

“The Shallow Boast of Cheapness”: Public School Teaching as a Profession in Philadelphia, 1865-1890

IT MAY be useful to describe at the outset the research procedures utilized herein. The historian of American pedagogy lacks the traditional tools for historical research. American teachers rarely left papers, diaries, letters, or autobiographies to aid the historical task. Normal school registers, school board minutes, school committee records, and faculty lists provide some primary sources. As with most research in social history, it is necessary to seek alternative means of gaining information about the organization of the nineteenth-century teaching profession.

The availability of census manuscript data provided a unique research opportunity. It was hoped that the basic demographic data found in census records would yield insights concerning the age structure, economic background, and social organization of the nineteenth-century teaching profession. One hundred and fifty-three public school teachers were selected from the 1870 census manuscripts for the city of Philadelphia. They comprise 10.5% of the total teaching population of the city's public schools in 1870 and represent a fairly accurate cross section of the group. For example, all but one of the city's twenty-eight wards are represented and the six men in the sample reflect the insignificant proportion of the city's teachers who were male. In some of the statistical analysis which follows, the total sample is divided into two subsamples, 113 teachers and forty principals.

Generalizations about Philadelphia's teachers presented here are based upon findings relating to this 153-teacher sample. An effort was made to utilize all available public school records to broaden knowledge gained from the census about these teachers. Unfortunately, personnel lists were not accessible for the period before

1870, causing gaps in the important data indicating the first year of employment for these teachers. Whenever possible this information has been inferred from Girls Normal School records and teacher certification examination lists. Philadelphia Board of Public Education records dating forward to 1890 have been studied for information about changing personnel policies and the length of employment for teachers in the sample. This analysis will have to be extended for more complete information on teacher persistence.

While it is fashionable to commence academic writing with a self-justifying comment about the impoverishment of scholarship in the field under consideration, there is truly a dearth of research on the history of American teaching. Willard Elsbree's landmark work, *The American Teacher*, is an intuitive although comprehensive analysis of the teaching profession published in 1939.¹ The work is dated and needs to be re-examined using modern methodologies of historical research. Recent works by Paul Mattingly and Barbara Joan Finkelstein are useful although limited in their scope. Mattingly's *The Classless Profession* details the development of the American Institute of Instruction and Finkelstein's "Teacher Behavior in American Primary Schools 1820-1880" creatively reconstructs nineteenth-century instructional processes from autobiographies dating from that era.² There have however been no systematic analyses of the socioeconomic background, professional commitment, and public stature of the nineteenth-century American teacher. It is hoped that the work that follows will begin to suggest possible directions for additional research in this area.

By 1867, the public school had become the single most important social institution in Philadelphia on the basis of comprehensiveness of coverage. Of the city's children aged between six and twelve years, 66.1% attended public school, 10.7% attended parochial schools, 9.3% attended private schools, 12.1% were idle at home, and 1.8% were engaged in regular employment.³ With burgeoning school enrollments, the influence of public school teachers had by

¹ Willard Elsbree, *The American Teacher* (New York, 1939).

² Paul Mattingly, *The Classless Profession* (New York, 1975); Barbara Joan Finkelstein, "Governing the Young: Teacher Behavior in American Primary Schools 1820-1880" (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1970).

³ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 10, 1867, p. 4.

this period reached a majority of the community's families. Thus, increased interest was focused upon the educational professionals who were exercising the public trust. Before turning specifically to the teachers of Philadelphia, some comments are necessary about the general condition of the American teaching profession in the post-Civil War period.

In Philadelphia and throughout the nation, there was a prevailing skepticism concerning the abilities and qualifications of the average public school teacher. Speaking at the 1870 National Education Association convention, William Franklin Phelps, head of a Minnesota normal school, bemoaned the prevalence of "ignorant, unskilled teachers . . . poor schools and poor teachers are in a majority throughout the country."⁴ As with most social problems, this generally low level of pedagogical ability was rooted in economic factors. Municipalities with limited resources were obliged to set aside relatively meager budgets for education. Thus, teacher compensation was established at a particularly low level for a profession requiring an educated labor supply. School administrators, faced with serious personnel shortages due to rapidly expanding enrollments and the reluctance of educated men to teach for limited wages, were compelled to reach outside the male labor force and invite females to enter the profession. Feminization of the profession proceeded at an extraordinary rate, with the percentage of male public school teachers dropping from 61% in 1845 to 14% in 1865.⁵ The maintenance of abysmally low salary schedules was justified by the societal disposition to assign less economic worth to work performed by women. Despite the transparent expediency of this movement toward feminization, common school advocates like Henry Barnard provided support in publicly commending the virtuousness of the "kind, affectionate, and skillful teacher."⁶ While teaching afforded the only nonmanual occupational alternative for educated nineteenth-century women, the persistence of female domination and

⁴ Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1962), 303.

⁵ Geraldine Joncich Clifford, *The Shape of American Education* (Englewood Cliffs, 1975), 217.

⁶ Quoted in Donald Seckinger, *A Problems Approach to Foundations of Education* (New York, 1975), 212.

resultant inadequate compensation ensured the profession's incapacity to attract qualified men and diminished the public stature of the profession.

Educational literature of the nineteenth century is replete with gloomy pronouncements on the state of the profession. Aside from the prevalent tendency to dismiss teaching as mere women's work, there were widely-published attacks on the extreme youth, instability, and lack of educational qualifications of American teachers. A typical denunciation was offered by S. S. Overholt of Bucks County in the *Pennsylvania School Journal* in 1864:

In consequence of the want of proper facilities to acquire professional skill, and the miserable compensation paid to teachers generally, we have yet but few professional teachers. Three-fourths are merely temporary teachers, who engage in teaching for want of better employment, and leave it whenever a favorable opportunity to obtain more lucrative employment offers. Hence the majority are changed almost every season. . . . Unless, we elevate the profession of teaching, so that it will afford constant employment to those who engage in it, at reasonable salaries, we cannot expect to secure first-class teachers. Till this be done, we must continue to employ many who are inexperienced and poorly-qualified to discharge their duties.⁷

A systematic analysis of the teaching profession in Philadelphia during the post-Civil War period will afford an opportunity to evaluate such dire assessments of the American teacher of this period. The analysis will focus upon seven structural characteristics which affected the organization and development of the profession in the nineteenth century: age; socioeconomic background; household composition; training and recruitment of teachers; remuneration; feminization; and persistence.

By current standards, the nineteenth-century teaching profession was particularly notable for its youth and inexperience. Overholt found 40% of Pennsylvania's teachers to be under twenty-one years of age and lamented that little could "be expected of boys and girls not out of their teens just emerging from boarding school

⁷ S. S. Overholt, "On the Advancement Made by Teachers," *Pennsylvania School Journal*, XII (1864), 253-254.

without experience, without judgment, without any fixed purpose.”⁸ Unquestionably, the relative immaturity of the prototypical nineteenth-century teacher contributed to the diminution in public trust accorded the pedagogue and exacerbated the problem of teacher turnover.

Philadelphia’s Board of Public Education had personnel requirements concerning the age of entrance to the profession, but these requirements did little to ensure the maturity of beginning teachers. Personnel rules established by 1861 dictated that the third-class teaching certificate could only be issued to qualified persons of at least seventeen years of age. A principal had to be at least twenty-one before the appropriate certificate could be awarded. An alteration in the requirements in 1865 made twenty-year-old women eligible for the principalship in the primary schools after three years of teaching experience.

Philadelphia Girls Normal School was the primary training ground for prospective teachers and fourteen years was the minimum age requirement for entrance. Its records for the period from 1860 through 1876 indicate that exactly fifteen years was the lowest mean age for an entering class in 1872 and fifteen years, eleven months the highest mean age for an entering class in 1864. As the Normal School program was three years in length, the average prospective teacher would have completed her preparatory training by eighteen years of age, but, since many students left Girls Normal School before graduation to assume teaching positions, the age for the initial nineteenth-century teaching experience in Philadelphia is further reduced. Of sampled Philadelphia public school teachers in 1870 who had attended Girls Normal School, 42.4% left before graduation to begin employment in the 1850s and 1860s. Furthermore, only 43.8% of the city’s teachers in 1870 had any Normal School training whatsoever. The majority of Philadelphia’s teachers were employed with only a grammar school education. It is reasonable to assume that these teachers without a Normal School diploma were assuming their duties at or near the minimum age of seventeen.

This supposition is confirmed by the finding that of sampled teachers in 1870, only two had passed their twentieth birthday

⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

when they began their teaching careers. This pattern of teenage entrance into the profession remains firm even when the tendency of nineteenth-century women to understate their age is accounted for.⁹ In analyzing the age data for this sample of Philadelphia's public school teachers, it would appear that, while youthful, they were somewhat more mature than Overholt's intuition about the age structure of the profession.

AGE DISTRIBUTION, 153 TEACHERS, 1870

Under 21	22.9%	31-35	13.7%
21-25	35.3%	36-45	6.5%
26-30	17.6%	Over 45	3.9%
Median Age		24	

The elimination of the forty principals who were generally older from the table further emphasizes the immaturity of Philadelphia's teachers during this period.

AGE DISTRIBUTION, 113 TEACHERS, 1870

Under 21	30.1%	31-35	8.8%
21-25	40.7%	36-45	4.4%
26-30	14.2%	Over 45	1.8%
Median Age		23	

Thus, 70.8% of all public school teachers were under the age of twenty-five. Given the unstable nature of this younger urban population who frequently taught as a stopgap while anticipating marriage and motherhood, it is reasonable to infer an unsettling impact upon the profession.

A common assumption is that the American teacher, historically as well as in the present period, has been generally drawn from what may be regarded as the lower-middle class. Teachers are frequently portrayed as the children of farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen, or civil servants for whom teaching represents an advance up the social and economic ladder. Willard Elsbee contended that there had been no marked change in this pattern since the Civil War. The family

⁹ In comparing school enrollment records to census records, it seems that 66% of teachers whose actual age was over 25 underreported their age by a mean of 4.5 years.

backgrounds of Philadelphia's teachers in 1870 would seem to contradict that notion.

Public school teachers were generally raised in economically-advantaged homes. Utilizing real and personal property data as recorded in the 1870 census as an indicator of relative economic position, it was observed that 54.8% of teachers came from families that possessed real estate while only 15.4% of the city's families owned that form of property. Of the teachers in the sample, 70.4% had parents with personal property, as defined by the census, while the percentage for the population at large was only 35.0%.¹⁰ The disparity here is significant enough to suggest that, based upon this single criterion, teachers were drawn from relatively advantaged economic backgrounds.

An effort was made to substantiate the existence of economic and social advantages for young women entering the teaching profession by employing the vertical codes to reflect occupational structure conceived at the Philadelphia Social History Project.¹¹ These codes indicate the relative socioeconomic status of nineteenth-century work roles. Where the father's occupation was available for the sampled teachers, a vertical code was assigned to ascertain the relative position of the parents in the occupational hierarchy. It was assumed that the occupational variable would prove the most accurate indicator of family socioeconomic standing. Again, the findings establish the advantaged socioeconomic background of teachers, although the results are not as conclusive as they were when property was used as an indicator. Of the sampled teachers in 1870, 34.1% had fathers with white-collar occupations as compared with 23.4% of the total population. Only 11.4% of the sample had fathers who were unskilled workers compared with 27% of the total population in 1870.¹² A possible factor of distortion here is the older age structure of the teachers' fathers than the population at large with a higher percentage (11.4% to 2.1%) reporting no occupation.

¹⁰ It should be noted that teachers living apart from their parents were excluded from this analysis as the economic background of the family could not be determined.

¹¹ See Theodore Hershberg and Robert Dockhorn, "Occupational Classification," *Historical Methods Newsletter*, IX (March/June 1976), 59-77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

The central point here is that contrary to popular wisdom, the public school teachers of Philadelphia in 1870 came from socio-economic backgrounds discernibly higher than the norm. Indeed, this finding might have been expected in the context of Selwyn Troen's work on the correlation between family economic status and educational attainment in nineteenth-century St. Louis.¹³ Students who attained the educational levels needed to teach were generally from families with sufficient resources to obviate the need for children to terminate their education prematurely and enter the labor market. Why then did these women assume teaching positions upon the completion of their education if there was no economic obligation to do so? A suggestion might be that employment like boarding¹⁴ represented an expression of freedom from the strictures of family life and provided a welcome alternative to idleness in the home until marriage. For these women from upper socioeconomic strata, teaching represented the only employment opportunity offering intellectual challenges and stimulating responsibilities.

It may be instructive to look briefly at the residential patterns of teachers in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. The common pattern seemed to be for unmarried female teachers to maintain their residence with their families.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF TOTAL SAMPLE (153)

Living with 2 parents	43.8%
Living with 1 parent	31.4%
With sibling or other relative	14.4%
Boarding or living alone	10.5%

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, 113 TEACHERS

Living with 2 parents	48.7%
Living with 1 parent	29.2%
With sibling or other relative	10.6%
Boarding or living alone	11.5%

¹³ Selwyn Troen, "Popular Education in Nineteenth Century St. Louis," *History of Education Quarterly*, XIII (1973), 23-40.

¹⁴ See John Modell and Tamara Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXV (1973), 467-492.

It is interesting to note that principals, who were older and presumably more stable in employment and residence, were more likely to be separated from parents with 32.5% living with other relatives or alone. Teachers who had established a residence independent of parents were considerably older than the norm with a median age of thirty-five as opposed to twenty-four for the total sample. These educators living apart from their parents were more likely to reside with siblings than to board alone. Thus, it may be assumed that they were not inclined to attach themselves to what Modell and Hareven have termed a surrogate family.¹⁵ Residential independence from the family may have signified passage to a less transitional stage of life.

Married females were not teaching in the public schools of Philadelphia in 1870. While the employment of married women was not explicitly proscribed, the complete absence of married female teachers suggests an implicit regulation in this regard. This limitation of employment for married women is accountable to several factors. Nineteenth-century social custom justified the imposition of paternalistic personnel requirements upon women in the labor force. Moreover, nineteenth-century women seem to have voluntarily withdrawn from the world of work upon marriage. Claudia Goldin found that only 4% of Philadelphia's married women were gainfully employed in 1870, with these women largely belonging to households where the male head contributed little or nothing to the support of the family.¹⁶ It is likely that given the advantaged socio-economic background of the city's teachers, continued employment after marriage was not an economic necessity and teachers abandoned the profession to assume a more traditional social role.

A principal focus of educational concern during the post-Civil War period was the difficulty in recruiting and maintaining a quality teaching force. The primary requirement for teacher employment in Philadelphia was the successful completion of a certification examination that encompassed eleven major subject areas and was administered semiannually by the Committee on Qualifica-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Claudia Goldin, "Female Labor Force Participation: The Origin of Black and White Differences" (paper presented before the Economic History Association, 1976).

tion of Teachers. Until 1878, when two years of education at Girls Normal or Central High School were mandated for prospective teachers who had received their education in the city's public schools, educational requirements were limited and a grammar school experience sufficed. As early as 1863, the Committee on Qualification of Teachers proclaimed in its report that "all efforts to make teachers in Grammar Schools are of doubtful utility."¹⁷ Nonetheless, it was not until 1879 that two-thirds of the city's teachers had some normal school education.

An inadequate supply of trained teachers plagued Philadelphia's schoolmen during the post-Civil War period. M. Hall Stanton, President of the Board of Public Education, expressed concern in his *Annual Report* for 1870 "that in a few years the supply of competent teachers will fail to meet the demand and the consequent degeneracy of the schools will be an inevitable calamity."¹⁸ Despite the shortage of qualified candidates for teaching positions, the Board of Public Education retained stringent personnel regulations in certain areas. In all but one of the teacher examinations from 1860 to 1866, less than half of the eligible candidates were awarded certificates. In fact, no principal qualified for certification in 1866, which the Committee on Qualifications attributed to compensation insufficient to induce capable men to apply for such positions. Beside age and educational qualifications, the School Board also maintained a racial restriction in teacher employment policies. "No person of color" was permitted to assume a teaching post in a classroom intended for white children. Black teachers were to be given first priority for teaching posts in the colored schools of Philadelphia's segregated educational system.

The examination system for teacher selection did not immunize the nineteenth-century school district from the corrupting influences of Philadelphia politics. The first evidence of a political spoils system in teacher employment is found in the 1863 *Report* of the Committee on Qualification of Teachers which condemned "the practice of some school boards in placing their friends in positions

¹⁷ *Committee Report on Qualification of Teachers*, Board of Public Education, Philadelphia (1867).

¹⁸ *Annual Report of the Board of Public Education*, Philadelphia (1870), 18.

without experience or correct knowledge of the science of teaching."¹⁹ As the city's schools were divided for administrative purposes into ward-based units with local school boards, it is likely that political influence pervaded teacher selection throughout the post-Civil War period, although the controversy did not surface again until 1887. In that year, in his *Annual Report* to the Board, President Edward Steel decried the persistence of undue political control of teacher employment processes:

I am convinced that the practice which has sometimes been followed in selecting teachers for these schools has been a disadvantage to the city. It has suppressed, instead of bringing into prominence, the learning and skill which exists in our midst. Can it be assumed that the principal of a school or the Committee of the school has at command a knowledge of the most accomplished teacher obtainable, or can the personal or political friend of an applicant be relied upon to have investigated the entire field to satisfy himself that the person he recommends is in all respects the most capable? . . . The personal exercise of this appointing power is a form of patronage and the gratitude of the recipient is in proportion to his inability to obtain the place upon merit.²⁰

Steel's efforts to reassert a strict merit system were futile as ward political functionaries continued to influence teaching appointments into the twentieth century.²¹ The city's teachers, diminished in stature by insufficient education and extreme youthfulness, were further beleaguered by political involvement in the educational hiring process.

Inadequate compensation for nineteenth-century teachers was probably the most critical concern of educators during this period. Virtually every report of the Philadelphia Board of Public Education included an urgent plea for an upgrading of teacher salaries. Indeed, this problem was especially acute in Philadelphia. The Board of School Controllers reported in 1868 that Philadelphia had the lowest educational expenditure of the ten largest cities because of the

¹⁹ *Committee Report on Qualifications of Teachers*, Board of Public Education, Philadelphia (1863).

²⁰ *Annual Report of the Board of Public Education*, Philadelphia (1887), 15-16.

²¹ See Adele Marie Shaw, "The Public Schools of a Boss-Ridden City," *World's Work*, VII (1904), 4460-4466.

insufficiency of staff salaries.²² The median annual salary for sampled teachers in 1870 was \$432, with only principals receiving yearly wages of over \$500.

ANNUAL SALARY DISTRIBUTION FOR
TOTAL SAMPLE, 1870

Under \$400.....	27%
\$400-\$449.....	31%
\$450-\$499.....	22%
\$500-\$800.....	14%
Over \$800.....	6%

Salary schedules were determined according to rank and level of instruction. Thus, teachers in grammar and secondary schools received substantially better compensation than teachers in primary schools and principals received higher wages than lower ranking personnel. Salary schedules also reflected sexual differentiation with male principals of secondary schools receiving a yearly wage of \$1,200 while women in comparable positions received only \$540. A new rule in 1878 compounded the economic deprivation of female teachers by specifically making men ineligible for positions paying less than \$400 annually. A reform finalized in 1879 changed the basis for salary scales from rank and grade taught to length of experience, but failed to upgrade the relative economic position of Philadelphia's teachers. Figures released by the Board of Public Education in that year documented the dismal economic position of the city's teachers.

MEAN ANNUAL SALARY OF TEACHERS, 1879

Philadelphia.....	\$486.14
New York.....	\$814.17
Boston.....	\$978.35
Cincinnati.....	\$838.22
Chicago.....	\$700.00
Washington.....	\$654.00
San Francisco....	\$990.64

²² *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 11, 1868.

Edward Steel, in his *Annual Report* for 1879, deplored this state of affairs which placed the compensation for a Philadelphia teacher "not above a laborer's wages."²³ The widespread perception of schoolmen of this period was that a continuation of this pattern of insufficient remuneration would ultimately yield dire consequences for American education. This is best evidenced in Board President Stanton's somber assessment in 1872:

Not only are we guilty of an injustice in thus deprecating an office upon which we are dependent for so much, but that deprecation must, sooner or later, drag the office and those that hold it down to the level of low esteem in which they are held. . . . As the skilled teachers of the present generation disappear, the schools must languish for the want of suitable successors, and the shallow boast of cheapness will no longer be available from any point of view, for we shall, in that event, soon find that the article purchased will be dear at any price.²⁴

By the 1870s, public school teaching had been firmly established in Philadelphia as a woman's profession. In 1871, 1,505 out of 1,584 or 95% of the city's teachers were women. It is interesting to note that school districts in urbanized areas were in the vanguard of this movement toward feminization. According to occupational listings in the 1870 census records, 36.9% of Pennsylvania's teachers statewide were men in contrast to only 5% in the city of Philadelphia. While these census figures likely exaggerate the number of men in the public schools due to the preponderance of men as private venture teachers, the disparity is significant enough to warrant investigation of the differential impact of the urban environment upon teacher employment patterns. Possible explanations for the advanced state of feminization of the profession in cities are closely related to the conditions which caused the entrance of women into the teaching profession. Urban areas were particularly subject to teacher shortages due to rapidly expanding populations and increasing demands upon school facilities. Four thousand children were denied the right to enroll in Philadelphia's schools in 1868 for want of space and staff.²⁵ Thus, school districts with pressing manpower

²³ *Annual Report of the Board of Public Education*, Philadelphia (1879), 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (1872), 8.

²⁵ *Special Committee Report on Revision of Studies*, Board of Public Education, Philadelphia (1868).

shortages were unable to meet their needs with available male labor and were forced to admit qualified women to teaching ranks. Moreover, inadequate compensation precluded Philadelphia's Board of Public Education from obtaining the services of men with sufficient educational credentials. Philadelphia's complex urban economy offered many lucrative and prestigious alternatives to men who had an advanced education. The unavailability of such opportunities in rural areas may have induced men in other parts of the state to assume teaching roles.

While women occupied virtually all of Philadelphia's teaching positions during the post-Civil War era, there is evidence that the feminization of the profession was viewed with considerable skepticism by some of the city's leading schoolmen. In 1868, the appointment of Miss McManus to the principalship of Mount Vernon Boys Grammar School was blocked by the Board of School Controllers who feared that the presence of one woman at the helm of such a school would inevitably result in the appointment of women as principals at all of the boys grammar schools.²⁶ This concern was translated into a new personnel regulation adopted in 1872 which prohibited the election of a woman to the position of principal in a boys grammar school.

A more blatant manifestation of the growing disillusionment of the city's school authorities with the wholesale feminization of Philadelphia's teachers occurred in the late 1880s. Edward Steel, in his president's report for 1887, declared the small proportion of male teachers to be "the greatest weakness in the administration of the school department. . . . A corps of well-qualified male teachers is necessary to the success of a school system and hence this effort to secure certain positions to men. But if proper steps are taken to admit men of learning, character, and ability to the department, the place which should be filled by men will be secured to them."²⁷ Indeed, the accession of women to principalships and other school administrative posts had dismayed Philadelphia's prominent figures who retained a limited view of a woman's role. Their concern was doubtless exacerbated by the controversial appointments in 1883 of

²⁶ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 11, 1868.

²⁷ *Annual Report of the Board of Public Education, Philadelphia* (1887), 12-13.

two women, Lydia Kirby and May Haggenthorn, as Assistant Superintendents of Schools. The presence of women in positions of undisputed authority had upset the gentlemen of the Board of Public Education and a backlash against the feminization of teaching resulted. Steel's concern was amplified by Isaac Sheppard who succeeded Steel as President of the Board in 1889. He warned that "a woman, no matter how painstaking and conscientious will by reason of her natural limitations, teach from a woman's point of view. Women's methods of thought and illustration differ from those of men, and upon the larger boys, make less impression and are more easily forgotten when they come into the world. . . ." ²⁸ The reaction against female domination of the profession had little impact however. The establishment of public recognition of teaching as woman's work and the consequential low wage scales effectively prevented the re-entrance of substantial numbers of men into the profession until the twentieth century.

The high incidence of teacher turnover in the United States has long been perceived as a major problem affecting the quality of education in this country. Edward Steel lamented in his report for 1882 that "there is no other occupation in which nearly so many withdraw whose places are filled by new and inexperienced hands." ²⁹ Elsbree, writing in 1939, cited "the high degree of instability which has characterized public school teaching in America since its inception." ³⁰ While it was historically unavoidable that professions dominated by women had higher rates of employment turnover, the availability of census manuscripts and school department records permit a systematic exploration of teacher persistence and possible explanatory factors.

A rough estimate of the duration of employment for teachers in Philadelphia during this period may be derived by comparing the usual age of entrance into the profession with the median age of termination of teaching duties for sampled teachers in the 1870s and 1880s. The median age at the end of employment was thirty for teachers and forty-one for principals. Assuming eighteen to be

²⁸ *Ibid.* (1889), 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (1882), 13.

³⁰ Elsbree, 472.

the most common age at which a young woman began a teaching career in 1870, approximate average persistence rates of twelve years for teachers and twenty-three years for principals can be ascertained. While these figures still indicate considerable turnover, this may dispel the common impression that nineteenth-century school faculties were in a constant state of flux.

As 1870 was the year in which analysis of this sample from census manuscripts was initiated, rates of employment persistence from that date were established in relation to several demographic correlates.

PERSISTENCE FROM 1870—
113 TEACHERS

2 Year.....	85.0%
5 Year.....	67.3%
8 Year.....	54.9%
10 Year.....	47.8%
15 Year.....	31.0%
20 Year.....	21.2%

PERSISTENCE FROM 1870—
40 PRINCIPALS

2 Year.....	92.5%
5 Year.....	82.5%
8 Year.....	72.5%
10 Year.....	72.5%
15 Year.....	52.5%
20 Year.....	27.5%

Despite the fact that principals were generally older than teachers in 1870, they have considerably higher persistence rates at each stage of the twenty-year analysis extending to 1890. The implication is that professional status was a motivating factor in producing relative commitment to the profession. Once the role of principal was attained, teachers may have stabilized their career plans and rejected alternatives to continued educational service. Alternatively, principals who tended to be older than the teachers in this sample may have involuntarily resigned themselves to continued employment having passed the prime ages for marriage.

PERSISTENCE OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS BY AGE

Under 21 (35)	21-25 (54)	Over 25 (64)
2 Year..... 80.0%	2 Year..... 85.2%	2 Year..... 92.2%
5 Year..... 68.6%	5 Year..... 66.7%	5 Year..... 76.6%
8 Year..... 48.6%	8 Year..... 57.4%	8 Year..... 67.2%
10 Year..... 45.7%	10 Year..... 48.1%	10 Year..... 64.1%
15 Year..... 31.4%	15 Year..... 35.2%	15 Year..... 40.6%
20 Year..... 28.6%	20 Year..... 20.3%	20 Year..... 21.9%

As might be expected, teachers in the older age bracket in 1870 were more likely to remain in the profession at each interval until twenty years had elapsed in 1890. It may be assumed that some teachers in the older age group had reached a natural retirement age or died by 1890. The differential persistence rates may again be explained by the greater likelihood that younger teachers would terminate their employment to marry. To substantiate the reliability of this expectation that marriage would motivate the resignation of teachers, an effort was made to link teachers in the sample who terminated their employment in the 1870s with Philadelphia marriage registration data from the same period. While only twenty-five such teachers were located, 84% had married within two years of leaving the teaching profession. It thus seems plausible to assume that the professional commitment of nineteenth-century teachers in Philadelphia as measured by their employment persistence was directly related to their expectation of marriageability.

Other teacher characteristics which seemed to be of lesser importance in accounting for employment persistence were the teacher's household composition and educational level.

PERSISTENCE FROM 1870 BY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Lives with 1 or 2 parents (115)	With sibling or alone (38)
2 Year..... 87.0%	2 Year..... 86.8%
5 Year..... 71.3%	5 Year..... 71.1%
8 Year..... 58.3%	8 Year..... 63.2%
10 Year..... 53.0%	10 Year..... 57.9%
15 Year..... 34.8%	15 Year..... 42.1%
20 Year..... 23.5%	20 Year..... 21.1%

PERSISTENCE BY EDUCATION

Attended Normal (67)	Did not attend (86)
2 Year..... 85.1%	2 Year..... 88.4%
5 Year..... 73.1%	5 Year..... 69.8%
8 Year..... 64.2%	8 Year..... 55.8%
10 Year.. 58.2%	10 Year..... 51.1%
15 Year..... 42.0%	15 Year..... 32.5%
20 Year..... 31.3%	20 Year..... 16.2%

Teachers living with parents were somewhat less likely to persist at least eight years than those living apart from parents. This might reflect the greater life stability of teachers who had established independent homes or may simply be a function of the somewhat older age composition of that group. The enhanced tendency of teachers who attended Girls Normal School to manifest long-term employment may be accounted for by two factors. The motivation to pursue a normal school education might indicate an early disposition toward strong professional affiliation, or the higher level of education might have produced a greater number of principals among the group that attended Girls Normal School and a concomitant rise in persistence.

It is now possible to construct a composite portrait of the nineteenth-century teacher. The prototypical Philadelphia pedagogue in 1870 was a white female of native stock under twenty-five years of age who came from comfortable economic circumstances and continued to live with parents while employed as a teacher. She taught for twelve years at an annual salary of less than \$450 and terminated her employment due to the lure of matrimony.

While this information may certainly be discarded as an addition to the file of curiosities unearthed by researchers in social history, it may also have some significance in suggesting an altered perspective from which to view the current American crisis in education. For even in these early years of American public schooling, the organizational characteristics which impelled Amitai Etzioni to label contemporary teaching as a semiprofession³¹ are readily apparent. Etzioni's contention that teachers have less specialized knowledge, a lower level of popularly-legitimated status, and a shorter duration of training would be equally justifiable when applied to the state of the profession in 1870. Indeed, the structural characteristics which condemned public school teaching to a stature markedly inferior to that of professions like medicine and law were well established by 1870. Such problems as inadequate compensation, low employment persistence, an immature teaching population, and sexist attacks on the process of feminization degraded the public image of the profession. The result has been a persistent problem in

³¹ See Amitai Etzioni, *Semi Professions and their Organization* (New York, 1969).

the recruitment of public school teachers who manifest sufficient intellectual ability and professional commitment. It is not idle speculation to suggest that the tradition of American pedagogy could be much prouder had low remuneration levels not compelled the expedient feminization of the profession and the consequent pattern of professional instability.

Even in the wake of important studies by James Coleman and Christopher Jencks which have shaken the traditional American faith in education as an instrument of social mobility,³² the importance of quality teaching remains undiminished. Indeed, an extraordinary new piece of research by Eigil Pederson and Therese Annette Faucher of McGill University suggests that the impact of a talented first-grade teacher may persist into adulthood and promote enhanced socioeconomic status.³³ Even Coleman found a measure of teachers' verbal ability to correlate most significantly with student achievement. While teaching quality may be an abstract concept offering few opportunities for empirical verification, the talent of the pedagogue remains the most fundamental component of the educational process.

The policy implications of all this are clear. School reformers must turn their attention from structural changes, such as curricular alteration and modification in the physical environment, and address themselves to the nettlesome issue of teacher quality. Reform efforts must break the traditional patterns of limited professional stature, low wage structures, and inadequate professional commitment.

University of Pennsylvania

RICHARD B. FISHBANE

³² James Coleman, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, 1966); Christopher Jencks, *Inequality* (New York, 1972).

³³ Eigil Pederson and Therese Annette Faucher, "A New Perspective on the Effects of First Grade Teachers on Subsequent Adult Status," *Harvard Educational Review*, XLVIII (1978), 1-31.