

Sigmund Fischler: Educational Documents

When my father started his education in 1906, Saxony -- the state in which Leipzig is located -- was part of the German Empire. The Empire existed from 1871 to 1918, when, with the defeat of Germany in WWI, the Kaiser abdicated. Thus all of his primary and secondary education occurred in the Empire period. Ironically the date on his graduation document from the Oberrealschule is September 11, 1918 and thus shortly before the Kaiser abdicated on November 9. Somehow, despite the looming defeat of Germany, the schools kept operating.

The German School Year

The school year began at some point after Easter and went until June or July, with the official -- but not actual -- end being "Michaelmas". (September 29, named after the archangel Michael). Then starting at some point in the fall there was a winter term, with the official end being Easter.

The school terms were usually referred to as the Michaelmas term and the Easter term, but I will use the summer/winter terminology. I have, however, used the "Easter" and "Michaelmas" terminology when a document uses these terms for the starting or finishing date in a document instead of a calendar date.

The German School System in Imperial Germany

The following is based on what I have read and my father's records.

Children first attended a four-year *Grundschule* (basic or elementary school) from the age of approximately six to ten. The terminology "*Bürgerischschul*" also seems to have been employed; see item 1 below.

The *Grundschule* was followed a secondary school which, according to the *Wikipedia* article "Education in Germany", which was one of four general types:

When the [German Empire](#) was formed in 1871, the school system became more centralized. In 1872, Prussia recognized the first separate secondary schools for females. As learned professions demanded well-educated young people, more secondary schools were established, and the state claimed the sole right to set standards and to supervise the newly established schools.

Four different types of secondary schools developed:

- A nine-year classical *Gymnasium* (including study of Latin and Classical Greek or Hebrew, plus one modern language);
- A nine-year *Realgymnasium* (focusing on Latin, modern languages, science and mathematics);
- A six-year *Realschule* (without university entrance qualification, but with the option of becoming a trainee in one of the modern industrial, [office](#) or technical jobs); and
- A nine-year *Oberrealschule* (focusing on modern languages, science and mathematics).

I believe that the adjective *Real* has a sense related to the English word with the same spelling, i.e. the school was more oriented towards the modern world (mathematics, science, modern language) in contradistinction with the classical *Gymnasium*.

From his records my father was essentially in what is referred to in the above as the *Oberrealschule* stream. However, see below, he went to two different secondary

schools for periods of two and four years respectively and obtained a diploma *Reifezeugnis* (compare with the English "ripe, mature") from a *Realschule*. Then after two more years he obtained another *Reifezeugnis* from a *Oberrealschule*, for a total of eight years, rather than nine.

An 1899 work, *German Higher Schools* by James Russell, discusses the development and calibre of the system and contains lists of what was taught at different levels. Most of the text is based on education in Prussia -- which under Bismarck as Imperial Chancellor -- was the dominant state among the twenty-five that formed the German Empire in 1871. Saxony, where Leipzig is located, was one of these states and it and the other states probably had educational systems similar to that of Prussia.

The following chart [Russel, p. 153] compares the curriculum in the *Gymnasium* [G] and *Realgymnasium* [RG] in Frankfurt. The numbers are hours devoted to the subject during a week.

LEHRPLÄNE OF FRANKFORT GYMNASIUM AND REALGYMNASIUM.

Subjects.	VI.	V.	IV.	IIIb.		IIIa.		IIb.		IIa.		Ib.		Ia.		Total Week-Hours	
	Gym. & RG.			G.	RG.	G.	RG.	G.	RG.	G.	RG.	G.	RG.	G.	RG.	G.	RG.
Religion.....	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	19	19
German.....	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	31	31
Latin.....	..	..	..	10	8	10	8	8	6	8	6	8	6	8	6	52	40
Greek.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	..	8	..	8	..	8	..	32	..
French.....	6	6	6	2	4	2	4	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	30	38
English.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	..	4	..	4	..	4	..	18
History and Geography...	2	2	5	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	24	27
Mathematics.....	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	3	5	37	42
Natural History.....	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10	10
Physics.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	9
Chemistry.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2	..	2	..	2	..	..	6
Writing.....	2	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	4
Drawing.....	..	2	2	2	2	2	2	..	2	..	2	..	2	..	2	8	16
Totals.....	25	25	26	28	28	28	28	30	31	31	32	31	32	31	32	255	260

According to Russel [p.142] the following was the aim of the *Realgymnasium* in Prussia, but again it was surely similar in Saxony:

“The aim of the *Realgymnasien*, as of the humanistic *Gymnasien*, is to give the youth a liberal education founded, however, especially on instruction in the modern languages, mathematics and the natural sciences.” ^{2. The Prussian Realgymnasium.} The class divisions and the general requirements are the same as in the *Gymnasien*, but the curriculum is somewhat different. English takes the place of Greek, and more time is devoted to French and the natural sciences.

Notice how the numbering of the level of the years is in decreasing order, starting at 6 and with the final year being 1.

I have included several pages from Russell on this HTML page. Especially surprising, from a Canadian viewpoint, is the absence of error correction on the part of the teacher and the limited amount of testing. Grades for the year were determined by an examining board. There may have been changes made when my father attended.

The Documents

The numbering below corresponds to the numbering of the documents on this HTML page where a common first digit such as 2a and 2b indicates that the documents correspond to the same period in my father's studies.

There are several aspects of these documents that I do not fully understand.

1. The first item is a grade book which corresponds to the four-year *Grundschule/Bürgerischschul*. The grade book starts with 1906 summer term -- a few months before his sixth birthday -- and ends with the winter term of 1909-1910. No school title is listed, but on document (2) it is written that my father came from the 3. *Bürgerischschul*. The "3" is most likely the numerical designation of that particular school.
- 2a. His next schooling was at the *II. städtische Realschule zu Leipzig*. Again, "II" is most likely the numerical designation of that particular school.

The school level listed are 6 (starting Easter 1910) and 5 (starting Easter 1911) and there are four sets of grades, one for each of the two terms of each year. My father's grades at the *II. städtische Realschule* were either 2 or 3 (good or sufficient) except for the grade of 1 in religion.

The document also has level 4 (starting Easter 1912), but my father did the 4th level at the *Israelitische Religionschule zu Leipzig* (3a). The latter school only started with the summer term of 1914 so I suspect that the level 4 entry was written before my father transferred schools. That he did enter the latter school at level 4 is stated on document (3b)
- 2b. During the same period that he attended the *städtische Realschule* he also attended the *Israelitische Religionschule zu Leipzig*. No precise topics are mentioned, only conduct, diligence and accomplishment for which he always had a grade of 1. The grade for religion on document (2a) was probably taken from this school.
- 3a. Starting with the summer term of 1912 and ending with the winter term of 1915-1916 my father attended the *Höhere Israelitische Schule zu Leipzig*. The 1912-1913 school year was the first for this educational establishment, founded by the well-known orthodox rabbi Ephraim Carlebach. In line with the modern orthodoxy of the times there was also a separate school for girls.

The studies involved the regular curriculum, not just religion. The school was not able at that time to obtain the authorization from the school authorities to provide the curriculum for the last two years of studies and this explains why he went to the *Oberrealschule* (4) for the last two years.

At the end of the first year he was among the students honoured [SCHUL]:

am Schuljahresende gute Leistungen von Schüler/innen. Am Ende des Schuljahres 1912/13 erhielten diese Auszeichnung die Schüler Emanuel Fajarowicz, Herrmann Aussenberg, Adolf Terkeltaub, Isaac Cesinsky, Siegmond Fischleber, Leopold Baldinger, Max Sachs und Simon Goldrei.⁵¹⁵

- 3b. I do not have any documents for the individual four years of schooling, only what I suspect were the overall grades (*Einzelzensuren*) for the four years shown on his undated diploma (*Abgangs-Zeugnis*). These are all “good” or “very good”. I was surprised, knowing my father, by the grade of “very good” for military instruction. My “military studies” only lasted about two weeks at the start of my first year in university. After being reprimanded in the drill hall for not having shiny shoes and outside for not wearing my army hat, I withdrew from the course. My father surely did not have that option.

The diploma was signed by Carlebach and all the professors.

- 3c. Another diploma (*Reifezeugnis*), dated February 25, 1916 is from the *5. Städtische Realschule zu Leipzig* with the “5” being most likely the numerical designation of that particular school.

The February date is very early in the winter term. This leads me to suspect that the diploma refers to state examinations taken after ten years of school, at about age sixteen. A similar system, established in 1878, exists in New York State. We had to take the “Regents [of New York State] Examinations” in various subjects and these were held during the term and not at the end. These were completely written, whereas in Germany there was an oral part.

The grades are all “good” or “very good”, except for physics where the grade is “sufficient”. Mathematics and chemistry are only good; English is very good and German and French are good. The grade for religion, “very good”, was taken from the Jewish school.

- 3d. Another document from this period is a “Certificate of Academic Qualification for a Year of Volunteer Work”, dated February 5, 1916. From Russell's book ([p. 191]; see the article on this HTML page) we learn that a similar certificate was issued throughout the empire and exempted the holder from a compulsory year of army service.

At an earlier date [p.190] a similar certificate allowed the holder to do voluntary work in the army (whatever that might have been!).

Given that Germany was involved in WWI such a certificate may have exempted good students from army service, at least until they finished further studies. My father, being -- on account of his father -- a Russian citizen would not have been allowed in the German army. My father did do voluntary work at the *Deutsche Maschine-und-Papier-Industrie-Werke* (5) right after his graduation from the *Städtischen Oberrealschule zu Leipzig* (4).

- 4a. Starting with the winter term of 1916-1917 and ending with the summer term of 1918 my father attended the *Städtischen Oberrealschule zu Leipzig*. As evidenced by the number of students admission must have been extremely selective and graduation even more so.

There are only three grade reports, all labeled "half-year report", and then the grades on the diploma.

Winter term, 1916-1917: Only in mathematics did he have the grade 1. He is stated to be the 7th ranking student out of 35.

Summer term 1917 (dated October 30, 1917): He now had a 1 in mathematics, physics and chemistry (only 3 in singing!). The number of students had dropped to 21 and he was the 3rd ranking student.

Easter, 1918. He only had a 1 in physics and chemistry. There was a further drop in the number of students to 15 and my father was the 2nd ranking student out of 15.

For both the 1917 and 1918 grade sheets it is stated that the grades for religion were taken from a Jewish school, but I do not have any records related to this. Perhaps the *Höhere Israelitische Schule zu Leipzig* was offering courses for graduates of their school. There is no grade for religion on the 1916 grade sheet.

- 4b. Similar to situation in (3a) there is a diploma (*Reifezeugnis*) from the *Städtischen Oberrealschule zu Leipzig* dated September 11, 1918. He had the grade of "very good" in natural history-chemistry, physics, French and "good" in the other subjects aside from singing. He also had the mention "entirely satisfactory" for behaviour (unlike me).

On this last diploma his stated aim was to study engineering. This is probably why he wanted to go to the Technische Hochschule Dresden at first rather than studying pure chemistry at the Universität Leipzig.

From September 28, 1918 -- thus soon after his graduation -- until January 3, 1919 he was a "volunteer" at the *Deutsche Maschine-und-Papier-Industrie-Werke*. This was surely related to the "Certificate of Academic Qualification for a Year of Volunteer Work" discussed in (3a)

5. January 3, 1919 is also the date of the testimony that he had been a volunteer.

The next phase of my father's academic pursuits has to do with the *Technische Hochschule Dresden*, but what transpired is far from clear.

- 6a. Among my father's documents was an acceptance letter from the *Technische Hochschule Dresden* dated May 8, 1919 and thus a few months after the end of his volunteer service. The letter states that even though he was accepted there was no guarantee that there would be space for him in the lectures or in the laboratories!!
- 6b. Another, but shorter, letter dated May 27, 1919 also states that he been accepted.
- 6c. In a letter dated October 14, 1958 to the City College of New York -- as part of an application for credit for his studies in Germany -- my father states that he had studied for *two* terms at the *Technische Hochschule Dresden*, but that he no longer has the documents. Since he also submitted a statement that he had studied for *three* terms at the *Universität Leipzig* this was not a case of confusing the two institutions.
- 6d. A letter from the Rector dated April, 9, 1998 (the name of the institution had been changed to *Technische Universität Dresden*) says that although they have a record of his acceptance there is no indication that he actually attended.

Did my father attend classes for two terms on an unofficial basis in the hope of obtaining a space? He would often speak of the *Technische Hochschule Dresden*. In any case it was apparently too late to apply to the *Universität Leipzig* that year. Thus it would appear that between the September 1918 diploma from the Oberrealschule and October 30, 1920 when he entered the *Universität Leipzig* he did not attend an institution of learning; what a waste of time, what a system.

Did he work with his father during this period? I have no knowledge about this.

Credence to the statement that he had been in Dresden for two terms is supported by the date of August 26, 1919 on which my father applied for entrance to the *Universität Leipzig*. This was apparently too late for him to start courses that fall because he only officially entered the university in October 1920. Applying on a date after the deadline -- probably in the spring if we go by his application to Dresden -- suggests that he had had hopes of finally being admitted to the *Technische Hochschule Dresden* during the fall and winter terms of the 1919-1920 academic year.

Starting at the end of October, 1920 he attended the university for three terms and then, while still a long way from obtaining a degree, he obtained a statement from the university that he had been a student. This is shown by the following documents:

- 7a. An acceptance letter dated September 16, 1919 shows that he had applied for admission on August 26, 1919.
- 7b. An entrance certificate for the university dated October 30, 1920.
- 7c. A "College book" (*Kollegien-Buch*). This covers the three semesters, winter 2020-2021, Summer 1921 and winter 1921-1922. In the booklet the courses that he took, as well as the names of the professors, are noted as are the fees for each course.

I have been unable to determine how university students were graded, if there were laboratory sessions associated with each of the chemistry courses etc. I suspect, based on the *Realschule* and *Oberrealschule*, that there were examinations at the end of each course or only at the end of the programme.

- 7d. After three semesters of study my father withdrew from the university. This document, sent to me by the university, has his signature and a list of the courses that he taken. His student number is given as 1346.
- 7e. Another record related to his withdrawal with the date when this occurred.
- 7f. An official document which would serve as a record of the length of time that he had been at the university.
- 7g. A letter from the archivist at the *Universität Leipzig*.
- 7h. A letter from the archivist at the Institute for the History of Medicine and Science of the *Universität Leipzig* thanking me for sending them copy of my book, *A Mathematical History of Division in Extreme and Mean Ratio*, in honour of my father.

Starting with the winter term of 1958 -- when I was in the fourth semester at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn -- my father took four courses, three in mathematics and one in philosophy, as a non-matriculated student at the City College of New York. City college was only two subway stops from where we lived. He tried to obtain credit for the chemistry courses that he had taken in Germany, but they were not accepted.

I do not remember if he ever asked me for help. See the text for a page from the notebook in which he worked out problems. He told me that he would work on his mathematics while customers looked at the furs that he had brought them for inspection.

- 8. This document shows the courses and the grades that he obtained at City College. The student gave the professor a self-addressed postcard in order to receive the grade. My father had stapled the postcards on the blue registration cards for the course and that accounts for the blue in the images.