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Trained to Teach:

A Study of Women Teachers Currently not Teaching

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Master of Arts in Education
at Massey University

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This thesis is dedicated to my daughters

Jenny, Rachel and Amy

in the hope that they may be free to choose social and personal
roles that enhance them.

Abstract

This study had two main objectives:

1. To describe the population of nonteaching female primary school teachers in terms of demographic and professional variables.
2. To explore the conditions under which these women might return to teaching.

To achieve the above objectives, a nation-wide, randomly-selected sample of 110 nonteaching female primary school teachers was sent a self-administered postal questionnaire. There were 79 usable responses, and the data from these forms the basis of this report.

The findings of this study indicate that nonteaching female primary school teachers fall into three distinct groups. One group is comprised of female teachers who do not want to teach ever again. As a group, they are older, their children are older, and they have given more years of service than women in the other two groups. As well, those of them who are not in the paid workforce do not intend to return to paid employment. As a group they represent about a quarter of the sample.

About ten percent of the sample intend to return to teaching. They have young children and had left the classroom to be at home with their children. These women are generally under 35 years of age, and their children of preschool or early primary school, age. They indicated that they would return to the classroom when their children are older.

The third group of teachers comprising about two thirds of the sample, are of the opinion that it is possible that they may return to teaching. They too have husbands and young children, but many of them feel unsure about a return to any paid work.

Respondents were asked why they are not currently teaching, and the great majority indicated a strong commitment to the roles of wife. They did not want to take any employment which would interfere with their fulfilment of these roles. Generally, the women in this study liked teaching, particularly the involvement with children and the fostering of their development.

An important outcome of the study is the advancement of a theory of commitment, in which people are seen to commit themselves to certain values. These values may be expressed in many different lifetasks. The women in this study liked the nurturant role in teaching, and once they had their own children they felt that the needs of these children of theirs should come before other considerations.

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Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Contents	4
List of Tables	5
Introduction	6
Chapter One: Women in Teaching	7
Chapter Two: Vocational Commitment and Women Teachers	20
Chapter Three: Methodology	38
Chapter Four: Results	57
Chapter Five: Discussion	109
Conclusion	140
Bibliography	142
Appendix One: Interview schedule	
Appendix Two: Draft questionnaire	
Appendix Three: Pilot questionnaire	
Appendix Four: Report of the Pilot Study	
Appendix Five: Final Questionnaire	
Appendix Six: Selected Tables of Results	

List of Tables

<u>Table</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	Primary Service Intake from Teachers College
2	Acceptance Rates
3	Status Levels, Women in Selected Institutions
4	Overall Shape of the Study
5	Number of Usable Questionnaires
6	Do You Want to Teach Now?
7	Presence of a Spouse
8	Intention to Return to Paid Work
9	Irving and Elley Rank
10	Irving and Elley Rank, Dichotomised
11	Elley and Irving Rank
12	Elley and Irving Rank, Dichotomised
13	Number of Children
14	Presence of Children
15	Number of Preschool Children
16	Presence of Preschool Children
17	Level of Education
18	University Experience
19	Liking for Teaching
20	Fulltime Teaching: Conditions of Return
21	Children at School
22	Children in Care
23	Need for Self-support
24	Smaller Classes
25	Specialised Teaching
26	Nearby Job
27	Parttime Teaching: Conditions of Return
28	Children at School
29	Children in Care
30	Need for Self-support
31	Relief Teaching: Conditions of Return
32	I Will Never Return
33	Regular School
34	Asked the Day Before
35	Regular Days
36	Children in Care

Introduction

There was a time when women teachers were obliged to choose between a career in teaching, or marriage. Nowadays women teachers may marry and continue their careers. However, the evidence is that most women nevertheless leave the classroom for a time at least, to raise their children. Criticism has been levelled at them for taking this time out from the classroom, and often they are labelled as uncommitted. It would seem clear on the basis of this study, that women teachers are committed to a role of nurturing the development of children. The objectives of this study were to find out something about the pool of nonteaching female primary school teachers in New Zealand, in terms of their demographic variables, and their professional characteristics. It was also hoped to be able to describe the conditions under which they might return to the classroom.

The report of this study consists of five chapters. The first provides background information about women primary school teachers in New Zealand. The second chapter reviews the literature on commitment, and suggests an advancement on a theory of commitment. Rarely has the concept of commitment been adequately specified, but as an outcome of this study an attempt is made to understand the complexity of the term. Chapter Three details the methodology of the study, and Chapter Four sets out the results that were obtained. In the last chapter, the findings are discussed.

Chapter One

Women in Teaching

Introduction

Information on women in primary teaching in New Zealand has been collected systematically since the 1920's. Although much of this information has been collected by way of studies which have varied considerably in design and quality, an overall picture of the career patterns and performance of women teachers can be formed.

This chapter describes some more recent patterns, and highlights the need for research into the large pool of women who are not currently teaching.

Training of Female Teachers

More than 75 percent of those entering primary school teaching from New Zealand teachers colleges are female. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, the percentage intake of women into the primary service has increased since 1977. Over this period there has been a proportional decrease in the number of males entering teaching (Whalley, 1978:1).

Table 1: Primary Service Intake from Teachers Colleges

Year	Male	Female	% Female of total
1976	432	1427	76.8
1977	405	1213	74.96
1978	367	1211	76.7
1979	331	1238	78.9
1980	303	1180	79.6

(Source: Department of Education)

Some general patterns seem to emerge from studies focussing on trainee teachers which have been carried out in New Zealand primary teachers colleges.

1. A considerably greater number of females than males apply for positions at teachers college¹ (Purdie, 1977; Ussher, 1977).

1. The Department of Education has a ten percent reserve quota for special categories of students, including males, in an attempt to redress the balance.

2. A slightly smaller proportion of females as compared with males is selected for entry to primary teacher training. Purdie (1977) provides evidence of this, (as shown in Table 2 below) from data collected at the Wellington Teachers College. From this Table it can be seen that not only were there more female applicants for entry to the college but that a lower percentage of them were selected.

Table 2: Acceptance rates of female and male students
Wellington Teachers College

Year	Men			Women		
	Applied	Accepted		Applied	Accepted	
1972	174	86	49.4%	501	222	43.8%
1973	218	89	40.8%	508	199	37.2%

(Source: Purdie 1977:110)

More recent data on acceptance rates at New Zealand teachers colleges is not available.

3. The entry standards for women in primary teaching in New Zealand are generally higher than those for men. Whalley (1978) found that women entrants score higher on personal qualities than men. Along with Freyberg (1977), Whalley says that women entrants had also performed better than men on the School Certificate examination.

4. A greater number of women than men with University degrees enter one-year primary training courses at New Zealand teachers colleges. In 1979 there were 86 women and 33 men with degrees in these courses (Department of Education, 1980).

5. As a group, female primary teacher trainees perform significantly better in their academic courses and on classroom practice teaching ratings than do their male counterparts. Malcolm (1977) cites 1975 figures for the Palmerston North Teachers College to show that female students as a group achieved superior University examination pass rates. Similar findings were reported by Freyberg (1977:6) on a cohort of students at the Hamilton Teachers College. Freyberg also found that 'older women [were] significantly superior to all other groups in curriculum studies'. At the Wellington Teachers College Purdie (1977) and Ussher (1977) report that female students attain higher ratings for their teaching practice than do males.

6. During their first year of teaching, women as a group are adjudged to be more effective teachers than their male counterparts.² Findings from the studies of Purdie (1977) and Freyberg (1977), and Norman's recent (1981) Department of Education survey support this contention.

In summary then, when compared with males as a group, females as a group enter primary teacher training with higher ratings for academic and personal qualities; during training they achieve better academic results, and higher teaching practice ratings; more graduates enrolled in primary teachers colleges one-year courses are female; and that 'Inspections' of Year One teachers indicate that female teachers as a group are adjudged to be more effective.

In view of the foregoing, it might be assumed that in New Zealand the career performance of female teachers might be predicted to be at least equivalent to that of males, and the discussion which follows focuses on this issue.

2. In New Zealand, the first year of teaching for Primary school teachers is officially regarded as their final year of training.

Career Patterns of Female Primary Teachers in New Zealand

Despite their superior initial qualifications and performance, female primary school teachers as a group in New Zealand seem to fare less well than males in terms of promotion in their subsequent teaching careers. Indeed, within the education system as a whole, very few females are employed in the higher paid and/or higher status positions. This is shown in Table 3. Several observations can be made about Table 3.

1. Generally, less than one tenth of all the highest status positions mentioned (e.g. professor, principal), are held by women.

2. While the student populations of the universities and teachers colleges are made up of over 50 percent females, less than a quarter of all permanent staff are female.

3. In the hierarchy of positions in each of the institutions cited in Table 3, women cluster in the lower positions.

4. There is a predominance of women over men employed in the lower status institutions (for example, primary schools).

Table 3: Women at Different Status levels of given Educational Institutions

University 1979	Number of females	% Female of Status level
Professor, Associate Professor	129	6.5
Senior Lecturer, Reader, Lecturers	125	17.1
Junior Lecturer, Tutors	87	29.3
Parttime staff	271	17.1
Students, fulltime	2919	36.7
parttime	1850	70.1

[Source: Education Statistics of New Zealand 1980:99]

Teachers College 1981	Number of females	% Female of Status level
Chairmen, committee members	9	10.3
Principals, Vice Principals	1	5.9
Dean, Head of Department	21	26.6
Principal Lecturer	84	27.0
Senior Lecturer	3654	80.5
Lecturer		
Student		

[Source: Department of Education]

Secondary 1978	Number of females	% Female of Status level
Principals, Deputy Principals	67	12.5
Senior Assistant	180	66.6
Position of Responsibility 4.3	102	11.4
2.1	614	28.4
Assistant Teacher	3181	45.8
Students	115570	49.1

[Source: K. Roper 1979]

Primary 1979	Number of Females	% Female of Status level
Principals	101	4.7
Deputy Principals	126	12.2
Supervising Teacher of Junior Classes	789	85.4
Senior Teachers	1105	53.1
Scale A, Year One	9310	78.6
Students	240859	48.6

[Source: J. Whitcombe 1979]

On the basis of the above, one could conclude that the higher the status of the institution, (e.g. university compared with primary school) the lower the proportion of women to be found in the upper echelons.

So far this study has considered briefly evidence relating to the training of female primary school teachers, and the career performance of females in the education system. Attention will now be focussed on the years of service offered by women in the primary teaching profession. From an analysis of Department of Education statistics, (e.g. Teacher Movement Surveys), several patterns become obvious:

1. The loss of women teachers from the primary service is significant. For instance, of 2399 resignations in 1980, over three quarters were women (77%).³ This resignation rate for women has remained at about this level for the last five years.

2. Approximately three quarters of the women who resign from teaching each year are under 30 years of age.

3. In 1980 there were 15993 teachers in the primary service.

3. The most commonly recorded reason for women resigning from the primary teaching service is 'domestic occupation' and more than half who resign give this as a reason. (Teacher Movement Surveys).

From the above it appears that there may be some basis to the commonly-stated view (see Watson, 1957; Muldoon, 1976) that female teachers represent a poor return on the investment made in them.⁴ However the amount of recorded service given by women teachers is frequently an underrepresentation of the amount actually given. For example, longterm relieving teachers are sometimes employed for several years in the same school and take full responsibility for a class. This service is not recorded by the Department of Education. Similarly, parttime and casual daily relief teaching service is not recorded. Yet, over 70 percent of the teachers giving these forms of service are female. Moreover, recent figures from the eleven Education Boards in New Zealand (NZEI, 1981) indicate that certificated relief teachers hold 1181 (10.9%) of all teaching positions in primary schools.

4. Of all New Zealand educational institutions in 1979, the highest cost per student overall was expended in teachers colleges. For example, in that year, the cost per student in schools was \$764; in universities was \$4260; in teachers colleges was \$9430. The greatest expense is the payment of allowances to students. (Department of Education, 1980).

5. Teachers are awarded a New Zealand Trained Teachers Certificate after one year of successful teaching.

Large numbers (about 2,000) of women leave teaching each year. At the same time about the same number of women enter teaching from training college courses (approximately 1100) and from other sources (approximately 1100). The latter are certificated teachers re-entering the service, and about half (600) women come from 'domestic occupation' (Department of Education, 1981). These women are called by the Department of Education 'married women returners'. Records have been kept on this group since 1965. From these Departmental records and other sources (Smith, 1969; Renwick, 1975) it can be shown that

1. About a third have been away from the classroom for less than five years.

2. Most had taught initially for less than five years before resigning.

3. Despite their break in service about one quarter of re-entrant women go on to attain positions of responsibility.

In view of the number of women re-entering teaching, along with the fact that the recorded service given by women is probably not an accurate assessment of their service, criticism may be levelled at the assertion that women represent a poor return on the investment made in them (Ogilvy, 1970). However, it is clear that there is an imbalance between the number of women resigning from the primary teaching service each year and the number who return, thus creating a pool of trained women teachers who are not currently teaching. This pool was reflected in the 1976 census which showed 56,000 New Zealand residents whose highest qualification was the New Zealand Trained Teachers Certificate. About 20,000 of these would have been employed as primary teachers in state schools in that year. Even allowing that some of the remaining 36,000 would be employed in kindergartens, secondary schools, and private schools, and that some of those not teaching would be men, it can conservatively be estimated that there were at least 20,000 nonteaching female teachers in New Zealand in 1976.⁶ There is no reason to suppose that this estimate should be radically changed.

6. This estimate was validated in the course of locating the sample for this study. It was assumed that the population from which the sample was drawn numbers 20,000. The market research company, McNair, sampled 250 randomly-chosen households each week. If the estimate is correct, randomly sampling 250 households per week will produce, on average, six eligible potential respondents. (This calculation is made using probability theory). In fact, six subjects were located each week, which supported the initial assumption.

While there have been studies on female primary school teachers in training, and their subsequent career performance (Malcolm, 1979; Whitcombe, 1980), little information about re-entrant women teachers exists and almost nothing is known about the pool of nonteaching trained female primary school teachers in New Zealand. This has been corroborated by McDonald (1979), the New Zealand Educational Institute (1979,1980), the Department of Education (1979), and most strongly by Ramsay (1979) who suggests it is now timely for a research study to yield hard data on the availability of teachers currently not employed in teaching.

This lack of information on re-entrant women, and more particularly on the pool of nonteaching women teachers, was the impetus for the present investigation, which had two major objectives:

1. To describe the population of trained women primary teachers who are no longer teaching, in terms of demographic and professional variables, such as length of service; and

2. To produce information concerning the conditions under which a return to teaching might be possible.

Summary:

In this chapter, an overview has been given of the position of women teachers in the primary teaching service in New Zealand. It was suggested that female primary school teachers in training are a well-educated group; are evaluated on selection ratings as more suited to teaching than men; and as neophyte teachers they perform better in the classroom than their male counterparts. Yet in career terms, despite their relative high quality, they are underrepresented in the senior positions in the teaching service.

It was also shown that large numbers of female primary teachers leave the service each year for 'domestic purposes', that most of these were under 30 years of age and with less than five years service. While it was found that a proportion of these women return to teaching, little is known about them, and less about the relatively large pool of trained women teachers who are no longer teaching, and on the conditions under which a return to teaching might be possible.

The chapter concluded with a statement of the objectives to the present study.

In the chapter which follows, the term commitment, as it is used in reference to female teachers, is described.

A tentative theory of commitment is advanced which may go some way towards explaining the choices that are made by female primary school teachers who are no longer teaching.