hainiss, the well-known pediatrician.

Béla Zolnai, who became famous for his research in the field of linguistical ethics and stylistics, later became a teacher of the University of Szeged, and helped a lot to launch the career of the famous poet Miklós Radnóti.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that the above mentioned and many other remarkable alumni of those times could thank their successful careers to the fact that they could learn from the best high school teachers of the country and in the best equipped labs and classrooms.

POLANYI'S ENVIABLE ALMA MATER PART THREE

Presented by Petra Darvas

We can not fully examine Polanyi's life-work without knowing his teachers, who played such a big role in his life.

Sándor Pályi was the 'Minta's' geography and biology teacher from 1904 for 25 years. After graduation, he became an assistant at the Department of Industrial Botany of the Politechnical University. He initiated the microscopical method of food product examination. Later he considered the teacher's vocation as his primary mission. He was one of the initiators of grammar schools for girls. He was among the founders and the headmaster of an all-girl grammar school between 1896-1904. According to the 1928/29 school report: Pályi only taught '*...children what fits them, in a way that is suitable for their soul, and only as much as satisfies their curiosity.*'

Besides his activity at school he also worked a lot in the field of shorthand writing, as the developer of the system, created by Sándor Nagy. He also played an important role in adult education. In 1903 he was one of the launchers of the liberal 'Szabad Lyceum' (Free Grammar School). First he was the secretary, later became the vice president of this adult education institution. He was the director of the 'Szabad Egyetem' (free university), established by the 'Szabad Lyceum'. The Erzsébet Népakadémia (Elizabeth Folk Academy), in which he took part as co-president, was founded in accordance with his design, too.

For decades he was active in dissemination of scientific knowledge for the general public, having delivered hundreds of lectures. He left the Minta demonstration school at the age of 70.

Péter Szabó, who was Polanyi's math teacher, came to the Minta 10 years after graduation. Later he became one of the most outstanding colleagues of Manó Beke, head of the Reform Commission of Mathematics Teaching. He participated with Beke at the 4th International Council of Mathematicians. He was a descendant of an ancient family of intellectuals from Transsylvania, a many-sided person. Besides his interest in methods of teaching, Szabó was very active in researching the life-work of the two Bolyais. He too, contributed to the development of shorthand writing, and taught it at school. Moreover, he was the teacher-president of the Youth Music Circle, and was active in organizing concerts at the school.

Zsigmond Ritoók senior (left the school in 1920), in his memoirs mentions Péter Szabó, as an excellent teacher and a distinguished man. He died at the beginning of World War I, after a short illness.

Miklós Szíjártó, the pupil of Lóránd Eötvös taught at the Minta school for almost 30 years. During his career he trained generations of mathematicians and physicists, among them world-famous scientists such as Michael Polanyi or Edward Teller. He was a pioneer of teaching experimental physics. He encouraged students to draw their own conclusions from what they saw or experienced in the labs. He worked out the arrangement and equipment of the physics auditorium and laboratory consisting of 4 rooms.

He held extra lessons for the curious students, where they could try themselves the various experiments. Following his idea, part of the school's terrace was transformed into an observatory. During its construction he gave up his summer vacations to be there. He was the author of school text books in physics and mathematics which received broad recognition.

He routinely took part in the planning of curricula, in 1899 he co-operated with Lóránd Eötvös. He was commissioned by the Museum of School Equipment to draw up a list of the equipment needed at physics labs. He took part in adult education as well, held lectures at the 'Szabad Lyceum' and at the 'Erzsébet Népakadémia'.

The memoirs of some of his students also prove, how popular he was among his followers. Zsigmond Ritoók Senior remembers that Szíjártó invited the volunteers to come to school on Sundays. He retired in 1926, after 36 years of teaching at the Minta school. For this occasion, the school organised a memorable farewell party for him. An academic excellence fund named after Szíjártó was established by his pupils and their parents.

At the beginning of the century one of the most prestigious and popular teachers of the Minta was László Négyesy. He studied in Budapest and Vienna. He was the teacher-trainee of György Volf, who after his appointment as director, invited Négyesy to teach. His career at the Minta lasted for 20 years, from 1891 to 1911. His activity in the field of literary history and esthetics was also significant. He published plenty of studies, was a co-editor of the Great Pallas Encyclopedia. In 1896 he became a member of the Academy of Sciences, in 1904 of the Kisfaludy Society. In 1911 he was elected vice president of the Society of Hungarian Literary History. The same year he got an independent professorship at the University of Budapest. Négyesy also played an important role in shaping the educational system. He became a member of the National Council of Public Education, took part in preparing curricula and ordinances of the ministry of education. He was also very active in the public life of teachers. Between 1896-99 he was the editor of the journal *Hungarian Pedagogy*.

He was the secretary-general , later the president of the National Grammar School Teachers Society, in 1904 he also edited its bulletin. It was the year when the Teachers Society's member organizations in Budapest and in the country were engaged in a heated dispute about the pay rise of the teachers. But these many-sided activities didn't hinder Négyesy in his outstanding tutorial performance. In the first decades of the 20th century, he became famous for his lectures in stylistics at the Faculty of Arts. Among his students we can find well-known writers and poets such as Gyula Juhász, Árpád Tóth, Mihály Babits and Dezső Kosztolányi.

For many years Négyesy was the teacher president of the Minta's literary and debating club. In the school year of 1907/8 the 8th grader Michael Polanyi, who for 2 years was the student-president of the club, delivered a lecture on the poetry of Endre Ady, one of Hungary's world famous poets.

POLANYI'S ENVIABLE ALMA MATER PART FOUR

Presented by Zsófia Böddi

Trefort School today

Our school is one of the teacher training schools of the Eötvös Loránd University. Twice a year, graduating students come to the school to complete their teaching practice under the supervision of mentor teachers. Trefort School seems to be popular. Although it is in the centre of Budapest, many students come from other parts of the city or even from the nearby towns.

Besides the six lessons we have each day, there are many other opportunities to learn more about subjects that we are interested in. There are study circles and clubs in the afternoons. There are some that are connected to subjects we study at school e.g. Biology, Chemistry, Computer Sciences, Physics, etc., and there are some that provide opportunity to learn about other interesting things, e.g. films, aquaristics, the European Union etc.

It is useful that there are many languages to study in our school. In the first two years, students learn English or German. In the next four years they choose a second language. It can be Latin, French, Spanish, German or Russian. Besides the lessons, they can learn more in weekend-camps and via student exchange programs.

Students in Trefort School take part in many competitions during the school year. One of them is a competition for all secondary schools in Hungary. The best students can go to the university without an entrance exam. Besides these, they take part in other competitions in Mathematics, Chemistry, languages, Biology and sometimes we participate in competitions abroad e.g. in India in Science or in Italy in Latin.

We are also very proud of the “Trefort Choir”. They give Christmas concerts every year, and they also perform operas e.g. Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas with the help of “Trefort Orchestra”. They also take part in student exchange programs. In the near past, they were in Sweden and Transsylvania. The school also organises the “Trefort Musical Competition” and the “Zoltán Kodály Folksong Singing Competition” too. In February some classes take part in an amateur student theatre, where they perform short plays.

I have to mention sports. Basketball is the most popular sport in the school. There is training in the afternoon for every age group. From year to year our team is among the best teams at the Student Olympics of Hungary. There are also championships in

football and basketball held among the classes in the school. There is a very popular program in wintertime; it is the ski camp, usually in Slovakia. Once a year the school organises a “Sport Day”. We spend the whole day playing different sports and games.

In November we organise the “Trefort Days”. On the first day, the classes and the teachers play many funny games. On the second day, we can listen to interesting lectures held by students, former students and scientists. Another program is the ceremony for the graduating students in December and the “Trefort Ball” in February.

There are many outdoor activities too. The classes make two- or three-day excursions in May and a so-called forest school in the last week of the school year. There they learn a lot about nature. During the summer holiday, we also have the opportunity to meet each other in different camps. E.g. students can go to the so called “Nomad Camp” or paddling on the river Tisza. On the last week of the holiday we can go to the “Ecology Camp”. There we measure different things and learn about Science and environmental pollution. Each day, we make posters about what we learned that day. In the autumn, there is an exhibition with the posters and the photos from these camps.

I think, we have the opportunity to learn as much as possible in our school. Trefort School helps us to learn very much about the world. We are really proud of the former students of our school, like Michael Polanyi and one of our goals is to be a bit similar to them.