

AN IDEOLOGIZED AND A REALISTIC DISCOURSE ABOUT RURAL LATVIAN TEACHERS DURING THE STALINIST PERIOD: ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT OF THE NEWSPAPER “SKOLOTĀJU AVĪZE” AND THE MEMOIRS OF ANDREJS DRIPE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines an ideologically idealised and a realistic discourse about rural Latvian teachers during the late 1940s and early 1950s, as represented, respectively, in the newspaper *Skolotāju Avīze* (*The Teachers' Newspaper*), and in the memoirs of the former teacher and writer Andrejs Dripe. Dripe's memoirs date back to the 1990s, when diaries written by him after WWII were published. The texts are analyzed with the discourse-historical approach, with the aim and result being the identification of discourse among and about rural teachers. The newspaper *Skolotāju Avīze* was established to create a discourse about the global excellence of Soviet teacher which, nonetheless, did include positive and negative evaluation. The basis of this judgement was the extent to which teachers did or did not include themselves in the Soviet educational system and in the processes of Sovietisation. Dripe also divided teachers into positive and negative categories in a discursive manner. His point of view, however, emerges from his and his family's success in living and surviving in the Soviet system. The evidence suggests that discourse about teachers in such publications as *Skolotāju Avīze* and Dripe's memoirs cannot be identified or analysed without the contextual foundations of history, in this case the Stalinist period in Latvia.

Keywords: rural teachers, Stalinism, Soviet Latvia, Sovietisation, Soviet press, Soviet education system, discourse-historical approach

Introduction

The history of the teaching profession is among the most important topics in the scientific study of education, making it possible to comprehend the role of schools, the history of knowledge and that of educated people, as well as the dynamics of these components of society. Latvian historical

writing to date has not yielded much information about these subjects during the period of Soviet occupation, particularly from the viewpoints of social history and media history.

There did exist several studies in the Soviet era which praised Soviet society and its educational system (e.g., Builis, 1977; Cimermanis & Podnieks, 1985, Viksna, 1986). Research in recent years has shown, however, that the history of education and its components during the Soviet period was much more complicated than was once thought (see Krūze & Vugule, 2010). Schoolroom practices and the social status of a schoolteacher had long-lasting influence and did not disappear immediately or during the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. To a greater or lesser extent, their influence can still be felt today (see Kestere & Krūze, 2013). Within the newer literature on the history of pedagogy, I would like to emphasise several studies that have focused specifically on schools in Soviet Latvia. Bleiere (2013) analysed the post-WWII Sovietisation of general education. A very important contribution was the research done by Saleniece (2003a; 2003b) and Kopeloviča and Žukovs (2004) on the teaching profession and the training of teachers in Soviet Latvia. Also important is the work done by Kestere and Kalke (2018) on the visual presentation of teachers in Soviet textbooks, in the periodical press and photographs. Kestere, Stonkuvieni and Rubene (2020) have written about the utopian constructs of the Soviet “new person” in textbooks. Rubene, Daniela and Medne (2019) have studied how the bodies and minds of left-handed children were disciplined with the use of Soviet-era pedagogical tools. Studies of another important element of the era – the extent to which schoolchildren resisted the Soviet occupation – found that that young people fervently upheld the idea of the restoration of Latvia’s independence (Strods, 2001).

This paper analyses the representation of rural teachers in the newspaper *Skolotāju Avīze* (*The Teachers’ Newspaper*; 1948–1991), which first began to appear during the Stalinist period. After the restoration of Latvia’s independence, the memoirs of the schoolteacher Andrejs Dripe (1929–2013) were published in the 1990s. The purpose of the paper is to discover and analyse the dominant discourses about rural teachers during the Stalinist period, using both sets of texts. The research questions are these: what discourses were constructed about rural teachers in *Skolotāju Avīze* and by Dripe, what these two texts have in common, and how they differ.

Methodology

Two sources were chosen to conduct the present study. The first is the weekly newspaper *Skolotāju Avīze*, which was published by the Soviet Latvian Ministry of Education and the Committee of the Latvian Republic’s

Education, University and Scholarly Institution Labour Union. The first edition of the paper was published on January 1, 1948, and it continued to be published throughout the entire period of Soviet occupation. The readership of this newspaper was made up of workers in the field of education. It served as an organisational and educational tool for the field, and as such laid out clearly the nature of the activities and value systems required of Soviet-era pedagogical workers. *Skolotāju Avīze* had a distinct ideological mission focused on the Sovietisation of the Latvian educational system. The articles that have been analysed in this research involve editorials as well as articles specifically featuring schools in the countryside. There were two or three such articles in each issue of *Skolotāju Avīze*, and these are analysed in the present research.

The second source for this paper is a series of memoirs published by Andrejs Dripe in 1993 and 1994 with the title *Bez skaistas maskas* (Without a Beautiful Mask). These volumes were based on diaries the author had kept in earlier years. Dripe was a very popular author in Latvia from the 1960s to the 1980s, and his novels were usually based on the lives of young people and the problems that they had in the process of growing up. In the published memoirs after the restoration of Latvia's independence, Dripe wrote about the period of WWII and the post-war years. The 3rd volume was subtitled *Skolotāja darba gadi* (The Years of Working as a Teacher) and contained Dripe's description of his first jobs at rural schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The books were very outspoken, and they allowed one to track the everyday lives and work of Soviet teachers in rural areas. Dripe's classes were focused on training schoolteachers at a time when there were great shortages of teachers for Soviet Latvian schools. High school graduates were admitted to the programme. In 1950, Dripe and his wife, Zigrīda began work at a seven-year school in Atašiene in the Krustpils District. One year later they had relocated as teachers to the Spaliņi Elementary School in the village of Palsmane in the Smiltene District. In 1953, Dripe was a teacher at the seven-year Ķempi school in the same village (Bērsons, 1976, 110).

The texts discussed in the present study are based on the discourse-historical approach (DHA), which requires comment on three fundamental concepts, namely, critique, ideology, and power. These are necessary components of a critical approach to the texts in order to uncover how they embody the ideology of the regime. An important role for DHA is to understand the socio-political and historical context of the way in which the texts were created. Another useful analytical instrument is the identification of discursive strategies. This helps to find coded discourses in the texts and their linguistic realisations. The author has relied on the work of Reisigl and Wodak (2009), who have spelled out the necessary steps for

revealing the ideological content of discourses as embodied in written texts. The proposed strategy involves nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation and intensification/mitigation. The identification and description of these strategies helps to analyse both sets of texts and enables a discourse comparison between the *Skolotāju Avīze* and Dripe's account of what was involved in teaching in the Latvian countryside.

Results

Context

Soviet rule was re-established in Latvia in 1944/1945 as WWII came to an end. Occupation policies involved an all-encompassing implementation of Sovietisation. The term 'Sovietization' describes a process during which the occupied country's ideology, governance, economics, culture, and everyday life are integrated into or rendered similar to the model of the Soviet Union (Bleiere, 2018, 593).

Historians emphasise several elements in the post-war situation in Latvia. First, the cadre of teachers was replaced. Some Latvian teachers joined the flow of refugees who left Latvia and travelled westward because they feared the re-introduction of the Communist regime as the end of the war approached. People with many years of education and high social standing represented a substantial proportion of all Latvian refugees (Plakans, 2021, 31–40). In the autumn of 1944, the number of schoolteachers had dropped by more than 30% in Vidzeme and Kurzeme, in comparison to the 1940/1941 school year (Bērziņa, 1977, 39–40). Soviet Latvian schools fired teachers who might not prove loyal to the regime, and preference was given to those who had been educated in the Soviet Union. There was a great shortage of teachers, particularly outside of the capital city of Riga. In 1946, the training of elementary school teachers began at various high schools. Teachers for the 5th to the 7th grade were taught at teachers' institutes which accepted students who had completed their elementary education. Several special institutions of higher learning were established on the foundations of several of such institutes in the 1950s. (Krūze & Zigmunde, 2013, 115–117; Saleniece, 2003, 197–199).

The post-war years involved children who had been poorly educated in an inferior educational system, and had experienced such material problems as a lack of footwear, apparel and food among those who did attend school. Soviet Latvian schools mostly used textbooks from the USSR, translated from the Russian language. Latvian language and literature textbooks were written by people who were loyal to the Soviet regime. Even so, there continued to be shortages of textbooks in the first post-war years, and schools also were short of paper and writing implements.

The functioning of schools began to stabilise in the late 1940s, and that is when the mandatory seven-year education requirement was put into place (Bērziņa, 1977, 38–51).

In Soviet Latvia, schools established Young Pioneer and Komsomol units and actively encouraged children to join them, while teachers were similarly urged to join the Communist Party. By the late 1940s, there were Komsomol organisations in all high schools and most seven-year schools. During the 1944/1945 school year, there were 1,508 Komsomol members in Soviet Latvian schools, while during the 1952/1953 school year, there were 23,833, which represented 39% of the young people who were of Komsomol age (Bondarevs, 1987, 216). At the close of the 1944/1945 school year, 179 schools had Young Pioneer units with 30,313 members. By the early 1950s, most students were involved. During the 1954/1955 school year, an average of 61.5% of all children of the appropriate age were Pioneers, while in some schools the percentage neared 95%. Each school had a Pioneer director, and these people were trained in programs using the priorities of the Education Ministry (Špona, 1972, 107–112; Bleiere, 2013, 118). The Sovietisation policy saw schools as places where Soviet ideology could be inculcated, and the Soviet lifestyle could thus become an instrument that could be actively put to use.

The work of schools was also impacted by Soviet repressions. These generated a permanent atmosphere of fear and disorganised classroom work. Mass deportations on March 25, 1949, involved more than 44,000 people in Latvia. Structural analysis of the deportees conducted on the basis of documents in the Latvian National Archive, unfortunately, does not cover all of those who were involved in the 1949 deportation action, but there is evidence to show that 26.1% of those who were deported were children up to the age of 16. Surveys and reports from special settlement points show the names of 224 teachers (Āboliņa et al., 2007, 200). These data, however, are incomplete, because not all deportees filled out the necessary documents. The biographies of teachers were examined strictly by the Soviet regime lest they contain such compromising facts as active employment in the pre-WWII educational system. “Teachers needed to become loyal instruments of Soviet school policies,” argues Saleniece (2003a, 306).

School-age pupils were nonetheless among those who during the post-war era were most actively involved in opposition to the Soviet regime. Strods (2001, 661–666) has written that this national movement involved two branches: (1) active avoidance, which meant refusal to be involved in social and after-school activities and refusal to join the Young Pioneers and Komsomol organisations; and (2) membership in groups manifesting active resistance. The aim of the resistance movement was the restoration of an independent and democratic Latvia.

Repressions against teachers and students, as well as the ideologization of educational processes and curricula, were the primary instruments of the Sovietisation of the school system in Latvia. The newspaper *Skolotāju Avīze* was part of this process. Dripe's memoirs, in turn, offer a closer look at how rural schools were Sovietised from the perspective of a young schoolteacher.

Discursive strategies

This section of the paper looks at texts from *Skolotāju Avīze* as well as the discursive strategies that could be identified in Dripe's memoirs.

The **nomination discursive strategy** is used to identify social actors, objects, events, processes, and actions. At the centre of the present study is the conceptualization of a teacher as a social actor. In the Soviet regime, the work of teachers was not limited to the transfer of knowledge and the rearing of children. Teachers were expected to help in the Sovietisation of society. *Skolotāju Avīze* insisted that "the teacher is the primary figure at school" ([S. n.], 1948b, 1). The newspaper had less to say about the teacher as the explicator of a specific subject area, and attributed greater importance to other roles which he or she was expected to play. A teacher was depicted, instrumentally, as a leader of a class, a principal of the school, and a leader of the Young Pioneers, as well as an organiser of various interest groups focused on nature, technology, tourism or sports. Teachers were also expected to work as 'agitators' (activists) and propagandists. The definition of the role of teachers, in other words, expanded beyond the boundaries of the school as such. The Soviet press discussed teachers in a discursive way as Soviet employees who were involved in local community life and took part in the ideological and organisational work of the Soviet system.

The nomination of rural teachers for these expanded roles in 1948 and early 1949 was the same as for teachers in cities. After the mass deportation on March 25, 1949, and the rapid approach of agricultural collectivisation, teachers became defined as people who facilitated the establishment of kolkhozes (collective farms). This role for them was clearly defined in an essay that was written for *Skolotāju Avīze* by the secretary of the Soviet Latvian Communist Party's Central Committee, Arvids Pelše (1949, 1–2).

In his memoirs, Dripe, too, describes himself in instrumental ways. He was a teacher of certain subjects, a form-master (Latvian: *klases audzinātājs*), and an 'agitator.' Later he was an education supervisor. Describing everyday events at school, Dripe defined his colleagues on the basis of their instrumental roles – principal, education director, Young Pioneer leader, etc. In writing about the work of schools, Dripe emphasised the individuality of some of his colleagues, because individual characteristics had a key influence on the work of the school as a whole and on the relationships among teachers.

This allowed Dripe (1994, 24–25) to describe some colleagues at his rural school as “a chronic drunk,” “a sad guy,” “a chatterbox,” and a “person for whom things stick to his fingers” (i. e., a petty thief). Dripe also wrote that the profession of a teacher in the countryside meant being as close as possible to the Sovietisation. People who thought that the regime was good and “tooted its horn” were described by Dripe (1994, 41) as “idiotic or blind servants of the regime.”

The **predication discursive strategy** is used to define the discursive qualifications of social actors. *Skolotāju Avīze* used a black-and-white discursive representation of teachers, dividing them among positive and negative social actors. Teachers and principals who successfully handled ideological issues as well as their duties as principals, subject teachers or form-masters were positive actors. Also viewed positively were teachers who sought improvements in their political qualifications, who prepared for lessons, and who struggled to improve the performance of unsuccessful pupils and of those who were often absent from class or had quit school entirely. Other positive role models were teachers who assisted children in joining the Young Pioneers or the Komsomol. The newspaper regularly praised specific schools at which teachers were doing everything that the regime expected them to do.

Skolotāju Avīze did not hesitate at citing specific teachers by name. This served to highlight the correct way for teachers to behave, and also allowed teachers to receive praise for becoming involved in the Soviet education system and doing all the things that were expected of them. One article in the paper noted that 500 teachers in Riga and its surrounding areas had successfully passed tests at the Institute to Raise Qualifications. Several teachers from the countryside and small towns were noted in particular. *Skolotāju Avīze* reported that these teachers “understood their need to continue growing so as to successfully rear new builders of Communism” ([S. n.], 1950, 3). Similar lists of good teachers were also published in other issues of the newspaper. It is clear that this usage underlined the granting of an indulgence by the Soviet system. The regime had accepted such teachers as people who were loyal toward it. Praise in the periodical press could also facilitate the individual career development of teachers in Soviet Latvian schools.

It was true, however, that *Skolotāju Avīze* also published examples of negative work by schools and teachers. There were denunciations of principals, teachers, and form-masters. Sometimes entire articles were devoted to a single miscreant. The principal of a seven-year schools in Vidriži, Pēteris Strods, for example, was presented as a man who had been fired because he was a poor principal and teacher whose work was described as being harmful to Soviet youth (Kalns, 1948, 6). Negative descriptions

in the newspaper applied to teachers who were insufficiently dedicated to ideological work, whose pupils were very unsuccessful, who did not prepare appropriately for lessons, or who taught classes poorly.

In his memoirs, Dripe usually presented black-and-white portraits of teachers. He explained that the book was based on diaries that he wrote as a young man, noting that people in that age group tend to be categorical in their judgments (Dripe, 1994, 55). Dripe wrote positively about his work and that of his wife and of other colleagues. This assessment was based on lessons that had been taught well, as well as on artistic events in which students were involved, namely, theatrical performances and concerts by student bands or choirs. Negative characterisations were applied to teachers who did poor work, could not adequately explain classroom subjects, were quarrelsome, or engaged in petty arguments or intrigues. Dripe also admitted that teachers drank a great deal and often taught classes while drunk. In discussing the March 8 Women's Day celebrations at the school in Atašiene, Dripe (1994, 44) noted that the school was shut down for several days because teachers were just too drunk to do their work. Dripe did not particularly denounce drinking, writing instead that this was a normal social phenomenon of the period. Drunkenness was an everyday occurrence, even though it did make harder the lives of people at the school and the whole village.

The **argumentation discursive strategy** serves to justify and question claims of truth and normative correctness. The very first issue of *Skolotāju Avīze* argued that the Soviet system had the most favourable circumstances for the work of teachers, which meant that the regime could make serious demands of people who did that work: "No teacher in Latvia has stood in front of such a responsible and noble rearing job as is the case right now," the paper stated. "Never have teachers been able to work on behalf of the nation. This high level of consciousness and the great trust possessed by the people must inspire us to do major and successful work in rearing our nation" ([S. n.], 1948a, 1). The newspaper added that the profession of a teacher was much more important and respected in the Soviet system than had been the case in the "bourgeois" Latvian state. The special status that was granted to teachers by the regime justified the assignment to them of their basic tasks.

This norm-based superiority of Soviet teachers also involved volunteer work in 'agitating' for the Soviet system, the inculcation of Russian language skills, increased teaching of the Russian language to schoolchildren, as well as handling other similar tasks assigned by the regime. Russian language lessons and the popularisation of Russian culture were inalienable parts of Sovietisation, and were therefore part of the job of 'positive' teachers. As *Skolotāju Avīze* put it: "Teachers must do major work to broadly involve

the Russian language in extracurricular activities and everyday life. They must teach Russian songs, write letters, publish newsletters in Russian, read extensively in Russian literature, newspapers, and other periodicals in Russian [...], write business documents in Russian, speak to and meet more often with students from Russian schools, organise friendship evenings, etc., etc.” ([S.n.], 1948c, 1). Among the public duties of countryside teachers was the creation of partnerships with local kolkhozes. This could involve the presentation of ideological lectures, organisation of amateur concerts, help with crop harvesting, supervision of the work of children at collective farms, and work with parents to convince them to send their children to school and to accept the legitimacy of the Soviet system.

Material considerations were involved in the justification of the special status of Soviet teachers. On April 2, 1948, the Soviet Latvian Council of Ministers approved Decision No 364 on the benefits and privileges of rural teachers. These were based on similar measures promulgated at the all-Soviet level. Directors of local institutions were instructed to provide teachers with free apartments, to cover heating and lighting costs, and to ensure the provision of hay. On February 2, 1949, the Council of Ministers approved another decision on the construction of housing for teachers in the countryside. *Skolotāju Avīze* insisted that such measures meant that the Soviet regime truly cared for people in this profession, and added that the decisions were indeed being carried out. District-level local governments that violated these directives were chastised.). By awarding material advantages, the regime sought to deal with teacher shortages in the countryside.

Dripe’s memoirs suggested that the material support for Soviet teachers was effective. He recalled that he himself enrolled in a pedagogical class so that he would avoid mandatory military service and received the subsidy that was given to young teachers. The sum was 4,000 roubles, and that was enough money for Dripe to support his family. Equally important was housing. Dripe’s first job was at the seven-year school in Atašiene, and he was given a room in a recently built wooden house, painted yellow. The house had previously been occupied by a teacher who had been deported to Siberia in a repressive act by the government (Dripe, 1994, 12). Dripe wrote several times about a shortage of promised firewood, which the school, despite instructions from the Council of Ministers, failed to provide. Sometimes Dripe and his wife had to steal wood from the nearby forest to keep at least some modicum of warmth in their apartment (Dripe, 1994, 35).

Dripe read *Skolotāju Avīze* and was bitterly ironic about the tasks the paper sought to assign to teachers and the criticism was levelled against teachers who were declared to be ‘negative.’ He wrote about teachers he knew who were put on the list of ‘negative’ teachers because they ignored pointless instructions from above. They refused, for instance, to give

unearned grades to students just to maintain the required grade point average. Writing about the work of teachers in the countryside, Dripe (1994, 68) described “enormous work loads after classes, trembling before inspectors each time that a failing grade was given to a pupil, the obligation to lie to people via various lectures and political classes, knowing that people knew the real truth and yawned while you were talking – is that not idiotic?” He (1994, 68) added that Soviet teachers reminded him of “hunted and trapped animals that always tremble about their tomorrow.” Dripe’s own motivation for continuing his job as a teacher lay in the pride he had about what he could teach to his students, but also in the fact that the state provided him with material support.

The **perspectivisation discursive strategy** speaks to the framing or positioning of the speaker’s point of view. *Skolotāju Avīze* was a typical Soviet newspaper, and it functioned on the basis of principles used by all media in the USSR. The paper was owned by the state and it appeared in line with the formula prescribed by the first leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin. The paper had to be a “collective organiser, collective agitator and collective propagandist,” and in that fashion expounding the world view dictated by the regime. The media were used as instruments to bring about the social changes the regime required (Schramm, 1963, 116). *Skolotāju Avīze* presented the voice of the regime to its readership, issued commands and instructions, monitored their implementation, and designated schools and teachers as positive and negative social actors.

Dripe’s memoirs presented his views about the early phases of his employment in the Soviet Latvian school system. At the conclusion of each chapter, Dripe offered commentary about how he now viewed what he had written in the earlier diary. He (1994, 57) admitted that the entries involved a great deal of subjectivity and observed that young people are maximalists and put forward categorical evaluations. The authenticity of his story is strengthened by photographs which the author took in the 1940s and 1950s. Dripe’s memoirs make it possible to understand the great difference between the real work of rural schoolteachers and the depiction of that work in *Skolotāju Avīze*.

The **intensification and/or mitigation discursive strategy** is used to modify the epistemic meaning of propositions. It has to be said that this strategy is not used in the representation of rural teachers in *Skolotāju Avīze* or in Dripe’s memoirs. Soviet newspapers intensified their discourse with directives and an instructive language style, both of which were mandatory. The language of the articles was completely businesslike, without any decorative elements that might have suggested a double meaning or uncertainty in a message. A decorative or artistic style of writing was totally unacceptable during the Stalinist period. *Skolotāju Avīze* made it perfectly

clear that the Soviet school system was the only place they could work as teachers, and that they therefore had to take into account everything that was written in the newspaper.

Dripe's memoir clearly showed its basic honesty. The author noted that he wrote the book when he was older than 60 years of age, and that was an appropriate age to remember how he "tripped through life" (Dripe, 1993a, 5). In the early 1990s, he felt a sense of disappointment about the fact that the Latvian state and society were not what he had hoped for earlier, when struggling for the country's independence. Writing his memoir allowed Dripe to flee from the tensions and political and social contradictions of the 1990s. He noted that the diary that he wrote as a young man was not polished, and that is why the book was titled "Without a Beautiful Mask." The simple language in the diary, the conversational style of the 1940s and the slang that was used at the time testify to the truth of his account.

Discussion and conclusions

The discourse-historical approach in analysing *Skolotāju Avīze* and Dripe's memoirs makes it possible to identify the primary discourses in the representation of rural teachers in both publications. It is true that the two discourses are quite different (see Figure 1 and 2).

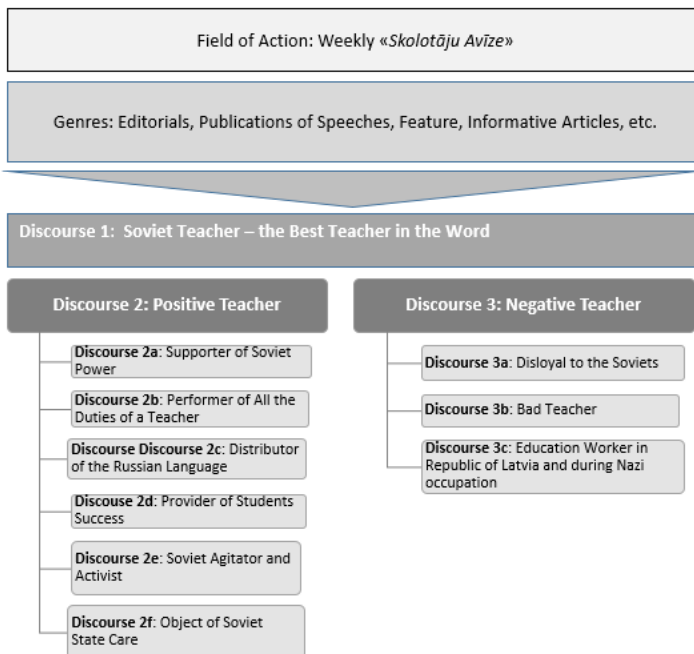


Figure 1. Discourses of rural teacher in “Skolotāju Avīze”



Figure 2. Discourses of rural teacher in Dripe's memoirs

Skolotāju Avīze always presented rural teachers as part of the Soviet teaching profession that, in official discourse, offered the best work opportunities and the most clearly defined status in the world. This discursive framework made it possible for the regime to place certain demands on teachers. *Skolotāju Avīze* divided teachers by reference to positive and negative traits. There were three sub-discourses in the description of negative teachers. The first concerned doubt and spoke of the lack of clarity about the possibility that the teacher might not be loyal toward the Soviet Union. The second used claims that negatively described teachers who did their work badly. They did not teach well, and they did not do things which the Soviet regime required. Such teachers did not raise children and young people to become Communists. The negative discourse about teachers often included their work in the education sector during the pre-war period of Latvia's independence or during the WWII Nazi occupation years. Such 'standards' frightened teachers and caused timidity. Negative descriptions of teachers often meant that they were fired from their jobs.

As noted earlier, discourse of a positive nature tended to be more frequent than its negative counterpart. Positive teachers who those whom the newspaper held up as models for others, with other teachers being urged to compare themselves to their 'positive' colleagues. A positive discourse about teachers had several distinct sub-discourses. The positive models were presented as being unquestionably loyal to the Soviet system, which meant that they participated in establishing and sustaining it. Teaching children in accordance with Soviet pedagogical requirements meant that positive teachers were shaping others to become part of Soviet society and helping to build Communism. Positive teachers also were faithful to Stalin as a national leader and to his policies. The next sub-discourse concerned

a teacher's pedagogical duties. This meant that everyday work for teachers was in line with the requirements of the regime. Teachers were expected to ideologize their students. Regular preoccupation with such activities shaped another sub-discourse about positive teachers – they were to be Soviet public activists and ‘agitators.’ There were two more sub-discourses that related directly to the teacher's work. One concerned teachers who popularised the Russian language and culture. Teachers were also expected to ensure success among their students. Many unsuccessful students threatened the teacher, who might well find himself or herself on the list of ‘negative’ teachers. Another sub-discourse was related to the claim that the Soviet regime was particularly concerned with the welfare of rural teachers. Free apartments, firewood, electricity, and hay were all presented in *Skolotāju Avīze* as self-evident component of the outstanding social status of teachers in the Soviet state. It was not discussed, however, as a way of dealing with a shortage of teachers.

The overall discourse about rural teachers in Dripe's memoirs can be divided into the representation of positive and negative teachers. In his eyes, positive teachers were the ones who truly worked with their students, gave grades that correlated with the student's knowledge, and tried to organise extracurricular activities that would help students to develop their personalities. This included art and sports. Dripe understood that teachers had to obey the dictates of the Soviet system, including work as ‘agitators,’ service on election commissions, and delivery of ideological lectures. Dripe discursively and positively wrote about those who did the work successfully. Dripe's discursive depiction of positive teachers included their ability to yield before the Soviet system and to live and survive within it.

The negative discourse about fellow teachers concerned those colleagues who made it more difficult for Dripe to live and survive under the Soviet occupation. It was important for him to protect his own life and that of his family, as he sought to ensure for them as many benefits as the system allowed. Dripe clearly presented himself as a conformist, and in order to survive, he had to choose a life that fit in with the Stalinist form.

Historical context is important to identify and understand the discourses about rural teachers that appeared in *Skolotāju Avīze* and Dripe's memoirs. The periodical press during the Stalinist period could not be understood read without contextualisation, because without context the press reports were simply disinformation about schools, the education system and teaching profession of the time. An understanding of the historical context is thus an obligatory pre-requisite to the analysis of discursive representation of these topics in both the Soviet press and in the memoirs of participants.

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