

# AUSTRALIAN WOMEN EDUCATORS' INTERNAL EXILE AND BANISHMENT IN A CENTRALISED PATRIARCHAL STATE SCHOOL SYSTEM

*El exilio interior y el destierro de las maestras australianas  
en un sistema escolar estatal centralizado y patriarcal*

Kay Whitehead<sup>a</sup>

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**Abstract.** This article explores Australian women teachers' struggles for equality with men from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. While Australia purported to be a progressive democratic nation, centralised patriarchal state school systems relied on women teachers to fulfil the requirements of free, compulsory and secular schooling. This study focuses on the state of South Australia where women were enfranchised in 1894, far ahead of European countries. However, women teachers were subjected to internal exile in the state school system, and banished by the marriage bar. The article begins with the construction of the South Australian state school system in the late nineteenth century. The enforcement of the marriage bar created a differentiated profession of many young single women who taught prior to marriage; a few married women who required an income; and a cohort of senior single women who made teaching a life-long career and contested other forms of subordination to which all women teachers were subject. Led by the latter group, South Australian women teachers pursued equality in early twentieth century mixed teachers unions and post-suffrage women's organisations; and established the Women Teachers Guild in 1937 to secure more equal conditions of employment. The paper concludes with the situation after World War Two when married women were re-admitted to the state school system to resolve teacher shortages; and campaigns for equal pay gathered momentum. In South Australia, the marriage bar was eventually removed in 1972.

**Keywords:** Women teachers; Marriage bar; Patriarchy; Centralised state school system.

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<sup>a</sup> UniSA Education Futures, University of South Australia, Level 1 De Lissa building, Magill campus, 5072 Adelaide, Australia. kaywhitehead88@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2139-151X>

**Resumen.** *Este artículo explora las luchas de las maestras australianas por la igualdad con los hombres desde finales del siglo XIX hasta mediados del siglo XX. Aunque Australia pretendía ser una nación democrática progresista, los sistemas escolares estatales patriarcales centralizados dependían de las maestras para cumplir con los requisitos de la escolarización gratuita, obligatoria y laica. Este estudio se centra en el estado de Australia Meridional, donde las mujeres obtuvieron el derecho al voto en 1894, muy por delante de los países europeos. Sin embargo, las maestras fueron sometidas a un exilio interior en el sistema escolar estatal, y desterradas por la barrera matrimonial. El artículo comienza con la construcción del sistema escolar estatal de Australia del Sur a finales del siglo XIX. La aplicación de la prohibición del matrimonio creó una profesión diferenciada de muchas mujeres jóvenes y solteras que enseñaban antes de casarse; unas pocas mujeres casadas que necesitaban un ingreso; y una cohorte de mujeres solteras de edad avanzada que hicieron de la enseñanza una carrera para toda la vida e impugnaron otras formas de subordinación a las que estaban sujetas todas las maestras. Encabezadas por este último grupo, las profesoras de Australia del Sur persiguieron la igualdad en los sindicatos mixtos de profesores de principios del siglo XX y en las organizaciones de mujeres posteriores al sufragio, y crearon el Women Teachers Guild en 1937 para garantizar unas condiciones de empleo más igualitarias. El documento concluye con la situación después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, cuando las mujeres casadas fueron readmitidas en el sistema escolar estatal para resolver la escasez de maestros; y las campañas por la igualdad de salarios cobraron impulso. En Australia Meridional, la prohibición del matrimonio se eliminó finalmente en 1972.*

**Palabras clave:** *Maestras; Prohibición del matrimonio; Patriarcado; Sistema escolar estatal centralizado.*

In 1940, a professor of History and Political Science at the University of Adelaide, South Australia, opined that “two opposed conceptions of society face the world – the totalitarian and the democratic” and asked “how is Australia meeting the totalitarian challenge in the sphere of education”.<sup>1</sup> His concern was that “state educational systems are so completely centralised ... that it would not be hard for a totalitarian administration to control teaching”. He did not advocate decentralization nor did he focus on teachers’ working conditions, but called upon schools and universities to “uphold democratic ideas of tolerance, of equal

<sup>1</sup> Garnet Portus, “The totalitarian challenge to Australian education”, *The Australian Quarterly*, 12 no. 4 (1940): 75.

opportunities, of the importance of the individual” and “the independence of judgement that is necessary for citizenship”.<sup>2</sup>

Women teachers underpinned Australian state school systems, but it is unlikely that the professor had them in mind. Instead of equal opportunities, the scholarship on Australian women teachers demonstrates that centralised patriarchal state school systems “used rigid official policy, both at the level of convention and specific rules and regulations, to exclude women from the service and restrict their equal promotional opportunities” from the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Women had fewer opportunities than men to qualify as teachers. Whereas men were promoted to positions of increasing authority and salary, women were poorly paid and assigned to one-teacher rural schools (*escuela unitaria*) far from their families; and mixed classes in graded schools (*escuela graduada*).<sup>4</sup> At the same time, enfranchised Australian women teachers were exercising the independence of judgement that is necessary for citizens in a democratic society. Indeed, they were agents of change in schools, teachers unions and social movements.<sup>5</sup>

Scholarship on Spanish teachers which has been published in English indicates some commonalities with their Australian counterparts. For example, provisions for Spanish women to qualify as teachers were restricted.<sup>6</sup> Both Spanish and Australian men tended to move from rural

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Noeline Kyle, “Woman’s ‘natural mission’ but man’s real domain: the masculinisation of the state elementary teaching service in New South Wales”, eds Sandra Taylor and Miriam Henry *Battlers and bluestockings: women’s place in Australian education* (Canberra: Australian College of Education, 1988), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing women: origins of women’s education in nineteenth-century Australia*. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kyle, “Woman’s natural mission”, 29-30; Kay Whitehead, “Vocation, career and character in early twentieth century women teachers’ work in city schools”, *History of Education*, 34, no. 6 (2005): 579-597.

<sup>5</sup> Lynne Trethewey, “Either you have misunderstood the directions, or you are not playing the game’: South Australian women in educational administration 1900-1960”, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 38 no. 1 (2006): 1-18; Lynne Trethewey and Kay Whitehead, “The city as a site of women teachers’ post-suffrage political activism: Adelaide, South Australia”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 39 no. 1 /2 (2003): 107-120.

<sup>6</sup> Víctor García Hoz, “The education of teachers in Spain”, *Journal of Educational Research*, XLIII no. 8 (1950): 561-570; Narciso de Gabriel, “The entrance of women into the teaching profession in Spain (1855-1940)”, *History of Education*, 43 no. 3 (2014): 334-355.

to city schools during their careers.<sup>7</sup> However, Spanish women teachers “fulfilled the feminine role assigned to mothers” and were subordinate to headmasters.<sup>8</sup> By the late nineteenth century, some Spanish and Australian women teachers were headmistresses and school inspectors.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Spanish women educators were agents of change, pending twentieth century democratic and totalitarian politics.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there are crucial differences. Australian state school systems were secular, and religious affiliation was not a determining factor in teachers’ careers. In stark contrast, the profound influence of the Catholic Church in women teachers’ lives is a dominant theme in histories of education in Spain.<sup>11</sup> The dramatic shifts between democracy and totalitarianism in Spain were not experienced in Australia. Australian women teachers were not subjected to the same exile and banishment as their Spanish counterparts, but their subordinate positions might be understood as “internal exile” or “displacement” (including geographical) from leadership and professional status. Unlike Spanish women teachers, Australian women teachers were also banished by marriage bars to their employment in state school systems, making marital status a determining factor in their lives and work.<sup>12</sup> Marriage

<sup>7</sup> Kira Mahamud and M.<sup>a</sup> José Ruiz-Tunes, “Reconstructing life histories of Spanish primary teachers”, *History of Education*, 43 no. 6 (2014): 793-819.

<sup>8</sup> Sonsoles San Roman Gago, “The Spanish schoolmistress: from tradition to modernity”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 36 no. 2 (2000): 584; Sonsoles San Roman, “Professional identities of teachers during the social transformation toward democracy in Spain”, eds. Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Roman *Women and teaching: global perspectives on the feminisation of a profession*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 23-50.

<sup>9</sup> Narciso de Gabriel, “The entrance of women”, 349-350; Miguel Roca and Juan Marti, “The pedagogical foundations of primary school inspector Leonor Serrano (1919-1939)”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 54 no. 3 (2018): 338-354; Kay Whitehead, “Troubling gender relations with the appointment of ‘that lady inspector’ in post-suffrage South Australia” eds. T. Allender and S. Spencer, *“Femininity” and the history of women’s education* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham Switzerland, 2021), 89-118.

<sup>10</sup> Consuelo Flecha Garcia, “Education in Spain: close-up of its history in the twentieth century”, *Analytical Reports in International Education*, 4 no. 1 (2011): 17-42; M. de Mar del Pozo Andres and Sjaak Braster, “The reinvention of the new education movement in the Franco dictatorship (Spain, 1936-1976)”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 42 no. 1-2 (2006): 109-126.

<sup>11</sup> Aida Terron, Josep Comelles and Enrique Perdiguero-Gil, “Schools and health education in Spain during the dictatorship of General Franco (1939-1975)”, *History of Education Review*, 46 no. 2 (2017): 208-223; Roca and Marti, “The pedagogical foundations”, 339; M.<sup>a</sup> del Mar del Pozo Andrés and Sjaak Braster, “The reinvention of the new education movement”, 126.

<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Theobald, “And gladly teach? The making of a woman’s profession”, eds Elizabeth Smyth and Paula Bourne *Women teaching, women learning: historical perspectives* (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc, 2006), 65-84; Kay Whitehead, “The spinster teacher in Australia from the

bars also existed in English-speaking countries such as Canada, Great Britain and the United States.<sup>13</sup>

My article adopts a feminist approach to explore internal exile and banishment in Australian women teachers' lives and work in state school systems. Although centralised patriarchal state school systems were similar throughout Australia, I focus on women teachers in the state (or province) of South Australia where legislation for secular and compulsory primary schooling was enacted in 1875; and the marriage bar was not removed completely until 1972. Sources include annual reports, publications and correspondence files of the South Australian education department, magazines of three teachers' unions, and newspapers. Although most of these texts were produced by men, I pay attention to women's voices. My objective is to highlight women educators' agency in circumventing the multiple forms of discrimination to which they were subject in their struggles for equality in the profession.

The first section of the article describes the geographic, political and social context of South Australia along with the construction of the late nineteenth century state school system. Women teachers were not only relegated to subordinate positions but also required to resign when they married. The enforcement of a marriage bar generated a "three-caste system" of women teachers.<sup>14</sup> Most young women taught for a few years before marriage ended their careers and a few married women without economic support were permitted to teach. The third group of single women made teaching a life-long career and emerged as leaders in the quest for equality in the profession. The second section explores women teachers' collective action and the impact of World War One on their working conditions. The third section discusses masculinisation and

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1870s to the 1960s", *History of Education Review*, 36 no. 1 (2007): 1-17; Marjorie Theobald and Donna Dwyer, "An episode in feminist politics: The Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act, 1932-47", *Labour History*, 76 (1999): 59-77; Donna Dwyer, "Justice at last? The Temporary Teachers Club and the Teaching Service (Married Women) Act 1956", *Labour History* 91 (2006): 151-168.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila Cavanagh, "Female teacher gender and sexuality in twentieth century Ontario, Canada" eds Rebecca Coulter and Helen Harper *History is hers: women educators in twentieth century Ontario* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2005), 111-134; David Donahue, "Rhode Island's last holdout: tenure and married women teachers at the brink of the women's movement", *History of Education Quarterly*, 42 no. 1 (2002): 50-74; Alison Oram, *Women teachers and feminist politics 1900-1939*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Theobald, "And gladly teach?" 67.

tensions in South Australia's teaching workforce which were exacerbated by economic depression in the early 1930s. In 1937, the majority of South Australian women teachers broke away from the mixed teachers union and formed the feminist Women Teachers' Guild. Between 1937 and 1951, the Women Teachers' Guild was the dominant voice for women teachers and the fourth section explores its relationship with the education department and mixed teachers union during World War Two. The unions amalgamated in 1951 and the final section articulates women's ongoing struggles for equality when acute teacher shortages necessitated the employment of married women. Whereas teaching was constructed as single women's work in the late nineteenth century, it transformed into married women's work in the post-war era. The marriage bar was eventually deleted from the regulations in 1972.

#### “IN ANY MIXED SCHOOL, THE PRINCIPAL MUST BE A MASTER”

South Australia was a British colony from 1836 and Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their lands by British Protestant families who were guaranteed freedom of religion. Additionally, German Lutherans who were escaping religious persecution constituted 10% of the population. The Catholic Church served less than 15% of the population and was politically, economically and socially weaker than elsewhere in Australia. When a democratic national government was formed in 1901, South Australia became a state but maintained its responsibility for education.<sup>15</sup>

Geographically, South Australia is approximately twice the size of Spain with much of the land in the north of the state being desert. Adelaide was designated as South Australia's capital city in 1836 and remained the only city and the political, administrative, commercial and educational centre for the following 150 years. However, about 75% of people were living outside metropolitan Adelaide when legislation for compulsory and secular schooling was passed by the South Australian government in 1875. State schooling became free in 1891. The Catholic and Lutheran churches opposed the secular component, referring to state schools as “godless institutions”, but they were not sufficiently

<sup>15</sup> David Hilliard and Arnold Hunt, “Religion”, ed. Eric Richards *The Flinders history of South Australia: social history* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986), 194-234.

powerful to affect the legislation and they did not receive government funding. More than 70% of white children between the ages of seven and thirteen attended the free, compulsory and secular state schools.<sup>16</sup>

Inspector general Hartley led the state school system until 1896. A mixed training college was opened in Adelaide in 1876, and an all-male inspectorial system was established to supervise state schools and teachers. The central office of the education department in Adelaide controlled all teachers' appointments and transfers between schools. Furthermore, teachers were required to state in writing their willingness to teach in any part of South Australia at any point in their career. This requirement for teachers' mobility became the source of tremendous tension regarding the employment of married women teachers in the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Inspector general Hartley created two categories of schools. "Provisional" schools (*escuela unitaria*) with fewer than 20 boys and girls were located in the thinly populated rural areas furthest from Adelaide. The vast majority of provisional teachers were young women who served a brief apprenticeship but were not qualified. Their meagre salaries assumed that they were not supporting family members and would teach for about five years before marriage. They were excluded from employment upon marriage, but the marriage bar was not formalised in the regulations. Most provisional teachers were denied opportunities to qualify as teachers. Living far from their families and from Adelaide, they were professionally, socially and geographically exiled. Nevertheless, their wages facilitated a measure of independence so as to make marriage a choice rather than an economic necessity. And aside from a yearly inspector's visit, each provisional teacher had relative autonomy to deliver the centrally mandated secular curriculum in her one-room school.<sup>18</sup>

Inspector general Hartley designated mixed schools with more than 20 students as "public" schools (*escuela graduada*) and they were staffed by qualified teachers. Public schools were erected in more populated

<sup>16</sup> Pavla Miller, *Long division: state schooling in South Australian society*. (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986), 37-56.

<sup>17</sup> Whitehead, "Troubling gender relations", 99-101.

<sup>18</sup> Whitehead, "The spinster teacher", 3, 5; Kyle, "Woman's natural mission", 29-30.

rural districts and metropolitan Adelaide, and in most cases the education department also built a house for the head teacher who was assumed to be a married man with a family. Most public schools comprised a headmaster and one or two women teachers, and classes were mixed. The headmaster taught the older children and women teachers had an extra task of teaching sewing to the girls. A few large public schools in Adelaide were divided into boys, girls and infants departments. Public teachers' working conditions were based on men's life trajectories from youth to the compulsory retirement age of 70, assuming that they would pursue a "service ladder" of ascending levels of occupational responsibility, salary and prestige. Men's "breadwinner" salaries reflected their social obligations to marry and support a wife and family. The highly-regulated service ladder for men commenced with qualification at the training college in Adelaide, and then appointments as teachers and then headmasters of rural public schools of increasing size and responsibility, followed by metropolitan schools in Adelaide. Promotion along the service ladder was by seniority and pedagogical expertise as assessed by inspectors. The pinnacle of a man's career was to be headmaster of a large divided school in Adelaide, and a few headmasters became inspectors.<sup>19</sup>

Inspector general Hartley claimed that the training college attracted women of superior attainments compared with men, but their separate and inferior service ladder was bound by conventions and regulations that protected men's careers and ensured that no women would be placed in a position of authority over men. For example, women teachers in public schools were excluded from leadership by the regulation: "Should the average attendance be higher than 100 [subsequently reduced to 30], in any mixed school, the principal must be a master".<sup>20</sup> Most women worked as teachers in rural and then metropolitan schools led by headmasters until marriage ended their employment. Their "living wage" assumed they had no dependents and that teaching would not be a life-long career. For the small cohort of women who did not marry, promotion to schools in Adelaide enhanced their professional status.

<sup>19</sup> Whitehead, "Vocation, career and character", 579-589; Theobald, *Knowing women*, 149, 156-161.

<sup>20</sup> "Education Regulations", *South Australian Parliamentary Papers* 1876, no. 21, 2, 4-7 (Hereafter SAPP).



Only a handful of women attained the position of infant mistress or headmistress of the girls' department in a large divided school. They were also subordinate to the headmaster.<sup>21</sup>

In essence, the centralised patriarchal state school system was structured so that most men became headmasters and women were exiled to subordinate positions as teachers in provisional and public schools. By 1889, there were 252 public schools and 288 provisional schools in South Australia; and 1,076 state school teachers, 62% of whom were women. More than 50% of the men were headmasters in public schools, and almost all women were either qualified public teachers or unqualified provisional teachers.<sup>22</sup> In stark contrast to Spain where 48% of women teachers were married in 1885, the enforcement of the informal marriage bar constructed teaching as an occupation for married men and single women.<sup>23</sup> Most young provisional and public women teachers taught for a few years prior to marriage. A miniscule number of married women (mostly widows) were permitted to teach. Women who advanced along the service ladder gravitated to Adelaide so that there was a cohort of qualified, senior in terms of age and experience, single women teachers in metropolitan schools, but subject to male leadership. Compared with young provisional teachers in rural schools, they had less autonomy in their daily work, but they had access to more congenial living arrangements, social, professional and political networks in the capital city. These senior women teachers demonstrated their agency and ambition in ascending the service ladder but the education department's regulations stated that that "teachers are enjoined not to take part in political affairs, otherwise than by exercise of the franchise".<sup>24</sup>

Women in Adelaide schools circumvented sanctions against political participation by joining professional and socio-political organisations and contesting gendered inequalities. Headmistress Catherine Francis was the first woman to present a paper to the South Australian Teachers

<sup>21</sup> Whitehead, "Vocation, career and character", 586-589.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 371-372.

<sup>23</sup> De Gabriel, "The entrance of women", 352.

<sup>24</sup> "Education regulations 1885", *SAPP* 1885, no. 34, 3.

Association in 1888, and decried women's workloads.<sup>25</sup> An anonymous letter to the press supported her grievances and argued that "women need the suffrage in order that they may obtain fair consideration in the schools and other public institutions".<sup>26</sup> The letter was timely as the women's suffrage movement was gathering momentum in South Australia. South Australian women won suffrage in 1894 and paved the path for all Australian white women to achieve suffrage in 1901, thereby contributing to the nation's reputation as a progressive democracy.<sup>27</sup>

Inspector general Hartley's accidental death in 1896 necessitated the appointment of another inspector and the pro-suffrage minister of education decreed that it must be a woman. Adelaide's senior headmasters (and potential inspectors) and the new mixed but male-dominated South Australian Public Teachers Union (SAPTU) were outraged. Buoyed by the suffrage, the senior women responded that "they were proved to be quite competent to take part in making their own laws, educational or otherwise".<sup>28</sup> Headmistress Blanche McNamara won the position as the first woman inspector in an Australian state school system. McNamara contracted tuberculosis, however, and died in 1900. The woman inspector's position was subsequently withdrawn.<sup>29</sup> Although women's suffrage had not resulted in fair consideration for women teachers, they were enfranchised and emboldened to act collectively in the early twentieth century.

### "STIRRINGS AMONGST THE WOMEN"

Inspector general Hartley was replaced by a more conservative administration that eroded women teachers' working conditions. Class sizes were increased and the positions of headmistress and infant mistress were abolished in 1900. They were replaced by "chief assistants" with reduced salaries and status, thereby consolidating headmasters' authority.<sup>30</sup> In 1903, drastic reductions in teachers' salaries generated widespread discontent.

<sup>25</sup> *Observer*, September 8, 1888, 35; *Education Gazette*, October 1888, 80.

<sup>26</sup> *Register*, September 11, 1888, 7; *Evening Journal*, September 15, 1888, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Whitehead, "Troubling gender relations", 99-104.

<sup>28</sup> *Evening Journal*, January 21, 1897, 5; *Advertiser*, January 21, 1897, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Whitehead, "Troubling gender relations", 104-114.

<sup>30</sup> "Education regulations", *SAPP* 1901, no. 37, 13.

Men's grievances were canvassed at SAPTU's annual conference in July 1903 but the women were ignored.<sup>31</sup>

In August 1903, women teachers in Adelaide schools formed the Women Assistants Association and affiliated with SAPTU. Their aims were: "To combine for mutual benefit and improvement; to discuss professional subjects with the aim of helping each other; to protect the interests of all women teachers".<sup>32</sup> The group soon reconfigured as the Women Teachers Association (WTA) to include all women in the state school system. However, SAPTU and the WTA were based in Adelaide. Their location facilitated access to the government and education department's centralised administration but marginalised rural teachers from active participation. SAPTU was led by senior members of the profession in metropolitan schools, namely primary school headmasters; and senior single women teachers led the WTA.

In 1906, WTA president Lizzie Hales proposed the first motion from women teachers at SAPTU's annual conference. Acknowledging the implications of the marriage bar with a little humour, the WTA demanded equal pay and equal service ladders.

The woman who sought work in the higher branches of the profession meant to make teaching her life-work, unless, of course, she met a man with £1,000 a year and a motor car (laughter and cheers). Teaching would be her life-work as much as a married man's life-work and she would pursue her calling for two reasons – because she was progressive and because the state of her finances compelled her to do so. As regards training, women received the same scholastic and theoretical training as men, and in many of the big schools received a more diversified practical experience. Women therefore, asked for the same remuneration as men, and demanded that they should be judged by their capability and not by their sex.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Education Gazette*, July 1903, 110.

<sup>32</sup> *Education Gazette*, September 1903, 130.

<sup>33</sup> *Education Gazette*, July 1906, 171-172.

In essence, South Australia's women teachers were deploying discourses of professionalism by claiming teaching as a life-work and the same service ladders and salaries as men. The motion was passed at the conference but SAPTU's all-male governing council contained this threat to male privilege by "resolving to take no action".<sup>34</sup> SAPTU council deployed this strategy frequently to block women for the following thirty years.

WTA activism was wide-ranging, commencing with Lizzie Hales' election as the first woman on the SAPTU council. In 1909, the WTA affiliated with the post-suffrage Women's Non-Party Political Association (WNPPA) and Hales presented a paper on equal pay. The WTA used its central location in Adelaide to collaborate with women's organisations to advance women and girls' interests.<sup>35</sup> WTA representatives also made formal deputations to the director (formerly inspector general) of education. For example, the establishment of four state high schools in Adelaide prompted a deputation requesting headmistresses for their girls' departments and more chief assistants in large primary schools.<sup>36</sup> This deputation was not successful. With only 22 chief assistants among 1,200 women teachers, the women argued that there was "practically nothing for the brilliant, the ambitious, the progressive woman to aspire to" in the state school system.<sup>37</sup>

The outbreak of World War One coincided with the introduction of a new education act which introduced full-time attendance for all white children to the age of 14. The category of "provisional" school was abolished and teachers in one-room schools (*escuela unitaria*) were reclassified as public teachers, but the impediments to their careers did not diminish.<sup>38</sup> Australia entered the war to support the British, and the enlistment of many men led to a shortage of teachers. Qualified married women teachers were recruited as "temporary" teachers pending the men's return from the war. The marriage bar was formalised in the 1915

<sup>34</sup> *Education Gazette*, January 1907, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Trethewey and Whitehead, "The city as a site", 110-113.

<sup>36</sup> WTA to director, August 5, 1914, GRG 18/2/1914/1969, State Records of South Australia (Hereafter SRSA).

<sup>37</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1916, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 152-153.

Education Act to ensure their temporary status. The education department established the Schools Patriotic Fund and also increased the size of classes to sixty students.<sup>39</sup>

In 1915, the WTA was reconstituted as the Women Teachers Progressive League (WTPL) with high school teacher Adelaide Miethke as president and Phebe Watson as secretary. Both also represented women on SAPTU council. Miethke was “one of the strongest lady teachers” in the state school system and organised the Schools Patriotic Fund from 1914-1918.<sup>40</sup> Men in SAPTU acknowledged Miethke as “a fine organiser, a tireless worker and a fearless fighter”.<sup>41</sup> Phebe Watson was the “mistress of method” at the training college and prepared teachers for one-room schools. Whereas Miethke was the public advocate for women, “Miss Watson does not seek the limelight but she wields a fine influence ... In union matters she chooses to be the head rather than the hands or the voice”.<sup>42</sup> Watson contributed regularly to the *SA Teachers' Journal*, supporting young women teachers and reporting on WTPL activism. Miethke and Watson were life-long friends and integral to “stirrings amongst the women” for more than three decades.<sup>43</sup>

The WTPL's first conference in 1915 was addressed by the president of the WNPPA. Women teachers adopted an incremental approach to salary disparities with equal pay as their ultimate goal. In keeping with WTPL nomenclature, they endorsed student-centred pedagogies such as the Montessori approach, and argued for smaller classes and better school facilities. Improved working conditions for young women in one-teacher schools was another priority but the WTPL did not comment on the formalisation of the marriage bar or the employment of married women as temporary teachers.<sup>44</sup> Whatever members' personal views, the WTPL usually refrained from public comment about marital status but was well aware of its significance in the social construction of

<sup>39</sup> *Express and Telegraph*, December 7, 1915, 4; WTPL to Director, May 15, 1915, GRG 18/2/1915/1306, SRSA.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Trethewey and Whitehead, “The city as a site”, 116.

<sup>41</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, August 1920, 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>43</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, April 1919, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Trethewey and Whitehead, “The city as a site”, 113-119.

femininity. In Australia, marriage and motherhood together were represented as the peak of femininity or women's natural destiny. Married women had more status than single women; and age played a very important role so that young women were deemed marriageable and older women not so. The marriage bar not only generated the latter group of teachers but also facilitated the equation of teaching with spinsterhood. The contentious image of the never-married "old maid" or "spinster" as a failed woman was inevitably associated with South Australia's women teachers who were the largest group of women in professional employment. Given the negative connotations of their marital status, WTPL activists rarely entwined teaching with the maternal sphere.<sup>45</sup> Instead, they prioritised salaries and a service ladder that empowered women to maintain the status and attributes of a profession.

Well aware of the competing demands for government funds to support the war, a WTPL deputation in 1917 asked the director for a "living minimum wage". Women teachers in one-room schools earned "less than the daily wage of a washerwoman". Qualified women had to work for seven years to attain the same salary as the lowest paid male teacher. Some senior women including Phebe Watson at the training college were paid less than a male teacher at the beginning of his career. WTPL representatives claimed that women were "bearing the brunt of the extra work entailed by the enlistment of men" and their increased workloads were taking a physical and mental toll: "If further proof were needed one only has to compare the faces of a group of women teachers with those of any other group of the same age – the latter youthful, careless, the other strained, set, prematurely aged".<sup>46</sup> This description invoked the stereotypical imagery of the spinster teacher and representatives added that teaching compromised women's natural destiny of marriage and motherhood.

It was a well-known fact that women teachers, passing their days among juveniles, and too worn out after a day's work to figure much in adult society – or to figure to advantage, after two or three years find themselves practically shut off from matrimonial

<sup>45</sup> Whitehead, "The spinster teacher", 1- 9; Oram, *Women teachers*, 8-11, 47-52; Cavanagh, "Female teacher gender and sexuality", 111-134.

<sup>46</sup> WTPL to Director, May 15, 1915, GRG 18/2/1915/1306, SRSA.

prospects. Their higher education, their very training (to command – to assert themselves) are further deterrents.<sup>47</sup>

Given this dilemma, the women asked for a salary that enabled them to work and live in the manner befitting a profession: “We plead that women teachers shall be freed from financial stress ... Work which demands such mental freshness as teaching should carry with it a natural right to relaxation, intellectual, artistic and physical”.<sup>48</sup> None of the women teachers’ arguments persuaded the director to increase their salaries during the war years. However, the 1920s and 1930s were decades of progress and setbacks for South Australia’s women teachers.

#### “MASCULINITY OF DEPARTMENTAL PERSONNEL”

The interwar years began positively with the appointment of a progressive administrator, director McCoy, in 1919, and modest salary increases in 1920. McCoy reinstated infant departments, appointed and empowered infant mistresses in large metropolitan schools, and elevated the newly appointed inspector of infant departments, Lydia Longmore, to the same rank as men who inspected mixed schools. Longmore was a passionate advocate of Montessori education. In 1924, McCoy created six metropolitan boys and girls “central schools” and appointed headmistresses and chief assistants in the latter. He selected Adelaide Miethke as inspector of girls’ departments in central and high schools. In essence, women’s service ladder expanded under McCoy’s leadership and the WTPL rejoiced in his support.<sup>49</sup>

Although inspectors retained their SAPTU membership, it was customary for them to withdraw from official positions. Miethke resigned as WTPL president but did not forsake women teachers. Combining with Phebe Watson as secretary, Miethke used her leadership of the National Council of Women (NCW) and other women’s organisations to advance women teachers’ struggles for equality. The NCW became the most influential post-suffrage organisation in Australia and Miethke and

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; Whitehead, “Vocation, career and character”, 589-591.

<sup>49</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, October 1922, 205; Trethewey, “Either you have misunderstood the directions”, 4-7.

Watson exemplified women teachers' interlocking professional and socio-political networks in metropolitan Adelaide.<sup>50</sup>

SAPTU entered a new sphere in 1924 when the union was granted registration in the South Australian Arbitration Court to prosecute salary claims.<sup>51</sup> However, headmasters dominated SAPTU council and men ruled the industrial court. In 1925, SAPTU president Gartrell, headmaster Skitch and headmistress Lizzie Lamb presented the teachers' cases. Lizzie was headmistress of Norwood Girls' Central school and WTPL president. Her evidence highlighted the WTPL's incremental stance regarding equal pay, and was endorsed by Gartrell and director McCoy. Lizzie Lamb proposed that female salaries should be 80% of male salaries. She stated that teaching was women's work, and that women had the same qualifications and performed the same work as men. She claimed that women taught infants better than men; that child-centred education demanded more effort from teachers than traditional methods; and that teaching compromised their marriageability.<sup>52</sup> Here, she was hinting that never-married women were career teachers like men. Given that men's salaries were based on a breadwinner family wage, Lamb was interrogated about women's family responsibilities and responded that some women were supporting dependents. The outcome of the 1925 salaries award was that most women's salaries were set at 80%, resulting in substantial increases.<sup>53</sup> South Australian women teachers were still subject to many forms of internal exile but the 1920s were halcyon days compared with the following decades.

Director McCoy died in 1929. His replacement, director William Adey was a traditionalist who sympathised with headmasters and stated that he would "certainly not sacrifice the dignity of the men".<sup>54</sup> Adey immediately strengthened headmasters' authority over headmistresses and chief assistants. Next, the onset of economic depression proved disastrous for women teachers. Director Adey dismissed all temporary (married

<sup>50</sup> Trethewey and Whitehead, "The city as a site", 116-119.

<sup>51</sup> Adrian Vicary, *In the interests of education: a history of teacher unionism in South Australia*. (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin 1997), 52-54.

<sup>52</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, July 1925, 1104-1112; *Observer*, October 24, 1925, 47; *News*, March 3, 1926, 5.

<sup>53</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, November 1925, 4-6, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Trethewey, "Either you have misunderstood the directions", 8.



women) teachers and economised by not replacing headmistresses and chief assistants who resigned. The government cut teachers' salaries by 10% in 1930 and a further 15% in 1931. State school teachers' compulsory retirement age was reduced from 70 to 65 for men and 60 for women.<sup>55</sup> The WTPL protested that these measures constituted "a crushing blow to our treasured status, a status so highly prized and sought", and recalled that "South Australia was the first to grant women's suffrage. But even in less progressive countries Mussolini stated that women should have equal opportunities".<sup>56</sup>

There were other factors impacting women teachers in the 1930s, including the increasing masculinisation of South Australia's teaching workforce. Whereas women constituted about 70% of state school teachers in 1900, they were less than 50% by the mid-1930s.<sup>57</sup> From 1926, many qualified (and costly) men were commencing their careers in one-room schools which constituted 53% of South Australia's primary schools. Men's service ladder became over-crowded so that many were still located in one-room schools when they married and required a family home. However, there were not enough residences attached to these schools. Director Adey conceded that "the rapid increase in the masculinity of Departmental personnel is not in the best interests of either the mobility or the economy of the department".<sup>58</sup> Although the "preponderance of men" displaced young women from one-room schools and impacted on women teachers in mixed schools because they had to teach sewing and physical education to the girls in men's classes as well as their own, Adey's focus was men's careers. He responded by admitting fewer men to the training college with the flow-on effect of alleviating pressure on their service ladder.<sup>59</sup>

Amidst anxieties about men's service ladder and salary losses generated by the economic depression, there was little empathy for women teachers from Adey and even less from SAPTU's leadership whose

<sup>55</sup> Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 64-68; Trethewey, "Either you have misunderstood the directions", 11.

<sup>56</sup> WTPL to Director, July 1931, GRG 18/2/1931/1008, SRSA.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 372.

<sup>58</sup> *News*, July 11, 1940, 4; "Report of the Minister of Education, 1939", *SAPP* 1940, no. 44, 7, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 212.

perspectives matched those of the director. In 1930, SAPTU's president, Peter Corry, asserted that "woman's place was in the home" and expressed deep-seated fears about women teachers' presence in SAPTU. Notwithstanding the masculinisation of the teaching workforce, he stated that "the men have been afraid for many years that the women would arise in their might, use their numbers and utterly swamp them".<sup>60</sup> Corry's statements were indicative of a growing backlash against women who did not marry. As this article has shown, the centralised patriarchal structures and processes in the state school system, including the marriage bar, had paradoxically generated a cohort of socially and economically independent senior women teachers in metropolitan schools who flouted women's natural destiny and were active unionists. In the inter-war years, Corry's patriarchal stance was invigorated by sexologists and psychologists who proposed that heterosexuality in marriage was essential to women's health and happiness. These ideas were evident in a vicious letter to the press about South Australia's women teachers:

They cling tenaciously to their positions as some compensation for that which they have missed, and the joys which would have been theirs in the bonds of matrimony ... Such women are, indeed, a pathetic spectacle and the [education] department would be doing a kindly action if it pensioned them off at 40 and let them live in seclusion in some remote region.<sup>61</sup>

Corry was utterly opposed to increasing the representation of women on SAPTU council and the salaries committee. Convinced that SAPTU had not represented their interests fairly during the economic depression, the WTPL dissolved as a formal structure and affiliated as seven separate women teachers' organisations, thereby increasing the number of women on SAPTU council.

Antagonism between men and women teachers flared when SAPTU endeavoured to restore teachers' salaries to the 1925 level. Activists including Adelaide Miethke and Phebe Watson were witnesses on behalf of women teachers and supported by the NCW and other socio-political

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> *Recorder*, March 20, 1937, 2; Whitehead, "The spinster teacher", 10-11; Oram, *Women teachers*, 186-191; Cavanagh, "Female teacher gender and sexuality", 111-134.

organisations. All were cognisant of president Corry's politics, and women were wary of returning to the industrial court, with good reason.<sup>62</sup> In 1933, the president of the industrial court claimed that the 1925 salaries award was "extravagant".<sup>63</sup> Taking the "normal marrying age for the male school teacher" to be 26, much of the men's case revolved around ensuring that the lowest paid men in one-room schools had sufficient income to support a family.<sup>64</sup> Given that bargaining was based on a male breadwinner wage and a female living wage, women teachers were an unwelcome anomaly: "The difficulty is that in ordinary industry a female is employed with the idea that in time she will marry. In the case of teachers, they enter the profession for life and their careers are more comparable with men's".<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the new award not only failed to fully restore men's salaries but also set women's salaries at 62.5% of the male rate rather than 80% as per the 1925 award. The latter ratio was generally accepted across Australia so South Australia's women teachers were devastated by this outcome.<sup>66</sup> Corry and his supporters did not realise that the scene was set for women to break away from SAPTU.

#### "AN ORGANISATION RUN BY WOMEN FOR WOMEN"

Without equal representation on SAPTU council and salaries committee, women teachers had little chance of achieving parity with men. When women tabled a motion for equal representation in 1937, male teachers attended SAPTU's annual conference in large numbers to defeat the women. In August 1937, 400 women teachers met in Adelaide and voted overwhelmingly to withdraw from SAPTU and form the Women Teachers Guild (WTG). That consummate strategist, Phebe Watson, emerged as WTG president and stated her aspirations:

My own feeling is that the new organisation will be truly democratic in that it will be an organisation run by women for

<sup>62</sup> Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 76-77.

<sup>63</sup> *Advertiser*, December 14, 1933, 18.

<sup>64</sup> *News*, March 23, 1934, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Advertiser*, December 19, 1934, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 76.

women, with full representation from all bodies of teachers ... my *conviction* is that women will get a fair hearing by putting their own case rather than having to first convince the union of the justness of their cause, which for the past two or three years has been an impossible task.<sup>67</sup>

Watson had retired in 1936 and devoted the following five years to the WTG and its 800 members. She established an office, library and restrooms in Adelaide; and affiliated with nine women's organisations including the NCW and League of Women Voters. The WTG shared an office assistant with the NCW whose president and Watson's friend was Adelaide Miethke.<sup>68</sup> Watson also founded and edited the *Guild Chronicle* to "voice in the main the ideas and opinions of women".<sup>69</sup> Its first issue clearly articulated the inequalities between teachers' service ladders:

Given average skill, academics, personality and zeal, the man may pass from stage to stage of promotion – from assistant to head of school, with always the incentive of possible promotion before him, always the opportunity of being his own master with the joy of creating, building, planning, following out his own ideas.

All this is denied the woman teacher. The vast majority begin and end as assistants, carrying out the ideas imposed by somebody else, fortunate if the head teacher be a tolerant cultured man of high influence and ability, thwarted and unhappy when he happens to be a man of limited vision, mediocre ability, poor organising power and with a flair for interference.<sup>70</sup>

The WTG pursued these inequalities relentlessly but its initial focus was the young women in one-room schools who had fared worst of all in the 1935 salaries case when they were classified as "unskilled" workers and paid "barely more than a waitress or housemaid".<sup>71</sup> Based in remote

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> *Advertiser*, May 16, 1939, 7; Trethewey and Whitehead, "The city as a site", 113-116; Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 121.

<sup>69</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, June 1938, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>71</sup> WTG deputation re lowest paid teachers, 5 July 1938, GRG 18/2/1938/365, SRSA.

rural schools, they were unable to participate actively in the WTG but Watson was their advocate. Acknowledging the significance of marriage, she addressed them in the *Guild Chronicle*:

I don't doubt that most women will agree with the idea that to be happily married ... would be the ideal state of being ... But woman must allowed to preserve the right to make a free choice not to be forced into marriage because she is deprived of the means to support herself ... The right to work for her living, and maintain her economic freedom, is an absolute fundamental for her material and moral wellbeing.<sup>72</sup>

This stance underpinned the WTG's argument for young single women teachers to be paid a living wage that was commensurate with their enormous responsibilities in one-room schools and preserved their economic freedom. The education department agreed to pay a "subsistence allowance" to supplement their wages.<sup>73</sup>

Watson also factored age and marital status into the case for senior women's salaries:

Up to forty years of age, the woman is, perhaps, not concerned with the idea that she will go on teaching all her working life – there is always the possibility of marriage. After forty, I suggest that in common fairness, the woman's salary should approximate more nearly that of the man's of equal status – she has her old age to provide for, and has in an astonishing number of cases to be responsible for a home, aged parents and other dependents.<sup>74</sup>

Both the WTG and SAPTU adopted an equal pay policy but SAPTU refused to pursue equal pay in salary negotiations. SAPTU vehemently opposed the WTG's registration in the industrial court in 1940 but was defeated, and friction between the two unions was intense until the late 1940s. Men's concerns such as adequate housing for headmasters and

<sup>72</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, August 1938, 9.

<sup>73</sup> WTG deputation re lowest paid teachers, 5 July 1938, GRG 18/2/1938/365, SRSA.

<sup>74</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, February 1940, 12.

their crowded service ladder were prioritised over issues raised by the few women who remained in SAPTU.<sup>75</sup>

The WTG's relationship with the education department's senior administration improved significantly when director Charles Fenner replaced director Adey in 1939. Fenner encouraged progressive ideas, converted boys and girls central schools into "technical schools" with the status of a secondary school; and empowered infant mistresses. Unlike the previous incumbent, director Fenner maintained that "the headmaster loses nothing in dignity when he delegates authority to his staff, whether it be to his infant mistress or to his chief assistant".<sup>76</sup>

Whatever the gendered relationships at play, World War Two impacted on everybody's work. Australia declared war in September 1939 and Japanese air raids on northern Australia escalated anxieties throughout the nation in 1941. By December 1941, 324 men teachers had taken leave from their positions and joined the military forces.<sup>77</sup> Air raid shelters and trenches were dug in schools, and children were taught air raid drills. The Schools Patriotic Fund was re-established and led by inspector Miethke, and women teachers added voluntary work in wartime organisations to their school duties. By 1942, 186 qualified married women were re-employed as "temporary" teachers. They included some who had married in haste prior to their husbands' assignments to the overseas war front, and continued teaching.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the education department's regulations compelled women teachers to resign for three days in order to marry. In so doing, they lost their position on the service ladder and all accumulated entitlements; and were re-employed at base salary. None of these grossly unfair conditions applied to the absent men whose entitlements were preserved pending their return from the war.<sup>79</sup>

Over-burdened by leadership of the Schools Patriotic Fund in addition to her inspectorial duties, Miethke applied to director Fenner for assistance in October 1940. Following consultation with Miethke, the

<sup>75</sup> *News*, August 19, 1944, 3; Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 86.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Trethewey, "Either you have misunderstood the directions", 13.

<sup>77</sup> "Report of the Minister of Education, 1941", *SAPP* 1942, no. 44, 3; Miller, *Long division*, 208-213.

<sup>78</sup> *News*, August 14, 1940, 8; WTG to Director, 1942, GRG 18/2/1942/631, SRSA.

<sup>79</sup> *News*, July 5, 1944, 5; Miller, *Long division*, 212-213.

director appointed Ruth Gibson as an “acting inspector”.<sup>80</sup> The most senior women in the state school system in terms of age, experience and position had been overlooked in favour of Gibson, aged 39 and recently promoted to chief assistant in a technical school. Given that Gibson was also secretary of the WTG, she resigned from the role. Deputation after deputation from senior women met with the director who fuelled dissatisfaction by intimating that the optimum age for promotion to inspector was 35. Everyone also knew that Miethke was approaching the statutory retirement age of 60 for women, thereby by opening a rare, perhaps once in a lifetime opportunity for a woman to access the pinnacle of the profession. Gibson subsequently won the inspector’s position in July 1941.<sup>81</sup> The crux of women’s dissatisfaction was their longstanding internal exile as represented by their restricted service ladder. Senior women’s quest for equal service ladders continued along with advocacy for young women in one-room schools.

In 1941, both the WTG and SAPTU’s attention was drawn to the third group of women teachers in the three-caste system, namely married women who had been banished from the state school system in the late nineteenth century and were now re-joining as temporary teachers in ever increasing numbers.<sup>82</sup> Both unions were contacted by the United Association of Women seeking support for the removal of marriage bars to women’s employment. Given that married women teachers did not impede men’s service ladder, SAPTU typically deferred the issue to a committee.<sup>83</sup> With about half of the temporary teachers located in metropolitan schools, the situation was more complex for women teachers.<sup>84</sup> Whereas permanent teachers were required to teach in anywhere in South Australia, married temporary teachers were insisting on schools near their metropolitan homes. Senior single women teachers were being displaced from metropolitan schools, sent to rural schools and subordinated to younger inexperienced headmasters with consequent loss of status, networks and homes. The WTG protested that temporary

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<sup>80</sup> *Education Gazette*, November 15, 1940, 222.

<sup>81</sup> Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 83-85.

<sup>82</sup> *News*, July 5, 1944, 5.

<sup>83</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, January 1941, 5.

<sup>84</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, August 1941, 5.

teachers were receiving “preferential treatment”, and added that married women’s “divided interests” rendered them less “efficient” than permanent teachers.<sup>85</sup> Assuming that single women had no homes or dependents, one temporary teacher defended her request to remain in Adelaide, countering that “the aforementioned homes and children are not so easily transported as are a single teacher’s winter clothes and golf sticks”.<sup>86</sup> Director Fenner offered little solace to the WTG when he stated that the “Department is in the hands of temporary teachers and had to accept them at their own terms”.<sup>87</sup> Notwithstanding their inferior conditions of employment, married women had some bargaining power during this shortage of teachers. After much discussion, the WTG passed a motion that “the employment of married women, except in special circumstances should not be supported”.<sup>88</sup> So long as temporary teachers were not subjected to the same mobility requirements as permanent teachers, the WTG was reluctant to endorse the removal of the marriage bar.

Neither the education department nor the unions anticipated that married women teachers would soon underpin the state school system when the South Australian government established an all-male committee in 1943 to make recommendations about post-war education. The absence of women brought storms of protest from 18 organisations including the WTG, NCW and SAPTU. Chairman Bean conceded to appoint the NCW president to the committee and heard evidence from women teachers.<sup>89</sup> Gertrude Menear from the WTG claimed that the “centralised system of education tended to produce a dictator and automatons” and argued that “teachers should be given more freedom while guided along paths that led to a better understanding of children”.<sup>90</sup> Natalia Davies argued that the current system “submitted teachers to tyrannisation not found in any profession”.<sup>91</sup> Both women’s

<sup>85</sup> WTG to Director, 1942, GRG 18/2/1942/631, SRSA; *Guild Chronicle*, October 1942, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, May 1943, 21.

<sup>87</sup> WTG to Director, 1942, GRG 18/2/1942/631, SRSA.

<sup>88</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, August 1941, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 91-93.

<sup>90</sup> *Advertiser*, March 8, 1944, 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Advertiser*, March 21, 1944, 3.



inferences to totalitarianism were supported by SAPTU's evidence.<sup>92</sup> WTG president Jessie Cooper requested promotion opportunities for women teachers in primary schools, and reiterated issues regarding women in one-room schools.<sup>93</sup> The anticipated growth of secondary education and concomitant expansion of the teaching workforce were canvassed. Here, the discussion focused on the recruitment of young people to the profession. The Bean committee did not recommend that the centralised patriarchal structure of the state school system be dismantled.<sup>94</sup> On the matter of the marriage bar, the committee stated that its removal "would cut cleanly across long-established policy, and would be repugnant to the opinions of many people".<sup>95</sup> In so doing, it reflected escalating societal tensions regarding the employment of married women as well as those within the teaching workforce. It would take nearly three decades for South Australia's "temporary teachers" to be reinstated as permanent employees in the profession.

### TEACHING AS MARRIED WOMEN'S WORK

Although Australia emerged victorious from World War Two, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by social, political and educational conservatism and anxieties about the spread of communism and potential nuclear war. Both the national and South Australian governments promoted the patriarchal family and marriage and motherhood as women's natural destiny. Marriage rates increased, the age of marriage decreased and Australia experienced the highest birth rates of the twentieth century. Conservative governments restricted expenditure on social services and focused on industrialisation. Severe labour shortages were addressed with a massive migration programme, initially comprising 170,000 refugees from Poland and the Baltic countries between 1948 and 1951, followed by voluntary British and European families, including a few from Spain in the late 1950s. The majority of migrants went to South Australia and the neighbouring state of Victoria. Many married women migrants joined the workforce, including as teachers. Migration

<sup>92</sup> *Advertiser*, September 1943, 3.

<sup>93</sup> *News*, March 20, 1944, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 219-228.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Miller, *Long division*, 221.

and the so-called “baby boom” led to a 110% increase in the number of students in South Australian state schools between 1947 and 1958, at the same time as South Australia’s government “resented increased expenditure on education”.<sup>96</sup>

Leadership of the state school system was also marked by conservatism after director Fenner retired in 1946. Colonel Evan Mander-Jones, the former deputy director of military intelligence, was South Australia’s director of education until 1967. The supply of new schools did not keep pace with the explosion of enrolments. Staffing shortages worsened and the re-employment of qualified married women temporary teachers (plus some retired teachers) was not enough to solve the problem. Rather than establishing more training colleges and improving teachers’ salaries to attract recruits, the parsimonious government offered three-month preparatory courses for women and employed them as “unclassified” teachers if they were single and unclassified temporary teachers if married.<sup>97</sup>

Amidst shared concerns about the profession’s status and working conditions, SAPTU and the WTG entered a period of rapprochement. In 1949, the two unions presented a joint salaries case on a platform of equal pay for equal work. Although equal pay was not achieved, leaders of both unions initiated an amalgamation. The South Australian Institute of Teachers (SAIT) was formed in 1951 with separate men’s and women’s sections, each electing a president. SAIT’s ruling council of equal numbers of men and women was led by an elected president-general.<sup>98</sup> Although women teachers retained an independent forum, they had to persuade SAIT council to accept their recommendations. Given previous antagonisms, the men’s and women’s sections avoided open confrontation, but men maintained their advantages. They dominated SAIT’s committees; their professional networks included senior male administrators in the education department; and the president-general was always a primary school headmaster.<sup>99</sup> Men and women campaigned

<sup>96</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 235-237, 247; Elaine Martin, “Social work, the family and women’s equality in post-war Australia”, *Women’s History Review*, 12 no. 3 (2003): 445-468.

<sup>97</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 239-240; Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 93-101.

<sup>98</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, June 1951, 4.

<sup>99</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, August 1955, 33; *SA Teachers’ Journal*, February 1958, 3.

together against policies which staffed schools with unclassified teachers, achieving some success when they persuaded the education department to replace the shortest preparatory course with a one-year course. Reflecting post-war migration, the 1956 cohort comprised 28 Australian-born, 20 British and 5 European women students, all but two of whom were married.<sup>100</sup>

With the influx of migrants, South Australia's teaching workforce feminised and diversified culturally by the mid-1950s. There were 4,294 teachers in the state school system in 1955, of whom 57.3% were women. The majority of women, 63.4%, were temporary teachers, of whom almost half were qualified, and the remainder were unclassified.<sup>101</sup> However, SAIT's male members were not at the forefront of campaigning on three intertwined issues that affected all women teachers. They were service ladders, equal pay and the marriage bar.

Subject to internal exile from the advent of the state school system, women teachers had been campaigning for equal service ladders throughout the century. Infant, technical and high school women teachers had achieved positions of some authority at various times, but not primary teachers.<sup>102</sup> According to a British migrant teacher, "most primary school heads [in England] are women", but there was "no future for women teachers in South Australia".<sup>103</sup> Determined to change the status quo, a senior primary teacher, Jean Pavy, researched women's service ladders in Australia, Scandinavia, Alaska and England; and reported to SAIT's women's section and council in 1954. With agreement from SAIT council, Pavy and two colleagues met twice with director Mander-Jones "re promotion positions for primary school women".<sup>104</sup> In February 1956, Mander-Jones proposed that deputy heads be appointed to large primary schools and that "headships of all primary schools shall be open to men and women equally on their merits".<sup>105</sup> This proposal had the

<sup>100</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, October 1956, 16; Vicary, *In the interests of education*, 93-101.

<sup>101</sup> "Report of the Minister of Education, 1955", *SAPP* 1956, no. 44, 4.

<sup>102</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, November 1956, 19.

<sup>103</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1951, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Diary – Jean Pavy, D 7256(L), State Library of South Australia (Hereafter SLSA).

<sup>105</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, February 1956, 7.

potential to overturn men's unfettered access to prestigious positions in the state school system. The proposal was debated vigorously and sometimes viciously at a joint meeting of the men's and women's sections in April 1956. Men knew that few women were eligible for headships in the large metropolitan schools but feared that younger women might block their promotion to medium-size schools and win headships over older men.<sup>106</sup> The debate about service ladders threatened the unity of the relatively new mixed union more than any other issue in the post-war era.

Director Mander-Jones converted the proposal into policy, necessitating changes to the regulations and the reclassification of primary schools. Eighty-eight new deputy head positions were created and Jean Pavy became one of a handful of female deputy heads in metropolitan schools.<sup>107</sup> While men's complaints about the service ladder continued into the 1960s, Jean Pavy emerged as SAIT's leader in the battle for equal pay.

This article has shown that South Australia's women teachers first staked their claim to the same salaries as men in 1906, and that there were as many setbacks as progress towards this goal in the ensuing years. Supported by the NCW and other women's organisations, there was a national campaign for equal pay in the post-war era. However, many trade unions prevaricated, claiming that equal pay would reduce men's salaries as breadwinners.<sup>108</sup> Although SAIT was committed to equal pay, there was underlying resistance. One member argued that "equal pay was unfair to the family man" and another opined that "single women's claim for equal pay seems hollow and selfish".<sup>109</sup> Jean Pavy and her colleagues researched the issue thoroughly, and in 1958 the *SA Teachers' Journal* reported that "most countries in the world (many of which Australia considers backward) give equal pay to teachers".<sup>110</sup> SAIT's salaries claim was rejected a few months later, prompting a member to point out that "last century Australia led the world in granting

<sup>106</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, June 1956, 10.

<sup>107</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, October 1957, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Miller, *Long division*, 211; Martin, "Social work, the family", 451.

<sup>109</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, April 1959, 8; *SA Teachers' Journal*, March 1964, 30.

<sup>110</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, February 1958, 7; Diary – Jean Pavy, D 7256(L), SLSA.

women's rights".<sup>111</sup> The absence of equal pay damaged Australia's reputation as a progressive democratic nation, and in 1961 Pavy informed SAIT council "we are now one of the few countries with Nicaragua who have not implemented the clause".<sup>112</sup>

Thirty professional and women's organisations representing 55,000 workers formed the South Australian Equal Pay Council in 1962, elected Jean Pavy as president, and joined forces with the Trades and Labour Council.<sup>113</sup> Pavy led a deputation and delivered a forty-page document to the South Australian government in 1964, to no avail.<sup>114</sup> SAIT formed an equal pay committee of three men and three women to support Pavy.<sup>115</sup> In 1965, the election of a progressive government resolved the stalemate in South Australia, and SAIT announced that equal pay for teachers would be phased in over four years from July 1966, coincidentally 60 years after Lizzie Hales had first proposed that motion to SAPTU.<sup>116</sup>

Resolving the inequalities regarding married women temporary teachers was a complex process; subordinated to the campaigns for equal service ladders and equal pay, and complicated by ambivalence from men and women who were permanent members of the profession. Given staffing shortages, the education department encouraged headmasters' wives to become temporary teachers and appointed them conveniently to the same schools.<sup>117</sup> This strategy displaced young single women teachers to the most remote rural schools as well as affecting senior metropolitan women teachers. With the exception of one inspector and one SAIT president-general, Donald Carmichael, who highlighted "the glaring injustice that is perpetrated on our women who marry", men teachers rarely spoke publicly about the marriage bar.<sup>118</sup> Carmichael was referring to the notorious regulation that forced women to

<sup>111</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, August 1958, 5.

<sup>112</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, December 1961, 6.

<sup>113</sup> *Tribune*, July 11, 1962, 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Tribune*, April 22, 1964, 10.

<sup>115</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1964, 4.

<sup>116</sup> *SAIT Newsletter*, June 15, 1966, 7.

<sup>117</sup> *Education Gazette*, April 1956, 141.

<sup>118</sup> *Advertiser*, October 29, 1953, 2; *SA Teachers' Journal*, April 1956, 3.

resign for three days in order to marry and thus lose their accrued entitlements. While one temporary teacher complimented Carmichael, another correspondent reflected the widespread suspicion about married women's capacity to combine their domestic and teaching responsibilities. There was also consternation about married couples drawing two salaries.<sup>119</sup>

As previously stated, marital status was a sensitive issue for the senior single women who led the struggles for equality in the teaching profession. Condemnation of spinsterhood escalated in the post-war era and married and single women's capacities as teachers were pitted against each other to the detriment of the latter.<sup>120</sup> In keeping with the former WTG, SAIT's women leaders focussed on redressing the inequalities arising from the three-day break in employment. As early as 1944, the WTG had argued that temporary teachers should retain their salaries, status and entitlements.<sup>121</sup> With many women continuing their careers immediately after the three-day break, the inequalities were magnified in the 1950s. In August 1954, SAIT's women's section discussed the situation at length and passed the following motion unanimously: "In view of the fact that the department now employs married women, they be asked to rescind this regulation".<sup>122</sup> SAIT council endorsed the motion but director Mander-Jones refused to respond to SAIT's correspondence and the campaign for equal service ladders superseded issues to do with temporary teachers.<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile, SAIT celebrated the enrolment of its 4,000<sup>th</sup> member who was a qualified temporary teacher from Britain where the marriage bar had been removed in 1944.<sup>124</sup> A report to the United Nations Status of Women conference in 1951 noted that Australia was one of only five countries with a marriage bar out of 44 participants, and that some

<sup>119</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, July 1956, 11; Martin, "Social work, the family", 445.

<sup>120</sup> *Daily News*, August 26, 1941, 10; Whitehead, "The spinster teacher", 14-16; Oram, *Women teachers*, 223.

<sup>121</sup> *Guild Chronicle*, July 1944, 10.

<sup>122</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1954, 34.

<sup>123</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1955, 15.

<sup>124</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, October 1955, 12; Oram, *Women teachers*, 222.

countries including Spain had also introduced paid maternity leave.<sup>125</sup> Some migrant teachers were dismayed to discover South Australia's marriage bar.<sup>126</sup> However, there was no consensus among temporary teachers who constituted about half of SAIT's women members. Some married women reconciled their temporary status with the limited bargaining power that enabled appointments near their homes. There was also much friction between qualified and unclassified temporary teachers.<sup>127</sup> In contrast to the neighbouring state of Victoria where temporary teachers' collective action hastened the removal of the marriage bar in 1956, married women did not lead the debates in South Australia but worked alongside SAIT's senior single women including Jean Pavy.<sup>128</sup>

Amidst frustration about the absence of collective action by the 2,000 temporary teachers, SAIT's women's section passed motions that long-serving qualified temporary teachers "be admitted to permanency if they apply".<sup>129</sup> The men's section added "we believe in equality, but equality in this context means that married women who seek permanency must accept all the [mobility] obligations of men".<sup>130</sup> After much discussion, SAIT "approved the policy that permanency be granted to qualified married women on request and on the same [mobility] conditions as apply to single women".<sup>131</sup> Jean Pavy presented this resolution to the conservative government who rejected it outright in 1962.<sup>132</sup>

As SAIT's president commented, South Australia was "out of step with the rest of the world" regarding the marriage bar as well as equal pay.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, both issues were being debated vigorously throughout Australia. Women's organisations demanded the removal of

<sup>125</sup> Marian Sawyer, *Removal of the Commonwealth marriage bar: a documentary history*. (Canberra: Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, University of Canberra, 1997), 7, 22.

<sup>126</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, July 1962, 14.

<sup>127</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, September 1958, 7.

<sup>128</sup> Dwyer, "Justice at last", 156-163.

<sup>129</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, April 1958, 21.

<sup>130</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, November 1958, 10.

<sup>131</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, July 1960, 9.

<sup>132</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, June 1962, 26.

<sup>133</sup> *SA Teachers' Journal*, July 1960, 8.

marriage bars but there was no consensus among politicians and unions.<sup>134</sup> As with equal pay, the election of a progressive government in South Australia broke the impasse regarding the marriage bar. In 1965, the notorious three-day break was abolished but married women remained temporary teachers: “Women intending to marry” were required to notify director Mander-Jones and they were “transferred without break of service to the temporary staff”. Mander-Jones added that the centralised patriarchal administration had “no obligation to find an appointment which suits the convenience of the married woman teacher”.<sup>135</sup>

From 1965, “married women teachers could become permanent teachers and eligible for promotion as long as they signed an undertaking to teach anywhere” in South Australia.<sup>136</sup> Few married women were able to fulfil this mobility obligation so most remained temporary teachers. Almost 60% of South Australia’s women teachers were married when a new director finally admitted that “married women were an essential part of the teaching workforce” in 1967.<sup>137</sup> In 1970, two married women proposed the following motion at the SAIT conference: “That a delegation from this Institute approach the Minister [of education] as soon as possible with the view to removing married women from the temporary staff provided that they retain the right to elect to teach in the area in which they live”. However, the proviso was deleted by amendment and the motion passed as per SAIT’s previously stated policy.<sup>138</sup> The marriage bar in South Australia’s state school system was eventually deleted from the regulations in 1972.<sup>139</sup> South Australia had led the way in women’s suffrage but Australia was one of the last countries in the world to abandon marriage bars in all occupations.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Sawyer, *Removal of the Commonwealth marriage bar*, 8-13.

<sup>135</sup> *Education Gazette*, March 1968, 93.

<sup>136</sup> Denise Bradley, *Inequality of opportunity: a report from the women’s adviser to the Education Department of South Australia*. (Adelaide: Education Department of South Australia, 1978), 16.

<sup>137</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, August 1967, 4.

<sup>138</sup> *SA Teachers’ Journal*, May 1970, 2.

<sup>139</sup> *Education Gazette*, August 1972, 243.

<sup>140</sup> Sawyer, *Removal of the Commonwealth marriage bar*, 7.



## CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding Australia's status as a progressive democratic nation, South Australian women teachers' struggles to redress their internal exile and banishment in the state school system were inexorably slow. From the outset, Australian state school systems and mixed teachers unions were centralised and patriarchal so that men's lives and work were privileged and protected as breadwinners and professionals. Young unqualified women teachers in one-room schools were displaced geographically, professionally, socially and politically from Adelaide as the centre of politics and education. With few exceptions, qualified women teachers were denied a service ladder that incorporated school leadership and associated professional status, and they bore the brunt of economising measures such as large classes and the extra work of teaching sewing to the girls. All women teachers were economically disadvantaged by salary inequities and all women teachers' employment was contingent on their marital status. Whereas marriage facilitated men's careers and the education department supported them wholeheartedly, women teachers who married were banished from the system, only to return as temporary teachers during teacher shortages. The marriage bar reinforced the hegemony of marriage and motherhood, and single women were further differentiated by age. Far from accepting their professional and social subordination, senior single women teachers capitalised on their location in Adelaide as the centre of post-suffrage politics and education to advocate for women teachers through collective action. From the beginning of the twentieth century, they prioritised salaries and a service ladder that preserved women's economic independence and professional status commensurate with men. While their own lives challenged marriage as women's natural destiny, they did not contest the marriage bar until teaching in the state school system became undeniably married women's work as much as single women's work. Lest it be thought that equal pay, equal service ladders and removing the marriage bar to women's employment from the regulations eliminated the inequalities between men and women teachers in the South Australian state school system, only 6% of women teachers satisfied the criteria for promotion to senior positions and thus higher salaries in the 1970s. Most married women teachers were clustered at lower salary scales, were not fully-qualified and thus not eligible for leadership positions,

and remained temporary teachers because they could not meet the mobility obligations of permanent teachers.<sup>141</sup> Women's struggles for equality in Australia's centralised patriarchal state school systems continue into contemporary times.

### Note on the author

KAY WHITEHEAD is an Adjunct Professor at the University of South Australia and a historian of education who publishes widely on the lives, work and transnational travel of Australian, Canadian and British women educators from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>141</sup> Bradley, *Inequality of opportunity*, 12-23.

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