DOI: 10.35464/1642-672X.PS.2020.1.05

PEDAGOGIKA SPOŁECZNA
Rok XIX 2020
Nr 1 (75)
Pioneering women
in adult education

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Elise Luquin (1832–1898): an educator dedicated to French women's labour*

ABSTRACT: This article presents a biography of Elise Luquin (1832–1898), pioneer of the professional training of girls and women in 19th Century France. She created an accounting class in Lyon in 1857 and then expanded it for several decades to cover the whole country, trained instructors, promoted this teaching via textbooks and public speeches. Then, this article wants to shed light on the way which E. Luquin gained status and authority in women's education: first through relating her own professional career and second, through highlighting her writings and actions to advocate for women's education and work. She endeavoured to intervene at all stages of education: defining the position of qualified women in this business sector, developing curricula, and training a pool of women specialised in business education.

KEYWORDS: History, Women, Gender, Vocational education, Bookkeeping and Accounting, 19th C. France.

On 1 December 1857, in the Lyon metropolitan region, the 'public, special and free class in commercial accounting for married and unmarried women' was inaugurated. Elise Luquin, a young schoolteacher, created this class and managed it until she died in 1898 at the age of 66. Beginning with this class in Lyon, which trained a large number of women to be accountants, bookkeepers, shop employees or business school teachers, Elise Luquin built a nationwide vocational education network for women. Over more than four decades, this network challenged women's place on the job market and more specifically in trade.

* The article is part of an ongoing research project on 'Women and vocational education: women's leadership in teaching, local training methods and gender in accountancy, 1850–1890'.

By looking at Elise Luquin's pioneering career and activities, this paper aims to shed light on women's contribution to vocational education in France. In this field, the history of education has generally focused on men, with women's efforts pushed to the sidelines, sometimes regarded simply as inconsequential charitable works, or even completely forgotten (as was the case for Elise Luquin) (Thivend, 2012). Nevertheless, Luquin had acquired a status and become an authority for the education of women and girls, as we shall see by looking first at her biography and career, then by focusing on her writings and her efforts on behalf of women's vocational education in France. We will refer to the activity reports that Luquin wrote about her accounting classes, her correspondence with the city of Lyon and the ministry, and the records for her Legion of Honour. However, the bulk of the documentation comes from her publicly-expressed opinions (e.g. during addresses at international conferences) and the textbooks she published.

Giving visibility to women with numerical skills and training them in the accounting sciences: Elise Luquin's pioneering career

From small silk shops to teaching in Lyon

Elise Luquin's youth was spent at the crossroads of two worlds: the small shops of Lyon and primary school teaching.

Françoise Elise Luquin was born in Lyon on 2 May 1832. Her parents were François, a small shopkeeper in Lyon's second arrondissement, and Joséphine Besson, then 'without occupation'.[1] Elise's childhood milieu was that of Lyon's silk merchants[2]; the surname 'Luquin-Besson' was in the city's directories until 1869, as 'silk assayers', 'merchant-manufacturers', and in the case of Elise's uncle, 'bookkeeper'.[3] Her early training in arithmetic and bookkeeping thus occurred during her adolescence, in daily contact with the family's business. There, like many daughters of shopkeepers, she probably had to do many tasks, such as bookkeeping and checking the ledgers (Chassagne, 1981; Labardin, Robic, 2009).

She also learned from teachers, 'bookkeepers' and 'professors' belonging to the 'milieu' of accounting instructors active in Lyon since the 1830s.

[1] Lyon Municipal Archives (AML), birth registry, 2E264.

[2] Lyon was then the second largest city in the country, and had prevalent economic activities such as the silk industry and trade, and a variety of machine making industries and the mechanical sector at large (Bayard, Cayez, 1990).

[3] AML, directories of the city of Lyon.

Benjamin Rolland, presented in the Lyon city directory as 'expert' and 'bookkeeper' beginning in 1838, an accounting professor at the École Spéciale du Collège Royal in the 1830s, probably taught her accounting and business law. Luquin publicly stated her background and was part of this Lyon shopkeepers' milieu (Luquin, 1886).

However, her second 'world' was that of the city's primary schools, where she began working in 1854, at age 22 and holding a teaching certificate. She was promoted as headmistress of a school in a Lyon working-class neighbourhood two years later. Her professional position, and probably also her tenacity, then allowed her to approach the notables of the Chamber of Commerce and the Société pour l'Instruction Primaire du Rhône (SIPR – a company that managed schools for the municipality) to persuade them to support her accounting class project.[4] At the SIPR, she enjoyed support from its chairman Humbert Valois, an advisor to the Prefecture and president of the Lyon Court of Appeals, and probably also from SIPR secretary-general Arlès-Dufour, who served as commissioner for silk-making and was a Saint-Simonian known soon thereafter for assisting feminist Julie Daubié (the first woman to pass the Baccalauréat exam), and lastly, from accounting professor Benjamin Rolland (Thiercé, 1993).

The 'public, special and free class in commercial accounting for married and unmarried women' was quickly created following deliberations by the city council on 20 November 1857. It was funded by the city, the Chamber of Commerce, and later the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

An opportunity on two fronts

Elise Luquin's pioneering initiative in 1857 can be understood in light of the two converging contexts surrounding it.

Firstly, the turn of the 19th century was a period of changing knowledge and accounting and commercial practices (Labardin, 2010). Faced with the growing complexity of business transactions, the 'accounting science' was presented as a tool to avoid bankruptcies and scams, and accounting was synonymous with order and honest, and should thus be taught outside companies.[5] While hands-on training and apprenticeships did not completely disappear, knowledge of accounting was included in Guizot's primary school curricu-

[4] Archives Nationales (AN), LH 1710/48, dossier Légion d'honneur, Françoise Elise Luquin.

[5] *Ibid.*

lum, and in the curricula of boys' grammar schools under the July Monarchy (Marchand, 2011). For young men who left school early – workers, craftsmen, clerks and employees – the first evening classes in bookkeeping and accounting were set up in the 1830s in a few polytechnic and philotechnic societies (De Oliveira, 2014). However, craftswomen and women merchants or workers were not involved in this wave. When Luquin started her class in 1857, there were no other accounting classes for women in Lyon or anywhere in France. There were a few evening classes for women in the basics (reading, writing and arithmetic), for preparing the teaching certification, or drawing classes for the industrial arts.[6]

Secondly, Luquin's Lyon initiative was part of a movement started by the Saint-Simonians in the 1830s calling for better education for women, or even education giving them access to 'careers' (Rogers, 2015, chap. 3). As we have no tangible evidence, we cannot be certain that the young Elise Luquin shared the ideas of her elders Eugénie Niboyet and Jeanne Deroin. Nevertheless, her initiative – just ten years after 1848 – was an early contribution to the debate around 'the woman question'. The need to train women for a trade was at the heart of efforts of English feminists in the 'Langham Place group', which published articles on this subject in the *English Woman's Journal* beginning in 1857, founded the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women in 1859, and launched its first vocational class for adult women in 1860 (Jordan, 1999; Richmond, 2012). In France, the Saint-Simonian Elisa Lemonnier created the first girl's vocational school in Paris in 1861. These initiatives would fuel discussions within first-wave French feminism, whose beginnings were circa 1868–1869, connecting the issue of women's education to that of women's employment and, for the most radical feminists, the issue of women's economic independence (Klejman, Rochefort, 1989, chap. 1; Rogers, 2015).

These converging contexts gave rise to an opportunity that Luquin seized. To justify the opening of her accounting class for women, Luquin cleverly used economic arguments as well as philanthropic ones.

The economic argument: citing the large number of women who kept the books for family businesses, Luquin suggested training them in accounting so that they could be careful guardians of their family's wealth. Vocational education was viewed as a means to prevent bankruptcies. Thus, Luquin believed that she would be 'helping small shopkeepers', and Valois – chairman of

[6] See *Enquête sur l'enseignement professionnel ou Recueil de dépositions faites en 1863 et 1864 devant la Commission de l'enseignement professionnel, vol. 2,* Paris, Impr. impériale, 1864–1865.

the SPIR and Luquin's main supporter – echoed this argument of 'good economic sense': '… there are no public classes, not even any private institutions, where these (merchant) women can acquire the knowledge or habits of accounting that are necessary to have regularity and order in trade movements.'[7] The proposed accounting class would thus meet the recognised economic need of good accounting in trade. This argument implicitly sheds light on women's work in trade. While they are often absent from historical sources, they kept the books and took care of the clientele in the shops of their fathers or husbands (and, for widows or single women, in their own shops) (Craig, 2017; Labardin, Robic, 2009).

The philanthropic argument: In Elise Luquin's view, teaching accounting to these women 'so many [of whom] live from working in small shops and boutiques, with such great struggles and deprivation', should also 'rescue from poverty those valiant individuals who are unable to eke out an existence from their labour',[8] for after being trained, these women would be able to live decently from their work as shop employees. Thus, this was an answer to the 'woman question'.

The economic argument undoubtedly influenced the decision to finance the class with public funds rather than donations from individuals or companies (contrary to the Lemonnier vocational schools, which were financed through philanthropy a few years later) (Albisetti, 2012).[9] Inaugurated in December 1857 in municipal premises in the heart of Lyon's merchant district, the class included three subjects: accounting principles and rules; business maths; single-entry and double-entry bookkeeping. Luquin's goal was to deliver both theoretical and practical instruction that would be directly useful for women from the 'working merchant classes',[10] unmarried or married women, sometimes women with children, 'all of whom work and have a place'.[11] The classes were held at the end of the day, from 5 to 8 pm, three evenings a week from October to July. There were 107 students – a high number that remained fairly steady over the following decades.[12] But good attendance was hard to achieve, as shown by the flexible organisation, adapted to women's

[7] AML, 176 WP 056, Humbert Valois au sénateur, 9 Oct. 1857.

[8] AML, 176 WP 056, Elise Luquin au sénateur, 1 Sept. 1857.

[9] See minutes of the general meetings of the *Société pour l'enseignement professionnel des femmes*.

[10] AML, 176 WP 56, Elise Luquin au sénateur, 1 Sept. 1857

[11] AML, Ville de Lyon, *Compte-rendu d'Elise Luquin sur les cours de comptabilité dirigés par elle*, 1880.

[12] AML, 176 WP 57, statistiques des inscrites et des diplômées, 1861–1888.

working schedules, with 'extra make-up classes' to compensate for students' frequent absences.[13] In the 1860s, new subjects were added, including arithmetic and grammar, commercial law, commercial and industrial geography, and around the late 1870s, optional courses in foreign languages and telegraphy were introduced. Teaching then took place five days a week, with an elementary level in the day and higher level in the evening. A portion of the student body was younger, with some adolescents learning virtually side by side with an unchanged number of adult women. More staff was hired, beginning with two teachers in the 1860s to eight in the 1880s.

An early example of a 'woman educational expert', in Lyon and abroad

While Elise Luquin directed her teaching institute for nearly 40 years, from 1857 to 1898, her activities were not limited to the school.

She developed her own teaching method for accounting and business law, with the 1859 publication of her first business law textbook, *Études commerciales*, which was republished in 1878. Three other books followed, in 1880, 1883 and 1888, all published by Guillaumin, the publisher of the prestigious *Journal des économistes* As the only women to write accounting and business law textbooks,[14] Luquin held a unique place in the field of accounting knowledge production, as she sought early on to find an audience of both men and women for her methods and teaching content outside her school in Lyon.

Luquin was rapidly seen as an 'expert', and quickly noticed by the successive ministers of Public Instruction and of Industry and Commerce. These ministers asked her to organise classes and schools based on the Lyon model in the main cities of France (1866), then to organise and inspect business schools (1888).[15] These duties broadened Luquin's area of influence to all of France – except Paris, which was setting up its own inspection system at the same period. Luquin thus joined the nascent technical teaching institutes, helped draft the business curricula for the vocational 'higher primary schools' (EPS) in 1890, then joined the High Council for Technical Training, which allocated government subsidies and inspected technical schools. There, she worked alongside Marguerite Malmanche and Anna Vigneron, the only other women in a technical world almost exclusively made up of men.[16]

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[13] AML, 176 WP 56, Bilan des travaux et compte-rendu moral pour 1882–1883 rédigé par E. Luquin, 1883.

[14] Marguerite Malmanche, former student and teacher for Luquin's school, began to publish her own materials in 1889.

[15] *Bulletin administratif de l'Instruction publique (BAIP)*, 10 Nov. 1888.

[16] See AN, LH 1710/48 et *BAIP*, arrêté du 26 nov 1892.

Lastly, Elise Luquin was a tireless advocate for business instruction for women, in France and abroad. She presented her activities at the World's Fairs of London (1859) and Paris (1867, 1878 and 1889), the 1894 Lyon exposition, and the first Congrès Internationaux de l'Enseignement Technique (CIET), held in Bordeaux in 1886 and 1896 (Thivend, 2013). In these fora for discussing and developing business teaching and technical education in general, Luquin acquired greater visibility and introduced the issue of vocational training for women into discussions largely focused on industrial teaching for men.

Training for women, by women

Elise Luquin endeavoured to intervene at all stages of education: defining the position of qualified women in this business sector, developing curricula, and training a pool of women specialised in business education.

Sharing her conviction that accounting is a 'woman's occupation'[17]

In Luquin's view, shedding light on women's work in business would also give weight to the idea that bookkeeping or accounting were occupations that were 'made' for women.

In *Le commerce: enseignement en 16 tableaux* (1880), Elise Luquin traced back women's role in the history of commerce all the way back to Antiquity: women were merchants in ancient Egypt 'while their husbands made fabrics'; in Rome, 'where the right to do business was left to them'; in France already 'under St Louis's reign'. Thus, women had always done business, and they did not need to be integrated into the business world, but just educated. Another preliminary comment: women can do business according to the Civil Code, which distinguishes between unmarried and married women, with the incapacity of married women in civil law being extensively described to show that this was not an obstacle to their commercial activities.[18]

If women do business, it is also because their 'nature' predisposed them to it more than any other occupation. Thus, beginning in the 1880s, Elise Luquin developed arguments around gender aptitudes. At the CIET of 1886, she stated that trade was 'a position suited to a woman, for order and patience are her innate virtues, and she is naturally prepared for all the ideas of conservation and economy.'[19] Defining aptitudes by gender also delineates

[17] The expression comes from M. Perrot (1987)

[18] Elise Luquin, *Le commerce…*, *op. cit.*

[19] Bordeaux Philomathic Society. *Compte-rendu des travaux, 20–25 septembre 1886*. 23 September session.

the sphere of action for women in shops, with such women to be 'under the vigilant watch of their father or mother, standing beside them at the counter or in the store'. After marriage, 'their influence grows thanks to the fortune that they help acquire.' [20] Ten years later, at the Bordeaux convention, Luquin sought 'to bring into the current of public opinion the simple and true idea that, if active enterprises, vast conceptions and heavy responsibilities belong to men, women can find their rightful place at his side, as a faithful supporter, as a reliable and devoted collaborator.'[21] Elise Luquin's positions on women's work did not overturn the gendered division of commercial work, nor did it challenge the gendered order within the family. Circumscribing women's role in a family company under the responsibility of the father or mother, insisting on the complementary roles of each person, was a way to reassure families and politicians. It was also probably a way to convince her audience to leave these jobs to women, for the sake of this complementarity. This position, already spelled out in 1857, converged with that developed by feminist Paule Minck in 1868. In Minck's view, men should, due to this complementarity, leave their position to women in a certain number of sectors, notably in trade (Klejman, Rochefort, 1989).

While Luquin conformed to the gender standards of her contemporaries, she did not intend to scale back her ambition of training professionals. 'Made' for business, women were especially suitable for accounting, the foundation of the curriculum: 'Accounting is within a woman's aptitudes, and the study of this science, as a necessary complement to good business education, is not a dry topic for women.'[22] Luquin wished to give women a broad business culture that went beyond bookkeeping, hence the breadth of the accounting classes in Lyon (see above). In 1886, Luquin defined accounting as 'the general science that every person must have if he wants to manage or wisely administrate any industrial undertaking'. Therefore, accounting must not be confused with bookkeeping, which 'is a mere applied writing system; the term accounting must be understood in a much broader sense.'[23] Luquin thus placed women in the field based on intellectual reasoning, as accounting became a matter of judgment, professionalism and thinking (Labardin, 2010). We should undoubtedly understand this positioning as a desire not to restrict

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Bordeaux convention, 1895, report by E. Luquin entitled *Les progrès de l'enseignement commercial en province*.

[22] Bordeaux convention, 1886, 23 September session.

[23] E. Luquin, *Etudes commerciales, vol. 2, op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 4.

women to bookkeeping alone, as the bookkeeper's tasks became increasingly specialised in the 1880s and the social status deteriorated.

Carving out women's place as accountants, convincing the general public that women could be good accountants and skilled merchants also involved the publicity given to the results of the classes. Elise Luquin kept a statistic on the number of registered students and graduates, with an indication of graduates' occupation after earning their diploma. The results, published regularly as from the 1880s in the school's annual reports, at the world's fairs and the CIET, reveals the significant challenge of jobs for women.[24] The aim was to show that training was useful for trade by providing good accountants, as well as for women by giving them the means to live. In 1883, a salary range was mentioned: 'from 1,200 francs to 4,000 francs or even 5,000.'[25] Many 'accountants', 'bookkeepers', 'scribes' and 'shopkeepers' graduated from the Lyon accounting school.

Training a pool of specialised women teachers with national influence

The teachers trained alongside these 'experienced and educated' merchant women. Beginning in the mid-1860s, Luquin opened up her classes to young schoolteachers to train them in business instruction. Thus, Marguerite Malmanche, Marie-Louise Coste and Louise Grivet – all three of whom held their primary school teaching certificate – came to study business in the evenings after working. They received a 'skills certificate for bookkeeping and business management', then taught at Luquin's school for a few years. Thus, a pool of specialist teachers took shape. Elise Luquin relied on this pool to spread business teaching in all kinds of schools (day classes and evening classes). When the school received an annual subsidy from the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1868 for the preparation of 'teachers for all similar foundations in France', Luquin had already trained 44 schoolteachers in accounting.[26] Twenty years later, 206 women schoolteachers had reportedly graduated from Luquin's classes. In 1894, a ministerial decree (issued on 21 July) recognised this long-term work by adding a 'teaching division' to the class to train the teachers of business vocational schools and the business departments of higher primary schools (EPS).

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[24] AML, 176 WP 57, Statistiques du nombre de diplômées, 1891.

[25] AML, 176 WP 56, Bilan des travaux et compte-rendu moral pour 1882–1883 rédigé par E. Luquin, 1883.

[26] Archives départementales du Rhône (AD69), T 623, Historique du cours de comptabilité, by Elise Luquin, undated (late 1870s).

Elise Luquin claimed ownership for founding this new business education for women. She thus stood at the heart of this 'network' woven by teachers trained at her school, then sent to jobs across France to develop vocational training.[27] Especially, this network grew in the 1860s–1870s mainly as part of evening courses for working women. In 1868, the Rhône Society for Vocational Training (which had opened training for adult men in Lyon four years earlier) set up its first evening classes for 'ladies'. Most students were workers in the silk industry. Schoolteachers trained and working at Luquin's school, like Jeanne Chervin (1868–1874), Zoé Solichon (1872–1879) and Marie Giraud (1875–1885) were teaching there, grammar, maths, writing and basic accounting (Thivend, 2017).

The spread of the Lyon model was especially remarkable in Paris. On 5 May 1870, Marguerite Malmanche, a schoolteacher and a student from the 1866–67 class, then a deputy director at the school from 1867 to 1870, was sent to Paris, at the behest of Octave Gréard – who planned to develop free evening classes for women in the capital. Until 1884, Malmanche managed the creation and development of 13 courses, then 18 in 1889, plus two 'free accounting courses for adult women' (1874 and 1876) at the Paris Chamber of Commerce; she also directed these courses. The sociological profile of the audience for these municipal courses, held from 7.30 to 9.30 m, every weeknight except Saturday, reflected the variety of women's demand for education which Elise Luquin and Marguerite Malmanche were able to understand. Adolescent girls mostly living with their parents, shop employees, florists or seamstresses, as well as small shop keepers.[28] For these women, evening classes gave the possibility for learning new professional skills or learning a new trade so that they could find skilled jobs. For these women in commerce, evening courses were also a place to acquire knowledge away from the family control within the family-owned shops.

Over more than 40 years, Elise Luquin built a vocational training place for women, organised by women. She created a class and then expanded it to cover the whole country, trained instructors, promoted this teaching via textbooks and public speeches. In so doing, she opened an initial 'period of possibilities' for women, shedding light – via accounting training – on an entire field of activity that her contemporaries voluntarily chose to ignore: the field

[27] This was notably the case for the EPS of Amiens, Bordeaux, Le Havre, Marseille, Nantes and St Etienne. Research is under way on Luquin's network in French cities.

[28] Octave Gréard, *Education et instruction, Tome 1, Enseignement primaire*, Paris, Hachette, 1889, p. 118.

of women in commerce. Luquin clearly understood that the key for women's economic emancipation lay partly in their vocational training. In this respect, the apparent disconnection between Elise Luquin and feminist milieus is very intriguing. At this stage of my research, I have not noted any ties with the feminist milieus of the 1870s–1890s. While Elisa Lemonnier, and later Marguerite Malmanche,[29] have entered feminist memory as the founders of vocational training for women, due to their achievements in Paris, Elise Luquin's pioneering contribution has been forgotten, despite claiming throughout her life to have founded business education for women.

Translated by *Christopher Mobley*

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[29] See the obituary in *Action féminine, Bulletin officiel du Conseil National des femmes Françaises*, 1913, no. 2, p. 469.

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