

# THE NEW MASCULINIZATION OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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*Le mouvement de féminisation dans le domaine de l'enseignement au niveau élémentaire durant les 1870 a pris une direction contraire vers la masculinisation au début des années 1970. Une enseignante s'inquiète de ce changement.*

*'Women work because they have to. This isn't an alfalfa-sprout eating, liberal middle class women's libber issue, it's a bread and butter issue.'*

Jane Fonda, 1979

Some startling new information contained in a working paper to the 1978 Commission on Declining School Enrolments in Ontario entitled *The Implications of Declining Enrolment for Women Teachers in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ontario* indicates that women teachers are declining in number while men teachers are increasing. In 1972-73 women made up 52 per cent of all teachers providing instruction in kindergarten to grade thirteen classrooms in Ontario. By 1976-77 women comprised only 49 per cent of this group. Teaching, once considered the only socially appropriate professional choice available to women other than nursing, is no longer a predominantly female profession.

This trend toward the masculinization of the teaching profession has emerged during a period marked by budget constraints and declining enrolment in Ontario schools. It is a particularly alarming trend at this time because the status of women in many sectors of the labour force is getting worse—not better. Women, who already earn approximately 40 per cent less than men on average in Canada, are currently suffering from an increase in this earnings gap. A trend toward increased clustering of women into a few occupational groups where salaries are generally low (such as clerical and sales) may be contributing to the fact that the difference between men and women is growing. In addition, more women in Ontario are unemployed and seeking work than men. The implication for individual women who are unemployed and can no longer gain access to the teaching profession is one of downward mobility. The implication for women at large is an increase in inequality based on sex at a time when equal opportunity is being encouraged by provincial and federal governments.

Teaching has been one of the few professions in which women have been able to participate in large numbers and receive equal remuneration with men on the basis of experience and qualifications. Surveys of various professions done by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labour and published in *Women In The Labour Force: Facts and Figures, 1973* indicate that men are more than 90 per cent of doctors, dentists, engineers, chartered accountants and lawyers and somewhat more than 75 per cent of university teachers. Nursing, social work and teaching (particularly elementary teaching) have been the few fields in which women have found opportunities to exercise competence at the professional level

and to receive relatively good salaries in return.

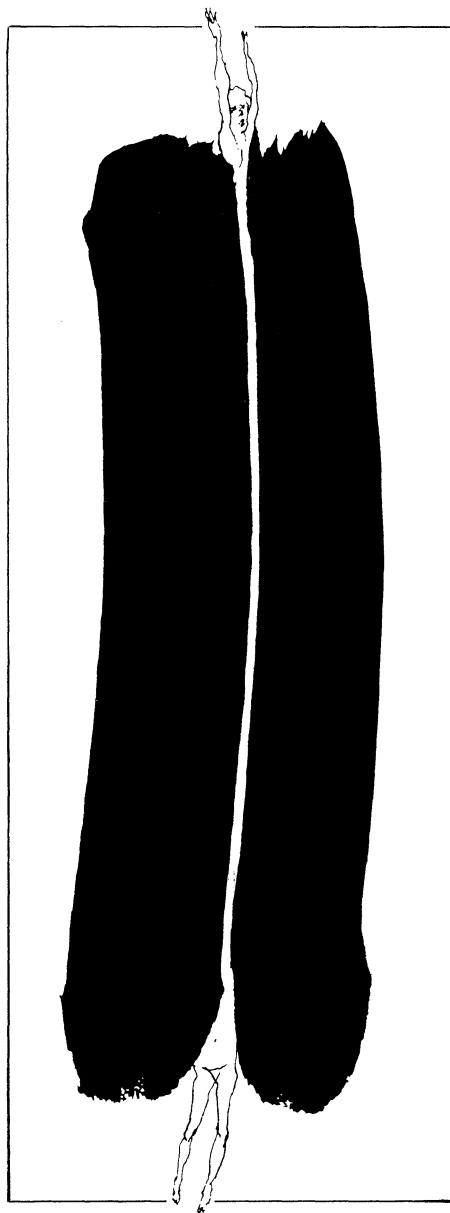
Elementary teaching has been viewed as specifically fitting for women. What was the historical basis for the large-scale acceptance of women teachers in Ontario's elementary schools and why are women losing this position today? Numerically women have dominated the elementary teaching profession in Ontario since 1871, when parsimonious school boards of the day realized that women teachers could be counted on to do an equal job in the classroom while being paid half the salary demanded by men. They also were thought to be particularly suited to teaching young children. This salary inequity continued until 1951, when women in Ontario won the legal right to equal pay for equal work. The Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario had been pressing for this legislation for many years and it was finally granted to women (and to women teachers especially) in recognition of the tremendous support women had given to the war effort.

Men, encouraged by competitive teaching salaries and lacking opportunities in other fields, have been actively competing with women for elementary teaching positions since the beginning of the Seventies. The result is that women's share of the elementary teaching profession in Ontario has been declining steadily. The feminization of the elementary teaching force which occurred in the 1870s is being reversed by a new trend toward masculinization begun in the 1970s.

Another disturbing feature is the trend to return to classroom teaching assignments which reflect traditional sex roles. Specifically, women who comprised 56.1 per cent of teachers who taught in grades 4 to 8 in Ontario in 1972 represented only 51.5 per cent of this group by 1976. It seems that men teachers are increasingly likely to be teaching in the junior and senior grades whereas women teachers are increasingly likely to be teaching in the primary division.

What of the status of women in educational administration? Have new attitudes and Affirmative Action programs supporting promotion of women on an equal basis with men resulted in any visible gains for women across the province? There is a clear trend toward decreasing promotional opportunity for elementary teachers—but this trend is most marked for women. Whereas 8.2 per cent of elementary public school principals were women in 1972, only 6.9 per cent of elementary principals were female by 1976. Women also experienced a 5 per cent de-

cline in their share of other administrative positions (department head, assistant department head and chairpersons) during this period. Only one instance of a change toward increasing equity can be noted—women have increased as a proportion of vice-principals. In 1972, 134 women held vice-principal positions—11 percent of the total. It is difficult to assess how many of the vice-principal positions acquired by women have come about as a result of



promotion and how many may be associated with the decline in principal positions held by women.

The trend toward an increasing number of men in the elementary panel is not balanced by a trend toward an increasing number of women in the secondary panel. Data contained in the report indicates that women who comprised as little as 36.6 per cent of all classroom teachers in

secondary schools in 1972 represented only 34.4 per cent of this group by 1976.

Ideally, it would be desirable to have women and men represented equally in all sectors of education and in all professions. Secondary school students would benefit from having women teachers increasingly visible in the schools as role models demonstrating female competence at the professional level. The trend toward masculinization of the elementary teaching force cannot be rationalized on the basis of increasing sexual equality in the educational system at large because it is not balanced by a parallel movement of women into secondary school teaching positions.

There is no doubt that women are bearing the brunt of declining enrolment and budget constraints. This has been brought about by a historical process which has allowed women and men to be placed unequally within the teaching profession. As men are more likely to hold positions of responsibility they are generally better able to defend their right to retain their jobs during a time of crisis. And the greater ability of men to retain their occupational status may result in the implementation of practices which discriminate against women. (For example, many school boards do not give job seniority credit for maternity leaves, yet teaching positions are retained on the basis of seniority when school enrolments decline.)

We should not restrict our efforts to the elimination of specific instances of discrimination in working to allow women to maintain their jobs on the same basis as men. We must grapple with the pervasive structure of inequality which exists between the sexes in the educational system and in society at large. Toward this end Rosabeth Moss Kanter offers a structural analysis of inequality as it exists within the corporate world in her book *Men and Women of the Corporation*. She notes that policies which enhance opportunities, empower individuals and balance the numbers of socially different kinds of people at all job levels are most likely to lead to a reduction in inequality based on sex. I suggest that a similar analysis of the teaching profession might lead to similar conclusions. Analyses and solutions based on principles of structural inequality must be further accompanied by Affirmative Action programs which are upheld by contract compliance legislation. This may be a lengthy and arduous route but I believe it is an essential one if women are to retain and perhaps improve their status within the teaching profession during the 1980s.