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## **“Das Schulwesen aber ist und bleibt allezeit ein politicum”: The Felbiger General School Ordinance and School Reform in the Eighteenth-Century Habsburg Monarchy**

Martin Viehhauser

On December 6, 1774, Austrian Empress Maria Theresa signed a school act that made elementary schooling compulsory for all children from age six to twelve in the hereditary lands of the Habsburg Empire. The school act, consisting of 24 paragraphs, became known as *Allgemeine Schulordnung* (General School Ordinance) and was mainly formulated by Johann Ignaz Felbiger (1724–1788), a Catholic abbot from Silesia, a region of mixed Catholic and Protestant creeds that was conquered by Prussia in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The ordinance’s core concern was first and foremost the literacy of the people. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and, of course, religious education were among the main subjects to be taught, with additional subjects for city schools. However, at the same time—and when observed within the contemporary historical context—the school act was a tool to integrate the diverse dominions of the empire into one political sphere. From the perspective of state-building, which in this chapter will be the main framework for my interpretation of the ordinance, the school act helped to limit

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the political influence of the Catholic Church and to install a political system via the institutionalization of public elementary schooling.

The edict *Allgemeine Schulordnung* was issued toward the end of Maria Theresa's regency (she died in 1780), which was an era of transformation of the Habsburg Empire from *ancient régime* politics to a bureaucratized absolutist government.<sup>2</sup> Much of the reformatory attempts, including educational reforms, were experiments that followed more or less established models from inside or outside the monarchy. Maria Theresa herself emphatically promoted this process of experimentation, and after her death, her successor and son, Joseph II, pushed forward even more decisively—and often recklessly—his own enlightened agenda. After Joseph's death in 1790, the short two-year regency of his brother Leopold II followed the same values of an enlightened politics. During his tenure as the Duke of Tuscany, Leopold had also sympathized with the idea of a constitutional monarchy—yet back in Vienna, he did not have the time or energy to implement his often-radical ideas.

The transitional period between the *ancient régime* and a modernized monarchy would later be termed Josephinism, which describes a culture of political thought within the general process of state-building that enabled laws, including the law on compulsory schooling. This chapter focuses on the 1774 School Ordinance as a centerpiece of this transformation toward a machinelike state that should work in a uniform way all over the Austrian empire—a *Neues Systema*, as Maria Theresa's minister for governmental reforms, Count Friedrich Wilhelm von Haugwitz, intended it.<sup>3</sup> The need for reform was indisputable. The crisis of the military services, which became evident during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), revealed the structural deficits of the widespread, multiethnic, religiously and linguistically diverse, and geographically partly disconnected Habsburg Empire—an empire that stretched from Transylvania in the east to the Habsburg Netherlands in the west, from Tuscany (present-day Italy) in the south to Bohemia, Galicia, and Lodomeria (present-day Poland/Ukraine) in the north.<sup>4</sup> Within this conglomerate of territories, the hereditary Austrian estates of the Habsburgs were comparatively small. "Austria" (*Österreich*) was

the name for the geographical region that today roughly encompasses Upper and Lower Austria, with Vienna at its center.<sup>5</sup>

The harmonization of institutional structures and bureaucratic procedures became one of the Habsburgs key concerns after the existential threat of the war. Such efforts were, however, made not only for military reasons but also because institutional practices, legal conceptions, and statuses varied throughout the empire and hindered efficient government. With respect to public elementary education, the uniformity to which the empire aspired, however, did not mean uniformity of language: Elementary instruction was given in vernacular languages, and textbooks were translated into the languages spoken within the monarchy. Instead, the government strived after uniformity in the administration of the school system as well as in pedagogical content and methods.

Another important function of compulsory schooling was to integrate the different parts of the empire into a coherent political sphere. Schooling meant that the political center of the empire established a new channel of communication to its subjects. Compulsory education also directly exposed every subject to the power of the state. Through daily school experiences, the state became "real" for its inhabitants. Schools, like other governmental agencies including post offices, communal magistracies, and local military bases, were thus among the main representatives of an otherwise largely abstract state.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the experience of war, the state-building process of the Habsburg Monarchy was also dependent on a specific legal prerequisite. As a woman, Maria Theresa could take over the throne only because of the so-called Pragmatic Sanction, a house law issued by her father, Charles VI, in 1713. The Pragmatic Sanction functioned as a constitutional law because it bound the different lands to Habsburg rule, fixed their affiliation to the crown and defined the outline of a political entity ruled by the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>7</sup> The Sanction's main objective, however, was to define the legal order of succession to the throne within the Habsburg family and to enable female succession in case of lack of a male heir. Consequently, the Sanction institutionalized the emperor (or the female ruler) as the legal head of the territorial conglomerate, which received its name almost one hundred years later

when Francis II/I declared the Empire of Austria (*Kaisertum Österreich*) in 1804.<sup>8</sup> The Pragmatic Sanction linked the name “Austria,” the name for the Habsburg’s geographical heartlands, to the monarchy, and the Habsburg dynasty became known as the *Monarchia Austriaca*, the “House of Austria.”

The new quasi-constitutional framework also initiated a slow transition from ruling based upon succession to ruling based upon the power of public government.<sup>9</sup> By linking the lands of the Habsburg Monarchy to the dynasty, the political entity of the monarchy simultaneously became self-contained and independent. The installation of a modern bureaucratic order marked the transition from *ancient régime* to a state of enlightenment that had the *bonum commune* at the core of its rationale—of course, only within the framework of an absolutist government.<sup>10</sup> Against this backdrop, rather than speaking of the building of an Austrian “nation,” this chapter addresses the question of statehood and the provisions made by defining schooling as mandatory in order to integrate the state’s population.

## Reformatory Attempts Prior to 1774

In Maria Theresa’s regency (1740–1780), education became emphatically a matter of political concern, a *politicum*, and thus a secular matter for all time, as the empress famously explained in a decree in 1770.<sup>11</sup> The historical context of the Maria Theresian school reforms was complex. As a ruler, Maria Theresa clung far more to the traditional logic of dynastical order and its ceremonious social world at court than to a political agenda of the enlightenment, which marked her attempts to reform education.<sup>12</sup> She continued to perceive the inhabitants of her territories as subjects and not as free citizens, a view that the school act’s provisions consequently promoted. However, the institutionalization of a legally regulated and accountable public school system conditioned the understanding of a public sphere emancipated from the non-transparent principles of imperial dignity and the courtly politics of favor with mutual personal gratitude—elements of a world that Maria Theresa embodied throughout her lifetime. Although she was a woman

of strong Catholic faith, Maria Theresa often entrusted counselors from regions influenced by Protestantism to design institutional reforms, including those of the educational sector. The attempts at social and educational reform of the era should be understood against the background of this sometimes-confusing context.

As explained in the historian James Van Horn Melton's lucid analysis, Maria Theresian institutional reforms basically dealt with the more general problem of controlling a growing population.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the reforms were triggered by concrete challenges that threatened the dynastical order and even the survival of the monarchy in the 1740s. After her father Charles VI died, the 23-year-old Maria Theresa not only inherited a highly indebted empire but also succeeded to the throne as a woman, to whom European powers immediately declared war—the so-called War of the Austrian Succession. The level of loyalty and vigor among the army, partly a consequence of underfunding, turned out to be low; the empire was vulnerable on every corner, and the loyalty of the nobility to the monarchy was fractured. In the wake of experiencing this existential crisis, Maria Theresa soon *had* to embark on a reform agenda.<sup>14</sup>

The initial phase of Maria Theresian institutional modernization started with the appointment of Haugwitz, who elaborated a plan to reform the monarchy's financial system according to a cameralist conception of bureaucratic efficiency. Haugwitz called this model *Neues Systema*, and it was based on a structural change from revenues by quasi-voluntary contribution to an impersonal, much more efficient and accountable mechanism of tax income. According to Haugwitz, "a well-arranged financial administration is the soul of the state."<sup>15</sup> The new system also sought to centralize the power of control of the army and of public administration, transforming the gentry from feudal rulers to subjects of the supreme monarch.<sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, these reforms suffered from considerable acceptance problems. However, despite inevitable fallbacks and subversive resistance on the local level, these first attempts at institutional reforms set off a dynamic of making the empire more efficient and—maybe even more importantly—centralized. The reforms established a centralized bureaucratic structure, outlined government-run districts for

local public administration, and founded, in 1749, the institution *Directorium in publicis et cameralibus* on top of the administrative hierarchy, which absorbed the competencies of former local chancelleries.<sup>17</sup> This step of building a coherent state was followed by other actions; for instance, the establishment of an official archive in the same year, the *Haus- und Staatsarchiv* that documented the public and monarchic affairs and helped to construct the state's historical narrative. The imperial order to map the territories in the 1770s added to the centralizing attempts to transform the territories into governable and easily taxable structures. Additionally, thorough population censuses provided lists and information about the population and especially about men eligible for military service.<sup>18</sup>

The preoccupation with surveys and overviews, abstract numbers, and charts of the territories shaped a conceptual scheme of what a "state" was, and it also set educational reforms rolling, which initially gained momentum in provinces such as Tyrol and Styria. In 1751, for example, a survey in Styria reported on the condition of basic education.<sup>19</sup> Each province executive had to make specifications on the conditions of the school system in cities, market towns, and villages, with remarks on whether *Winkelschulen* had been established.<sup>20</sup> This latter information was of particular interest for the state administration because *Winkelschulen*, often located in remote regions, operated without official permissions and therefore were alleged to be places where crypto-protestant education could take root. The reports also included suggestions on how to improve the school system. These and later reports documented problems local schools had to struggle with, such as underfunding, a lack of interest in schooling from local authorities, and irregular rates of school attendance.

The Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763 seemed to lessen enthusiasm for reforming the school system, as the lack of military vigor once again absorbed political attention.<sup>21</sup> However, the intention to centralize the government of the empire had already emerged during wartime in the foundation of a government agency called *Studienhofkommission* in 1760, responsible for planning and administering secondary schools (so-called *Lateinschulen* or *Gymnasien*) as well as higher education at the universities.<sup>22</sup> A couple of years after the war, in 1770, Maria Theresa

now decisively addressed the matter of schooling for the whole population and founded a commission entrusted with elementary schooling (called *deutsche Schulen*—later called *Volksschulen*—since the language of instruction was German, in contrast to the Latin Schools). This crucial commission was responsible for Upper and Lower Austria (the region surrounding the city of Vienna) and was called the Lower-Austrian School Commission (*Niederösterreichische Schulkommission*).<sup>23</sup>

Who were the people for whom elementary schooling was intended? As previously mentioned, Maria Theresa embodied traditional forms of courtly politics. She saw herself as the general and first mother of the people.<sup>24</sup> However, she very rarely and only in formalized contexts came into contact with the inhabitants of her lands; too many hierarchical levels separated her from her subjects. Those subjects, however, were synonymous with the peasants, the workers, and other representatives of the lower classes.<sup>25</sup> Peasants and other workers in the agricultural sector were the majority of the empire's population—approximately 80% made their living on the basis of agriculture in unfree conditions, dependent on manorial lords, supplying compulsory labor, and bound to their lords' favors.<sup>26</sup> The peasant's compulsory service for the lords (called *Robot*) was, however, identified as one of the problems for the state by Maria Theresa and her counselors, just like the system of lordship—lords being the rulers of their estates—in general.<sup>27</sup> The more unfree the subjects were—that was the insight—the less they could contribute to the state's prosperity with labor productivity, with taxes and contributions, and with healthy soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

The population grew during the second half of the eighteenth century, and new, more managerial approaches in agriculture and the economy were required. New policies also supported the establishment of proto-industrialist manufacturers, some of which produced textile goods. These manufacturers became an important branch of industry offering employment opportunities and income, especially to families of lower classes, including women and children.<sup>29</sup> The increasing impact of the rule of law over public order and the growing efficiency of bureaucracy promoted mercantilist positions in economic policy, which eventually led to the suppression of internal tariffs and to the creation of a customs union.<sup>30</sup> In addition to affecting economic development,

all these developments contributed to the creation of a public sphere, in which the General School Ordinance could originate in 1774.

The Enlightenment was also an important condition for this school act. Although Maria Theresa herself did not promote a pronouncedly enlightened agenda—she even perceived the French Enlightenment as a dangerous fashion—she nevertheless saw potential rather than risk in a literate population.<sup>31</sup> In addition to political and economic reasons, the potential for moral improvement through education fueled her enthusiasm for educational reform. Maria Theresa saw public schooling as a way to improve discipline and morality, especially in the growing population of the lower classes. Being a woman of strong Catholic faith, she also believed in the power of education to strengthen religious formation and distanced herself from the opinion—sometimes held by her clerical counselors—that education led to emancipation from religion. Instead, she believed in the enhancement of the peasant's industriousness and the state's economic well-being, and ultimately in the potential to increase the state's general felicitousness through education.

## Felbiger and the General School Ordinance

The reformatory attempts under Maria Theresa's regency set off the dynamic of an increasingly secular, impersonal, and centralized bureaucratic administration of Habsburg territories, thus producing an ever-growing flood of papers, memoranda, and reports.<sup>32</sup> The governmental reforms under the lead of Haugwitz and later of Prince Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg, chancellor of state, delivered some of the mosaics for this transitional phase, while the reform of elementary education, firmly addressed in the 1770s, accounted for others. The crucial phase of remodeling the school system began with a memorandum for the empress on the condition of elementary schooling, written by Leopold Ernst Firmian, Prince-Bishop of Passau, which proposed to engage secular powers in the matter of schooling. The Lower-Austrian School Commission was thereafter entrusted with developing an applicable reform plan.



Backed by this entrustment, the pedagogue and member of the Lower-Austrian School Commission Joseph Messmer, who himself had written a memorandum on the improvement of the German schools, planned a *Normalschule*. This model institution was founded in 1771 in Vienna, directed by Messmer himself and initially funded by the governmental budget. In subsequent years, the Lower-Austrian School Commission became the main hub for educational reforms, at a time when many of the plans for educational reform were abandoned. The dissolution of the Jesuit Order in 1773 by Pope Clemens IV suddenly changed the situation, opening new opportunities and stimulating action.

The Jesuits and their Society of Jesus had traditionally been a major player in the educational sector—especially in higher education—and their school system had been an important Catholic bulwark during the period of counterreformation. However, the Society eventually lost credit because of political intrigue, fraud, and conspiracy, which led to the annulation of the order. Maria Theresa—being a woman of strict faith—lamented the decision but reacted in a pragmatic fashion, typical of her decision making: “one has to make the best out of it for our holy religion and the state.”<sup>33</sup> Van Horn Melton marks the dissolution of the Jesuits as “a monumental event in the history of Austrian schooling.”<sup>34</sup> The vacuum in education that it caused opened a window of opportunity for transforming the school from a matter of *ecclesiasticum* to a matter of *politicum*. The Jesuits’ significant wealth and property, which the monarchy (not the Catholic Church) took over, additionally helped finance this transition of educational matters.

As a reaction to the abolition of the Society of Jesus, Maria Theresa entrusted the *Studienhofkommission* with developing a plan for general educational reform. A prominent member of the commission, Professor Karl Anton von Martini, took the chance of promoting an enlightened agenda. The commission suggested appointing Silesian abbot Johann Ignaz Felbiger, widely known for his methods and system reforms, to develop and implement a new order in elementary education following the overarching principle of uniformity in pedagogical practice throughout the *Monarchia Austriaca* and specifically the German-speaking hereditary lands of the Habsburgs.

Once he arrived in Vienna, Felbiger began to work out a general outline for the elementary school system. After a short time, he presented in 1774 the school act *General School Ordinance for German Normal, Major and Minor Schools in all Imperial and Royal Hereditary Lands* (*Allgemeine Schulordnung für die deutschen Normal-, Haupt- und Trivialschulen in sämtlichen Kaiserl. Königl. Erbländern*). The edict defined the legal basis for compulsory elementary schooling for children of both sexes between the ages of six and twelve, as it recognized “the education of youth of both sexes as the most important basis for the true happiness of nations.”<sup>35</sup>

With Felbiger as its author, the General School Ordinance was written by a Catholic Augustinian abbot from Zagan, Silesia (today a small city in Poland near Görlitz, Germany). His abbey was located in a religiously diverse region populated by people of Lutheran and Catholic faith, and he had hence delivered schooling in a context of competition with often-innovative Protestant education by Lutheran schools. Against the backdrop of the disastrous state of Catholic schools in Zagan, Felbiger had developed an interest in pedagogy as an important element of strengthening Catholicism.<sup>36</sup> He had read educational literature and had been inspired by exemplary schools, especially the *Realschule* in Berlin, founded by Johann Julius Hecker, a former student at Francke’s famous pietistic educational institution in Halle.<sup>37</sup>

Inspired by German educational literature and Prussian examples, Felbiger wrote a program of regulations for Silesia’s educational system in 1764. This so-called *General-Land-Schul-Reglement* defined fundamentals for teacher training, school attendance, and school inspection, among other features of schooling in Silesia. He thereafter used his 1764 school program as a model when he drafted the Austrian school act of 1774.<sup>38</sup> As historian Helmut Engelbrecht notes, after 1774, the new order of schooling in Catholic Austria was consequently based on protestant ideas coming from Prussia.<sup>39</sup> This may seem more surprising than it actually was. Some of Felbiger’s new pedagogical methods—such as instruction in groups—were already practiced in some parts of the monarchy, and his ideas soon traveled not only to Bavaria and other German areas but also to Russia and the orthodox areas of Serbia.<sup>40</sup> In this respect, Felbiger is an excellent example of the circulation of pedagogical ideas in nineteenth-century Europe.

## The General School Ordinance of 1774

The General School Ordinance of 1774 was composed of 24 paragraphs that organized the hierarchical structure of the new school system.<sup>41</sup> As the title of the act indicated, it founded three different types of German schools on three different hierarchical levels: (1) the normal school (*Normalschule*), a model institution setting the norms for the other schools within a province and the place for teacher training—the school act determined that teachers had to be instructed and certified at a normal school to be employed<sup>42</sup>; (2) the major school (*Hauptschule*) as the school form for bigger communities and cities; and (3) the minor school (*Trivialschule*) to be situated in market towns and every other place, wherever a parish was located.

The School Ordinance placed the inspection and administration of the schools in the hands of a school commission responsible for a province. The Lower-Austrian School Commission had already existed since 1770, and other commissions were to be founded later. The provincial administration appointed members of a school commission, normally two or three magistrates, a clerical delegate, and the director of the normal school, which should be established in every place in which a school commission was located. In 1777, Felbiger himself took up the post of a supreme director surveying the local school commission. When he resigned in 1781, these provincial agencies on elementary schooling were incorporated into the *Studienhofkommission*.

Further central aspects of Felbiger's 1774 School Ordinance concerned the contents of schooling. Paragraph 3 defined that all schools had to follow one common way of teaching (*Lehrart*) and a common set of subjects (*Lehrgegenstände*). Paragraph 5 lists the subjects according to school form. The subjects were classified into four sections: (1) religion; (2) reading, writing, and arithmetic; (3) vocational and academic preparation (depending on the school's location); and (4) teacher training. A normal school had to teach the subjects in all four sections, while a major school had to deliver vocational and academic preparation (as the educational path could lead both to a *Gymnasium* and to vocational careers as merchants or craftsmen, for example) in addition to religion,

reading, writing, and arithmetic. The subjects of vocational or academic preparation included German composition, basic Latin, cultural and natural history, and geography. The *Trivialschule* (minor school) had only to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and of course religion, which enjoyed special emphasis. In addition, other subjects that aimed at economic efficiency and moral integrity were also included in the minor schools.

With respect to the common way of teaching, a book on methods and on the pedagogical principles of teaching complemented the School Ordinance. Felbiger considered pedagogical methodology to be the most important element of school reform, and he thus published in 1775 his doctrine on methods of proper instruction in a separate book, the *Book of Methods for Teachers of German Schools* (*Methodenbuch für Lehrer der deutschen Schulen*). This book was published by the in-house printing press of the Lower-Austrian School Commission, and it was translated into all major languages of the monarchy.

In Zagan, Felbiger had already written methodological observations and textbooks in which he promoted the central innovation of his pedagogy, the method of teaching all children simultaneously in a class, especially at the level of elementary schooling. Felbiger called this new method “instruction altogether” (*Zusammenunterrichten*), which consequently created classes of homogenous achievement groups. In accordance with the contemporary Baroque conceptualization of the state, which was idealistically imagined as a well-functioning machine,<sup>43</sup> Felbiger created his own pedagogical methods according to the principles of mechanics: “Every pupil of a class must see, think, hear, and do one thing.”<sup>44</sup>

The *Book of Methods* treated pedagogical work in schools as a structured practice. It transmitted the idea of pedagogy as a matter of insight and inner beliefs aiming at the pupil’s conduct (e.g., obedience), while measures such as punishment were nevertheless used for achieving educational objectives. The book was composed of three main parts: the first dealing with pedagogical methodology in general, the second delivering observations on teacher training and instructions for inspectors, and the third presenting ordinances including the 1774 School Ordinance and other regulations.

In addition to the focal method of class instruction, the *Book of Methods* conceived the "method of letters" (*Buchstabenmethode*) as a second new method. According to that method, the teacher wrote the first letter of a word or sentence on the chalkboard while he pronounced the word or sentence that he wanted pupils to memorize. The teacher thus fostered—at least theoretically—the concentration and the senses of a pupil. A third method proposed by Felbiger was the "method of tables" (*Tabellenmethode*). A teacher had to classify a topic by a logical system that connected single parts to the whole. The teacher thus had to use the chalkboard to make relations within a topic easily conceivable to pupils on the basis of sensual perception. The fourth method promoted by Felbiger was called "catechizing" (*Katechisieren*). The teacher had to ask consecutive questions in order to control the pupil's understanding of the topic. The previous methods all aimed at memorizing, while this fourth method focused on understanding.

In terms of financing, the third paragraph of the 1774 School Ordinance mandated a decentralized funding scheme for the local minor schools, where the local communities (municipality or lordship) were to bear the costs for local minor schools. This school type was considered to benefit the local community foremost, whereas major and normal schools had an impact extending beyond the specific location and therefore were to be financed by a special school fund managed by the provincial school commissions.<sup>45</sup> The local communities bore the principal responsibility for school funding, but resources from the school fund could also be tapped to help with exceptional and temporary financing of local minor schools. Funding on this level included infrastructure as well. Communities had to deliver venues—school-houses or other buildings apt for schooling—that would serve only the purpose of schooling and no other activity.<sup>46</sup> Paragraph 4 of the school act assigned one schoolroom to a teacher and defined standards for the provision of light and furnishings. Teachers were forbidden to use their apartments as schoolrooms.

Financial matters, of course, turned out to be a major challenge of implementing the School Ordinance. Although the provincial school commissions launched school funds with diverse and often creative sources of income, such as contributions by the lordship, provincial

capitals, and taxes on masquerade balls, the amount of income was—with local variations—rather low.<sup>47</sup> A significant source of income was the confiscated property of the Jesuits, either in terms of infrastructure (normal schools, for instance, were usually operated in former Jesuit school buildings) or in terms of capital and interest earnings. The three main sources of revenues of the Habsburg school funds (of all lands except the Kingdom of Hungary) in 1781 were ex-Jesuit funds (approximately 30%), interest on capital (approximately 16%), and taxes on masquerade balls (approximately 12%).<sup>48</sup> Another significant source of income was profits from the selling of textbooks published by normal schools (approximately 7%).

Families were obliged to contribute to the operation of schools through school fees, given weekly to the teacher, but poor households were exempt from these fees and also received textbooks for free.<sup>49</sup> Other resources to pay the minor-school teachers' salaries were rarely available, and their income depended largely on school fees. Many teachers had to earn their living with secondary employment, such as the office of sacristans.<sup>50</sup> A year's salary of a minor-school teacher was—depending on region, perks, and school type—between 150 and 300 florins, while the director of a *Normalschule* earned approximately 500 florins, the director of a *Hauptschule* 400 florins, and Felbiger himself obtained 6000 florins as supreme director, which was a rather high salary for a president of a courtly agency. These salaries may be compared with a chaplain's salary of between 300 and 400 florins and the 150 florins of unskilled laborers and servants.<sup>51</sup>

This presentation of decentralized school funding following the School Ordinance indicates that funding was often a matter of improvisation. It appears as an antinomy that the ordinance promoted a centralized school system with *uniformity* as a top priority but that school funding was handed to provincial and local offices.<sup>52</sup>

Significant parts of the 1774 School Ordinance regulated temporal aspects of the school year and teaching time. These aspects—critical for the acceptance of school reform in every pre-modern agricultural society with children's work as a central pillar of economic survival—were oriented toward the seasonal cycle of farming. In the countryside, the school year was split into two terms, summer school and winter school.

In the winter term, from December 1 until the end of March, lessons were to be taught from 8 to 11 a.m.; in the summer term, from the first Sunday after Easter until Michaelmas Day (end of September), from 7 to 11 a.m.; and in both semesters from 2 to 4 p.m.. However, only in rare cases did children attend school frequently throughout the school year. Especially in Alpine regions, three-fourths of the minor schools operated only in the winter term. Engelbrecht indicates that most pupils received schooling only during three to four months of the year.<sup>53</sup>

According to the School Ordinance, education was compulsory, but schooling was not. Paragraph 12 stipulated that children of all social levels between the ages of six and twelve had to attend school or to be educated privately in their homes.<sup>54</sup> Girls should, if possible, be taught in separate schools. Major communities should preferably establish a girls' school and sometimes such schools already existed, usually operated by women's orders such as the Ursulines or the Congregation of Jesus.<sup>55</sup> If there was no possibility for separate girls' schools, as in most cases, girls and boys were at least spatially separated in coeducative classes.<sup>56</sup> In any case, girls were subjected to a specific curriculum that included sewing and knitting.

Girls also attended school less frequently than boys.<sup>57</sup> However, school enrollment was a general challenge in the implementation of the School Ordinance, even if the rates rose after a couple of years. The extent of growth, however, depended largely on the school commission's commitment, in addition to funding of course, and differed significantly between regions. According to Wangermann, throughout the monarchy, only an average of less than one-third of all school-aged children attended a public school.<sup>58</sup> Van Horn Melton reports the following numbers based on published statistics: In Vienna, the number of children between the ages of six and thirteen attending public school increased between 1771 and 1779 from 4665 to 8039 (while approximately 5400 pupils were still taught otherwise, particularly at home, at the beginning of the 1770s). In Lower Austria, school enrollment was only approximately 34% of all school-aged children in 1779 but had improved from an even lower level of 16% in 1771. In the Bohemian provinces, however, two-thirds of all school-aged children were enrolled

in school by 1790, which was one of the highest enrolment rates in the monarchy thanks to an exceptionally dedicated implementation of school reform by individuals such as the supervisor of Bohemian schools in Prague, Ferdinand Kindermann.<sup>59</sup>

The 1774 School Ordinance also defined how the knowledge received in schools should be sustained after the children had left school. Until the age of 20, young people in both the countryside and towns had to attend two-hour courses at schools to refresh their knowledge every Sunday after church service (paragraph 15). These refresher courses were particularly targeted at young male craftsmen (who could only be dispensed on the basis of a certificate by a school inspector). The courses were to be held by the teacher and supervised by the local priest.

Most of the final part of the School Ordinance addressed questions of control and inspection. Lists were the main instrument for controlling school attendance. Children reaching the age for compulsory schooling were listed, and lists had to document the attendance and absence of children; these latter lists were called “catalogues of diligence” (*Fleisskatalog*). Control also took place every half-year on the occasion of bigger exams, at which an official had to be present. Outstanding pupils were to be honored, which should promote ambition and control by positive role modeling.

With respect to school inspection, which several paragraphs addressed, school commissions played a major role.<sup>60</sup> These bodies had to appoint supervisors for each school district (usually an archpriest, as a school district in the countryside usually coincided with the decanate) and inspectors who—in rural areas—would be recruited among clerical and lay personnel. Finally, the School Ordinance opened up the possibility to promote school inspectors who were exemplary in pursuing their work.

## Consequences of School Reform

From the perspective of state-building, the General School Ordinance of 1774 set a new standard in the administration and management of the school system. The School Ordinance installed a new hierarchical



system of school inspection and changed bureaucratic procedures, and the conception of how the school system should be managed. The school act fostered a unified public and centrally organized elementary school system both in terms of the bureaucratic functioning of the system and in pedagogical methodology. Teacher training programs, the publication and delivery of teaching materials, including standard references on pedagogical methodology, many of them initially written by Felbiger himself, were homogeneous throughout the empire, which also contributed to the school act's centralizing effect.

However, as Engelbrecht notes, the school reform did not immediately function in the machinelike bureaucratic way that was intended.<sup>61</sup> A glance at day-to-day practices shows that the new school act failed in many ways. Key problems in the attempt to implement compulsory schooling in an effective manner were funding and the lack of interest in schooling on the part of children and their parents, especially in farming communities.<sup>62</sup> During Maria Theresa's regency, the number of schools was also too small for every boy and girl to obtain schooling.<sup>63</sup> A survey in 1781 showed, for instance, that an average of less than a third of all school-aged children attended school, an unacceptable fact for an enlightened monarch.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of this perceived failure of the 1774 School Ordinance, Joseph II intensified attempts to push statewide elementary schooling by numerous decrees during his 10-year regency (1780–1790). His measures included more coercive means, such as penalties for absenteeism and the obligation of each parish or locality, where more than 90 school-aged children lived, to open a school. He also incentivized parents to send their children to school by repealing school fees.<sup>65</sup>

Under Joseph II, and with Gottfried van Swieten as the chairman of the *Studienhofkommission* between 1781 and the reconstitution of the agency in 1791, additional measures were also taken to improve the efficiency of the elementary school system. To create efficient state bureaucrats, the German language became the first language that had to be mastered by each teacher whose mother tongue was not German. Under Joseph II, the schools were also opened for non-Catholic children who did not have to attend religious education.<sup>66</sup> In the 1780s, physical punishment was prohibited (except in severe cases), with the intent

of making the school system more humane. In terms of pedagogy, Felbiger's methods were abandoned in favor of more Socratic methods, inspired by the enlightened pedagogical movement of Philanthropism, which saw education as a means to foster reasoning and as intended to strengthen understanding rather than memory.<sup>67</sup> To promote these measures, Joseph II established the post of a governmental inspection authority at the local level, the *Kreisschulkommissär*.

In the late 1790s, the *Studienhofkommission* under the new denomination *Studien-Revisions-Hofkommission* revised the entire elementary school system. This process led—now under the regency of Emperor Francis II/I—to a new school act issued in 1806 that would become the legal framework until the 1850s.<sup>68</sup> It reinforced the organizational structure of the Josephinian school system, while it withdrew the formerly desired secularization of the school and reassigned the inspection and control of minor and major schools to the authority of the Church. Francis II/I reestablished neo-absolutist forms of government under the influence of the French Revolution—generally perceived as a threat in Vienna due to Napoleonic aggression.<sup>69</sup> Central inspection and pedagogical competencies in school matters were reassigned to the Catholic Church—the state receded from a struggle that it had fought during the second half of the eighteenth century. However, in terms of state-building, the 1774 General School Ordinance had helped to establish an enduring public sphere and had contributed to the presence of the state on the local level.

## Schooling as a Political Concern

Maria Theresa's signing of the General School Ordinance in 1774 was an event that depended on a number of preconditions and contemporary challenges that occurred suddenly or that lurked beneath the surface. One factor was that politics was preoccupied with the political consolidation of the territories and aimed at uniformity. Social and economic developments—the growth of population, enforcement of labor productivity driven by cameralist thought, and new branches of industry apart from agriculture—added further elements, as these

developments contributed to a constant transformation of the social and economic world. In addition, the school reform was also inspired by the discourse of the Enlightenment and the controlling rationality in an increasingly impersonal apparatus of government.

This chapter situates the School Ordinance of 1774 within the processes that transformed the princely state of *ancient régime* government toward a state of laws through an enlightened but still absolutist form of government. The historian Gary Cohen describes this process as the weaving of a web of the state by establishing laws, administrative procedures, communicative channels, and so forth.<sup>70</sup> The statewide web of the new school system established communicative channels for the centralized government to control even the most remote areas, thanks to a tight organization that included school inspection and uniform pedagogical methods and textbooks. In this respect, the school system also served as a hub for surveying the population.

Hence, the initial challenge for Maria Theresa as a ruler was to establish a public sphere, which she—with respect to education—achieved in the last decade of her regency particularly by wresting competencies in schooling away from the Catholic Church. She defined schooling as a secular political concern for once and for all: “Das Schulwesen aber ist und bleibt allezeit ein *politicum*.”

## Notes

1. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 102–18.
2. Judson, *Habsburg*, Chapter 1.
3. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 183.
4. The latter two regions (Galicia and Lodomeria) were annexed in 1772.
5. The name *ostarrichi*, first mentioned in 996 in a deed by Otto III, originally meant the “empire in the east.” For the conceptual history of the notion cf. Klingenstein, “Was bedeuten ‘Österreich’ und ‘Österreichisch’ im 18. Jahrhundert?”
6. Cohen, “Citizenship and Nationality in Late Imperial Austria,” 206. Cf. also Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 13–22.
7. The judicial terminology “Pragmatic Sanction” meant the fundamental law of an empire. Brauneder, *Studien I: Entwicklung des Öffentlichen Rechts*, 89.

8. Francis II/I was the son of Emperor Leopold II, mentioned above. After pronouncing the Austrian Empire, Francis II continued to reign under the name of Francis I—therefore the notation Francis II/I—and abdicated as Emperor of the Roman-German Empire when it finally collapsed in 1806.
9. Judson, *Habsburg*, 41–43.
10. For a general account of the bureaucratization in the era of Josephinism cf. Heindl, *Gehorsame Rebellen*, Chapter I; Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs*, 36–55.
11. Gant, “National-Erziehung,” 98–99.
12. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 349–53.
13. Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism*.
14. Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism*, 193–212.
15. As quoted in Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism*, 75. See also Judson, *Habsburg*, 33.
16. Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism*, 73–74.
17. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 204.
18. *Ibid.*, 690–99.
19. Donnermair, “Primarschulwesen,” 14.
20. “[...] in was vor einem Zustande das Schulwesen in denen Städten, Märkten und Dörfern deines Kreises sich befinde, auch ob etwan viele Winkelschulen vorhanden sein?” Courtly decree from 29th of January 1751, quoted in Donnermair, “Primarschulwesen,” 14.
21. Donnermair, “Primarschulwesen,” 16.
22. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 84.
23. The commission was incorporated into the *Studienhofkommission* in 1781.
24. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 682.
25. Butschek, *Österreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 79.
26. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 684.
27. *Ibid.*, 684–88.
28. Butschek, *Österreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 83.
29. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 702.
30. Butschek, *Österreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 86–90.
31. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 714–15.
32. *Ibid.*, 243–45.
33. “[...] man muss daraus für unsere heilige Religion und den Staat das Beste machen.” Maria Theresa, quoted in *ibid.*, 607–8.

34. Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism*, 210.
35. "[...] dass die Erziehung der Jugend, beyderley Geschlechts, als die wichtigste Grundlage der wahren Glückseligkeit der Nationen ein genaueres Einsehen allerdings erfordere." [Without Author], *Allgemeine Schulordnung*, 4. The edict prescribed more exactly the obligation to be taught, as private education was accepted and usually practiced in aristocratic and wealthier bourgeois families.
36. Krömer, *Johann Ignaz von Felbiger*, 23–24.
37. For Hecker, see also the chapter on Prussia in this volume.
38. Krömer, *Johann Ignaz von Felbiger*, 37–38.
39. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 103.
40. Ibid., 107; Okenfuss, "Education and Empire," 44–47.
41. For a discussion of *Allgemeine Schulordnung*, see also Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 103–6.
42. The Tyrolean capital Innsbruck already had a kind of a normal school when the school act was issued that experimented with Felbiger's methods. Ibid., 107. The normal school in Vienna, as previously mentioned, was founded in 1771, and other schools were founded in 1775 in the provincial capitals Linz, Klagenfurt, and Graz. Teacher training became successively standardized, not only for beginners but also for experienced teachers via further vocational training.
43. Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 182.
44. "Alle Schüler einer Klasse müssen einerlei sehen, hören, denken und thun." Felbiger, *Methodenbuch*, 4.
45. Helfert, *Die österreichische Volksschule*, 401–02.
46. The communities were, however, rather reluctantly committed. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 115.
47. Ibid., 114.
48. Wangermann, *Aufklärung und staatsbürgerliche Erziehung*, 51–53.
49. One out of four textbooks were provided for free to children from poorer households. Helfert, *Die österreichische Volksschule*, 493.
50. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 114.
51. Helfert, *Die österreichische Volksschule*, 386, 403. Cf. also Sandgruber, "Einkommensentwicklung und Einkommensverteilung," 255.
52. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 114.
53. Ibid., 117.
54. Ibid., 113.

55. In 1780, the following locations in Lower Austria had girls' schools run by women's orders: Vienna (four schools for a total of 836 girls), Krems (108 girls), and St. Pölten (80 pupils). Engelbrecht, *Österreichisches Bildungswesen*, 410–11. Other major communities with girls' schools run by secular women teachers included the cities Hall in Tyrol and Teschen in Silesia. Helfert, *Die österreichische Volksschule*, 407.
56. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 117.
57. Engelbrecht reports numbers in *Trivialschulen*, such as 3753 boys versus 2286 girls in 1780 in Vienna's suburbs or 73 boys versus 22 girls in 1777 in Judenburg, Styria. Ibid., 338.
58. Wangermann, *Aufklärung und staatsbürgerliche Erziehung*, 42.
59. Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism*, 220–21.
60. Stanzel, *Die Schulaufsicht*, 257–74; Van Horn Melton, *Absolutism*, 213–14.
61. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 110.
62. Ibid., 112–15.
63. Judson, *Habsburg*, 93.
64. Wangermann, *Aufklärung und staatsbürgerliche Erziehung*, 42.
65. Engelbrecht, *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, 120.
66. Ibid., 126.
67. Ibid., 127.
68. Ibid., 223–29. The 1806 school act, issued under the regency of Francis II/I, was called *Politische Verfassung der deutschen Schulen in den k. auch k.k. deutschen Erbstaaten*. See ibid., 521–22 (with an extract of the school act and indication of source).
69. Butschek, *Österreichische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 95.
70. Cohen, "Citizenship and Nationality," 223.

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