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From religious instruction to school education: Elementary education and the significance of ambulatory schools in rural Finland at the end of the 19th century

SOFIA KOTILAINEN

The ambulatory schools remained a significant part of the Finnish popular education system right up to the beginning of the 20th century. They made it possible to bring education to areas where economic, geographical and attitudinal reasons would not have permitted the building of a school for decades to come. In Finland, the education of the people was arranged from the beginning of the early modern era by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church according to the traditional Swedish practice. The 1866 Decree on Elementary Education transferred the task of educating the people from the church parishes to the local municipalities, but in the countryside the parish ambulatory schools continued for several decades to supplement the work of the elementary schools, especially in the outlying villages. They also answered the need for children's primary instruction in addition to that provided at home. The teaching of the early ambulatory schools was mainly religious, and also the background of the teachers was often connected in some way with the work of the church. I examine, as an example of the gradual secularization of popular education, the development of the school network in the parish of Kivijärvi in Central Finland over an extended period.

When the old inhabitants of the parish of Kivijärvi reminisced in the middle of the 1930's about their childhood at the end of the previous century, the folklorist who collected their memories described those times as follows: "An extremely important position in the children's upbringing

was given to religious instruction, which was obtained both in the Sunday schools and by learning the catechism, a process that began at a very early age in the home. As soon as children started to have even a little understanding, their parents began to teach them to bless themselves. Thus one informant stated that he knew how to 'bless himself' before he was familiar with a single letter.¹ Literacy was still at that time closely bound up with the education offered by the church: the clergy defined and directed how the common people set out on the road to learning.

During the 19th century, the church's role in popular education was also important elsewhere in Europe, such as in the Nordic countries, Germany and Britain, at least until the enactment of general laws of popular education or the introduction of compulsory education. In most western European countries the change happened earlier than in Finland.² Eventually the interest in popular education also grew in Finland and ever since the 1860's, an increasing number of municipal elementary schools were established in the countryside; they were governed by the municipal councils, which consisted mainly of peasant representatives. However, in remote areas very few elementary schools were built, and often primary education was provided by the Sunday schools and the ambulatory schools organized by the church parishes. This was also the case in all the Nordic countries.³ The 19th century was the time of the romantic nationalists' efforts to reform popular education to enable the masses to learn at least to read and write in their own mother tongue.⁴ It has also been considered that the secularization of society gradually made the education of the masses the duty of the state, which concomitantly almost automatically reduced the church's power over instruction of the people.

However, the transition from religious teaching to school education deserves further investigation. In this article, I examine to what extent religion,

1 SKS KRA. Hänninen, Eeva KT 1936: 250. The informants were inhabitants at the age of 53–61 years from the Lokakylä village in Kivijärvi and in Kyyjärvi, in those days village of Karstula.

2 Lambert, *State*, 13–18; Magnússon, *Wasteland*, 87–88; Richards, *Primary Education*, 54.

3 Johansson, 'Staten'; Magnússon, *Wasteland*, 137; Richardson, 'Folkskolan', 36–37. See also Garðarsdóttir in this volume.

4 Coe, 'The Education'.

the church and the religious instruction arranged by it continued to influence the contents of the primary instruction in Finland administered by the early parish and municipal councils during the latter half of the 19th century. The 1865 Local Government Act distinguished the municipal and parochial administrations from each other and gradually shifted the responsibility for education to the municipalities. With the 1866 Decree on Elementary Education, it became the duty of the municipality to arrange elementary education, but in the countryside, in practice, the church parish continued to provide elementary education right up to the beginning of the next century. I examine the position of the parish ambulatory schools, in particular, in the creation and establishment of the new rural educational system at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, I consider why the shifting of congregational elementary instruction to the municipal elementary schools was not as straightforward in the outlying countryside as in the towns and in the more prosperous rural parishes.

I concentrate on elementary education at the local level using the administrative parish of Kivijärvi in Central Finland as a case study.⁵ It represents remote agrarian areas, where no school providing elementary education was at first available for all children.⁶ The number of children who received an elementary school education in the area remained insignificant for a long time, even after the coming into force of the Decree on Elementary Education. The study focuses on the early ambulatory school and elementary school teachers who were responsible for the teaching and their individual contributions to popular enlightenment. A noticeable proportion of them were women. The influence of revivalist movements became particularly strong in the countryside in the late 19th century, when personal religious faith also influenced the work for popular enlightenment. The teachers were supposed to be devout Christians and persons for whom teaching was a calling, but their religious values had to be adapted to local attitudes. The

5 This article is connected to my postdoctoral research project (funded by the Academy of Finland), ongoing during the years 2011–2014: “The Benefits of Literacy in Everyday Life: The impacts of improved literacy on the opportunities for social advancement in remote local communities (c. 1800–1930)”.

6 Kotilainen, *Suvun nimissä*, 274.

teacher's personal religious conviction was not allowed to contravene local religious views.⁷ The perspective of the article is not only based on local relevance (the ambulatory schools of Kivijärvi and other elementary education arranged at the end of the century have not been studied earlier in greater detail, especially from the teachers' point of view), but also on a need to add to our knowledge of the early history of popular education, as well as the literacy skills in Finland and in northern Europe. In particular it helps us to understand the character of primary education in remote rural areas.

This article focuses on an analysis of the nature of the change-over from religious instruction to school education, using a few examples to illustrate this process. I examine the spread of elementary education from the viewpoints of a few individual persons and through their life stories. With the help of this methodological approach and a few detailed biographies it is possible to draw more general conclusions about how the introduction of rural ambulatory schools affected the development of Finnish popular education. These biographies help to observing the diversified history of the secularization of the education from the viewpoint of a rural teacher, which has only seldom been examined on the micro level. The biographies may explain the possibilities and ambitions the teachers had to work for the improvement of the usually very modest local educational conditions, and they can also reveal how and why the religious vocation or gendered differences affected the teacher's work.

The educational history of the remote rural areas describes more profoundly the practices and realities of organizing the early elementary education. The agrarian Central Finland contrasted sharply with the town of Jyväskylä, the cradle of the teaching and training of teachers in Finnish language. The distance between them was only a couple of hundred kilometres, but the attitudes and values connected with the popular education were almost opposite. This is why only one teacher could begin a huge change in the rural parish he or she started working. I use a range of sources in my article: newspapers and oral recollections as well as archival sources concern-

7 Markkola, 'Calling of Women'; Rantala, *Kansakoulunopettajat*, 282–283.

ing the parish of Kivijärvi. By collating several different sources systematically I investigate the reasons why even a single teacher could be significant in the establishment of the new elementary educational system. Again, the biographical data may explain why the secularization of education was not necessarily a very straightforward process.

The rural ambulatory schools in the organization of elementary education

In Finland popular education was the sole preserve of the church until the establishment of the elementary school system during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, the functional literacy skills of the population were still extremely weak in the mid-19th century. Even up the advent of universal compulsory education in 1921, children in the countryside usually obtained their elementary instruction either from their parents at home or in ambulatory schools maintained by the church parish. The ambulatory schools had already been employed in earlier centuries to assist in the provision of popular education. In the early 18th century, the Welsh cleric and educational reformer Griffith Jones organized several “circulating schools” for popular education in order to teach people to read in their own language. In 1764 Catherine II of Russia commissioned a report on the organization of these schools and used them as an example when she was planning the reform of the Russian school system, also in the area of the so-called “Old Finland”.⁸ In Finnish ambulatory schools, the teacher went from one village community to another teaching local children and staying from one week to two or three months in each place. The parochial ambulatory schools did not have a common curriculum, so there were considerable differences in their activities. Also the qualifications of the teachers varied, and especially in the earlier part of the period anybody could serve as a teacher; usually it was an older person, but sometimes the instructor was only a little older than the

8 Clement, *Jones*. This Russian school reform affected also the organization of secondary schools in the towns of South-Eastern Finnish areas of the so-called “Old Finland”, i.e. the areas that Sweden ceded to Russia in the 18th century. Later in the 19th century these were an example for the rest of the autonomous Finland in developing the national secondary school system. Rajainen, *Vanhan*, 2–11.

pupils. For example, in Sweden, too, the schoolteachers of small children were at first farmers who had sufficient knowledge of Christian doctrine, reading, writing and arithmetic. Also some former soldiers or students, who had not graduated yet, taught in the rural schools.⁹ An attempt was made to wind down the ambulatory schools gradually after the 1866 Decree on Elementary Education was enacted, and at the latest after universal compulsory education came into force.¹⁰

There were big qualitative differences between the town schools and the ambulatory schools of the countryside, which were held for only a few weeks at a time, in the provision and obtainment of primary instruction as well as in the attendance rates. In the towns, the children of the common people had considerably better opportunities to receive instruction, for example in Sunday schools or pre-schools for small children. Even so, teaching at home was still the most common way to teach children the rudiments of literacy everywhere in Finland.¹¹ Right up to the end of the 19th century, small children in Kivijärvi largely depended on the activeness of their parents for their teaching.¹² The Decree on Elementary Education made the rural municipalities fully responsible for neither the provision of teaching nor for the implementation of compulsory education; rather each municipality could make its own decision on the establishment of an upper elementary school. On the other hand, the rural administrative parishes were obligated to ensure that all those children who did not receive satisfactory instruction in reading and Christian teaching in their own homes should get such teaching in either fixed or ambulatory schools. Initially it was considered, however, that only orphans or neglected children who were not taught by their parents needed organized school teaching. On the other hand, ambulatory schools had not yet really become common in the 1860's.¹³

9 Johansson, 'Staten', 153; Melin, *Alkuopetus*, 17.

10 Hyyrö, 'Alkuopetus', 334, 336. Jones's circulating schools were held for three months in the same place, usually in the winter months when farm work was slack. The pupils were taught to read the Welsh Bible and learn the Church Catechism. There were also night schools for those who could not attend teaching during the day. Jones himself trained the schoolmasters. Clement, *Jones*.

11 Hyyrö, 'Alkuopetus', 327.

12 SKS KRA. Hänninen, Eeva KT 1936: 250.

13 Hyyrö, 'Alkuopetus', 328, 334.

In 1890 over three fourths of the children living in Finnish towns went to school, whereas at the same time the figure in the countryside was only less than one fifth.¹⁴ In 1890 the population of Kivijärvi was approx. 4900 persons, and in the parish there was one ambulatory school, which operated in nine different venues over a period of 36 weeks. It was attended by altogether approx. 300 pupils, i.e. one fourth of all the school-age children. At that time there was no longer any ambulatory school at all in the neighbouring parish of Viitasaari, the population of which was about 8300, nor in its chapelry of Konginkangas (ca 1900 inhabitants). The situation in Kivijärvi was considerably better than in another neighbouring parish, Pihtipudas, where 300 pupils out of a total population of approx. 4500, less than 10%, attended the ambulatory school. The local ambulatory school had been founded there in 1873, and its teaching period was 36 weeks in 36 different locations. In 1890 the elementary schools in Kivijärvi had a little over 5% of all the school-aged children as their pupils, whereas in Pihtipudas the amount was a little over 9% and in Viitasaari it was almost 15%. Sunday school was attended in Viitasaari by 67%, and in Pihtipudas by 86%. However, in Kivijärvi, only 19% of all the school-age children attended Sunday school.¹⁵

Finland's first ambulatory school teacher training seminary was established in conjunction with the elementary school teacher training college in Sortavala in 1890. Ambulatory school teachers were certainly much needed because there were about 200,000 ambulatory school pupils at the time and only about 110,000 elementary school pupils. Even in 1920 there were still more than 1300 ambulatory schools maintained by the church in Finland.¹⁶ There were also ambulatory schools in Karstula, the neighbouring parish of Kivijärvi, before compulsory education came into force. One of the teachers was Hilma Noronen. At her ambulatory school, the pupils studied reading and religion as well as the basics of writing and arithmetic.¹⁷ There were villages in the parish of Karstula in which there was no elementary school and where not many of the older people had attended the ambulatory school

14 Leino-Kaukiainen & Heikkinen, *Yhteiskunta*, 14.

15 SVT X: 17, 28–29; Jokipii, *Keski-Suomen*, 695.

16 Rantala, 'Kansakoulunopettajat', 278.

17 SKS KKA 1. Karstula 4N.

either. Some parents taught their children the rudiments of reading, and at the age of 6–7 years the children could begin Sunday school. In this way, children gradually learnt to read. However, there was a bad shortage of teachers.¹⁸

During the early 20th century, former ambulatory school teachers sometimes became elementary school teachers as the number of elementary schools in the countryside increased. For example, Hilma Noronen, a crofter's daughter from Karstula who later on married a farmer called Viljam Hakkarainen from Kivijärvi, first worked as an ambulatory school teacher in Karstula and Kivijärvi in 1889. Later on she became the teacher of the elementary school in the church village of Kivijärvi. Being a teacher gave a woman a more professional status than that of an ordinary woman in the rural community¹⁹. For example, Hilma Noronen was generally called "Teacher Noronen" in both Kivijärvi and Karstula.²⁰ The ambulatory school teachers were widely known locally. Their prestigious status indicates how rare a skill fluent literacy was in small rural communities in those days.

The organization of popular education in Kivijärvi

The Finnish educator Uno Cygnaeus, originally a pastor and "father of the Finnish elementary school", planned and launched the first Finnish teacher training college in Jyväskylä, and he also became its principal. The Decree on Elementary Education of 1866 did not totally realize his dream of implementing the basic education of the whole nation. Towards the end of the 1800's the education of the masses became a common trend all over Europe, but the processes in different countries are not totally comparable because they took place at different times.²¹ The development was accelerated by nationalist values and the romanticisation of the common folk.²² Even before this, the 18th-century charity-school movement in Wales had already de-

18 SKS KKA 1. Karstula 13N.

19 Markkola, "Women in rural society".

20 Kokkinen, *Kipin*, 24; Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, Name archives, Nicknames: Kivijärvi, Rautiainen 1972.

21 Bowen, *A History of*, 286–327; Coe, "The Education", 26. About the organizing the primary education in Nordic countries, see Melin, *Alkuopetus*, 16.

22 Coe, "The Education", 23.

manded religious schooling in the vernacular.²³ Cygnaeus also emphasized the importance of religion in his educational thinking.

In his work, Uno Cygnaeus absorbed influences and ideas from the educational philosophies of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel, among others. In many respects, the Swedish school system offered a model for the Finnish one. It was advanced in its development, and Sweden, being in other respects, too, an economically more prosperous country, had introduced compulsory education about twenty years earlier than Finland. The Swedish primary school was similar in nature to the Finnish ambulatory school institution. Cygnaeus held Danish elementary instruction in particular in high esteem. In Denmark, the school system was under secular administration, but organized in the manner that outside the capital the clergy was responsible for the inspection of elementary schools. Cygnaeus also used the example of the Baltic countries in developing the Finnish school system. He had become acquainted with the popular instruction provided by the Lutheran Baltic congregations during his St. Petersburg years.²⁴

Even though Cygnaeus tried to develop the Finnish elementary school system into one that permeated all strata of society, primary education still remained, even after the reform, the responsibility of the families and the church. The major significance of the decree from the point of view of the rural administrative parishes was the fact that the state undertook to pay for the greater part of the elementary school teachers' salaries. In spite of this, those municipal councils in which the farmers were in the majority were not keen to pay for the establishment of elementary schools, especially in outlying villages. Often the decision to establish such schools was made only after the local pastor had supported it. Generally, the lack of resources, the sparseness of settlements and the absence of educated parishioners slowed down the establishment of elementary schools in central and northern Finland. The farmers resisted projects that meant extra taxes, and the rural population reacted suspiciously to elementary schools when it could not

²³ Bowen, *A History of*, 154–155.

²⁴ Melin, *Alkuopetus*, 15, 19–21.

see any great advantage accruing from them: going to school only made the children lazybones.²⁵

In Central Finland, the first elementary schools were established in the remote chapelries of Konginkangas and Pylkönmäki in 1867. They had church buildings but no preachers of their own. The new Decree on Elementary Education provided an opportunity for them to get village preachers salaried by the state, which is why clerical tasks were added to the teacher's duties. In some places the establishment of elementary schools was slowed down by the years of severe famine in the late 1860's.²⁶ In Kivijärvi in the village of Kinnula, too, it was decided to establish an elementary school whose teacher would also preach in the church on religious holidays. It was possible in this way to employ a kind of substitute for a clergyman in the chapelry, and even one whose salary was subsidized by the state. The school began operating in rented premises in October 1874. Karl Gabriel Leinberg, an elementary school inspector and senior teacher at the teacher training college in Jyväskylä, inspected the new school in Kinnula for the first time in the following winter. The teacher was Antti Räsänen, a trainee at a school for missionaries. When the inspector discussed the matter with the board of governors of the school, he discovered that the teacher was highly regarded in the village community. However, he thought that this was mainly due to the teacher's "priestly service".²⁷

In 1878, Antti Räsänen was appointed as the teacher of the newly established elementary school in the neighbouring municipality of Karstula. This choice was probably influenced by the pastor's commendation of his talents as a preacher. Certainly the clergy of Karstula subsequently exploited these talents since they frequently invited him to preach in the church.²⁸ In practice, the custom of combining a teacher's and a preacher's duties caused problems in small chapelries when the teachers moved on to other posts in bigger schools. The schools in both Konginkangas and Pylkönmäki had to be closed on a number of occasions because there were no teachers avail-

25 Halila, *Jyväskylän*, 11–21; Kokkinen, *Kipin*, 28; Mönkkönen, 'Sivistyselämä', 562.

26 Mönkkönen, 'Sivistyselämä', 563–564.

27 JyMA, KSA, minutes of the parish meeting 13/9/1874; Mönkkönen, 'Kansansivistys', 445–446.

28 Koski, 'Koululaitos', 486–488.

able.²⁹ The inhabitants of Kinnula were more fortunate because they were able to acquire a new teacher for their school in 1878: Edvard Olsoni, who remained in the locality for several decades.

In Kivijärvi the first elementary school was established in 1872. When the plan was discussed at the parish meeting in May, the majority of the participants opposed the pastor's proposal. The meeting decided that it was not possible to establish a teacher's post since there were no funds available. Instead, it was decided to establish 24 Sunday school districts, which were, however, no proper substitute for an elementary school. Therefore, the matter was brought up again in September of the same year, and a decision on the establishment of a school was reached when Pastor Viktor August Kon-sin promised to place a three-hectare parcel of his own arable land at the teacher's disposal and offered to accommodate the school in the old parson-age building.³⁰ The participation of the clergy in the boards of elementary schools was considered very desirable. In 1872 a local pastor chaired the board of the elementary school in all the parishes in Central Finland except for those chapelries which had no clergy of their own. However, in 1882 a decision of the Diet transferred the task of inspecting schools from the clergy to civil servants. In consequence, the church administration began to favour a parish ambulatory school system over the elementary schools. The parish of Viitasaari in Central Finland was exceptional in that it actually abolished the ambulatory schools with the support of the local clergy, and in their stead the municipality established the six elementary school districts in 1889. There were also some other places, such as Jyväskylä, where the clergy generally reacted positively to the development of elementary schools.³¹

In 1879 the parish meeting of Kivijärvi established two ambulatory schools specifically to promote the development of reading skills among children in the outlying corners of the parish. Two students from the teacher training college in Jyväskylä, Johan Exell and Henriikka Liukko, were appointed as the first teachers. In 1883 the ambulatory school operated for

29 Mönkkönen, 'Sivistyselämä', 564.

30 JyMA, KSA, minutes of the parish meeting 25/5/1872 and 21/9/1872.

31 Mönkkönen, 'Sivistyselämä', 567–568.

thirty weeks. The pupils were mainly illiterate children under ten years of age. The school expenses of poor children were paid for out of the poor relief fund of the municipality, so a lack of means was not an obstacle to studying.³² Many other early schools were founded for charitable reasons because it was believed that they provided children with an opportunity to get on in life and perhaps even to improve their social position. For example, the early schools in Wales and Ireland were organized by the charity school movement, and in the Nordic countries the schools for small children were at first mainly philanthropic institutions.³³ The clergy, too, tried to take care of the elementary instruction of all sections of the population in Kivijärvi right up to the last decades of the 19th century. An ambulatory school pupil of the time later recalled:

“Rankka [Frans Petter Krank] is the first minister that I remember. [...] And it was he who got me to go to the ambulatory school. Since we were poor, and often didn’t have food or anything, he got me into the farmhouse at Sepänlahti [where the school was operating], and Rankka told them to give me food and that he would pay the household for the food. So he was so good to me, that Rankka, and also in his confirmation classes he was good to me. Yes, I did my homework and I didn’t have to re-take my class.”³⁴

From the viewpoint of small rural parishes with limited resources, the ambulatory school was an economic teaching institution because first of all it did not require them to invest in their own school buildings. The classes were held in one of the local homes (usually a farmhouse) or in the parsonage. For example, in Kivijärvi (as well as in many other parishes) the location of the ambulatory school followed the venue of the parish catechetical meeting. It was customary that the same household in which the parish catechetical meeting was held in the (late) winter offered a room for the ambu-

32 Kokkinen, *Kipin*, 24.

33 Bowen, *A History of*, 154–155, 158–159, 291; Melin, *Alkuopetus*, 16. For example Pestalozzi was especially interested in the education of poor children, and he wanted to combine the teaching of reading and writing with training for future employment. Coe, ‘The Education’, 23.

34 SKS KKA 1. Kivijärvi. 9N.

latory school in the following autumn.³⁵ Parish catechetical meetings were usually held to examine the parishioners' knowledge of the catechism, and this was combined with teaching the children to read. In them, the curate or the cantor taught the children to read separately from the adults' catechization. If a young reader progressed sufficiently well, he or she got a mark in his or her reading report and the right to take confirmation classes. In this way the teaching of literacy even after the mid-19th century continued to be strongly based on the church's tradition of religious instruction. The most important texts that were used in popular education were religious. In practice, the clergy also tested the level of the ability to read of the parishioners regularly every year. Religion also affected the contents of the ambulatory schools' teaching. For example, the above-mentioned ambulatory school teacher Hilma Noronen used Sundvall's *Raamatunhistoria* [Biblical History] and the Small Catechism of Luther as textbooks in teaching religion. Singing was likewise studied using the hymn book and other collections of spiritual songs.³⁶

In the peoples' eyes, the ambulatory school together with the Sunday school constituted an institution onto which they could shift the responsibility for their children's primary education until they attended the elementary school. During the school year of 1883–1884, about 39% of the children in Central Finland who were sent to the elementary schools had already gone to an ambulatory school, while in the whole country the proportion of these pupils was about 35%. However, in Kivijärvi a lower proportion of all the school-age children attended the ambulatory schools compared to other parishes in Central Finland at the end of the 19th century. It was customary for elementary school teachers to arrange short courses for young children in the autumn and spring. By attending these, children could attain the skills required to begin elementary school, if home teaching did not provide them with these. However, this kind of teaching was fairly irregular. For example, in the school year of 1875–1876 such classes for young children were held for two weeks in Kivijärvi, whereas for example in the neighbouring parish

³⁵ Hyyrö, 'Alkuopetus', 334–336; Kokkinen, *Kipin*, 15.

³⁶ Kokkinen, *Kipin*, 25.

of Saarijärvi they lasted altogether six weeks. The pre-school classes became common in Central Finland when the elementary schools were established. They were especially common from the 1880's onward, and some children, whose parents did not intend to send them to elementary schools, also attended them. In Kivijärvi, only 62% of the children who had attended pre-school classes were registered for the elementary school while their proportion in the whole country was about 75%.³⁷ As can be seen, the ambulatory school partly replaced the elementary school as the most significant institution offering primary instruction, even though it had been originally intended to be a temporary institution and only provide a preparation for the elementary school.

What kind of then was the role of an ambulatory or elementary school teacher in his or her local community? How did gender, religion or the length of time the teachers spent in the parish affect their vocation as teachers? The life stories of two rural teachers, Riikka Vesterinen and Edvard Olsoni, tell more about their motivation to teach. They both stayed for a longer time in the local community, where they were appointed as teachers, in which case they committed themselves quite profoundly to developing their home parish and its school system. They came from such areas where the popular education had been more advanced already in their childhood than in Kivijärvi, and they had had a chance to study more than the majority of the population in Kivijärvi. On the other hand, they had very different kinds of backgrounds and possibilities to work in the teaching profession. Examining of the characteristics of their biographies reveals to what extent the teacher of remote rural areas has been able to participate in the local educational work.

37 Mönkkönen, 'Sivistyselämä', 568–569, 696.

Riikka Vesterinen: from a servant to an educator

“There were no schools at that time in Kivijärvi, nor did anyone want them. Then came the first ambulatory school teacher. As far as I remember, it was Vihtori Vesterinen’s³⁸ mother, and she first kept the school in Viivataipale.”³⁹

Ambulatory school teachers played an important role in their local communities in the latter half of the 19th century. As teachers Finnish women, even if they came from a modest background, could participate in communal educational work in a significant way. This was the case also in the other Nordic countries. Still there were more women teachers in the towns than in the rural areas. In Finland, a little over 40% of elementary school teachers were women in the beginning of the 1890’s. In the province of Vaasa, in which Kivijärvi belonged to, only less than one fourth were women. However, for example in Prussia, the authorities were unwilling to assuage the shortage of teachers by making the profession open to women.⁴⁰

In Kivijärvi, one of the female ambulatory school teachers was Riikka Liukko, who was born in 1852 in Keuruu in Central Finland, the daughter of a crofter. Two of her parents’ six children perished in the famine winter of 1867. Riikka left home as a child to work as a servant in Keuruu; in 1873 she moved to the capital Helsinki. However, she returned home the following year and took up employment as a servant in the parsonage of Alavus, a little less than one hundred kilometres away from Keuruu in Southern Ostrobothnia. She had also served in the parsonage of Keuruu, where the pastor, Frans Henrik Bergroth, supported popular education and was the main force behind the establishment of a local elementary school. Also the family of the parish pastor of Alavus, Karl Fredrik Stenbäck, was progressive, and his son Lauri Kivekäs (former Stenbäck) was an active Fennoman. Probably supported by the masters and mistresses of these parsonages, Riikka

38 Vihtori Vesterinen was a government minister in the years 1945–48 and 1950–51.

39 SKS KRA. Rautiainen, Albert 4016. 1960.

40 SVT X: 18, 33, 37; Johansson, ‘Staten’, 153; Lamberti, *State*, 19–20. See also Garðarsdóttir in this volume.

Liukko applied for admission to the teacher training college in Jyväskylä in 1877. Especially her musical talent and her beautiful singing voice had attracted attention, and the inhabitants of the parsonage, with their interest in popular education, had certainly noticed that she possessed gifts that suited her for something more than just servant's work. However, a lack of funds forced Riikka to give up her studies after just one year, and she returned to the parsonage in Alavus.⁴¹

On the other hand, even this short period of study opened up the possibility for Riikka to serve as an ambulatory school teacher in some outlying rural parish, and in 1880 she was appointed as teacher of the southern ambulatory school district of Kivijärvi. However, her career as an ambulatory school teacher soon ended when she married Lauri Vesterinen (usually the female teachers were not married), and became the mistress of the Kivikko household in the village of Pudasjärvi. Altogether nine children were born to the couple. The farm was considerably larger than ordinary farms in Kivijärvi, and its main building in particular was impressive compared to other farmhouses in the region. The interior likewise told of the wealth of the owners and represented rather the culture of country gentlefolk than the traditional local peasant way of life. Furthermore, Lauri Vesterinen quickly managed to increase the area of his land to about 6000 hectares. Of this, the amount of arable land rose to about 50 hectares, and there were about thirty crofters living on the estate. In order to improve the poor transportation connections, he acquired two lake steamers, which sailed on Lake Kivijärvi. One of them, a passenger vessel, was named after his wife Riikka.⁴²

Lauri Vesterinen adopted the Laestadian⁴³ faith, which had spread to Kivijärvi in the 1870's and was strong there. It meant that high moral demands were placed on the daily life of the whole family. On Sundays, the master read Luther's Small Catechism to his household. Riikka Vesterinen had a strongly social disposition: all beggars and other vagrants got a place to stay for the night in her household. Itinerant Romanies were also wel-

41 Kangas, *Vihtori*, 17–19.

42 Vesterinen also established a sawmill and a mill. Kangas, *Vihtori*, 19–21.

43 Revivalist movement was named after its leader, priest Lars Levi Laestadius, and it got its members especially from Northern Finland.

come, and the hostess was widely respected among them. Riikka adopted much of her husband's Laestadian faith. She was a religious person, but her Christianity was not quite as strict as that of her husband. Riikka Vesterinen remained interested in social matters all her life. She participated in the establishment of an elementary school in her home village in the early 1890's, served on its first board of governors and influenced the development of the school in other ways. She also stood as a parliamentary candidate of the Young Finns party in the 1907 general election.⁴⁴ The teacher's lifelong mission had a comprehensive impact on several spheres of life, and it exemplified many other ways in which women could exert their influence socially than merely in the education of the children.

Edvard Olsoni: preacher and teacher

The church continued to participate in the provision of popular education at the end of the 19th century because its own resources were limited, and cooperation with the secular school system for its part also increased religious teaching in the outlying countryside. The connection between the schools and religion was still very strong in the latter half of the 19th century, and the same persons often took care both of religious instruction and popular education. The village of Kinnula became a chapelry of the parish of Kivijärvi in 1864, and the village's own church building was completed in 1867. Because Kinnula had no minister of its own living in the locality, the clergy of Kivijärvi came to hold services there four times a year, and during the intervening times a lay preacher took care of the celebration of services.⁴⁵ During the time Kinnula was a chapelry, it was mainly the elementary school teacher who served as a preacher in the chapel. The first teacher, Antti Räsänen, carried out the duties of a preacher in the 1870's, and he was followed by Karl Edvard Olsoni. According to local oral tradition, the latter had studied theology but still needed to pass a few courses in order to obtain his degree.⁴⁶

Edvard Olsoni was born in 1835. His father and mother both came from

44 Kangas, *Vihtori*, 21–25.

45 The local newspaper *Keski-Suomi* 9/3/1887, no 19. Letters from the countryside. From Kivijärvi 14/2/1887.

46 Leskelä, *Kimmulan*, 29–30.

eastern Finnish clerical stock.⁴⁷ He had studied at Kuopio Upper Secondary School and took his matriculation examination in 1857. Although his elder brother was a lawyer and a civil servant, the younger brother became more oriented towards teaching than university studies, and he began working as a teacher in Kuopio in 1865 and as an elementary school teacher in 1873. During his time there he worked to further popular education. In the Kuopio newspaper *Tapio* in 1865, he expressed his thanks on behalf of the pupils of the Sunday school for donations of books received by the school library. Similarly, in the 1870's Olsoni worked as a librarian in the Kuopio Municipal Sunday School for Artisans and probably also in another Sunday school.⁴⁸

Edvard Olsoni worked as an elementary school teacher from 1878 to 1900 in the village of Kinnula.⁴⁹ He was sometimes called “the preacher of Kinnula”, for example in the parish registers of Kivijärvi.⁵⁰ Olsoni was in a way “Kinnula’s own pastor”, but he was not qualified to celebrate church rites, such as baptisms and burials.⁵¹ He also served as the teacher of the Sunday school in Kinnula, at least in 1901 and possibly also in earlier years.⁵² Olsoni also administered emergency baptisms in Kinnula to altogether 16 children between 1881 and 1901. Furthermore, he and his wife were the godparents of several children in the locality. A few other elementary school teachers from Kivijärvi also performed emergency baptisms of new-born children when necessary. Later in the early 20th century, emergency baptisms were often performed by Sunday school teachers, who anyway had a good knowledge of the Lutheran confessions of faith, as was required of an emergency baptizer.⁵³ Like many other teachers, the above-mentioned ambulatory school teacher Hilma Noronen was mentioned as a godparent of a new-born baby in the baptismal records of 1912.⁵⁴

47 Helsingin yliopiston ylioppilasmatrikkelit 1640–1852; 1853–1899; Bergholm, *Sukukirja*, 974.

48 Huttunen, ‘Kuopion’, 12; *Tapio*. N:o 25, 23/6/1865; N:o 1, 2/1/1875; Helsingin yliopiston ylioppilasmatrikkelit 1853–1899; Bergholm, *Sukukirja*, 974; Wanne, *Kuopion*, 20.

49 Talvisto, *Kinnulan*, 180.

50 E.g. JyMA, KSA, records of births and baptisms 15/3/1886.

51 Leskelä, *Kinnulan*, 29–30.

52 JyMA, KSA, Records of parish catechetical meetings 1901.

53 JyMA, KSA, Records of births and baptisms 1881–1901; Notes on the state and life of the parish of Kivijärvi during the years 1927–1931 for the 1932 synodal meeting of the Synod of the Diocese of Tampere and the 1933 General Synod.

54 JyMA, KSA, births and baptismal records of 1912.

Teachers were popular godparents, and they were also chosen as emergency baptizers because they were usually regarded as possessing better knowledge and learning than the rest of the rural population thanks to their professional skill and training, and because of this they were also respected rather in the same way as the upper classes had been earlier during the period when society was divided into estates. The teachers were in many ways important local communal actors, to whom the community turned to on other everyday matters than just those connected their educational duties. Often the relation of the teacher to the locals to a great extent resembled the relationship of trust between the clergy and their parishioners.

The longevity of religious instruction in elementary education

During the 19th century most European countries developed their national education systems and organized schools for the rural population as well. In Finland, the ambulatory schools organized by the church played a very important role during this long liminal period because they ensured the continuity of the teaching in places where the secular authorities had not yet been able to establish elementary schools. As late as the first decades of the 20th century, popular education in the Finnish countryside still had strong connections with the elementary instruction organized by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church. At that time, compulsory education had already been enacted in many European countries and education had become more the task of the state than the church. Some of the elementary instruction was obtained at Sunday schools, and religion had a significant influence on the teaching in other respects, too. The basics of reading skills were often acquired in the centuries-old traditional way by learning the main confessions of faith by heart.

Since the possibilities for obtaining schooling were low in the remote countryside, the ambulatory school continued to be a significant instructional institution right up to and even after the coming into force of universal compulsory education. In 1927 it was noted in Kivijärvi: "Home teaching has become very insignificant in those parts of the parish where there are schools. Two ambulatory schools operated until last spring, of which one has been designated for abolition next autumn by a decision of the parish

meeting because of the increase in elementary schools.”⁵⁵ The last ambulatory school in Kivijärvi was wound up in the autumn of 1934, even though at the end of the 1930’s the pastor thought that it was still needed. One consequence of the winding up of the ambulatory school was that at least in two remote villages some of the children were left without sufficient elementary instruction, since the operation of the lower elementary school had not been properly organized either.⁵⁶ The ambulatory schools were still necessary in remote areas in the 1930’s, and in Finland about 250 ambulatory schools were still operating in the mid-1930’s.⁵⁷

Many early popular educators were either members of revivalist movements or even church priests; this was the case for example in Wales. In Kivijärvi, the work of Edvard Olsoni exemplifies how popular education and religious instruction were combined in various ways. Many other ambulatory school and Sunday school teachers also made up for their deficient training for their tasks with their religious conviction. Male teachers may have previously pursued theological studies and training for the priesthood. For example, Sunday school teachers who were laymen and had often themselves not received much schooling were nevertheless religious or even members of local revivalist movements, as was the case also elsewhere in Europe. For many teachers, popular education represented a calling. It was a vocation that remained important for women teachers, too, even after they married and established families and no longer necessarily worked as ambulatory or elementary school teachers themselves. As wives they still participated in many ways in the work of popular enlightenment and in the activities of the associations that promoted it in their own home areas.

In Finland, the ambulatory school was largely a form of instruction organized by the church parish, and it supplemented municipal elementary instruction especially in outlying villages right up to the early 20th century

55 JyMA, KSA, Notes on the state and life of the Parish of Kivijärvi in the years 1922–1927 for a report submitted to the General Synod 1928; Description of the state of the Parish of Kivijärvi in the years 1922–1926 for the Synodal Meeting of the Diocese of Tampere on 18 October 1927.

56 Notes on the state and life of the Parish of Kivijärvi during the years 1932–1936 for the 1937 Synodal Meeting of the Diocese of Tampere and the 1938 General Synod. Submitted on 25 March 1936 by Pastor Väinö Havas.

57 Hyyrö, *‘Alkuopetus’*, 338.

and the implementation of universal compulsory education. Without it, the rural population would have been deprived of even rudimentary teaching. It was cheaper to arrange than elementary school education, and while it did not offer the pupils as much basic information as the elementary school, they got through their schooling more quickly. The popularity of the ambulatory school was undoubtedly also influenced by the fact that the rural population continued to regard schools and prolonged school attendance with suspicion. They believed that it was more important to learn the practical skills of agriculture than to sit on a school bench. Research on the ambulatory schools shows how short the history of a uniform system of popular education in Finland is and how rapid the development of universal compulsory education actually was. Only from the 1970's on has there been a uniform comprehensive school that offers an education that is broadly the same for a whole age group. This has sometimes been difficult to remember when the excellent learning results produced by the Finnish welfare society and the advantages provided for the development of the information society by a uniform educational system has been examined in hindsight.

The mobility of the ambulatory school also made it a very flexible institution, and for precisely this reason it was initially better suited than the fixed elementary school to a situation in which popular education was just becoming established and the resources for it were limited. In its own way, it symbolizes the whole gradual secularization process and the change that was going on in the rest of society at the same time. Even though the ambulatory school was originally intended as a temporary teaching institution to supplement the elementary school, in the slowly modernizing countryside it actually took the place of the elementary school for several decades. Moreover, especially the ambulatory school teachers who worked for decades in the same area became important role models in their own village communities.

The ambulatory school was characterized by mobility and expediency in other ways too: it tried to respond to the educational needs of the poorest and least lettered people in such a way as to make it possible for each locality to adopt it according to the resources available. Education, which had traditionally been characteristically religious and dominated by the higher es-

tates and especially by the clergy, was gradually becoming not only the duty but also the right of every citizen. And the ambulatory school offered many children an opportunity to obtain the skills needed later in the new civic society of the 20th century, even if they did not have otherwise had a chance to obtain elementary education. Teaching was not initially as accessible in the countryside as it was in more densely settled areas, which explains why individual ambulatory school teachers held considerable responsibility for the quantity and quality of the teaching provided for the majority of school-age children living in the parish.

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