

# "I knew I would have to make a choice": Voices of Women Teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador

Alice Collins et Patricia Langlois

Volume 11, numéro 2, fall 1995

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds11\\_2art07](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds11_2art07)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Collins, A. & Langlois, P. (1995). "I knew I would have to make a choice": Voices of Women Teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador. *Newfoundland Studies*, 11(2), 308–328.

# **“I knew I would have to make a choice”: Voices of Women Teachers from New- foundland and Labrador**

**ALICE COLLINS and PATRICIA LANGLOIS**

## **I. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:<sup>1</sup>**

IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR, women have been primary animators in all areas of education, including classroom teaching, administration, association activity, and professional development. From providing cocoa-malt to pupils on the potbelly stoves of one-room schools to feminist activism in the association board-rooms of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, women's contributions to education deserve to be recognised and documented. Such documentation is crucial to reconceptualizing women as vital agents within Newfoundland's educational history and to reconceptualizing history itself.<sup>2</sup>

To date no comprehensive or even partial history of women teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador has been written. A comprehensive history of women teachers in this province would explore a vast number of areas and help to reconstruct historical accounts which have largely ignored gender as a defining feature of the teaching profession. The idea for documenting teachers' life histories evolved from an ill-fated attempt to develop a university course on women and education, ill-fated because like many historians of education elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> we had difficulty finding material on women's lives in the archives of this province. Historian Linda Kealey suggests that while historical studies of women's roles as teachers have sprung up elsewhere in Canada, there has been a puzzling lack of attention to the feminization of teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>4</sup>

While gender is certainly only one among the factors that have influenced teachers' professional and family lives, gender is of particular significance to women teachers. Cultural constructions of gender, primarily influenced by the

gendered division of labour, shape and limit women teachers' career paths in special ways.<sup>5</sup> In the narrative section of this paper we explore the impact of the gendered division of labour in the work and family lives of eight women teachers who taught for various periods of time from the 1930s to the present. These eight women's lives were influenced to varying degrees, because of age and family situations among other factors, by the gendered division of labour. The title of this paper, "I knew I would have to make a choice," reflects the fact that these women teachers often had to make choices that amounted to curtailing or restricting personal and professional aspirations.

The "gendered division of labour" refers to the assignment and allocation of labour based on gender. For women, the gendered division of labour connotes the maternal and domestic responsibilities traditionally assigned to them. In broad terms, the gendered division of labour, and particularly women's responsibility for unpaid domestic labour, have been identified as central to women's subordination to men in families, in the workplace and in society in general.<sup>6</sup> By extension this term has been seen as the reason for the underdeveloped potential of women.

Within feminist education literature, school teaching has been viewed as a classic case of the gendered division of labour for several reasons.<sup>7</sup> First, women teachers undertake the burden of a "double day of work" by working full-time as teachers and, at the same time, assuming primary responsibility for domestic life.<sup>8</sup> Second, women teachers have been relegated to teaching positions that rely on maternal, nurturing characteristics. Third, and relatedly, women have been relegated to the lowest paying jobs at the bottom of educational occupational ladders while men have been favoured at the top.<sup>9</sup> In this paper, we try to demonstrate that women's primary responsibility for childcare and domestic labour has limited women's career opportunities and advancement. In cases where women teachers' individual career paths have not been hindered by the gendered division of labour, their success as teachers has depended on other women performing sometimes unpaid childcare and domestic duties.

A "domestically-oriented ideology of teaching"<sup>10</sup> emanates from the concept of a division of labour based on gender. Historically, a "domestically-oriented ideology" characterized the work of women teachers in several ways. First, teaching was considered either a preparation for motherhood or a "flat" career<sup>11</sup> (a static career with no upward mobility). In other words, teaching for women was "motherhood-in-waiting" or "teacher-in-training-for-motherhood."<sup>12</sup> In nineteenth-century Ontario and Quebec, for instance, women were subjected to this ideology which assumed that teaching was an ideal preparation for motherhood.<sup>13</sup> Second, women formed a convenient pool of cheap labour, and, responding to the nurturing role, conducted schooling in accord with a domestically-oriented ideology.<sup>14</sup> Third, women were viewed as best suited to teach young children because they were considered "natural" nurturers. The earliest record of women teachers in the United States is that of women teaching Bible classes. Later, when the

### 310 Collins and Langlois

profession opened up to women, they were relegated largely to primary and to some extent elementary classrooms.<sup>15</sup> Men, on the other hand, did not view teaching as a terminal career, but as a means to an end. Often a young man would use school teaching as a stepping stone to another more lucrative profession; if he stayed in teaching it was usually in the hope of eventually exerting his "natural" authority as a principal, or as an inspector or superintendent of schools.<sup>16</sup> The report of the Inspector of Protestant schools in Newfoundland contains the elements of the prevalent view toward women teachers in the nineteenth century: "The employment of Female Teachers is well worthy the consideration of the Boards, not only as requiring a smaller salary for their maintenance than males, but as being better adapted to conduct many of the small schools."<sup>17</sup> The Inspector goes on to state that men are likely to find success in careers other than teaching and they "lack the requisite patience and perseverance in little things."<sup>18</sup> Women, on the other hand, have "the power of easy, quiet, unconscious influence ...."<sup>19</sup>

Although historical research on education in this province has not centred on women, Phillip McCann's *Schooling in a Fishing Society* provides an excellent starting point for research on women teachers. His work places Newfoundland's educational history within its unique economic and social context as a migratory fishing colony. He argues that the sharp class divisions within a "mercantocracy" of a single-industry economy, and a weak educational tax base, largely due to a cashless "truck" or credit system, help to explain the limited government support for popular education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. McCann argues that had women teachers not been willing to accept lower salaries than men, the province's educational history would have been an even more dismal one. In Newfoundland in 1856 only 15.2% of teachers were female.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter their numbers rose rapidly, as women took advantage of the independence and respectability which the profession offered. By the end of the century six out of every ten teachers were women.<sup>21</sup> However, throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century women teachers' salaries averaged only 60% of those of males.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly but not surprisingly the situation was similar in Ontario where women teachers comprised less than 20% of the profession in Ontario in 1851, with an increase to 50 % by 1881.<sup>23</sup> As with the Newfoundland situation, women teachers' willingness to accept lower salaries in return for independence and status was spurred by a government regime with limited support for public education.<sup>24</sup> McCann suggests that "The hidden subsidy of female teachers (akin to that of their sisters in the fishery) helped to shore up a sagging system [in Newfoundland]. When a comprehensive economic history of Newfoundland comes to be written, the unsung heroines may well prove to be the working women."<sup>25</sup>

The situation improved somewhat during the first half of the nineteenth century; both male and female salaries suffered heavily in the economic depression of the 1930s, though the Commission of Government did manage to increase

teachers' remuneration by the end of the war. In 1946, however, women teachers were receiving only 79.3% of male salaries.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to a continuing differential salary scale based on gender, the grading of teachers and its connection to salaries introduced in the late nineteenth century represented a further gender difference. In the inter-war period female teachers were in a minority among those obtaining the highest grade, namely two years of university attendance; from 1936 to 1946 the proportion hovered around 36%. Conversely, women formed the largest proportion without grade or certification, between two-thirds and three quarters of all teachers, in the period 1921-1946.<sup>27</sup>

There was an improvement in the salary position in the Confederation period; the proportion of women's to men's salaries increased slowly but steadily, from 77.3% in 1951 to 86.3% in 1986.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the percentage of female teachers with a degree increased from 5.4% in 1961 to 77.6% in 1986—though still a smaller proportion than that of men, 91.0% of whom had degrees in 1986.<sup>29</sup> The dominance of the teaching profession by women disappeared in this period, from two-thirds in 1951 to just over half (51.7%) in 1986.<sup>30</sup>

The economic and political context of nineteenth-century Newfoundland institutionalized women's domestically-oriented position in education. There is evidence that the struggle for suffrage was also couched in domestically-oriented language. Margot Iris Duley's article suggests that a cornerstone of the women's suffrage movement in the province was a maternalist argument.<sup>31</sup> In the wake of the Newfoundland government's neglect of education around the turn of the century, suffragists demanded that more money be put into the educational system. Extending suffrage to women, the suffragists held, would allow "women as mothers to influence educational policy."<sup>32</sup>

The domestically-oriented ideology characteristic of teaching during the nineteenth and early twentieth century seems to have survived well into the late twentieth century. While the present teacher salary scale is not based on gender, the historical relegation of women to lesser-paid positions as well as their lag in obtaining top qualifications maintains salary differences and leads to divergent career paths. *Progress Revisited*, a publication of the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 1993, reminds us that in areas of career advancement, pensions, and distribution of administrative and other better paying positions, gender continues to be an influential factor, positive for men, negative for women.

## II. METHODOLOGY:

Feminist sociologists and historians, including feminist historiographers in education, have emphasized the need to rewrite history from the standpoint of women in order to redress the silencing, or absence, of women in mainstream historical accounts. Traditionally, knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men's experiences were normative, as if being fully human meant being male.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, feminist theory is grounded in the tenet that human experience is gendered and that insofar as women and men are assigned different roles, they lead lives with significantly different patterns and contours.<sup>34</sup>

The gendered division of labour provides the central context for understanding these differing contours and patterns. To this end, feminist theorists promote qualitative methodologies such as women's personal narratives and biographies because they allow us to listen to women's voices, to learn from the details of their everyday lives (however seemingly insignificant), and, therefore, to reconstruct our understanding of the world.<sup>35</sup> Women teachers' work lives have been more strongly defined and limited by gendered responsibilities than men teachers' work lives. Thus, it is through a full exploration of their everyday lives, both personal and professional, that we glean the sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, impact of gender roles and the gendered division of labour on women's work.

Biography, as a feminist method, allows us to identify the commonalities in women's experiences. The use of narrative allows us to see the fullness of women's subjectivity and agency by collapsing the traditional dissociation between women's private and public lives. Kathleen Barry, a leading proponent of biography as method, emphasizes that interpretations of women's lives must not deny women's agency and ability to shape their lives in creative ways, despite the confines of limiting gender roles and societal structures: "By remaining interactively involved with the biographical subject and her interactions and interpretations of meaning, we can identify the moments, occasions, and conditions that produce gendered relations without reducing the subject to someone who has been determined by gender power. Determinism, on the other hand, denies action by turning active subjects into passive objects."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Canadian anthropologist Sally Cole suggests that the social construction of gender is a process not only of constructing ideals about gender roles and relations but also of manipulating those ideals, a process of negotiation.<sup>37</sup>

Feminist activism and scholarship in recent decades have aimed to uncover the significance of commonalities within women's private lives, especially those influenced by a gendered division of labour. In looking to women teachers' personal narratives, we intend not only to present to the public interesting anecdotes about women teachers' lives, but also to identify, on behalf of women, the commonalities among women's personal and family lives which give those lives political significance.

In this research we employed biographical interpretations of women's personal narratives as our primary methodology. Over the past five years several women teachers from various regions in the province have been interviewed. Whenever possible, we conducted multiple, in-depth interviews<sup>38</sup> designed to explore those aspects of the women's teaching lives most strongly defined and shaped by their gender as women. The first set of interviews took place between 1990 and 1992. The second set took place in the fall of 1995. From the first

interviews we identified themes which provided starting points for a second, more focused, set of interviews. Six of the eight women had been previously interviewed and, in preparation for the second interview, read transcripts of their first interview.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the participatory nature of this research, the women teachers were invited to respond to our analysis. While some changes resulted, there remains a difference in the critical nature of the analysis in two instances. Given the access the researchers had to the full scope of all the interviews, we are satisfied that the critical analysis is supported by the documentation. In the two cases cited, the women took a less critical and less feminist view of the material.

### III. THEMES EMERGING FROM THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES:

A number of themes emerged from the narratives of the women teachers we interviewed. These themes are presented under the following headings: family values placed on education; career options; benefits of teaching; and links between women's family and work lives.

#### Family values stressing education:

The women were unrelenting in their message about the importance their families placed on receiving an education. These women responded to parental messages by judging education as important in their own lives. This may support Lortie's claim that parental influence is greater on women than on men.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, in a few cases fathers were those who most strongly encouraged their daughters to seek an education. In at least one case, however, a father placed greater importance on his sons' pursuing post-secondary education than his daughters'. Many parents were not well educated and wanted their children to have more than they did. The parents of these women did not seem to push their daughters to enter any particular career, but valued education in and of itself.

Of her two parents, Susanne's father was especially emphatic about his daughters' receiving a good education:

My father was a self-educated man who had not even reached what we call now the junior-high level but who had gone on to educate himself through training. I think that my father felt that through education you could really improve yourself, that education was the way to go. This was where people were going to improve their lot in life. And he and my mother both wanted me to have more than they had. And in those days education was the way to do it. So as far back as I can remember it was always, "You must get your education." My father felt that you had to be able to look after yourself, a female as well as a male. I don't know where this idea came from but my father always said, "I want you to be independent; I want you to get your education, and then you can be independent." So it was instilled in me that I would become independent; I would look after myself. My mother had very little education, even less than my father, but she too realized that she wanted something better for

## 314 *Collins and Langlois*

her children. My sister went on to become a nurse and I became a teacher and they were very, very proud of us.<sup>41</sup>

Elizabeth, a school principal who began teaching in the early 1960s, said,

It was my father who probably encouraged us more to become educated...When we were going to school there weren't many options. Your options were to become a nurse, a nun, or a teacher, and my father always pointed out there was a fourth option. If you didn't do one of those things you could scrub floors for somebody else. And we were determined we weren't going to scrub floors for anybody else. He didn't say it as mean and cruel as that, but he obviously implied that, and let it be known.<sup>42</sup>

Margaret, a retired teacher, told us,

My father died when I was quite young and there was only my sister and I, and my mother always impressed upon us the value of education. It was important to go to school and to study hard and do the very best. She never accepted half-measures; she always wanted you to do the very, very best. In my mother's time growing up, they didn't get a lot of education; sometimes the boys had to stay home to go fishing to help their father and the girls stayed home to help their mother and everything, you know. But maybe that was why she placed such a high value on education. It was very important for her that we got an education.<sup>43</sup>

Anne, who was brought up by her grandparents during the early part of this century, said,

I often heard my grandparents say, "Anne, work hard in school because you know you've got to get a good education." [It was important to get a good education] so you could get a good job, get something good in life.<sup>44</sup>

In Catherine's family,

there was a high priority on education. It was just assumed that we would go on through school to complete grade eleven, which was as high as you went at that point, and then on to either university or some postsecondary education...And I think within the community itself there was a high priority on education.<sup>45</sup>

Eileen's words echo in a similar way:

Our school life was really important to [my parents]. We worked consistently, on a daily basis, to make sure we were ready for school, with, you know, homework done, assignments done. We were always encouraged; we knew in our house that education was really important.<sup>46</sup>

### Career Options:

The women's restricted career options were a resounding theme throughout the interviews. Despite the emphasis placed on education in these women's families, when the time came to choose a career none of the women felt they had many options about the direction their education would take. Career options for women between the 1930s and the 1960s were limited by traditional gender constructs, emphasizing women's "natural" affinity for nurturing and care-giving roles. Among the four main options were teaching, nursing, motherhood and, for young Catholic women, life in the convent. Notably, most of the women teachers we



interviewed found themselves “choosing” teaching from among the few career options open to women because, especially after Confederation when government support for education rose to its peak, educated adults were encouraged to enter the teaching profession.<sup>47</sup>

Elizabeth told us that she did not choose her career as a teacher; it was chosen for her:

The principal said, “You’re going to summer school.” And we went to summer school and we became teachers! I don’t think I’ve ever made a conscious decision about teaching. These were our only options [i.e., teaching, nursing, entering the convent or working as a domestic labourer] so when we were in grade eleven the principal said, “Okay, here’s the application for summer school.” He just assumed we were all going teaching. So we all filled out the application for summer school and we all went.<sup>48</sup>

Margaret, who began teaching in the early 1940s, emphasized that

in those days you kind of fell into something. My grade eight students one time asked me how I managed to remain teaching so long and did I really love it better than anything else? And I said, “Well, to be honest with you, I never did anything else so I can’t compare teaching with anything else.” But that’s the way it was in those days. Some of the teachers suggested, or the parish priest suggested, that “You’re graduating now, grade eleven, you know, you better go off to university and get a teaching position. Well, come back here and teach, for instance.”<sup>49</sup>

Marianne stressed that in her community on the Burin Peninsula during the 1960s and 1970s, teaching was the profession women automatically entered. Marianne explicitly described her mother as both a “full-time teacher and a full-time mother of seven” and was influenced by her mother’s example:

Actually, I can remember from a very young age always wanting to be a teacher. Maybe I was influenced by my mother’s role. I guess the tradition at the time, back then when we were going to school, was that women automatically went into teaching; it was one of the few occupations that women went into. I never really stopped to think actually. It was just something I wanted to do.<sup>50</sup>

Reflecting on the beginnings of her teaching career, Catherine said,

Well, I think, then compared to now, we were not as aware of the many options from which we could choose. We knew about nursing, we knew about teaching, probably something about business or some kind of work with the church. We really, you know, didn’t have much career guidance. So, anyway, my friend and I had decided from a very early age that we wanted to be nurses...In those days you could not get into nursing until you were eighteen. So I had two years in between and I wanted to go on. And at that point I thought that teaching might be interesting.<sup>51</sup>

Susanne, whose only other sibling, a sister, went into nursing, stressed that

there never seemed to be any other choices besides teaching and nursing. I don’t think if I had to choose today I would have chosen teaching. But I always felt very early on, back in grade nine, I suppose, or ten, when you think about what you’re going to do when you leave home, I always felt that I wanted to do something. I didn’t know

what but something different. I don't know why I felt this way; I just felt that life was out there, full of possibilities and I wanted to do something. I just didn't want to see myself teaching in a very small community, with three or four grades. That wasn't my idea of teaching. If that's what I had to do then I didn't want to teach. But when I found out from [a] teacher, that you could actually teach in a school, in a large centre, where you could do subject teaching, then I said, "Well, it looks good to me. Maybe this is what I'll do."<sup>52</sup>

Eileen's response to the question about career options was telling:

I can talk about the options I felt I had as a woman, but I can only spend a minute because I really didn't feel that there were very many options. I wanted something more than grade eleven. The cheapest, most accessible avenue at that time, in 1968, was teaching. There was still some money from the government to give me a grant to help me go and I think that essentially is what put me there.<sup>53</sup>

Benefits of teaching:

Undoubtedly, these women judged the teaching profession positively. Despite the fact that many of the women chose teaching by default, teaching became a fulfilling career for all of the women we interviewed. Teaching provided many benefits, including financial independence, a secure financial future, professional fulfilment, and a work and vacation schedule which eased the burden of those who were juggling teaching and motherhood.

For women, teaching can be an interrupted career, an "in and out" career;<sup>54</sup> this pattern is followed when they assume primary responsibility for their children. Ironically, a domestically-oriented ideology of teaching supported an interrupted career and was interpreted as a benefit for these women. The domestically-oriented characteristics of the teaching profession allowed women to have interrupted careers and to blend family and teaching responsibilities. None of the women fundamentally challenged the social construct which required some of them to make family choices over career choices. Nor did any of them challenge the gendered division of labour which relegated to women the primary responsibility for childcare. Even those who did not take time away from teaching shouldered the responsibility for arranging daycare and domestic help. In other words, while they did not always perform the domestic and childcare labour, the women assumed responsibility for arranging and organizing childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Since Elizabeth made no conscious decision to pursue teaching as a career, her story is perhaps the best example of the contrast between, and the irony of, on the one hand, a lack of choice in becoming a teacher, and, on the other hand, the clear benefits that her long-standing teaching and administrative career provided her. She emphasized these benefits:

I was determined that I would always have my own money. I would never have to ask anyone, including a male, for money. And I would never, ever have to ask a man for permission to go somewhere. . . . Teaching gave you money. Teaching gave me money and freedom and during the summer you still had money coming in. After

university I got out and I started to, you know, first of all I started to travel around Newfoundland, and later years I went on to travel around Canada. So teaching gave me freedom; it gave me what I wanted.<sup>55</sup>

Susanne cited several benefits to her teaching career. The first benefit she named had to do with a vacation schedule which enabled her to maximize family time:

The advantages, well, certainly one of the main advantages was the holidays. When the husband and wife are both teaching they have holidays together, and once we had our daughter that was great. The time off Christmas, Easter and the summer, there's no doubt about it. It was very attractive. Now I didn't go into teaching for that; I didn't even think about that at the time. But that was certainly one of the attractions. The other thing, I think that it was a job in those days where you had a certain amount of respect from the community and the students. [And] there was a security, a financial security. You could plan.<sup>56</sup>

Teaching gave Catherine the financial freedom to hire another woman to care for her children:

It was really convenient that I was off in the summer and even though I might do a university course I was able to organize that quite well. If I was teaching I would have a woman, the woman who was my childcare worker, come in about the time I was leaving, so she would be there to get the children off to school. She also would take the girls to their dancing or gymnastic classes after school. So that worked as well.<sup>57</sup>

Links between women's family and work lives:

The emergence of the domestically-oriented ideology of teaching and the gendered division of labour is most evident in the fluidity between women teachers' family and work lives. Their acceptance of a socially constructed reality of women as nurturers and primary caregivers for their children emerged in the interviews. This view in turn resulted in the choices that many had to make which led to interrupted careers, once again relegating women teachers to lesser-paid and less influential positions such as those in administration.

Feminist literature in education stresses that women experience the boundaries between their personal and work lives as fluid, not strongly demarcated. The literature does not romanticize such fluidity but identifies it as a cause of stress and limitation for working women because they continue to place family and domestic responsibilities above their work-related responsibilities. Madeleine R. Grumet suggests that women do not draw lines between their homes and their classrooms; they mother at home and they mother other mothers' children at school.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, *Progress Revisited* suggests that women tend not to have discrete "work lives" and "personal lives."<sup>59</sup>

The careers of the women teachers whom we interviewed can be represented on a continuum which ranged between two extremes: leaving the profession permanently upon marriage to maintaining a completely uninterrupted career.

Prior to the 1950s, women commonly followed a practice which required them to quit teaching once they married. Two of the women we interviewed accepted

## 318 *Collins and Langlois*

the reality constructed for them, that they should leave teaching once they decided to marry. Anne said,

In 1949 I got married. I was thirty-eight then. [I automatically stopped teaching]; I finished off in June. [I was married the] twenty-ninth of June. I couldn't [go back]. When you got married, that was the rule. It just wasn't done. It was just automatic. The priest gave me my final check. He never said, "Would you like to go back [teaching] when you get married?"<sup>60</sup>

In the second case, however, a twist of fate allowed the rule to apply itself differently. Jeanette said,

I just took it for granted, I guess, that you didn't [keep teaching once you got married]. At that time when you got married you started having a family and then that was it, you stayed home. It was a decision you had to kind of make and be comfortable with. I would say that was the attitude. And I don't know if it was a good attitude or a bad attitude...[But] the new priest who had just moved to our parish asked me if I wanted to continue teaching. And I said I hadn't really thought about it. So then he approached me. Now, of course, we, you know, had the discussion with my husband. And he said, "Well, I'm away all week." He was working in Stephenville. And my husband said, "It's entirely up to you. If you feel you want to go and do it, it's fine with me." And when I got pregnant I was due for June and the priest said, when the time came, he said, "You teach as long as you can and then you close up and we'll have a long summer holiday." That's what happened, too.<sup>61</sup>

The success of Jeanette's career, however, hinged on the unfailing support she received from her mother-in-law. While Jeanette was able to teach full-time without the burden of childcare duties, she relied on other women's unpaid labour to do so:

My mother-in-law took care of the children. She lived across the road and my husband's sister was home. It was good for the grandmother because she was young and loved the children. But other than that you'd have to get a baby-sitter to come in or bring the baby out, which wasn't happening here either. Oftentimes I'd feel kind of left out because there was nothing left for me to do as far as taking care of them and stuff. It was a perfect situation [and] I don't think if I'd had to get someone to come in or take the children out to another home, I don't think I would have kept at it.<sup>62</sup>

While Marianne is not herself a mother, she reflected on her mother's life and believes her mother's experience was an easy one:

Actually, I don't think my mother had a problem juggling being a full-time teacher and a full-time mother. It never seemed to pose a problem. Well, she taught for thirty years and had seven children so obviously there couldn't have been any problem with it.<sup>63</sup>

Several women who chose marriage and motherhood in addition to teaching interrupted their careers in order to give priority to their families. Leaves ranged from minimal to extended periods of time. While none of the women we spoke with talked in terms of the negative impact of the gendered division of labour, some

identified their domestic and childcare responsibilities as disadvantageous, especially in terms of limiting their opportunities for career advancement. They had to make difficult choices about further study or the jobs they held. The decision in several cases was to place the family first.

Margaret expressed relief that in the St. John's area by the 1950s the rule forcing married women to stop teaching was no longer being observed: "things had changed for the better." After Margaret got married she stayed at home with her children for "a good while." While she had two lengthy "lapses" in her teaching career in order to stay home with her young children, she eventually returned to teaching full-time and juggled her career with being the mother of five children. When she began teaching, a university degree was not required. As the standards for teacher qualification evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, she returned to university part-time and obtained her education degree, while she continued to combine full-time teaching with full-time motherhood.

Catherine told us that being the mother of five limited the realization of her career aspirations. However, she expressed little regret about this fact:

Well, actually, I had been working on the Master's and after the twins were born I worked on it a little. But at that point I knew that I would have to make a choice. And the choice that I made was to leave the Master's Program for a while, go back to full-time teaching and look after the children. I would do those two things. I just had to leave the Master's Program because I didn't have the time to give to it. I chose not to continue my career, you know, sort of in a continuous fashion. Had I gone on and had an unbroken career shall we say, you know, things might have gone differently. Looking back I think that perhaps I would have gone on and done the Master's Program earlier and would have maybe gone on and done a PhD, I'm not sure. I might have if I hadn't had all these breaks. But now the breaks weren't always negative either though, because I did other things. And I think that, too, is good for me as a person. And given the choice I would certainly prefer to have had my five children and the time with them, and being able to pick up my career when I did. It was good. I'm not so sure that people can do it to the same extent now.<sup>64</sup>

Eileen told us about her "small 'c'" choice to resign from a position as a school-board co-ordinator. Her initial response was one of resentment, although, like Catherine, she now feels the decision was the right one at the time:

In 1979 I got a job as co-ordinator for my school board [which involved extensive travelling] and my daughter was only a year old at the time. So at that point in time it was a benchmark, if you want, in my career. There was no way I was turning back. Now, three years after that when my son came along, because of the travel [I did give it up]. But now, having gone back into the classroom for a decade or so after that, I don't regret it. I'm very happy that that's what the situation at the time forced me to do...Our marriage was traditional at the time although I have a husband who, you know, now shares equally (and I think equally is maybe even not the word; he has a greater share in terms of domestic responsibility). But at that time we weren't there; we weren't at that point. I was the principal caregiver and I opted to do that. I made that choice, but small 'c.' There was pressure from my husband and I could have

fought it. I didn't fight it. For several years after that I resented the hell out of this decision. I saw it as a real back-tracking.<sup>65</sup>

Other women missed a negligible amount of time, or none at all. Elizabeth recounted her circumstances:

You're talking to someone who's been very lucky and very fortunate all her life. I had my son. I went back to school [after three months]. I had a babysitter and, of course, once he started school, life was even more convenient because he went to my school. So life was easy. And then when he got out of school he went to my mother, who lived very close to the school. He went and changed out of his school clothes and into his play clothes and continued with his life until it was time for me to go home.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, Susanne's career was not interrupted; she made a clear decision from the beginning that her teaching career would not be interrupted by family responsibilities:

I never, ever considered [taking time off]. I had my mind made up, that I would not stop teaching. Now, when Colleen came into our lives I certainly did have a babysitter come in to look after her in our home until she was old enough to go to kindergarten. But from the time she was born I also always had somebody come in once a week to do the housework as well. I mean, I didn't believe in killing myself. If I was working, and being paid for it, then I felt that I should have some help.<sup>67</sup>

A self-identified feminist and aware of the burdens placed on women by the gendered division of labour, Susanne also said,

I'm not saying because I had help that at times I didn't feel like I was burdened down around exam time and this sort of thing, teaching and doing other outside activities. And I'm sure that women must feel really hard pressed at times. They do get stressed out, I'm sure of it. There have been times when I've been stressed out, even though I had some extra help. There's still the pressure of things that you feel you have to do, and probably, the bottom line is, you know, you do have to do it. Certainly when any woman looks at what she's going to do other than family and work, if she's working full-time, I think she has to look at how much time it's going to demand and how many pressures are going to be put on her.<sup>68</sup>

Admittedly, Catherine, Susanne and Eileen stressed that they received help from supportive husbands. Catherine, for instance, suggested that without her husband's help in the home she would not have been able to manage a full-time career while being the mother of five children. Eileen's husband has come a long way since the "early days" of their marriage, and now supports Eileen's new position as a school administrator by taking on "more than half" of the responsibilities at home. Eileen's recent move into administration has also been facilitated by the fact that her young adult children no longer place the demands on her as a mother that they did when they were pre-schoolers.

The traditional view of women as natural nurturers, which historically relegated women to the lower-rung jobs and career paths, emerged in the voices of

these women teachers. Catherine told us that having children makes a teacher more aware of the home-school relationship, and, in her case, made her "a better teacher":

After I had my own children some of the work that I was doing in education became more meaningful. And also I could see the other perspective better. I could see things from the child's point of view and also from the parents' point of view better than I had before. I think it made me a better teacher.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps the best example of a domestically-oriented ideology as it applies to women teachers as nurturers is to be found in Elizabeth's description of teaching a class of students as

kind of like a family except it's bigger. And that's what we'd do, that's part of the philosophy if you come into our school. And I think if you came into our school you'd feel it. It's different and we like to say, "This is our home from the time we're here, from nine to five o'clock in the evening, this is our home." And we try to make it feel like home...I feel very, very strongly about that. To me, this is my home. I want to have it nice and warm and clean and comfortable. It's my home while I'm there. I spend all my day there. And it's the same way with the kids. And for some of these kids school is sanctuary. This is the place where they leave all their stresses outside, this is one place where it's calm, it's quiet...it's a sanctuary for some of them. It's probably the most peaceful time of their day so we try to make it like that.<sup>70</sup>

The nurturing aspect of women teachers emerged in the interviews in descriptions of these women's childhood. Most of the women were socialized as young girls to care for younger children; more than half of the women we interviewed said this socialization was intensified because they were oldest children in their families of origin. Elizabeth suggested that her position as the oldest of seven children made for a smooth transition into teaching:

You're most responsible [as the oldest child]. My mother was sick a lot during her lifetime so between her being sick and her having children, a lot of the responsibility for taking care of brothers and sisters fell on me. So I learned to be very independent and very responsible, very early in life...I was seventeen years old, had six weeks' training and I had sixty-three kids in one classroom, grades one to five, no indoor plumbing, no electricity, and a wood stove. So, that's what I was doing at seventeen...[I felt] very confident. Like I could handle the whole world. It was just something normal, ordinary. You never thought about it as anything out of the ordinary. You just did it...For me, teaching [was] kind of like a family, only bigger.<sup>71</sup>

Eileen, also the oldest of several children, told us of her childhood responsibility:

I was given a position of responsibility in the house quite young, and, you know, I had to care for younger siblings. I was thirteen when my brother was born and he [recently] mentioned how many times he could remember me; I guess I was a mother figure, although he didn't use those words. I really did have to take great charge. I can remember having taken significant chunks of responsibility. So I'm sure that has affected the way I am and the way I feel about accepting responsibility. It certainly prepared me and, I guess, set a model up in a way of the kind of work life I would have. You know, that when responsibility came my way I certainly would take it.<sup>72</sup>

Fluidity between family and teaching exemplifies the lives of the women teachers we interviewed. The women who were mothers moved back and forth between home and school with one set of experiences informing the other. There was an uncritical and positive orientation to their profession, even when difficult choices meant placing family ahead of career and personal aspirations. They viewed their career decisions as "all for the best," and, retrospectively, simply part of "doing what you had to do." There was a strong tendency to celebrate the many benefits the teaching profession brought to their lives. Thus, while the gendered division of labour was detrimental to some of the women's careers (although certainly not all), the women did not challenge their gendered family responsibilities in a fundamental way, but were content with their ability to merge their family and work lives. It is significant that the women whose careers were least affected by domestic and family responsibilities relied on other women to perform sometimes unpaid domestic and childcare duties.

#### CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this paper is to begin documenting the lives of women teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador. The biographical data, gathered through structured, in-depth interviews, provides not only anecdotal accounts of the experiences of eight women teachers whose careers spanned the years from the 1930s to the present, but also disclosures of commonalities in their lives. These commonalities emerge in the following themes: family values which stress the worth of education; career options; benefits of teaching; and links between women's family and work lives. It is through these themes that the gendered division of labour as it applies to teaching emerges, as well as the domestically-oriented ideology of teaching.

An analysis of the gendered division of labour in teaching reveals that women still assume full-time responsibilities both at home and at work, the classic "double day of work." From the accounts of these women's lives we discerned that the gendered division of labour has not been fundamentally challenged. Responsibilities at home evoked different responses among the women: some terminated or interrupted their careers; others were enabled to continue their careers without interruption by relying on the unpaid help of women relatives or by hiring other women to perform childcare and domestic duties.

The domestically-oriented ideology provided the earliest conceptual framework for understanding the role of women teachers. Because women were considered natural nurturers they were relegated to teaching and caring for younger children as a preparation for their eventual role as mothers. While leaving the profession upon marriage or motherhood is no longer a reality, the domestically-oriented ideology survives today in the fluid boundaries between women teachers' home and work lives. A domestically-oriented ideology reinforces, and allows to go unchallenged, the gendered division of labour.



How did these women view the choices they made in their work and home lives? For some of the women there seemed to be a sense of rationalization and resignation to a reality that was constructed for them. What was done and what was chosen were viewed as "all for the best," and part of "doing what you had to do." They judged the profession to have served them well despite restraints on their personal and career aspirations, and retrospectively they have constructed plausible, positive interpretations of reality.

Quantitative data would suggest that the teaching profession is equitable for women. However, the invisibility of women's work in the home renders questionable this claim of equity. While pay equity is institutionalized for the same work among women and men teachers, women's "double day" and interrupted careers continue to create barriers to career advancement and the financial and other benefits which accompany such advancement. We argue, therefore, that effective equity policies must be informed by an understanding of women's lived experiences as mothers and as teachers. By considering the impact of the gendered division of labour, policies could more effectively work to remove the barriers to equity in women's work and home lives.

Further research on women teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador could address a range of additional areas such as an in-depth study of the impact of historical, economic and societal considerations unique to the province; women teachers' teaching methods and the extent to which gender influences pedagogy; and women teachers' experiences of sexism and institutional discrimination. We hope that this initial research provides a sound starting point for further investigation.

## 324 Collins and Langlois

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviewee*	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Interviewer	Transcriber
Eileen	July 31/92	Corner Brook	A. Collins	K. Scott
Eileen	Nov 14/95	Corner Brook	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Susanne	June 7/92	St. John's	K. Scott	K. Scott
Susanne	Oct 23/95	St. John's	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Marianne	Aug 24/90	St. John's	A. Collins	K. Scott
Marianne	Oct 14/95	St. John's	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Catherine	May 20/92	St. John's	K. Scott	K. Scott
Catherine	Oct 31/95	St. John's	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Jeanette	July/91	Cape St. George	A. Collins	K. Scott
Jeanette	Nov 15/95	Cape St. George	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Anne	July 31/90	Avondale	A. Collins	K. Scott
Anne	Oct 5/95	Avondale	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Elizabeth	Oct 13/95	St. John's	P. Langlois	P. Langlois
Elizabeth	Oct 5/95	Outer Cove	P. Langlois	P. Langlois

\* The names are pseudonyms for the women interviewed.

### Biographical Notes:

Marianne was born on the Burin Peninsula in the early 1950s. She was one of seven children. She earned her Bachelor of Education degree from Memorial University and has devoted her career to elementary and primary teaching in native communities in Labrador.

Eileen, a language teacher in her early forties, presently holds a position as a school principal on the West Coast of Newfoundland. She was the oldest of eight children. She holds a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Education from Memorial University. Eileen is married and the mother of two children.

Elizabeth was born in the early 1940s in Conne River, a predominantly native community on the south coast of Newfoundland. She was the oldest of several children. At the age of nineteen she became the first native person to assume the principalship at Conne River's all-grade school. She has earned a Bachelor of Education degree and has received an Honorary Doctor of Law degree from Memorial University. Elizabeth is married and the mother of one child.

Susanne is a retired school teacher in her early fifties. She was born in Burin, Newfoundland, the older of two children. She earned her Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education and Graduate Diploma from Memorial University. A junior high teacher of English, History and Geography, she spent the majority of her teaching years in St. John's. Susanne devoted several years to working with the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. Susanne is married and the mother of one child.

Catherine grew up in a small rural community in Flat Island, Bonavista Bay. She has earned a Bachelor of Arts (Education) degree, a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Education degree from Memorial University. She is a retired math teacher and has been active in the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. She is married and the mother of five children.

Jeanette is a retired teacher and principal, now in her early sixties. She began her teaching career at the age of fifteen. She earned her Bachelor of Education from Memorial University and taught for more than thirty years in the community in which she grew up, a predominantly Francophone community on the West Coast of Newfoundland. She is married and the mother of two children.

Margaret, a retired teacher in her early seventies, was the older of two children. She grew up in a small community in eastern Newfoundland. She taught in St. John's schools for most of her teaching career. She is the mother of five children.

Anne was brought up in a rural community in Conception Bay. She taught in one-room schools on the Burin Peninsula and in the Conception Bay area during the 1930s and 1940s. Her teaching career ended when she married in 1949. At the time of the second interview in 1995 she was in her eighty-sixth year.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Women's Policy Office of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Secretary of State Women's Programme. We are also grateful to the women who generously shared their time and life stories with us. We thank Dr. Phillip McCann and Dr. Patrick O'Flaherty for their editorial assistance.

<sup>2</sup>Kathleen Barry, "Biography and the Search for Women's Subjectivity," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 1989, 12 (6), pp. 561-577.

<sup>3</sup>Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, *Women Who Taught* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Linda Kealey (Ed.), *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Heather-Jane Robertson, *Progress Revisited* (Ottawa: Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Meg Luxton, "Two Hands for the Clock," in *Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), pp. 39-55.

<sup>7</sup>Marta Danylewycz, Beth Light and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, May 1983, 16 (31), pp. 81-109.

<sup>8</sup>Robertson, *Progress Revisited*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>9</sup>Danylewycz *et al.*, "The Evolution."

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>Dan C. Lortie, *School-teacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 99.

<sup>12</sup>Danylewycz *et al.*, "The Evolution," p. 82.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>15</sup>Lortie, *School-teacher*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup>Danylewycz *et al.*, "The Evolution."

<sup>17</sup>*Journal of the House of Assembly* 1859, Report Upon the Inspection of Protestant Schools in Newfoundland, for the year 1858, Appendix, p.292.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Phillip McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1994), p. 29.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, Table 4, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, Table 6, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup>Danylewycz *et al.*, "The Evolution," p. 84.

<sup>24</sup>Danylewycz *et al.*, "The Evolution," pp. 91-92.

<sup>25</sup>Phillip McCann, "Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education, 1836-1901," *Historical Studies in Education*, Fall 1989, 1 (2), p. 190.

<sup>26</sup>McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society*, p. 199.

<sup>27</sup>McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society, Companion Volume: Tables*, Table III-18, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, Table IV-24, p. 300.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, Table IV-13, p. 289.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, Table IV-15, p. 291.

<sup>31</sup>Margot Iris Duley, "The Radius of Her Influence for Good," in *Pursuing Equality*, pp. 14-65.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup>Joy Barbre *et al.* (Eds.), *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Sandra Harding, "Starting Thought from Women's Lives: Eight Resources for Maximizing Objectivity," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 21 (2 & 3), pp. 141-149.

<sup>35</sup>Barbre *et al.*, *Interpreting Women's Lives*. See also Dorothy E. Smith's *Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup>Barry, "Biography," p. 569.

<sup>37</sup>Sally Cole, *Women of the Praia: Life and Work in a Portuguese Fishing Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 149.

<sup>38</sup>Shulamit Reinharz, author of *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Oxford University Press, 1992), suggests that multiple interviews lead to richer sources of data than single interviews.

<sup>39</sup>Interviews were conducted by A. Collins and K. Scott in 1991 and 1992 and by P. Langlois in the fall of 1995.

<sup>40</sup>Lortie, *School-teacher*, p. 48.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Susanne, 23 October 1995. The names are pseudonyms for the women interviewed.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>43</sup>Interview with Margaret, 5 October 1995.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with Anne, 5 October 1995.

<sup>45</sup>Interview with Catherine, 31 October 1995.

<sup>46</sup>Interview with Eileen, 14 November 1995.

<sup>47</sup>McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society*, Part IV, *passim*.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>49</sup>Interview with Margaret, 5 October 1995.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Marianne, 14 October 1995.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with Catherine, 31 October 1995.

<sup>52</sup>Interview with Susanne, 23 October 1995.

<sup>53</sup>Interview with Eileen, 14 November 1995. See Phillip McCann's *Schooling in a Fishing Society*, p. 217, in which he writes, "These improvements were fuelled by an expansion in the proportion of government expenditure devoted to education. That devoted to all types of education (on current account) rose to 17% in 1951 and for the decade 1956-66 reached and remained at just above 20%. The beginning of a deterioration in the economy, signalled in the late 1960s, did not, however, immediately affect governmental intentions to expand the education system. In the early 1970s more than a third of government expenditure was appropriated for educational purposes; the peak was 35.1% in 1976."

<sup>54</sup>Lortie, *School-teacher*, p. 88.

<sup>55</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>56</sup>Interview with Susanne, 23 October 1995.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with Catherine, 31 October 1995.

<sup>58</sup>Madeleine R. Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. xv.

<sup>59</sup>Robertson, *Progress Revisited*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>60</sup>Interview with Anne, 5 October 1995.

<sup>61</sup>Interview with Jeanette, 15 November 1995.

<sup>62</sup>Interview with Jeanette, 15 November 1995.

<sup>63</sup>Interview with Marianne, 14 October 1995.

<sup>64</sup>Interview with Catherine, 31 October 1995.

<sup>65</sup>Interview with Eileen, 14 November 1995.

<sup>66</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>67</sup>Interview with Susanne, 23 October 1995.

<sup>68</sup>Interview with Susanne, 23 October 1995.

<sup>69</sup>Interview with Catherine, 31 October 1995.

<sup>70</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Elizabeth, 13 October 1995.

<sup>72</sup>Interview with Eileen, 14 November 1995.