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SOWING THE SEEDS OF A PRE-SERVICE MODEL OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Our article seeks to describe, analyse and assess the contribution of Margaret Hodge and Harriet C. Newcomb to the training of kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers in New South Wales at a time of wide-ranging educational reform. These two English teacher educators were recruited to Sydney in 1897 for the purpose of establishing a new training scheme equivalent to the teaching diploma courses offered at the University of Cambridge. In their subsequent work for the Training Board of the NSW Teachers' Association, reconfiguring training programs for teachers in private schools, as lecturers and examiners in the history and theory of education, and in founding Shirley School and Kindergarten to practically demonstrate their progressive educational philosophy, the pair were at the forefront of moves to abolish the outmoded pupil teacher system and institute a pre-service model of teacher education. Concurrently, they agitated for change by speaking authoritatively in various forums on the broader issue of improved schooling standards through the systematic training of teachers in the science and art of education. On the eve of their return to London after eleven years in Sydney, Margaret and Harriet aptly concluded that if their record was one of "the petty done, the vast undone", and their appeal for the technical training of teachers so they might constitute themselves into a professional class "premature", they had "at least sown the seed".

Margaret Emily Hodge (1858-1938) and Harriet Christina Newcomb (1854-1942) were wealthy middle class Londoners whose fifty-year friendship began in the 1880s at Maria Grey Training College for Women, London, where both commenced as students and later returned as lecturers. Having each graduated with a Cambridge Teacher's Certificate, in the interim Margaret taught at the College's first practising school (Bishopsgate School for Girls) and Harriet at Exeter High School. In following years the two women travelled frequently to Europe to study educational trends. For example, "inspired by Matthew Arnold with an intense admiration for the German educational system", in 1892-3 Margaret spent six months visiting schools in the Rhine district, Hanover, Prussia and Saxony (Hodge, 1898, p. 1). Harriet spent an equivalent period in France during 1895 in order to "compare standards of teaching and methods of training with our own"; also "the organisation of Secondary Education, and French criticism upon it" as might inform English opinions on the subject (Newcomb, 1899, p. 2). Notably, whilst in Paris for three months, Harriet stayed with Madame R-El Chalamet - a leading educational reformer. Such travel enabled Margaret and Harriet to broaden their educational ideas and experience, to the extent that they became recognised as experts in their fields. Moreover, their positions as lecturers at Maria Grey afforded them opportunities to network with senior educationalists, including Sir J. G. Fitch, HM Senior Inspector for Schools, Sir H. Evelyn Oakeley, HM Chief Inspector of Training

Colleges, Sophie Bryant, headmistress of the prestigious North London Collegiate School for Girls, and Madame Michaelis of the Froebel Institute in Kensington, pioneer of the Kindergarten system in England.

Margaret and Harriet thus had the requisite cultural capital to fit relatively easily into the social-cum-intellectual circles that led public debate on educational matters in Sydney. They additionally possessed the credentials, experience and expertise which enabled them to speak with intellectual and practical authority. Ultimately, though, it was through Margaret's family connections that she and Harriet were recruited to Australia. In 1896 Professor Walter Scott of Sydney University, whose brother George (Tutor and Fellow, Merton College, Oxford) was married to Margaret's sister Florence, went to England with his wife. There he saw a good deal of the Hodges and Harriet, "with whose revolutionary ideas he was much impressed" (Guiterman, 1949, p. 6). He also visited Maria Grey Training College and approved the system, saying that there was a distinct opening in New South Wales for the training of teachers on such lines. With his encouragement, Margaret and Harriet emigrated to Sydney to direct the expansion and consolidation of training schemes conducted under the auspices of the NSW Teachers' Association, of which Professor Scott was a founding member and office bearer (Vice-President, 1893; President, 1894-5).

The pair were given temporary accommodation by the Scotts on arriving in 1897 and they were soon inducted into the professor's educational networks. Leading educationalists with whom Margaret and Harriet came to work most closely at Sydney University included Women's College principal Louisa Macdonald, M.A., Professor Mungo MacCallum, Professor and Mrs Maybanke Anderson (formerly Mrs Wolsteholme, proprietor of Maybanke School), and Professor and Mrs David (née Cara Mallett, foundation principal of

Hurlstone Training College). Louisa and Maybanke were also prominent in Sydney feminist organisations that Margaret and Harriet joined and through which they actively pursued improvements in all aspects of women's condition - not least the professional training of women teachers. For example, Margaret introduced this subject at the 1899 annual meeting of the National Council of Women - NSW (*The Dawn*, 13(2), June 1899, p. 5).

Professor Scott had been pressing for the introduction of teacher training at Sydney University since the 1880s and Fletcher (1992) suggests that much of the direction on teacher education adopted by the NSW Teachers' Association, formed in 1891, was probably due to his suggestion and guidance (p. 6). While numerous Association members expressed reservations about the importance of professional training for teachers, other influential professors and private school principals on the Council, but especially Louisa Macdonald, agreed with Scott's view (as cited in Beaumont & Hole, 1996) that "it was not enough that teachers should know how to manage a class; we ought to expect and require them also to be highly trained men and women" (p. 115). In 1894, responding to an appeal by Kindergarten reformers within the ladies' colleges, Scott called a meeting at the University to consider the need for examination and accreditation of kindergarten teachers. A significant outcome of this meeting was the formation of a Training Board, comprising selected executive members of the Teachers' Association, which subsequently issued a syllabus and undertook to arrange lectures and appoint examiners for the award of a Diploma in Kindergarten and Primary Grades. Details of the course, based on Hamburg-trained Fraulein Scheer's 'Scheme for the Training of Kindergarten teachers', were published in the Association's journal (*Australian Teacher*, 1(7), May 1894, pp. 5-6; 1(11), April 1895, pp. 6-7). Five kindergarten teachers were admitted to the

training scheme in 1895, three of whom graduated.

Scott also strongly supported Cara David's 'Proposed Scheme for the Training and Certificating of Elementary and Secondary Teachers', elaborated upon under the heading 'Practical Training of Teachers in Existing Schools' (*Australian Teacher*. 1(8), September 1894, pp. 7-8; 1(12), May 1895, p.7). However, it took several more years of discussion and planning before Board training was extended to primary and secondary teachers in a bid to raise their occupational status and improve educational standards in private schools. Importantly, the training schemes stressed both theory and practice as essential elements and an in-service model was adopted: students enrolling in the four proposed Diploma courses (Kindergarten, Primary, Lower Secondary and Higher Secondary) should already be employed as teachers in accredited schools where their practical teaching could be supervised by a well-qualified teacher, with their theoretical studies to be organised by the Teachers' Association in conjunction with the University.

When Margaret and Harriet were appointed to the Training Board in 1897 they found little advance beyond these tentative beginnings to the systematic training of private school teachers. In explication, Fletcher (1992) cites Louisa Macdonald's account of the shortcomings of the arrangements and lack of teacher training on the part of those who acted as supervisors and examiners. She adds that the examination syllabus was very demanding and ambitious in concept, there were insufficient schools which met the stringent pre-requisites for approval as a practising school, and Teacher Association resources were too limited to do much more than prescribe the syllabus. Hence numbers undertaking the Kindergarten Diploma course were initially low (pp. 21-3). Harrison (1985) points to another problem in the

training of teachers for Kindergarten work: finding suitable lecturers capable of providing the necessary theory and with experience of putting the theory into practice (p. 13). Margaret and Harriet were to admirably fill this void. Meanwhile, the main method of training teachers for state schools remained the English-based pupil teacher system, whereby 13-16 year-olds entered a form of apprenticeship, four years in length, and progressed to the grade of assistant teacher via a series of examinations. Only an elite few, those with the highest passes in the Class I examination, gained admission to the two state training institutions established under the 1880 Education Act: Fort Street Training School for men and Hurlstone (residential) Training School, Ashfield, for women (Barcan, 1980).

In October 1897 Margaret and Harriet became members of the NSW Teachers' Association and in 1898 Margaret was elected to its Council, on which she served until 1902. From the outset both women actively participated in the discussion of papers given at monthly meetings, deploying their knowledge of English and European education to sometimes vigorously challenge other members' perspectives. Seeking to influence public opinion on teacher education in this and other forums, papers they delivered revealed their own position. For example, in March 1898 Margaret addressed the Teachers' Association on 'Some Aspects of German Education Today'. She drew particular attention to "the great care given to individual children, the certain mark of the trained teacher and educator rather than the untrained crammer", and in concluding remarked that "the future of the Kindergarten system must depend wholly upon the qualifications of the Kindergarten teachers" (*Australian Teacher*. 1(27), April 1898, pp. 7-9). In complementary fashion, Harriet's March 1899 paper, 'Some Impressions of Education in France', highlighted the connection between teachers' qualifications and public respect for the profession, together with the

necessity for their training to include “first-hand study of children”, for theory to inform students’ teaching practice, and for a practising school in which they could apply such theoretical understandings. Harriet also lamented the absence in France of a training college “specially set apart for the formation of teachers of little children” since in her view (and Margaret’s) Kindergarten provided the foundation for all future learning and Kindergarten principles should infuse the whole of schooling (*Australian Teacher*. 1(31), June 1899, pp. 6-7).

Margaret’s position was rendered even more clear in her paper entitled ‘The Professional Training of Teachers’, given at the 1902 Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) conference in Hobart. In it she advocated a sound general education for teachers upon which to base their training, and she expressed her admiration for the Germans’ “intense belief in the need for a sound scientific theory to aid and correct personal experience [which] leads them to insist on the training of every teacher in the science and art of education”. She argued that untrained teachers, however great their practical experience, were not sufficiently well informed about matters of physiology, psychology and ethical principles as they related to children’s physical, intellectual and moral development, nor sufficiently reflective about their practice to be effective and bring out the best in scholars. Moreover, teacher training should precede instead of succeeding practical teaching. Lastly, she was convinced that the professionalisation of teaching, and thereby the raising of educational standards in schools, depended on the acquisition of credentials. She thus looked forward to the day “when it will be as impossible for a teacher to teach without a diploma as it is for a doctor to practice without a medical degree” (Hodge, 1902, pp. 780, 782, 784).

These were the major characteristics of teacher education that Margaret and Harriet strove to incorporate in their work for the

Training Board in New South Wales. Drawing on their knowledge and experience of the courses offered at the University of Cambridge and Maria Grey Training College, they embarked upon their task by forming a committee to reconceptualise the Teachers’ Association training schemes. The main outline of those previously developed was generally accepted but the theoretical side was expanded to include Physiology, Logic and Ethics. The difficulty of annually providing lectures in History of Education and Psychology was overcome when Margaret and Harriet assumed responsibility for these subjects as well as Nature Knowledge and Drawing. Furthermore, with Cara David they comprised the panel of examiners for the Training Board. In 1897 ten of the fourteen kindergarten students to whom they lectured presented themselves for the whole or part of the Theoretical and Practical Examinations. 1898 saw nineteen students take advantage of the new arrangements for kindergarten training, including “Specimen Lessons and other practical means of instruction”, whilst the scheme of primary and secondary teacher training also commenced operation with “enthusiastic support from the head teachers of some of the best girls’ schools” (*Australian Teacher*. 1(28), August 1898, p. 3).

In 1899 Louisa Macdonald negotiated with Margaret and Harriet to provide a course of lectures at Women’s College on the Science of Education and Practical Organisation of Teaching, for prospective teachers among her students. The arrangement allowed the two Englishwomen, appointed in July as Honorary Lecturers in the Theory and Practice of Education, to give tuition to college students at reduced fees plus public lectures for which they would receive the fees from outside students. The pair handled all applications and interviewed interested students as well as furnishing lectures covering physiology and psychology, history of education, “the best methods of teaching the subjects taught in schools”, and school

organisation and management. Candidates were also required to undertake practical teaching in Board-accredited schools and sit the designated examinations to complete the Primary or Secondary Diploma (Hole & Treweke, 1953, p. 89; *Australian Teacher*. 1(32), September 1899, pp. 4-6).

Margaret and Harriet were later characterised by one of the graduates of the secondary course as “two experts who had given years of thought, study and work to the training of teachers and who ranked high in the educational world of England”. This woman praised the quality of their lectures, noting that “even the young student is able to develop a theory as to the possible aims of education” and that “the lectures on the practice of education embodied wide experience in the methods of dealing with subjects and classes”. According to her, the perennial tensions between the theoretical and practical components in teacher training courses were not evident; instead “the practical and theoretical work aided and amplified one another” (*Australian Journal of Education*. 2(2), August 1904, pp. 5-6). Annual reports of the Training Board were similarly complimentary about the thoroughness of Margaret and Harriet’s work in this regard, whilst their 1899 report on the practical class teaching component of the Kindergarten course was considered to be “so important and suggestive that cyclostyled copies of it were made, and privately circulated among the Kindergarten Trainers” (*Australian Teacher*. 1(32), September 1899, pp. 3-4).

Margaret and Harriet’s 1899 report to the Training Board also prompted the decision that henceforth no student who was employed full-time as teacher would be permitted to compete for the Association’s diplomas due to the demanding nature of the course. As Fletcher points out, this stipulation signified the Board’s inclination towards the Englishwomen’s preferred model of pre-service training but probably precluded a number of practising teachers

from undertaking professional improvement (p. 24). Irrespective, the training scheme detailed in the September 1899 issue of *The Australian Teacher* represented a significant advance on the pupil teacher system currently used in the private (and public) schools of Sydney. The Board was in full accord with Margaret’s view - deeming the pupil teacher system to be an outmoded model; worse, “a disgrace to the English educational system” (p. 6). In thus moving towards prior training for private school teachers, the Teachers’ Association pre-empted by some years similar action on the part of the NSW Department of Public Instruction.

Yet another refinement to the scheme for training private school teachers was introduced in January 1900 when Harriet and Margaret opened Shirley New School and Kindergarten as “a living example of their philosophy in practice” and a Board-recognised training school for kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers (Harrison, 1985, p. 14). Although they had striven at the Board’s behest to transform teacher training, the pair faced serious difficulties in implementing the practical components of each course. By 1899 the Board’s exacting standards had led to the situation whereby only ten kindergartens, three primary and two secondary schools were registered as schools in which diploma students could complete the practicum requirement. The same lack of facilities hampered Margaret and Harriet’s ability to demonstrate the principles and practices in which they believed. Hence the decision to establish their own private school, comprising a kindergarten (attended by boys as well as girls), a transition class, a lower division for 9-13 year-olds and an upper division for girls aged 14-18 years.

The school’s *Prospectus* (1900) constructed ‘the two advanced Englishwomen’ as being at the cutting edge of progressive educational thought and practice:

The aim of this school is to give the pupils an education which shall develop individual power and widen the range of interest and sympathy in every direction. ... The methods which will be employed are the result of many years of school experience, together with the study of educational principles to which so much attention is now given in England, Germany, Sweden and America. These principles have hitherto been most completely carried out in the system called the Kindergarten. ... The Kindergarten principle of natural development by self-activity will be adhered to throughout the school. (p. 2)

Indeed Harriet and Margaret pioneered at Shirley many of the reforms being advocated by 'new' educationists world-wide at that time, including a focus on the individual child, early sensory training, experiential rather than book learning, open-air schooling, 'modern' curriculum offerings, self-discipline, cultivation of a family atmosphere and concern for 'the whole child' (Docker, 1950; Harrison, Ch. 2).

Shirley staff were all trained teachers, some of them graduates of the Diploma courses whose theoretical components Margaret and Harriet continued to teach and examine for the Training Board (*The Shirley*, 2(4), January 1908, p. 10). Public school teachers on day-release from their duties also frequently visited Shirley to observe specimen lessons, for the school's "unusual trend" was unparalleled in the state system (*Daily Herald*, 10 May 1913). Moreover, talk of the state establishing efficient training and practising schools was not acted upon until 1906 with the founding of Blackfriars Practising School in connection with Sydney Teachers' College (formed by the amalgamation of Fort Street and Hurlstone Training Schools). Harriet and Margaret's New School and Kindergarten, having functioned successfully as a demonstration/practising school for five

years by this time, may be seen as a leading exemplar for state-provided teacher training in New South Wales.

In January 1902 Margaret remarked that "the question of the adequate training of teachers has lately been a subject of much controversy in Sydney" (Hodge, 1902, p. 780. See also Barcan (1988), p. 207; Turney (1975), pp. 231-2). She was undoubtedly referring to events leading up to the appointment of two education commissioners, G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner, whose 1904 reports on 'Certain Parts of Primary Education' and 'Mainly on Secondary Education' stimulated reform of teacher training. In November 1901, Margaret and Harriet had participated in two public meetings held in Sydney Town Hall to demand such an education commission. The second of these meetings urged (among other things) reform of teacher training, extension of the Kindergarten system, revision of the primary school curriculum and teaching methods as well as specialised female education - changes the pair had been agitating for ever since their arrival in Sydney.

Appointed in March 1902, Commissioners Knibbs and Turner were sent abroad to investigate the educational systems of Britain, Europe, Canada and the USA before contrasting these with conditions in New South Wales. Each summarised his views independently; on the subject of teacher training they were substantially in agreement. Having detailed the defects of the pupil teacher system, both urged its abandonment and replacement by a system "which gives all teachers a better preliminary education and an adequate professional training before they are allowed to teach" (*Interim Report on Primary Education*, January 1902, p. 39. Emphasis supplied). This stance, incidentally, represented an about-face on the part of Commissioner Turner (Principal of Fort Street Training School), who at the 1902 Education Conference of Inspectors and

Departmental officers was “still wedded to the Pupil-Teacher System”, albeit with certain modifications (*Interim Report*, pp. 266-7). Not so Commissioner Knibbs (a young university lecturer in Surveying), for whom “proper training” in the science and art of teaching was “of the highest importance” since “the realisation of any scheme of public education depends on the thoroughness of the professional qualifications of the teachers” (p. 361). In support of his stance he made reference to Margaret Hodge’s “able” discussion of the subject in her 1902 AAAS paper.

To effect such professional training of primary school teachers the commissioners recommended the establishment of a seminarium, closely tied to the University and with an adjunct practising school, where 16+ year-olds who had passed the Senior Public Examination or its equivalent could undertake a three-year course in which all subjects were taught by specialists. The syllabus outlined in their Interim Report strikingly resembles the Primary Diploma course as reconceptualised and implemented by Margaret and Harriet years earlier. Commissioner Turner further recommended that a Kindergarten Training College be established, with Hurlstone students receiving regular instruction in Kindergarten theory and practice until this occurred; also that as soon as sufficient teachers were trained, the subject be taught in all infant schools and classes (Summarised Report, January 1904, p. 95). This was to completely ignore Margaret and Harriet’s work in the Kindergarten Diploma course conducted under the auspices of the Training Board, through which approximately seventy students had passed by 1901.

The Knibbs-Turner Report on Secondary Education (October 1904) dealt far more briefly with the issue of teacher training, concluding merely that a principal defect of the New South Wales system was “the absence of any definitely regulated scheme for the professional qualification of teachers”

- certainly not one comparable with European training methods - and “this defect reacts profoundly on the efficiency of education” (pp. 15, 359). Otherwise, the report outlined the one-year Secondary Diploma course “for Ladies’ Schools” under the supervision of Margaret and Harriet at Shirley. Thanking Margaret for supplying the prospectus as printed in this section of the report, the commissioners noted that candidates for the Secondary Diploma issued by the NSW Teachers’ Association were required to be university graduates and that five students had so far qualified whilst three were presently in training (*Report on Secondary Education*, ch. V, pp. 39-40). Commenting on these low numbers, Commissioner Knibbs summed up the situation:

Every secondary school in our state is practically a law unto itself. Under such circumstances it is difficult to establish any great educational traditions or to promote any thorough and obligatory system of professional training for teachers. The necessity for improvement in this respect has, it is true, been recognised by the Teachers’ Association and some steps have been taken to remedy this state of things. These, however, are quite inadequate and it would be idle to pretend that any sufficient success has been achieved (Ch. V, p. 31).

Whilst Margaret, too, acknowledged the relative lack of success of the Training Board’s scheme, it is significant to note that an equivalent diploma course was not instituted at the state teachers’ college until 1911.

Margaret played an active role in formulating the NSW Teachers’ Association response to the commissioner’s blueprint for secondary education. Indeed, she was the sole woman on a seven-member sub-committee appointed to remodel the Association’s resolutions as a set of policy statements. Her views clearly influenced the second of these resolutions, which argued in part “that the need for professional training of teachers should be

recognised as urgent” (*Australian Journal of Education*. 2(11), May 1905, pp. 5-6). She was, however, still pleading her case a year later: “The value set on training in England was shown by the extension and endowment of training colleges. ... It was quite certain that if we [in Australia] wished to approximate in our work the standard of Continental schools, we must make technical training a *sine qua non* for the admission of any man or woman to the profession of teacher” (*AJE*, 4(1), July 1906, p. 6). Nor was her concern ill-founded that this cause “meets with very little sympathy; indeed the majority of teachers are quite hostile, covertly if not overtly” (Hodge, 1902, p. 782). For Inspector Peter Board’s December 1903 ‘Report on Primary Education with regard to Other Countries’, which advocated modification rather than abolition of the pupil-teacher system in New South Wales, garnered more popular support than the Knibbs-Turner recommendations. Hence the training of state school teachers after 1905 proceeded under the probationary student system, essentially a different version of its predecessor, until 1913 when pre-service training at Sydney Teachers’ College took its place.

Margaret and Harriet’s lecturing, examination and demonstration work in the Kindergarten Diploma course continued until 1904 when the private training of kindergarten teachers became the responsibility of Sydney Kindergarten Teachers’ College (founded by the Kindergarten Union). Nonetheless, the Froebelian principles at the basis of their educational approach flowed on into the work of kindergarten trainers at the new institution. Additionally, in 1908 Harriet gave a series of twenty “fine” lectures on Kindergarten history and theory to twelve specially selected second-year students undertaking the Kindergarten and Infant School course at Sydney Teachers’ College. The two English teacher educators may thus be said to have significantly influenced the philosophy and approach to teaching of the

first generation of trained kindergartners in New South Wales. By their own admission, though, the same was not true of secondary teachers - nor of teacher training policy in general.

In her final report to the Training Board, whose operations ceased with the two women’s departure for England late in 1908, Margaret reflected on their eleven years’ work in Sydney:

*We came out to N.S.W. to found a system of training for teachers in secondary schools - work for which our own twelve years’ experience in the first Secondary Training College in London specially had fitted us. After three years of work as examiners and lecturers for the Board, we thought it advisable to open a school, where we could at all events give a practical illustration of our theories, and secure students for a consecutive course of training. About twenty students have taken part of their course with us, and eleven primary and six secondary teachers have taken their theoretical and practical examinations and gained their diplomas. ... The record I have just read is a rather melancholy one of the petty done, the undone vast, but the omissions were not due to any want of energy or lack of enthusiasm for the cause we have so much at heart. It may be that our appeal was made prematurely, when we urged embryo teachers to receive a technical training and thus constitute themselves as a professional class, if so, we have at least sown the seed, and we shall live in hope that our successors in the work will gather from this seed a plentiful harvest (*AJE*. 6(4), October 1908, p. 6).*

Margaret and Harriet’s contribution to teacher training in New South Wales as theorists and practitioners, together with their influence on policy development, can hardly be more aptly summarised.

CONCLUSION

Aside from a passing reference by Noeline Kyle (1986), Margaret Hodge and Harriet Newcomb's philosophies and agendas for teacher preparation have not been recognised in histories of Australian education. However, they were recruited to Sydney at a time when teacher training was in a state of flux, with the narrowly technicist pupil-teacher system being the subject of intense criticism. Margaret and Harriet were consummate political strategists in that they cultivated networks with New South Wales' leading social and educational reformers, and their ideas were subsequently promulgated in a range of public forums - not the least being the Knibbs-Turner Commission. In conceptualising and attempting to implement a pre-service model of teacher training, based on a sound general education and focusing on the nexus between theory and practice, they drew on British and European trends of the day. While their own success was limited, the pre-service model, over time, has become the norm across Australia. Given the recent attempts by conservative forces to re-introduce more technicist modes of teacher preparation, it is timely to reflect on the efforts of these two progressive women to sow the seeds of our current approaches to teacher education. Contemporary teacher educators may well find that Harriet and Margaret's ideas have particular salience today.

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