

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING AS A PROFESSION FOR WOMEN BEFORE 1870\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article argues that the development of teaching as a profession for women in England has often been written using an anachronistic and gendered conception of the term ‘profession’. A closer examination of the work of middle-class schoolmistresses in the first part of the nineteenth century reveals that the image of the amateurish governess was in part a fiction, which concealed the commitment and expertise of many women teachers. The mid-century reformers drew on this earlier tradition of feminine pedagogy and did not simply adopt the standards of boys’ education and their male peers. On the contrary, they contributed to the ongoing process by which teachers of both sexes sought to claim the status and authority of the ‘learned professions’. However, by the 1870s, the pressure to conform to the dominant model in boys’ education meant that this independent strand in education had largely been eclipsed.*

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### I

The history of girls’ secondary education in the nineteenth century has usually been written as a story of reform and professionalization; the schools of the first half of the century being characterized, in the words of one historian, as ‘a rash of small incompetent boarding-schools’.<sup>1</sup> Joyce Pedersen has contrasted the amateurish ‘lady-proprietors’ of the first half of the century with the ‘Head Mistresses’ of the period after 1860. These women were professional educators who had forced their way into the male academic institutions and modelled themselves on the headmasters of public schools.<sup>2</sup> However, in telling this story, Pedersen and others have presented an incomplete, even distorted, picture of the history of women’s education. The 1851 census counted 67,551 women teachers of all types; their numerical importance alone would seem to justify

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<sup>1</sup> Josephine Kamm, *Hope deferred: girls’ education in English history* (London, 1965), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Joyce Senders Pedersen, *The reform of girls’ secondary education in Victorian England: a study of elites and educational change* (New York, 1987), pp. 63–171; idem., ‘Schoolmistresses and head mistresses: elites and education in nineteenth century England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 1 (1975), pp. 196–282.

closer examination of the contribution of these women to the development of the teaching profession.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many middle-class schoolmistresses in the early part of the century viewed their work as ‘not merely drudgery for bread’.<sup>4</sup> They developed a conception of their role to which the later ‘professional’ headmistresses owed much. Working with a gendered and anachronistic understanding of the term ‘profession’, historians like Pedersen have overlooked the ways in which women teachers contributed to the development of teaching as a professional occupation.

It has been said that a ‘taxonomic quagmire’ surrounds the word ‘profession’ in history and sociology.<sup>5</sup> Penelope Corfield has traced the ways in which the status of the ‘learned professions’ – medicine, the law, and the clergy – rose in the eighteenth century. As increasing specialization demanded the mastery of a more inaccessible body of knowledge, the sense of mystery that surrounded these occupations contributed to their growing prestige. Contemporaneously, a new importance was attributed to the idea of ‘vocation’ for a profession as those who adopted them entered a hierarchical system of promotion and advance. In the nineteenth century, as members of new occupations sought to claim equality of status with the traditional professions, the meaning of the term gradually expanded.<sup>6</sup> By using the term ‘profession’ to describe their work, they were aspiring to the prestige, the ideals of autonomy and independence, and the intellectual clout attributed to the ‘learned professions’. The importance of training, examination, and certification in these occupations complemented the new ideal of employment on the basis of merit, which was gradually replacing patronage-based recruitment, and the professions came to be seen as embodying this ideal. Gillian Sutherland has shown how professionalization was perceived as a moral project, with the professional middle classes presented as the harbingers of a new standard of virtue.<sup>7</sup> The term ‘profession’ was never simply descriptive. It conferred prestige and suggested moral superiority, intellectual ability, modernity, and efficiency.

Historians of women’s work have tended to present the history of women in the professions as a story of exclusion and later triumphant entry. Margaret Rossiter goes further than most in arguing that professionalization was a mechanism developed to exclude women. She sees the process by which science became an academic discipline in the United States as specifically designed to

<sup>3</sup> Figures from Penelope Corfield, *Power and the professions in Britain* (London, 1995), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Jemima Clough, Paper for the North of England Council for the Promotion of Higher Education for Women, 1868, quoted in Blanche Athena Clough, *A memoir of Anne Jemima Clough* (London, 1897), p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> S. E. D. Shortt, ‘Physicians, science and status: issues in the professionalisation of Anglo-American medicine in the nineteenth century’, *Medical History*, 27 (1983), pp. 51–86, quoted in Mary Kinnear, *In subordination: professional women, 1870–1970* (London, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Corfield, *Power and the professions*, pp. 18–37.

<sup>7</sup> Gillian Sutherland, ‘Examinations and the construction of professional identity: a case-study of England, 1800–1950’, *Assessment in Education*, 8 (2001), pp. 51–64.

halt the ‘feminization of America’.<sup>8</sup> Dina Copelman has suggested that interaction between ideals of masculinity and ideals of professionalism made it particularly difficult for women to enter professional occupations.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, Penelope Corfield sees these occupations as especially vulnerable to campaigns to extend employment opportunities for women. She contends that the meritocratic ideal of the professions ‘proved the Trojan horse that admitted the claims of able women’.<sup>10</sup>

Recently, however, sociologists have called into question the traditional historical and sociological analysis of the professions. Magali Larson and Ralf Torstendahl have shown that the study of the professions has been based on an ideal-type model that simply reproduces the ways in which late nineteenth-century professional men sought to define themselves. They have called for an analysis that is more alert to the processes by which certain occupations identified themselves as professional, and emphasize that professionalization should be seen as a historically situated project rather than a fixed model.<sup>11</sup> This calls into question the idea of women storming, or slipping into, the professional citadel. It poses a challenge to the masculine/feminine, professional/amateur dichotomies implicit in the history of women’s education as told by Joyce Pedersen and others. Evidence gleaned from correspondence, biographies, and the records of training colleges and educational associations suggests that women teachers did not simply adopt an existing model of educational professionalism. On the contrary, they were deeply implicated in the development of teaching as a profession for women and helped shape the way it evolved as an occupation for men. In this, they drew on a pre-existing tradition of commitment to teacher training and pedagogical experimentation, which has previously been overlooked.

## II

The idea that schoolmistresses and governesses were ‘the children of affluent parents, who brought them up with every indulgence or preferment that wealth could bestow’, but who were suddenly thrown into teaching by ‘a sudden loss of fortune, a failure in business or death’, recurs frequently in nineteenth-century fiction and writing about women.<sup>12</sup> Teaching, as an

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Rossiter, *Women scientists in America: struggles and strategies to 1940* (London, 1982), p. xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Dina Copelman, *London’s women teachers: gender, class and feminism, 1870–1930* (London, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Corfield, *Power and the professions*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Magali Larson, *The rise of the professions, a sociological analysis* (Berkeley, 1977); Ralf Torstendahl, ‘Essential properties, strategic aims and historical development: three approaches to theories of professionalization’, in Michael Burrage and Ralf Torstendahl, eds., *Professions in theory and history: rethinking the study of the professions* (London, 1990), pp. 44–8.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Maurice, *Mothers and governesses* (London, 1847), p. 18. The term ‘governess’ was commonly used interchangeably with ‘schoolmistress’ before the 1870s. It seems to have been used to distinguish lady teachers from elementary teachers, rather than to refer to the location in which

extension of the maternal role, could be reconciled with a prevailing ideology of domesticity, and was considered the only way a middle-class woman could provide for herself without losing caste. Historians have often been too ready to accept this image of the reluctant genteel governess without question. This is in part due to the ubiquity and longevity of the stereotype, most memorably embodied by Miss Pinkerton and her academy, and reinforced by the judgements of the mid-century government commissions, as is suggested below.<sup>13</sup> But it also derives from the difficulty of assembling sufficient information about a large and disparate group of teachers, whose establishments, being run for private profit and frequently not outlasting a generation, are hard to trace. The interesting question of why the image of the ‘reduced gentlewoman’ and her superficial seminary proved so powerful can only be touched upon here; however, it has been possible to examine the experience of a fairly large group of teachers. By drawing on evidence gleaned from correspondence, memoirs, and biographies, the careers of eighty-three schoolmistresses born between about 1780 and 1860 have been compared.<sup>14</sup> The variable quality of the evidence available and the necessarily serendipitous process by which it was collected mean that the eighty-three women in the study cannot be regarded as a representative sample; however, the collective study of their lives does make it possible to identify certain trends and to avoid classifying common experiences as exceptional.

Examining the lives of these women reveals that, despite the currency of the idea of the ‘reduced gentlewoman’, many schoolmistresses were, to use the contemporary phrase, ‘educated for a governess’. This expression recurs frequently in the letters of application for assistance from the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution (GBI) and the upbringing of a significant number of the schoolmistresses in the sample had clearly been shaped by the same aim.<sup>15</sup> Thirty-two (68 per cent) of the forty-seven teachers whose early lives are described in some detail had lost their father, or seen him experience financial difficulties, before the age of fifteen. These girls would have known that they would have to provide for themselves if they did not marry. The upbringing of thirty-three of the teachers in the study is explicitly recorded as having been determined by the expectation that they would become teachers. Moreover, six are known to have become teachers from a sense of vocation, and five more declined offers of marriage, usually expressing their commitment to their work as one reason for their refusal.

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they worked. Thus *Hints to a young governess on beginning a school*, published anonymously in 1857, was intended as a guide for prospective boarding-school mistresses. <sup>13</sup> See p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> The study was based on an examination of the lives of women identified as proprietors of, or teachers in, schools for the middle class in Olive Banks, *Biographical dictionary of British feminists, 1800–1930* (Brighton, 1985); Peter Bell, *Victorian women: an index to biographies and memoirs* (London, 1989); and Barbara Kanner, *Women in English Society, II: Autobiographical writings* (New York, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Governesses’ Benevolent Institution (GBI), *Reports of the committee of management, 1847–1849* (London, 1847, 1848, 1849).

Professional men, including members of the newer professions such as engineering, were the largest occupational group amongst the fathers of the schoolmistresses in the study; thus of the sixty-eight women for whom the information is available, 57 per cent were the daughters of professional men. It would seem that the image of the lady who became a teacher after a sudden change in her personal circumstances was in part a fiction that usefully concealed the actual situation of the daughters of many impecunious professional men, who always expected to have to teach if they did not marry. The fiction that all governesses were lady amateurs had to be maintained in order to support an ideal of femininity centring on marriage and motherhood, and to bolster a notion of masculinity predicated on men's ability to provide for their families. In fact many professional families fell short of maintaining these ideals in practice. When one examines the lives of schoolmistresses like Elizabeth and Ellen Sewell (whose father was an unsuccessful solicitor), it becomes clear that just as considerable effort was put into preparing sons for a professional career, attempts were made to prepare daughters for educational work. Whilst their brothers were educated at Winchester and Oxford in the expectation that they would adopt a profession, Ellen and Elizabeth were sent to boarding school in Bath 'for the advantage of the masters'.<sup>16</sup> When they opened a school in 1852, their efforts were supported by their male siblings, three of whom were fellows of Oxford Colleges, and one of whom went on to establish a public school for boys. The second generation of Sewell daughters were for the most part educated at their aunts' school and two later became teachers, as did three of the third generation. The men of the family continued to be prominent in the universities and public schools. The example of the Sewell family gives a clear indication that educating daughters could be part of a family strategy to prepare children of both sexes for a future where financial security could not be guaranteed, and also points to the supportive environment in which some schoolmistresses worked.

Susan Skedd has suggested that it seems paradoxical that boarding schools for girls were multiplying during the Georgian period, when Evangelical ideals of domestic femininity were gaining currency.<sup>17</sup> However, these ideals were not necessarily, as Skedd assumes, an obstacle to the expansion of schooling for girls. On the contrary, especially in the early years of the century, ideas about the religious mission of women strengthened the conviction of teachers like Jane Gardiner that their work was important and necessary. She saw her role as 'to teach goodness' and rose everyday at 5 a.m. in order to study as preparation for her task of sending forth 'solidly educated Christian women'.<sup>18</sup> In the eyes of Sarah Ellis, best known as the author of *The women of England*, but also a

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, *Autobiography of Elizabeth Missing Sewell* (London, 1907), p. 24. Biographical information about other members of the Sewell dynasty is taken from Montague Owen, *The Sewells of the Isle of Wight* (Manchester, 1906).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Skedd, 'Women teachers and the expansion of girls' schooling in England, c. 1760–1820', in Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds., *Gender in eighteenth century England* (London, 1997), p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> Everilda Gardiner, *Recollections of a beloved mother* (London, 1842), pp. 4, 28.

successful schoolmistress, ‘a woman of cultivated understanding and correct religious principle, when engaged in educating the rising generation, in reality fills one of the most responsible stations to which a human being can aspire’.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Hannah More’s claim that ‘the profession of ladies ... is that of daughters, wives, mothers and mistresses of families’ emphasized the importance of women’s work and placed it on par with male occupations.<sup>20</sup> She argued that the best way to prepare women for this role was a rational intellectual education; a view reiterated by many teachers, including Hannah Pipe, a London schoolmistress of the 1850s. At her school, Hannah Pipe concentrated on ‘training those powers of the mind and heart that fit a woman for the thoughtful and intelligent performance of her duties in life’, though she did not question that those duties were to be performed in the home.<sup>21</sup> Schoolmistresses, usually unmarried, childless, and providing for themselves, could only adopt the ideals of feminine domesticity with a certain degree of ambiguity. Emphasizing the private and domestic nature of their establishments was a way of reconciling their work with domestic notions of femininity. Many of the eighty-three schoolmistresses in the study consciously restricted the number of pupils they would take and sought to compare their institutions to a family or home. Sarah Bennet, mistress of a school in Melton Mowbray in the 1830s, claimed that her pupils ‘enjoyed the advantages of home and school united’.<sup>22</sup> The Sewells were ‘indignant if “Ashcliff” [the name of their establishment] was called a school. It was a family home.’<sup>23</sup> Others self-consciously ‘mothered’ their pupils, cultivating warm personal relationships with them and staying in touch long after the girls had left school. In a culture where it was assumed that women and girls were naturally domestic, it was clearly in the interest of schoolmistresses to present themselves as maternal figures and their schools as ‘another home’. However, we should be wary of inferring from this that the intellectual education they offered was necessarily poor. The quality of the education provided at Hannah Pipe’s school is proven by the fact that her pupils were amongst the first students at Girton and Newnham. Moreover, in many cases, women teachers made a virtue of this necessity and developed an innovative pedagogical approach. Louisa Carbutt, who opened a school in Knutsford in the 1860s, noted that ‘we tried to have as few rules as possible and to make our school a home’. Having studied progressive pedagogical theory, she emphasized the importance of giving individual attention to each girl and refused to admit more pupils than she could educate in this way.<sup>24</sup> A number of schoolmistresses were thus elaborating

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Ellis, *The women of England: their social duties and domestic habits* (London, 1839), p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the modern system of female education* (facsimile edn, New York, 1974), p. 97. <sup>21</sup> Anna Stoddart, *The life and letters of Hannah E. Pipe* (Edinburgh, 1908), p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Sarah Bennet to a parent, quoted in G. R. Bennet, *The Christian governess: a memoir and selection from the correspondence of Miss Sarah Bennet* (London, 1862), p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Mrs Hugh Fraser, *A diplomatist's wife in many lands* (2 vols., London, 1910), 1, p. 223.

<sup>24</sup> W. H. Herford, ed., *In memoriam: Louisa Carbutt and Brook House, 1860–1870* (Manchester, 1907), p. 45.

a ‘domestic model’ of girls’ education, inspired both by contemporary ideals of femininity and by notions of child-centred learning, then prevalent in much continental educational thinking.

### III

The role and status of the teacher were undergoing a profound change at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The elaboration of a new ideal of liberal education, drawing on faculty psychology, meant that increasingly, ‘the teacher was important for scientific reasons. Only he disciplined minds; only he could determine which faculties needed strengthening, and, consequently, which programme of study best suited the student’.<sup>25</sup> It might be assumed that this movement would not have affected women teachers, since they were excluded from the public schools and universities where these ideas were being voiced. However, many schoolmistresses were claiming a new authority and affirming their expertise in educational matters. In the 1820s Elizabeth Pendered and Frances Broadhurst both published treatises defending school instruction. They claimed that women teachers, who could devote their lives to teaching, were best placed to take charge of the education of girls.<sup>26</sup> Other schoolmistresses showed a clear interest in discussing educational matters. In the first decade of the century, the Birmingham schoolmistress Sarah Bache and her stepsister Anna Penn exchanged letters discussing their reading of Locke.<sup>27</sup> Helen Higginson, who kept a school in Derby before her marriage to James Martineau, used conversations and correspondence with a fellow teacher to discuss teaching methods and her reading of various pedagogical texts. These included not only works by Mrs Barbauld, but also the educational treatises of Hartley and Lant Carpenter.<sup>28</sup> To justify writing long letters explaining her educational theories and discussing her pupils, she argued that the influence she had over her pupils gave ‘a dignity to even our homely endeavours and an importance to our occupations’.<sup>29</sup>

That women teachers, like their male counterparts, were claiming a new authority, based on their understanding of the science of education, is evident from the growing number of educational works published by women in this period. A number of the schoolmistresses in the study contributed to this genre. For example, in 1808, Jane Gardiner published *English grammar adapted to different classes of learners*, which went through three editions. Whilst echoing traditional themes in emphasizing the importance of religious and moral education, many of these treatises and textbooks offered practical advice on

<sup>25</sup> Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and change in English liberal education* (London, 1976), p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> [A. E. Pendered], *Remarks on female education, adapted particularly to the regulation of schools* (London, 1823), p. 10; Frances Broadhurst, *A word in favour of female schools* (London, 1826), pp. 10–15.

<sup>27</sup> Letters quoted in A. Matthews, *Life of Sarah Bache* (London, 1900).

<sup>28</sup> Helen Higginson to Edward Higginson, Oct. 1823–Feb. 1826, Oxford, Harris Manchester College (HMC), Martineau Papers, J. Martineau 8, fos. 3–116.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Higginson to Edward Higginson, Derby, 1 Feb. 1826, HMC, J. Martineau 8, fo. 53.



devising curricula and timetables, on methods of teaching and awarding merit. Several showed an understanding of the importance of tailoring methods to children's abilities and interests that seems progressive when compared to the mechanical style of much of the teaching then available in boys' schools.<sup>30</sup> Sarah Jolly's *Thoughts on the vocation and profession of the teacher* (1854) underlined that the schoolmistress's role was 'strictly intellectual, calling imperatively for the cultivation of all the faculties' and called on teachers to study their pupils in order to understand the process of learning.<sup>31</sup>

These publications and the developing teachers' press, reveal the keen interest of many schoolmistresses in the innovative pedagogical theories that were being elaborated on the continent. Journals like *The Governess* discussed Pestalozzi's ideas of child-centred learning and Jacotot's theories of learning by association. When compared to the resistance to change in many boys' schools, this suggests that though male educationists may have had a more powerful public voice, in practice, it was often in schools for girls that many of the new theories were being tested.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, an article on the evolution of ideas about infant education stressed that though the work of David Stow was important in this area, the contribution of women should be recognized.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, women teachers were not only drawing on ideals of feminine domesticity to express the importance of their work and their commitment to it, they were also participating in the construction of education as a discipline.

A corollary was the growing importance schoolmistresses attached to undergoing some form of specialized training. Evidence from the lives of the schoolmistresses in the study suggests that many self-consciously sought some kind of preparation for their work. This could take a number of different forms – attendance at public lectures, self-imposed courses of study, working as a Sunday school teacher or pupil teacher, or a period as an assistant in France. In the 1820s a number of schoolmistresses in the study, including Mary Carpenter and her sister, travelled to France, 'by way of further qualifying themselves' for school teaching.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, some schoolmistresses, like Frances Goodacre, brought back from France an enthusiasm for the system of training, examination, and certification of women teachers which had been established in Paris as early as 1810.<sup>35</sup>

Another method by which middle-class schoolmistresses obtained training is particularly surprising given the historiographical emphasis on the social divide between elementary and secondary or middle-class education. A small, but none the less significant, number of middle-class women were attending the

<sup>30</sup> See for example S. F. Ridout, *Letters to a young governess on the principles of education* (London, 1838), and *Hints to a young governess on beginning a school* (London, 1857).

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Jolly, *Thoughts on the vocation and profession of the teacher* (London, 1854), p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> On the pedagogy of boys' schools see John Roach, *A history of secondary education in England, 1800–1870* (London, 1986), p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> *The Governess: A Repertory of Female Education*, 1 (July 1855), p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> James Estlin Carpenter, *Life and work of Mary Carpenter* (London, 1879), p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Educational Times*, 1 (1 Dec. 1847), p. 47.



elementary training colleges. Of 270 applicants to the British and Foreign Schools Society's Borough Road College between 1830 and 1850, 34 (13 per cent) were clearly boarding-schoolmistresses and private governesses.<sup>36</sup> These women usually specified that they did not intend to seek places in the schools of the society, but wished, like Sarah Harridge, an applicant in 1834, to 'receive more training ... and thus better discharge her duties'.<sup>37</sup> Evidence from the records of the British and Foreign Schools Society suggests that it was not uncommon for boarding-school proprietors to recruit their teachers from these establishments.<sup>38</sup> In the 1840s, the expansion of elementary schooling through the work of the religious associations, and the grant of government funds to sponsor this expansion, meant that a network of publicly funded elementary training colleges began to materialize in England. By 1864, there were eighteen government-funded colleges open to women in England. It would appear that the new colleges were also frequented by middle-class women, though as many of the early registers of these institutions have not survived, this is difficult to quantify. Significantly, however, in 1850, a report on Whitelands College, a training college of the National Society, mentioned that the institution had been criticized for educating governesses.<sup>39</sup>

One student at the Borough Road College was Anne Clough, who went on to become the first principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, having first taught in her own school for middle-class girls. Her interest in education led her to pursue her training in a second establishment, the Home and Colonial School Society Institution, founded in 1836. This institution was intended to train teachers, particularly infant-school teachers, on principles derived from Pestalozzi. It was a progressive establishment, which in the 1850s contributed to diffusing the ideas of the German Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the Kindergarten movement to whom contemporary ideas of child-centred education owe much. Anne Clough found its methods inspiring and felt that 'from their lessons the children would acquire a greater love for information'.<sup>40</sup> When she needed an assistant for her own school, she recruited Selina Healey from the Institution.<sup>41</sup> Four of the eighty-three teachers in the study attended

<sup>36</sup> The sample was based on letters of application in three randomly selected periods, 1830–4, 1840–2, 1849–50; Applications and testimonials to Borough Road College, 1817–58, London, British and Foreign Schools Archive Centre (BFS), Applications to Borough Road College, 4, 437–49.

<sup>37</sup> S. Thoroughgood to the Ladies' Committee of Borough Road College, Feb. 1834, BFS, Applications and testimonials to Borough Road College, 4, 438.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Mrs Balmain's letter to the principal of Stockwell College, 28 May 1868, BFS, Middle Class schools – women, 319–1.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Frances Widdowson, *Going up into the next class: women and elementary teacher training, 1840–1914* (London, 1980), p. 22. Middle-class women who were not destined for elementary teaching regularly accounted for a small proportion of each year's intake at Whitelands Training College and Stockwell College. See the Register of Mistresses, I (1842–7) and III (1849–52), London, Whitelands College Archives, and Register of Students, 1858–62, BFS, Stockwell College, 608.

<sup>40</sup> Diary entry for 1849, quoted in Clough, *A memoir*, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> Anne Clough, 'Appointments to schools', *Quarterly Papers of the Home and Colonial School Society* (Jan. 1861), BFS, Home and Colonial School Society Reports, 814.

this institution, and in the 1850s Frances Buss encouraged her assistants to follow its courses in order to prepare themselves for work in her school.<sup>42</sup> The enthusiasm of these women for the instruction provided by the Home and Colonial Institution provides a further example of the openness of many schoolmistresses to pedagogical innovation and of their commitment to developing opportunities for the training of teachers. By the 1850s, networks like the constellation of schoolmistresses involved with the Home and Colonial were replacing the more informal interactions of women like Sarah Bache and Anna Penn. This, and the production and consumption of pedagogical literature by schoolmistresses, points to the fact that women teachers were beginning to perceive themselves as part of a group with a particular expertise and a shared identity.

#### IV

In 1846, the author of a series of ‘letters to the industrial classes’ claimed that: ‘The governess now, be it remembered, is a recognized profession, and thousands of young ladies ... are now studying and preparing for the profession, just in the same way as gentlemen study for the church or the bar.’<sup>43</sup> As seen above, even when formal structures for training were limited, women teachers were using various strategies to prepare for their work, and developing a common occupational identity in the process. However, by the 1840s, calls for the more systematic education of schoolmistresses and governesses were multiplying. Public pressure to extend the education of women teachers emanated in part from anxieties surrounding the figure of the governess, and fears about the plight of middle-class women who were obliged to provide for themselves.<sup>44</sup> These concerns were exacerbated by the findings of the 1851 census, which suggested that there was a ‘surplus’ of women in the population, leading to a flurry of articles on the subject of ‘redundant women’.<sup>45</sup> However, support for attempts to develop teaching as an occupation for women was also related to the gradual formalization of professional qualifications and must be situated within the context of shifting notions about the status of teaching.

In 1815, the Society of Apothecaries was granted the authority to license practitioners, which restricted entry to the profession. In 1836, qualifying examinations were introduced for the legal profession, and the Medical Act of

<sup>42</sup> Josephine Kamm, *How different from us: a biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London, 1958), p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Letters to the industrious classes: Letter IV – to the governesses of the United Kingdom’, *Reynolds’ Miscellany*, p. 368, extract pasted into Governess Papers, 1846, London, London Metropolitan Archives, GBI, 1, p. 421.

<sup>44</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson, ‘The Victorian governess: status incongruence’, in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and be still: women in the Victorian age* (London, 1980), pp. 3–20. See, for example, Pedersen, *The reform of girls’ secondary education*, ch. 5.

<sup>45</sup> W. R. Greg, ‘Why are women redundant?’, *National Review*, 14 (Apr. 1862), pp. 433–5. For a response, see Frances Power Cobbe, ‘What shall we do with our old maids?’, *Fraser’s Magazine* (Nov. 1863), reprinted in Frances Power Cobbe, *Essays on the pursuits of women* (London, 1863), pp. 58–100.

1858 created a General Medical Council, which provided for the training and registration of all practitioners. The learned professions were here setting a precedent of institutionalization and control, which many other occupations sought to emulate over the nineteenth century. A parallel and mutually reinforcing development was the increasing importance attributed to competitive examinations. In 1854 the Northcote–Trevelyan report recommended that entry to the civil service should henceforth be on the basis of merit tested by examination. From 1858, the University Local Examinations extended independent testing to secondary schools.<sup>46</sup> In contemporary discourse, proficiency was being prized above social status and ‘amateurish’ was becoming a term of disparagement.

Teachers of all levels were amongst those seeking to claim equality with lawyers and medical men. In 1846, a group of private schoolmasters established the College of Preceptors. Its purpose was ‘promoting sound learning and advancing the interests of Education, more especially among the middle classes, by affording facilities to the teacher for the acquiring of a sound knowledge of his profession’.<sup>47</sup> From 1866, its members campaigned for the registration of all teachers by a body like the General Medical Council. It was also at this time that the universities experienced a ‘revolution of the Dons’, when a number of Cambridge professors sought to develop a new type of university education and constructed a new ethic of career and service among Fellows in the process.<sup>48</sup> The middle decades of the century were thus a period of great activity within the teaching profession. However, the status of teaching as a profession was still contested. Significantly, it was not until 1861 that the census enumerators moved teaching from the category of ‘learned occupations’ to that of ‘professions’.

The creation of the GBI in 1843, to assist poor and infirm governesses, reflected both concerns about the situation of the ‘old maids’ of the middle class, and the new enthusiasm for systematic education and certification. The importance of the GBI was twofold. First, as an officially established body (the GBI obtained a charter of incorporation in 1848), sponsored by respected public figures, it focused nation-wide attention on the work of middle-class women and lent weight to the idea that schoolmistresses and governesses constituted a distinct occupational group. Secondly, it was under the aegis of the GBI that, in 1848, Queen’s College Harley Street was opened, offering lectures to women by professors from King’s College. The aim of its founders was to ‘exclude unqualified teachers from the profession; and gradually to raise the general tone of female education’.<sup>49</sup> This date has often been seen as a key

<sup>46</sup> For details of the development of examinations see John Roach, *Public examinations in England, 1850–1900* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>47</sup> Charter of the College of Preceptors, quoted in John Vincent Chapman, *Professional roots: the College of Preceptors in British Society* (Theydon Bois, 1985), p. 45.

<sup>48</sup> Sheldon Rothblatt, *The revolution of the Dons* (London, 1968).

<sup>49</sup> GBI, *Report of the committee of management, 1845* (London, 1845).

moment in the development of female education, and, indeed, several of the schoolmistresses in the study emphasized that their attendance at Queen's was of great significance in their careers. Thus, Frances Buss felt that, 'Queen's College opened a new life to me, I mean intellectually. To come into contact with the minds of such men was indeed delightful, and it was a new experience to me and to most of the women who were fortunate enough to become students.'<sup>50</sup>

However, though the college had initially been planned by the GBI committee specifically to provide instruction for governesses, by 1848, the annual report was stressing that 'The committee disclaim any idea of training governesses as a separate profession. They believe and hope that the ranks of that profession will still be supplied from those, whose minds and tempers have been disciplined in the school of adversity and who are thus best able to guide the minds and tempers of their pupils.'<sup>51</sup> It had also abandoned a plan for the registration of women teachers. By 1853, regular lectures on 'the theory and practice of education' had been dropped and the formal connection with the GBI severed.<sup>52</sup> Queen's College was to be an institution for the higher education of young ladies, not a training college for schoolmistresses and governesses. Significantly, both Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale regretted the change of emphasis, and felt that, in the words of Frances Buss, the college 'grew conservative and did not grow'.<sup>53</sup> The remarks in the 1848 report give an indication of the problems faced by any attempt to formalize training expressly for middle-class women. Teaching was seen to be a legitimate occupation for women because it drew on their 'natural' abilities as women and innate maternal qualities. Offering formal training for teaching, which implied that women needed to be taught to teach, endangered this understanding of femininity. Moreover, it called into question the ability of men to provide for their families. When faced with the prospect of contradicting widely held notions about gender roles, the men who established Queen's College drew back. The notion that women teachers constituted 'a definite class' was rejected, and it was left to others to seek to develop teaching as a recognized profession for women and to build on the existing tradition of teacher training among schoolmistresses.<sup>54</sup>

However, the withdrawal from professional instruction at Queen's is explained not only by the influence of conventional notions of femininity, but also by its founders' belief that pedagogical training was not only unnecessary, but also undesirable. The 1848 report emphasized that though training and certification were enough for the 'mere teacher', they were not enough for a governess.<sup>55</sup> Most public and grammar schoolmasters had had no formal

<sup>50</sup> Frances Buss to Dorothea Beale, 13 Jan. 1889, London, North London Collegiate Archives (NLC), Buss family papers, B1. <sup>51</sup> GBI, *Report, 1848* (London, 1848), p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> Elaine Kaye, *A history of Queen's College, London, 1848-1927* (London, 1972), p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> Frances Buss to Dorothea Beale, 13 Jan. 1889, NLC, Buss family papers, B1.

<sup>54</sup> F. D. Maurice, *Queen's College: its objects and methods* (London, 1848), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> GBI, *Report, 1848*, p. 17.

preparation for their work, a university degree being considered sufficient preparation for teaching.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the qualification of a public schoolmaster was a good liberal education, which marked him out as a gentleman, not pedagogical expertise. Instruction in the theory and practice of education was associated with the elementary school teachers of the working class, particularly after the government introduced certification and the pupil–teacher system 1846. In a lecture on Queen’s College, F. D. Maurice emphasized that training was for elementary teachers and assumed that the students at Queen’s would be drawn from families whose sons were pupils at Eton and Westminster.<sup>57</sup> The instruction offered to ladies at the college would correspond to the concept of liberal education upheld in the public schools and universities.

Unlike the founders of Queen’s College, the private schoolmasters of the College of Preceptors felt that schoolmasters should undergo some form of vocational training. Their commitment was in part self-interested, since most were not university graduates.<sup>58</sup> Nor were they, unlike many ordained public schoolmasters, accorded the prestige attributed to members of the clergy. They, like all women teachers, suffered from the low social standing of teachers and from the absence of a means to prove their professional worth. None the less, many of the members of this association had a serious interest in pedagogical theory and were dedicated to improving standards within the teaching profession. As a result, in 1846 the College established examinations in the theory and practice of education that tested candidates’ knowledge of teaching methods, and required an understanding of educational philosophy and psychological theories of learning.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, schoolmistresses were encouraged to sit these examinations, which were in effect, the first secondary teaching diplomas open to women.<sup>60</sup> By offering certificates to women, and recognizing the professional expertise and pedagogical knowledge of schoolmistresses, the College attracted the support of many women teachers. Sarah Ellis was one of the first subscribers to the College’s Ladies’ department. Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Frances Buss both became members of the College and in 1869, the latter was one of the first two women appointed to its council.<sup>61</sup> By 1862, there were at least forty-eight women licentiates, associates, and members of the College, and between 1867 and 1870, at least fifty-five schoolmistresses were regularly submitting candidates to the college’s school examinations. Their pupils regularly gained prizes in modern languages and, interestingly, in science, a discipline rarely taught in public schools at that

<sup>56</sup> T. W. Bamford, *The rise of the public schools* (London, 1967), p. 120.

<sup>57</sup> Maurice, *Queen’s College*, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Fifty years of progress in education: a review of the work of the College of Preceptors, 1846–1896* (London, 1896), p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> See the ‘selection from the examination papers’, *Educational Times*, 1 (2 Oct. 1847), pp. 3–5.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Educational Times* (Sept. 1848), quoted in Chapman, *Professional roots*, p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Ladies’ department’, *Educational Times*, 1 (2 Oct. 1847), p. 5; *A list of the Council of the Board of Examiners, Fellows, Licentiates, Associates and other members of the College of Preceptors* (London, December 1862); Chapman, *Professional roots*, p. 69.

time.<sup>62</sup> Despite its failings, the College of Preceptors provided a forum through which some private schoolmasters and schoolmistresses were able to promote the notion that education was a science and contributed to the development of teaching as a profession. In the process they were putting forward an alternative to the professional model offered by the public schoolmasters.

## V

Though the College of Preceptors was of greater importance for women teachers than has often been recognized, other networks proved more significant in contributing to strengthening the collective identity and authority of women teachers. The group centred around the Home and Colonial Institution intersected and overlapped with the better known example of the London Schoolmistresses Association (LSM) which met from 1866 to 1887. Attention has focused on the London group but it was not the only such association. The Manchester Board of Schoolmistresses, of which Elizabeth Wolstenholme was a prominent member, predated the London association and the 1869 list of members of the LSM refers to sister organizations in Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle.<sup>63</sup> The leader of the Newcastle association was Mary Porter, who had headed a training school for governesses and schoolmistresses in Tiverton in Devon, before establishing her own school in the north-east. She felt that ‘the time has gone by when an acquaintance with certain accomplishments only, and a greater or less knowledge of some few branches in education, were considered sufficient acquirements for a teacher, and emphasized that teaching was in itself an honourable occupation.’<sup>64</sup> The schoolmistresses’ organizations helped to reinforce teachers’ sense of the importance of their work, and stimulated the growing feeling of shared identity and professional authority. Anne Clough remembered that at the meetings of the LSM, ‘the mistresses planned and took counsel together, and gave mutual help. They learned to combine; they were no longer alone, each in her own small sphere which had been dull and monotonous; they were now becoming part of a system and gathering strength ... Their union has certainly given them strength and dignity, and their life has been altered by it.’<sup>65</sup> This new-found force is suggested by the LSM’s decision to refuse to join the College of Preceptors’ Scholastic Registration Association, established in 1866, until it agreed to campaign for the registration of women teachers on the same grounds as that of men.<sup>66</sup>

The LSM had originated from Emily Davies’s efforts to obtain the admission

<sup>62</sup> *A list of the members of the ... College of Preceptors*; ‘Examinations for Schools’, Register, Dec. 1866–Dec. 1875, London, Institute of Education, Papers of the College of Preceptors.

<sup>63</sup> London Association of Schoolmistresses, *List of members* (May 1869), Cambridge, Girton College Archives (GCA), ED IX/LSM 4.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Porter, ‘Hints on teaching, being the substance of two lectures addressed to governesses’ (London, 1865), NLC, Women’s education, D2. <sup>65</sup> Quoted in Clough, *A memoir*, p. 110.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the meeting of 14 June 1867, minute book, 1866–74, GCA, ED IX/LSM 1.

of girls to the University Local Examinations, and many of its members had met when presenting their pupils as candidates in 1863. Anne Clough felt that this had created ‘a bond of union’ between the schoolmistresses, a bond later reinforced by their successful campaign, again under the leadership of Emily Davies, to ensure that girls’ schools were included within the remit of the Schools Inquiry Commission.<sup>67</sup> The commission was set up in 1864 to inquire into the condition of middle-class education; its members visited grammar schools, proprietary and private schools, and considered the evidence of expert witnesses.<sup>68</sup> The consequence of their investigation was that when a body was created to reallocate existing endowments for education, one of its tasks was to consider where it might be possible to divert some of this funding for the creation of the first publicly funded secondary schools for girls. The inclusion of girls’ schools in the investigation indicates the degree to which the notion of reforming women’s education had gained support in government circles, if not in wider public opinion. Anne Clough, Frances Buss, Dorothea Beale, Mary Porter, and other schoolmistresses were called to give evidence to the commission. The commissioners also discussed a ‘memorial respecting the education of girls’, submitted by a group of women teachers from schools scattered all over the country. These women now considered themselves, and were regarded as, educational experts, a measure of the new authority and assurance that organizations like the schoolmistresses associations had helped to foster.<sup>69</sup>

The records of schoolmistresses’ associations and the writings of various key figures indicate that women teachers were consciously seeking to develop this authority and to raise the status of teaching as an occupation for women. Thus, a key aim of the National Union for the Education of Women (NUEW), founded in 1872, was ‘to raise the social status of female teachers by encouraging women to make teaching a profession’.<sup>70</sup> A second organization, the Association of Head Mistresses (AHM), established on the initiative of Frances Buss in 1874, united the heads of secondary schools for girls of all types and sought ‘to support and protect the status and interests of women in education’.<sup>71</sup> However, it has been argued that the mid-century schoolmistresses were constrained by a ‘double conformity’ – to domestic notions of femininity and to masculine educational standards – which hampered their efforts to develop teaching as a profession for women.<sup>72</sup> In fact, they had an

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Clough, *A memoir*, p. 110.

<sup>68</sup> Sheila Fletcher, *Feminists and bureaucrats: a study in the development of girls’ education in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1980), examines these campaigns in detail.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Minutes of evidence’, *Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commissioners* (Parl. Papers, 1867–8, xxviii), pp. 4, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Emily Shirreff, *The work of the National Union* (London, 1873), Appendix 1, ‘The objects of the National Union for the Education of Women’, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in P. H. Gosden, *The evolution of a profession* (Oxford, 1972), p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> S. Delmont, ‘The contradictions in ladies’ education’, in S. Delmont and L. Duffin, *The nineteenth century woman, her cultural and physical world* (London, 1978), pp. 134–63.



ambivalent attitude to those standards, as will be demonstrated below. Moreover, it seems clear that the relationship between ideals of domestic femininity and teachers' sense of their professional identity and authority was more complex than is often assumed. None of the schoolmistresses in the study publicly questioned the belief that women shared an essentially feminine nature, which differentiated them from men. However, this belief could be a source of strength. Both Elizabeth Sewell and Dorothea Beale argued that 'women alone can understand, and therefore truly educate women'.<sup>73</sup> Though this implied an adherence to conventional notions of femininity, it also strengthened their conviction that teaching must be developed as a profession for women. It pushed Elizabeth Sewell to imagine a corps of female lecturers and led Dorothea Beale to act in distinctly 'unfeminine' ways.<sup>74</sup> In 1856 she resigned from her position as mathematical tutor at Queen's citing 'the want of womanly influence' as one reason for her action.<sup>75</sup> As mentioned above, she had been disappointed by the move away from teacher training at the college, and at the time of her departure, the institution was troubled by disagreements between female members of staff and the male principal.<sup>76</sup> She also resigned from her next post on discovering that she was required to follow the directions of a male board of governors, and on her arrival at Cheltenham sought to ensure that women teachers predominated on the staff and could work without male interference. In 1871, when the school's shareholders refused to implement her plans for the institution, she and all the other teachers resigned in protest.<sup>77</sup> Estelle Freedman has argued that at certain points in history, a separatist approach was the only viable strategy open to women.<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Sewell and Dorothea Beale could be seen as operating within this logic, their understanding of women's separate nature underpinning and reinforcing their claims for professional authority.

Like schoolmistresses earlier in the century, Dorothea Beale also drew on ideas about women's role as the guardians of religion in expressing the importance of her work. She saw teaching as her god-given mission, and challenged the idea that all women were intended for marriage and domesticity, arguing that for some 'their whole being is amply satisfied by a life like mine ... in which they can live for others and minister to others' needs'. For her, women teachers constituted a 'sisterhood of service'.<sup>79</sup> Here, the notion that women's role was to serve others highlighted the idea that teaching could

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, 'The reign of pedantry in girls' schools', *Nineteenth Century*, 23 (Feb. 1888), p. 231; Dorothea Beale, quoted in Kamm, *How different from us*, p. 28.

<sup>74</sup> Sewell, 'The reign of pedantry', p. 229.

<sup>75</sup> Dorothea Beale, 'Girls' schools past and present', *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (Apr. 1888), p. 545.

<sup>76</sup> S. G. Gordon, 'Studies at Queen's College, Harley Street, 1848-1868', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 3 (May 1995), p. 148.

<sup>77</sup> Dorothea Beale to Frances Buss, 2 Oct. 1871, NLC, History of the school, B1.

<sup>78</sup> Estelle Freedman, 'Separatism as strategy: female institution-building and American feminism, 1870-1930', *Feminist Studies*, 5 (1979), p. 516.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (London, 1908), pp. 37, 53.

be a life-long career and strengthened her sense of teachers as a unified corps of workers. Her focus on the idea of service also resonated with the increasingly powerful idea that the professional middle classes represented a moral force, motivated by an ethic of service, rather than one of commercial self-interest. That women teachers were seeking to locate themselves within this ideology is clear from Frances Buss's exhortation that 'teaching should cease to be a mere trade – so many hours grudgingly given for so much pay – and that it should take its place as foremost among the learned professions, in which the excellence of work, and not work's reward, is the object of ambition'.<sup>80</sup> Ideals of domestic femininity could thus intersect with 'the powerful ideological matrix' of professionalism and enhance the status of teaching as an occupation for women.<sup>81</sup>

## VI

Emily Davies's campaigns for the admission of girls to the University Locals, and later her proposals for the creation of a university college for women were shaped by her insistence that girls should be subject to the same examinations as men and evaluated according to the same standards.<sup>82</sup> In her approach, Emily Davies, not herself a teacher, differed from many of the other members of the LSM. The minutes of their meetings reveal that some of the schoolmistresses in this group were hesitant about the wholesale adoption of the methods and practices used in the education of boys. The first associates of the LSM had been keen to put their pupils through the Cambridge exams, and the Manchester group sought 'to promote the university and other examinations'. These were seen as a means 'to raise the standard of education of girls', and many teachers shared the widespread belief in the moral value of testing.<sup>83</sup> However, this did not imply that they wished schooling to revolve around competitive examinations as it did in many boys' schools. Three of the first nine meetings of the LSM included debates about the merits of various methods of examining pupils.<sup>84</sup> Hannah Pipe, who was present at a meeting where emulation and the value of prizes were discussed, was strongly opposed to 'competitive learning'. In a letter to Dorothea Beale, she argued that the homogenization of the curriculum they entailed, and the possibility of cramming, meant that girls would be 'forced to swallow that for which they had no appetite', urging that 'we should be slow to systematize'.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Sewell argued that forcing the same curriculum on all pupils was 'a kind of intellectual despotism'.<sup>86</sup> Even Frances Buss, though recognizing the

<sup>80</sup> A. E. Ridley, *Frances Mary Buss and her work for education* (London, 1895), p. 91.

<sup>81</sup> Sutherland, 'Examinations', p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge* (London, 1975), p. 165.

<sup>83</sup> Manchester Board of Schoolmistresses, *Annual report* (Manchester, 1867), quoted in Rhama Pope, 'Ladies' educational organisations in England, 1865–1885', *Paedagogica Historica*, 15 (1976), p. 342.

<sup>84</sup> Minute book, 1866–74, GCA, ED IX/LSM 1.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Stoddart, *Life and letters*, pp. 87, 175.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth M. Sewell, 'The reign of pedantry in girls' schools', *Nineteenth Century*, 23 (Feb. 1888), p. 220.

usefulness of examinations in setting standards, cautioned against pedantry and emphasized the need ‘to exchange thought, experience, sympathy’.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Dorothea Beale was apprehensive about the effect of examinations.<sup>88</sup> To see women teachers simply as hoping to gain admission to the male educational establishment, and emulating its methods and structures is to ignore the degree to which those who campaigned for the reform of girls’ education adopted a critical attitude to existing provision for boys. Many felt like Dorothea Beale, who emphasized that ‘I do not want girls’ education to be what that of boys is now, but that both should move on together to a higher ideal, not as yet, realized by either.’<sup>89</sup>

The minutes of the LSM reveal that the mid-century schoolmistresses, like their predecessors, continued to show an interest in pedagogical innovation and experimentation. In the 1860s, its members discussed the language teaching methods then being developed by Professor Max Muller, the advantages of interspersing intellectual work with physical exercise, and the benefits of stimulating emulation amongst their pupils.<sup>90</sup> The notion of developing child-centred pedagogical strategies, which catered to the needs of the individual, continued to have particular appeal. For example, in 1879, Mary Porter presented a paper to the LSM calling for greater sensitivity to each pupil’s interests and abilities. She argued that pupils would learn their lessons better if more active methods were used, interspersing question and answer sessions with independent study and group work.<sup>91</sup> Significantly, Mary Porter, and several of her London colleagues, were amongst the founders of the Froebel Society, established in 1874 to contribute to the diffusion of the German educationist’s theories and methods.<sup>92</sup> This interest in child-centred methods was not confined to the members of the schoolmistresses’ associations. Elizabeth Sewell, a conservative High Church Anglican, would have disagreed with some of Mary Porter’s views on the benefits of greater social diversity in schools. However, she too was committed to the principle that ‘the mode of dealing must in every case be a subject of separate study’.<sup>93</sup> Many teachers saw moves to align girls’ education with that of boys as a threat to this tradition of pedagogical innovation and to the child-centred practice of a domestic model of schooling.

The commitment among women teachers to this educational style can be

<sup>87</sup> Frances Buss, ‘On the influence upon girls’ schools of internal examinations, with special reference to the Cambridge Local Examinations’, May 1868, Papers given and presented for the London Association of Schoolmistresses, NLC, Place of the school in history, RS7iv.

<sup>88</sup> Dorothea Beale, ‘Girls’ schools past and present’, *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (Apr. 1888), p. 547.

<sup>89</sup> Beale, ‘Girls’ schools’, p. 552. <sup>90</sup> Minute book, 1866–74, GCA, ED IX/LSM 1.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Porter, ‘The lecture system as applied to school teaching’, 1879, Papers given and presented for the London Association of Schoolmistresses, NLC, Place of the school in history, RS7iv.

<sup>92</sup> For the first members of the society see Joachim Liebschner, *Foundations of progressive education: the history of the National Froebel Society* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Sewell, *Principles of education, drawn from nature and revelation and applied to female education in the upper classes* (2 vols., London, 1865), 1, p. 30.

detected in the ways they sought to develop the provision of schooling for girls. In her evidence to the Schools Inquiry Commission, Anne Clough had described a system for improving women's education. She criticized existing schools for girls for their small size, which, she argued, made them inefficient and uneconomical. None the less, her project was designed to 'make it possible to get well paid and efficient teachers, and other advantages, while a variety of methods and the individual attention of a small school is retained'.<sup>94</sup> Whilst clearly recognizing the benefits of large schools, she was reluctant to abandon the merits of a more personal approach to education which catered to each child. Mary Porter showed a similar commitment to this approach as Head Mistress of the first school for girls opened under the aegis of the Girls' Public Day School Company in 1873. Her brief was to create a new and efficient type of school, preparing girls for the Local Examinations, and sending students to Cambridge. She found, however, that the number of teachers appointed was not sufficient to provide the level of individual attention that she felt the girls needed. Writing angrily to the board, she declared that 'we cannot begin the work of a school in a satisfactory manner with less than two teachers besides myself', and argued that girls of 'varying ages and attainments' needed to be taught with reference to their particular needs.<sup>95</sup>

As well as sharing with their predecessors an interest in pedagogical innovation and child-centred methods, the mid-century schoolmistresses continued to invest in the notion of teacher education. Frances Buss was especially active in this area, sending her assistants to the Home and Colonial Institution and stressing, in her evidence to the Schools Inquiry Commission, that she would like to see every teacher trained in the art of teaching.<sup>96</sup> Later, as a member of the council of the College of Preceptors, she initiated the establishment of the first chair of education in the country, to which Joseph Payne was nominated in 1873.<sup>97</sup> In her work for the North of England Council for the Promotion of Higher Education for Women, Anne Clough was particularly keen that emphasis should be placed on providing lectures for teachers. In the event, the committee decided that the lectures offered should be of general interest and open to a wider public, but she none the less wrote a paper to argue that the lectures should be framed with regard to teachers' needs.<sup>98</sup> In the 1870s, the NUEW focused on providing 'a thorough training in the art of teaching', and its founder was startlingly contemptuous of schoolmasters who 'shelter their incapacity under the dignity of the clerical profession'.<sup>99</sup> The Bishopsgate Training College for Women was established under the aegis of the NUEW in 1878.<sup>100</sup> The importance of women educators like Frances Buss in the history of teacher training has rightly been

<sup>94</sup> *Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission*, II, pp. 84–7.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Josephine Kamm, *Indicative past* (London, 1971), p. 53.

<sup>96</sup> *Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission*, II, pp. 252–67.

<sup>97</sup> Chapman, *Professional roots*, p. 73.

<sup>98</sup> Clough, *A memoir*, p. 140.

<sup>99</sup> Shirreff, *The work of the National Union*, Appendix I, p. 48, and p. 22.

<sup>100</sup> Shirreff, *The work of the National Union*, p. 22; Kamm, *Indicative past*, pp. 87–8.

acknowledged. However, their efforts have usually been perceived as motivated by the need to compensate for the inadequacies of girls' secondary education.<sup>101</sup> This interpretation ignores the long-standing interest of many schoolmistresses in 'the science and art of education' as well as their commitment to making teaching a professional career for women. In addition, it conceals the radicalism inherent in the idea of training women teachers. The founders of Queen's College had drawn back from a project which weakened the assumption that women were teachers by nature, but in a paper on the objects of the NUEW, Emily Shirreff explicitly rejected the idea that women could become competent teachers 'in the ordinary contact with children'.<sup>102</sup> The support of schoolmistresses for teacher training challenged conservative notions of femininity and offered women the possibility of a valued professional existence outside the home.

## VII

In their efforts to develop the education of girls along lines distinct from the accepted practices of boys' education, mid-century schoolmistresses found support from educationists working in the universities and boys' schools. The College of Preceptors continued to seek to develop an alternative professional model, campaigning for the registration and certification of teachers, and the establishment of qualifications beyond the simple possession of a university degree.<sup>103</sup> Joseph Payne was particularly active in this respect, and contributed a paper to the NUEW in which he argued that teaching could not properly be defined as a profession, unless those who took it up were fully trained in the science of education.<sup>104</sup> Herbert Spencer also viewed education as a subject for scientific analysis. Inspired by the theories of George Combe, he argued that teachers must have a thorough understanding of psychology. Several schoolmistresses in the study, notably Louisa Carbutt, were influenced by his work, which was also well represented in the library of the LSM.<sup>105</sup> Edward Thring, Headmaster of Uppingham, like Payne and Spencer viewed education as science and had sought to develop a new approach to boys' education, which echoed the emphasis of many schoolmistresses on individual pupils. He boasted that 'no great school in England has any system or machinery established for dealing with each individual according to his powers except that which exists here'.<sup>106</sup> He was particularly supportive of the AHM, claiming that unlike

<sup>101</sup> Lance Jones, *The training of teachers in England and Wales: a critical survey* (Oxford, 1924), p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Shirreff, *The work of the National Union*, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> G. Baron, 'The Teachers' Registration Movement', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 2 (1954), pp. 133–44.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph Payne, *The importance of the training of the teacher* (London, 1873).

<sup>105</sup> Stephen Tomlinson, 'From Rousseau to evolutionism: Herbert Spencer and the science of education', *History of Education*, 25 (1996), pp. 235–54; Herford, *In memoriam*, p. 18; list of books in the library of the London Association of Schoolmistresses, NLC, Place of the school in history, RS7iv.

<sup>106</sup> Edward Thring to William Gladstone, 1861, quoted in G. R. Parkin, *Edward Thring: diary, life and letters* (2 vols., London, 1898), II, p. 118.

himself and his colleagues, 'weighed down by tradition, cast like iron in the rigid moulds of the past', schoolmistresses would be responsible for developing new and innovative teaching methods.<sup>107</sup> In higher education, the transferral of J. R. Seeley's support from Girton to Newnham, on the grounds of his opposition to Emily Davies's refusal to abandon 'the old obsolete practices', is well known.<sup>108</sup> Seeley's views about the need to modernize university teaching practice were shared by other Cambridge academics, including Henry Sidgwick. They supported the greater flexibility of Anne Clough's arrangements at Newnham, and saw there an opportunity to experiment with teaching methods.<sup>109</sup>

However, these innovators were working against an increasingly powerful model of public school education, which was gradually emerging as the dominant system in English education.<sup>110</sup> Paradoxically, the Schools Inquiry Commission, which had contributed to strengthening the professional voice of women teachers, confirmed the dominance of this Arnoldian conception of liberal education. As Edward Thring hyperbolically observed, the commission was 'the most disastrous, the most unexpected reverse' for those seeking to develop a different educational model.<sup>111</sup> The Schools Inquiry Commission had been preceded by the Clarendon Commission, which had investigated the nine 'great' public schools, and published a report since described as 'the elite discussing its own education and the education of its successors'.<sup>112</sup> Though reforms had been recommended, the report celebrated a model of schooling which, according to the commissioners, had justly maintained the pre-eminence of classical studies, had developed a system of discipline which cultivated autonomy and manliness, and had distinctively moulded 'the character of an English gentleman'.<sup>113</sup> When the second commission investigated the schools of the middle class, they continued to use the model of the public schools to evaluate these other institutions. The government commissions thus gave official sanction to a particular conception of schooling, built on a reformulated ideal of liberal education, which presented classical studies as the best form of preparation for professional life, as well as the best form of intellectual training. The public-school model was not only bolstered by the official sanction of the commissioners. It drew strength from the social prestige attributed to a liberal education, as a growing number of ambitious

<sup>107</sup> Edward Thring, Address to the AHM, June 1887, quoted in G. R. Parkin, *Life and letters of Edward Thring* (London, 1900), pp. 483–4.

<sup>108</sup> J. R. Seeley, quoted in McWilliams–Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge*, p. 65.

<sup>109</sup> Gillian Sutherland, 'The movement for the higher education of women: its social and intellectual context in England, c. 1840–1880', in P. J. Waller, ed., *Politics and social change in modern Britain* (Brighton, 1987), p. 108.

<sup>110</sup> J. R. de Honey, *Tom Brown's universe: the development of the public schools in the nineteenth century* (London, 1977), see especially ch. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Parkin, *Edward Thring*, 1, p. 172.

<sup>112</sup> Gillian Sutherland, 'Secondary education: the education of the middle classes', in Sutherland, ed., *Education, government and society in nineteenth century Britain* (Dublin, 1977), p. 151.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Sutherland, 'Secondary education', p. 151.

middle-class families sought 'to dignify a process of upward mobility' by means of the 'conspicuous education' offered by the public schools.<sup>114</sup> As Malcolm Seaborne has shown, the enormous influence of this particular conception of education can even be traced in school architecture, as the physical characteristics of the great public schools were gradually recreated in grammar and proprietary schools.<sup>115</sup>

The impact that the success of the public-school model would have on the small-scale child-centred strand within girls' education is clearly apparent in the reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission. The commissioners noted that 'small schools are in themselves, as instruments of instruction, commonly inferior to larger ones' and declared that girls were often educated 'in schools too small to deserve the title'.<sup>116</sup> The normative definition of 'the school' based on the public-school model thus blinded the commissioners to the pedagogic principle which had led teachers like Louisa Carbutt to restrict the size of their establishments. In the face of this socially approved conception of schooling, a domestic model of schooling and the commitment to pedagogical experimentation upheld by many schoolmistresses and some of their male colleagues was largely eclipsed. Some of their ideas and methods were absorbed into the wider educational discourse; others were undermined by the need to assert the importance and legitimacy of women's education, which implied alignment with the dominant trends in boys' education. As Anne Clough realized, in order to achieve the extension and improvement of women's education, the mid-century schoolmistresses needed 'some recognition from those who rule, whether in the country or at the universities'.<sup>117</sup> Emily Davies fought for the allocation of endowments to girls, seeing that to be recognized as valuable educational institutions, girls' schools needed to be housed in buildings which approximated to those accommodating boys' schools.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, as privately owned institutions, the girls' schools of the domestic model would always be vulnerable to commercial pressures, limited as to the resources they could offer. Women like Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Emily Shirreff worked to create new types of publicly funded schools for girls. Similarly, Frances Buss acknowledged that her school 'cannot have any element of permanence so long as it remains unprovided with suitable buildings', and that she would not be able to provide these herself. Appreciating the influence of current developments in boys' education, she recognized that a new type of 'public' girls' school was required, and that it must be embedded in existing social practice. She therefore transferred her school to the ownership of a body of trustees, a painful process

<sup>114</sup> De Honey, *Tom Brown's universe*, pp. 124, 134.

<sup>115</sup> Malcolm Seaborne, *The English school: its architecture and organization, 1370-1870* (London, 1971), ch. 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission*, 1, pp. 56, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Anne Clough, 'Hints on the organisation of girls' schools', *Macmillan's magazine*, 14 (Oct. 1866), p. 439.

<sup>118</sup> Emily Davies, 'The application of funds to the education of girls', paper for the education department of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1868, GCA, ED X-6a-c.



which involved an abdication of responsibility she found hard to accept.<sup>119</sup> However, the gradual disappearance of the domestic model of a girls' school was not simply a function of schoolmistresses' pragmatism in a culture where education was defined by an Arnoldian conception of schooling. Reformers like Maria Grey and schoolmistresses like Frances Buss were also inspired by the ideals of liberal education. Teachers as different as Hannah Pipe and Louisa Carbutt cited Thomas Arnold as an important influence on their work and Frances Buss hoped that as a large, public institution, North London Collegiate would 'inspire pupils with a feeling of membership in a great body'.<sup>120</sup> She, like Dorothea Beale, extolled the virtues of community in a manner reminiscent of J. H. Newman.<sup>121</sup>

The dominance of the public-school model significantly influenced the evolution of teaching as profession. The Schools Inquiry Commission had concluded that in order to correct the low standards in girls' education, 'the first remedy is to provide all English women of the middle class with the opportunity of higher liberal education'.<sup>122</sup> In terms reminiscent of the words used by the founders of Queen's College, training schools were condemned as producing 'teachers and nothing else'.<sup>123</sup> They did recommend a system of certification and registration for both male and female teachers, but even this was dropped when the bill passed through parliament. As demonstrated above, women teachers continued to invest in the notion of teacher training and the period after 1870 saw the creation of a number of training colleges. However, the conclusions of the Schools Inquiry Commission had contributed to strengthening what Michael Burrage has identified as a particularly English tradition of practice-based professional training.<sup>124</sup> To have established professional training for teachers in the science of education would have required that the existing socially approved model of public school and university education be dismantled. As Christopher Harvie has argued, the mid-century educational reformers were enmeshed within the public school and university tradition, and unable to challenge existing structures.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, developing vocational training for middle-class teachers would have had the radical effect of making the occupation accessible to those who

<sup>119</sup> Frances Buss, appeal for support for North London Collegiate, ?1868/9, NLC, History of the school, B1. For the difficulties experienced by Frances Buss, see in particular three letters from Emily Davies to Frances dated 5 Jan. 1870, 1873, and 4 July 1874, NLC, History of the school, B1.

<sup>120</sup> Stoddart, *Life and letters*, p. 56; Herford, *In memoriam*, p. 22; quoted in K. Anderson, 'Frances Mary Buss, the founder as Headmistress, 1850–1894', in R. M. Scrimgeour, ed., *The North London Collegiate School, 1850–1950* (Oxford, 1950), p. 48.

<sup>121</sup> D. Beale, 'Of the disposal of our time', in E. Raikes, ed., *Addresses to teachers* (London, 1909), p. 9; J. H. Newman, *The idea of a university* (Oxford, 1976).

<sup>122</sup> *Reports of the Schools Inquiry Commission*, I, p. 62.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 613.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Burrage, 'From practice to school-based professional education: patterns of conflict and accommodation in England, France and the United States', in Sheldon Rothblatt and Björn Wittrock, eds., *The European and American university since 1800* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 180–3.

<sup>125</sup> Christopher Harvie, *The lights of liberalism: university liberals and the challenge of democracy, 1860–1886* (London, 1976), p. 211.

had not received the liberal education of a gentleman, thus unravelling the intertwined relationship between the middle classes and the professions. The social legitimacy of the idea that the best professional education was a general liberal education, added to the increasing number of opportunities for higher education open to women, devalued the importance of pedagogical training for female teachers. Whereas 26 per cent of those schoolmistresses in the study who were born between 1820 and 1839 had followed some kind of training course, of those born between 1850 and 1859, only 11.7 per cent had done so. By contrast, 64.7 per cent of the later generation had received some form of higher education. The trend was noted by Sophie Bryant, who commented that ‘the women educated at the universities persisted in neglecting professional training. Either they despised it, or could not afford it, or could get entrance to the schools without it.’<sup>126</sup> As would be expected, the effect was to reduce the diversity of social backgrounds amongst women teachers. Earlier in the century, schoolmistresses had been recruited from a fairly wide spectrum of middle-class backgrounds, though professional families were predominant. However, the social origin of the students at the women’s university colleges, now the main route into secondary teaching, was more narrowly confined to the professional upper middle classes.<sup>127</sup>

## VIII

In his study of ‘the rise of the professional classes’ in England, W. J. Reader suggested that ‘the public schoolmaster’s view of his job displayed to an extreme degree that contempt for specialized training which was characteristic of the Victorian upper classes’.<sup>128</sup> Studying the lives of middle-class schoolmistresses reveals that ‘contempt for specialized training’ was not universal amongst teachers in the nineteenth century. Contrary to the received picture, many women teachers in the first half of the century were committed to their work and convinced of the need for professional education. By the 1860s, an influential group of schoolmistresses, building on this earlier tradition, were consciously seeking to ensure that teaching should be recognized as a profession for women, and accorded the prestige and social position that this implied. Working at a time when informal instruction and amateurism were being discredited, they, like some of their male contemporaries, were organizing themselves into associations, which strengthened their identity as experts in education.

These associations could be seen as having embodied a distinct feminine tradition of reciprocity and collaboration. Unlike the Headmasters’ Conference, primarily a defensive organization which had resolved not to ‘deal

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Nonita Glenday and Mary Price, *Reluctant revolutionaries: a century of Head Mistresses, 1874–1974* (London, 1974), p. 31.

<sup>127</sup> Sutherland, ‘The movement for the higher education of women’, pp. 102–4.

<sup>128</sup> W. J. Reader, *Professional men: the rise of the professional classes in nineteenth century England* (London, 1966), p. 107.

with questions of structures and dissect one another's schools', the AHM sought actively 'to provide facilities for intercourse and exchange of ideas', building on the exchanges of earlier schoolmistresses.<sup>129</sup> Gender consolidated these networks, and meant that, to a certain extent, they were more efficient than their male counterparts. The College of Preceptors and Headmasters' Conference were separated from each other, and divided within themselves by the distinctions between greater and lesser public schools, grammar schools, private and proprietary schools. By contrast, the NUEW even sought to incorporate elementary teachers, thus creating the first organization to include teachers from every level of education.<sup>130</sup> Distinct from the schoolmasters' associations in their aims and structure, the records of their meetings also hint at a feminine tradition in educational thinking, privileging child-centred teaching methods. The circumspection with which many schoolmistresses regarded the 'lifeless mechanism' of boys' education reflected their allegiance to a domestic model of schooling.<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, the pressure to conform to the dominant conception of education meant that this feminine tradition all but disappeared. Its continued influence can be seen in the significant role played by women in the kindergarten movement, or in the female tradition of school gymnastics identified by Sheila Fletcher.<sup>132</sup>

Examining the development of teaching as a profession for women before 1870 makes it clear that to draw a marked contrast between the headmistresses of the second half of the century and their predecessors is to make a false dichotomy between the amateurism of earlier teachers and the professionalism of their successors. The grounds on which the early schoolmistresses have been dismissed as unprofessional – that they were forced into their work out of economic necessity, and had had no formal training – could equally be applied to Thomas Arnold, who became a schoolmaster for financial reasons and began teaching without any training.<sup>133</sup> Rather than dismissing schoolmistresses in the first half of the century as amateur lady-proprietors, we should consider their work in context and recognize that the emergence of the Headmistresses in the second half of the century was partly the result of the substitution of one professional model for another. Since the beginning of the century, the increasing attachment to certification and training, and the desire amongst teachers to claim the status and prestige of lawyers and medical men, had contributed to the elaboration of a number of competing professional models. By the 1870s, the dominance of a liberal understanding of education meant that the notion of pedagogical training for teachers, an important element of the ideal of the professional teacher upheld by many schoolmistresses, had been discredited. The Headmistresses of the later part of the nineteenth century

<sup>129</sup> Edward Thring, diary entry 27 Nov. 1867, quoted in Parkin, *Life and letters*, p. 179; quoted in Gosden, *The evolution*, p. 12.

<sup>130</sup> Shirreff, *The work of the National Union*, Appendix 1, p. 48.

<sup>131</sup> Hannah Pipe to Emily Davies, quoted in Stoddart, *Life and letters*, p. 180.

<sup>132</sup> Sheila Fletcher, *Women first: the female tradition in English physical education* (London, 1984).

<sup>133</sup> De Honey, *Tom Brown's universe*, p. 2.

followed a different professional tradition, which corresponded to that of public schoolmasters. Significantly, in 1878, when his opinion on the question of teacher training in Cambridge was solicited, the Headmaster of Eton declared that the best qualification for a teacher was 'some of that spirit, which in a word is best described as manliness'.<sup>134</sup> The implication of assimilating women teachers to a professional model predicated on masculinity is a subject for further study, but it is worth noting that when asked, in 1892, whether one of her colleagues was a lady, E. C. Wilson's reply was that she did not know, but that 'at any rate, she is a gentleman'.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Peter Scarby, *The training of teachers in Cambridge University: the first sixty years, 1879–1939* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> For contemporary studies see Kinnear, *In subordination*; Maaret Wager, *Constructions of femininity in academic women: continuity between private and professional identity* (Helsinki, 1994); and Nicole Mosconi, *Femmes et savoir: la société, l'école et la division des savoirs* (Paris, 1994); quoted in E. C. Wilson, *Catherine Isabella Dodd, 1860–1932* (London, 1936), p. 7.