

Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation
BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Review Essay

Rebecca Priegert Coulter and Helen Harper, eds.
*History is Hers: Women Educators in
Twentieth Century Ontario.*

Calgary: Detselig, 2005. 323 pp.

Ruby Heap, Wyn Millar, and Elizabeth Smyth, eds.
*Learning to Practise: Professional Education in
Historical and Contemporary Perspective.*

Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005. 311 pp.

Elizabeth M. Smyth and Paula Bourne, eds.
*Women Teaching, Women Learning:
Historical Perspectives.*

Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2006. 236 pp.

Kay Whitehead

Flinders University

The publication of these edited collections is indicative of the breadth and depth of research in Canadian history of education in recent years. In examining their titles, it is clear that gender continues to be an important category of analysis in the field and

that education is conceived broadly. Inside the covers, however, class, race and geographic location come to the fore in some essays, and we find 'education' embedded in medical journals and travel, for example, as well as schools and universities. Indeed, these books add substantially to our knowledge of women teachers and learners, individually and collectively, at many levels of education; and professional education and professionalisation across a range of occupations from the mid-nineteenth century to contemporary times.

The genesis of *Learning to Practise: Professional Education in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* edited by Ruby Heap, Wyn Millar, and Elizabeth Smyth was the Research Group on Women and Professional Education and this is the group's second book. This collection of ten essays problematises the subject of professional education in several occupations. The first essay by Bob Gidney anchors the work with an overview of the gradual shift of professional education from apprenticeships into universities. He argues that learning to practice is a matter of learning the how and why, or theory and practice of a profession. Several essays link directly to Gidney's work by examining various occupations, locations and eras. William Westfall adds to Gidney's discussion of apprenticeship models by featuring the practical aspects of Anglican clerical formation in four locations. A highlight of this essay is the discussion of the ways in which theory and practice were integrated in the Diocesan Theological Institute in the 1840s. Cathy James' fascinating essay also describes how theory and practice informed each other in social work in the interwar era. She shows that it was important for prospective social workers not only to know but also to 'be,' that is the construction of professional identities was paramount in the professional education of social workers. Indeed, the cultivation of 'character' or professional identity is an insistent sub-theme in this book and perhaps could have been addressed explicitly in Gidney's essay.

Every essay in the collection highlights complexities and contradictions inherent in learning to practice. Linda Quiney's essay focuses on Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses in the First World War and shows how their limited training and presence was perceived by Canada's trained nurses as a threat to the profession. Ironically, the VAD nurses conceptualized their work as war service and did not identify with trained nurses to the extent that they wanted to join the profession after the war. Tracey Adams' study of dental hygienists is a wonderful counterpoint to the 'normal' trajectory from apprenticeship to university in professional education. For these women moving from the university to community colleges enhanced professional status and autonomy. As many of Gidney's points resonate in this essay, it might have been placed earlier in the book to maximize its impact. Ruth Compton Brouwer's essay reminds us that professional learning does not finish with graduation but is a complex ongoing project. This essay focuses on medical missionary, Dr. Belle Oliver's leadership in the area of social hygiene, particularly birth control in India in the 1930s.

Some of the essays focus closely on who was learning to practice. Wyn Millar, Ruby Heap and Bob Gidney document the changing social and academic profiles of medicine, engineering and dentistry students at the University of Toronto in the first half of the twentieth century. Ruby Heap and Ellen Scheinberg focus on women

engineering students between 1939 and the 1950s. After reading these very interesting essays, I wondered how the changing demographic profiles might have mediated professional education, including the construction of professional identities during this era. Alison Prentice's essay on Canadian women who became historians and physicists points to contrasting career paths and shifts in professional identities over time. These essays convincingly demonstrate the value of comparisons between professions and between people within professions. They also combine with the first mentioned essays to capture the classed and gendered nature of the professions. Additionally, Jean McKenzie Leiper's essay on women law students' experiences of law school culture and pedagogy attends to factors such as age, race and sexual orientation. Like every essay in this collection, this one is grounded in a thorough review of the literature and painstaking research, thereby providing an important resource on the development of professional education in Canada.

For anyone who is interested in the richness and diversity of women teachers' lives and work in the twentieth century *History is Hers: Women Educators in Twentieth Century Ontario* is a must-read. Edited by Rebecca Priegert Coulter and Helen Harper, this collection is based on 200 oral histories of women who taught in Ontario between the 1930s and the 1990s. While the majority of women teachers were (and continue to be) white women of European descent, Canadian-born and English-speaking, a great strength of this project is the way in which it addresses social differences such as race, sexuality, marital status and geographic location. Furthermore, the introduction contains an illuminating discussion about the conduct of the project and recent debates in oral history. Several authors are also reflexive about the interview process in their essays. This makes the book extremely valuable for historians and students who might be contemplating similar work.

Section 1, comprising five essays, explores the views of women teachers who spoke from varied social locations and identities. This project encompassed women whose teaching careers were of varying lengths, and who contributed in many other ways to their communities. Thus the first essay by Aniko Varpalotai focuses on the experiences of rural teachers who were also farmers' wives. It shows how they juggled several roles and contributed to community building. However, there is a significant Canadian and international literature on rural women teachers and consolidation (an underlying theme of this essay and others) which could have informed this essay. Helen Harper's essay on women teachers in northern Ontario provides insights into the interactions between place and personal and professional freedom, or autonomy. This essay and many others also demonstrate ways in which centralization, regulation and standardization in Ontario education mediate teachers' work. The following two essays by Suzanne Majhanovich and Goli Rezai-Rashti clearly demonstrate that Francophone and immigrant women of color were outsiders in the Canadian teaching workforce. In countries such as Australia and Canada where the teaching workforce is so overwhelmingly white, Anglo and English-speaking there is very little research into 'other' teachers. Therefore, these essays make significant contributions to the field. The essay by Sheila Cavanagh on female teachers and sexuality is also important for it tackles marital status. I agree with Cavanagh who argues that the

most significant demographic change in the twentieth century teaching workforce was the shift from single to married women teachers. The demise of the spinster and the rise of the married mother as the archetypal woman teacher are outlined in all of their complexity in this essay.

The second section of *History is Hers* features two essays on women and leadership beyond the classroom. Janice Wallace focuses on the careers of four women who became superintendents. Whereas Cavanagh's essay positions single women as transgressive, this essay considers how these educators troubled the gender order in their work rather than their private lives. Rebecca Coulter provides a comprehensive account of the Federation of Women Teachers Associations of Ontario from its inception to the 1980s. This essay captures the array of perspectives of professionalism and collective organization. I enjoyed both chapters but I contend that this book has much more to say about leadership than is registered in Section 2. The essay on Francophone teachers, for example, demonstrates their curriculum leadership at the school and district level and could also have been located in this section. I gather that several interviewees became school principals and an essay about their experiences would have enhanced this section. Indeed, I suspect that this edited collection barely scratches the surface of the material collected in this oral history project and I look forward to more books and articles.

The final section on the perils and pleasures of teaching also comprises two essays. Sheila Cavanagh's provocative essay on female teacher maladies in the twentieth century tackles the issue of women teachers who had 'nervous breakdowns and their associated maladies' and Rebecca Coulter reclaims the pleasures of teaching in the twentieth century. Although both essays express important, well-researched views and make valuable contributions to our knowledge and understanding of women teachers, they are somewhat out of character with the rest of the book. Both rely heavily on sources other than the oral histories and neither differentiates between different groups of women as is the case with the other essays. The perils and pleasures of teaching were also more closely related than is implied in this section of the book. Indeed, the travel so loved by teachers was not only a pleasure but also counteracted the problem of strain or stress in their daily work.

History is Hers acknowledges the intellectual support of Kathleen Weiler and Alison Prentice in the oral history project. Weiler's approach to oral history is evident in several essays and Prentice's scholarship is ever-present in the footnotes. Likewise her essay and her previous research informed much of the writing of others in *Learning to Practise*. It is fitting, therefore, that the third book in this review is dedicated to Alison Prentice, the "scholar, mentor and friend" to so many historians for more than forty years. Elizabeth Smyth and Paula Bourne's introduction to *Women Teaching, Women Learning: Historical Perspectives* reviews Prentice's scholarship and identifies colleagues and students whom she has influenced along with her leadership in history of education and Canadian social history. This edited collection features essays by ten of the many scholars whose lives and work bear her imprint.

Contributions from Canada, Australia and Sweden in Section 1, "The lives of women teachers," are testimonies to Prentice's international standing. Three essays

are studies of women who were involved in teacher education. Rebecca Coulter's biography of Donald Dickie traces her thirty-five year career, working with undergraduates in Alberta and writing textbooks that were popular across Canada. Dianne Hallman and Anna Lathrop focus on physical educator, Mary Hamilton, in early twentieth century Toronto, and Irene Poelzer who took up a religious vocation in 1950, and made her mark on teacher education at the University of Saskatchewan. Inga Elgqvist-Saltzman's essay shows that early nineteenth century Swedish educator Cecilia Fryxell's progressive ideas resonate in contemporary times. Marjorie Theobald provides an incisive overview of the history of women and the teaching profession in Australia. Her discussion of the three-caste system of female teachers can be applied equally to the Canadian situation, and many of the issues raised in *History is Hers* are also present in this essay. Here, I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Alison Prentice, along with Marjorie Theobald and Alison Mackinnon whose publications were seminal to my Ph.D. research and many of my subsequent projects and articles. Additionally, our conversations at conferences in Canada and Australia have contributed significantly to my research directions.

Theobald's essay could have been equally well-located in Section 2, "Regulating women," alongside Harry Smaller's essay on women teachers, state formation and schooling reform in Toronto in the 1880s. This essay also has many parallels with the themes of centralization, standardization and accountability in *History is Hers*. Cathy James addresses state formation and the reform of social work with an interesting biography of social work pioneer, Edith Elwood, and Wendy Mitchinson explores the links between medical literature and the regulation of girls' secondary education. These essays are testimony to the breadth of Prentice's influence and its interdisciplinary character.

Three innovative essays on women's public and private lives complete the final section of this book. Susan Mann examines the travel diaries of thirteen Canadian women in the late nineteenth century, showing how these women blurred the boundaries between home and away. Alison Mackinnon's essay on Australian and American university students in the 1950s demonstrates ways in which these women came to terms with intellectual development, marriage, career and various kinds of independence. Cecilia Reynolds' paper is based on interviews with women university students, their mothers and grandmothers, and discusses their schooling and paid and unpaid work. These contributions honor Alison Prentice's diverse interests in women's and feminist history.

To sum up, these edited collections reflect the expertise of their editors and authors, and enlarge our understanding of several fields, historically and in contemporary times. They contain a wide range of approaches, perspectives, sources and research methods. Thus they make important contributions to Canadian history of education and have much of interest to historians internationally.