

# WOMEN AND TEACHING

*Global Perspectives on the  
Feminization of a Profession*



EDITED BY REGINA CORTINA  
AND SONSOLES SAN ROMÁN



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of a Profession

*Regina Cortina*  
*and*  
*Sonsoles San Román*

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Regina Cortina  
Sonsoles San Román

# Introduction: Women and Teaching—Global Perspectives on the Feminization of a Profession

*Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román*

This book is intended to fill a gap in the historical and social research into contemporary educational systems. Our purpose is to use the frame of gender, with all of its complexities, to analyze the role of the woman teacher from a comparative perspective. The chapters that follow will be of great use to all those who are interested in removing the historic veil over the feminization of teaching, making it possible to discover the diversity and plurality of the social contexts in which a feminized profession has been produced.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, we will examine from a comparative and global perspective the historic, political, social, and religious contexts which give shape to the educational structure in countries that are considered in this volume. Throughout these pages, we will attempt to show the degree to which the presence of women as a majority of teachers at the early levels of the educational system is rooted in certain historical, educational, economic, and political factors that still prevail today. One of our key objectives is to explain the forces that shaped the process of feminization in teaching.

The existing studies on this subject are, for the most part, historical investigations regarding the process of feminization in Britain,<sup>1</sup> Scotland,<sup>2</sup> Canada,<sup>3</sup> Australia,<sup>4</sup> New Zealand, and the United States,<sup>5</sup> countries in which the majority presence of women in the teaching field manifested itself almost a century earlier than in most of the countries for which case studies are presented in this volume. In 2003, for the first time a French journal published a volume comparing research on gender in the history of teaching in English-speaking countries with the histories of teaching in European countries.<sup>6</sup>

In English-speaking countries, a predominance of women in both urban and rural educational systems was already evident by the second half of the nineteenth century. In the case of urban schools, social historians in the United States have concluded that the factor that favored women's entry into this occupation was the organization of schools by grades; women teachers were thus concentrated in the early grades and men teachers in the higher grades and in school administration.<sup>7</sup> But this thesis cannot be easily adapted to the expansion of rural schools, because in some cases these schools were organized as one-room schools, while in others they were organized by grades.<sup>8</sup>

In the academic writings about the feminization of teaching, scholars have asked why men abandoned the classroom when women began to arrive. Among the explanations that have been developed, the ones pointing to changes in the bureaucratic organization of schools should be emphasized. When the school year became longer, there was a corresponding increase in professional requirements for teachers; but surprisingly, the salary remained the same. Confronted by this situation and able to pursue other job opportunities, men teachers abandoned the schoolroom at an accelerated rate.<sup>9</sup>

Through an extensive empirical and comparative study of the historical record of feminization in the different regions of the United States, Perlmann and Margo<sup>10</sup> show that feminization extended to rural zones not only because of the bureaucratic organization of the schools—since many of them were one-room schools—or the fact that women were paid less than men, but also because they were considered to be more maternal and adept at working with young children.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to studies that explain the massive process of feminization from a purely sociological or economic perspective, these authors find that the salary of women teachers did not increase—even despite a high demand—because traditional gender patterns restricted the participation of women in other occupations in the labor market. Perlmann and Margo conclude that the social transformations that parallel the evolution of school organization and cultural changes were “inextricably tied up” with the gendered character of teaching and the view that it was primarily a woman's occupation.

Since the mid-1990s, several anthologies have been published by social historians, educators, and feminist scholars focusing on the cultural construction of teaching from a gender perspective. These works seek to explain how gender shapes the social and school realities of women teachers, while also taking into account how these realities are conditioned by women's own social characteristics, such as race, social

class, marital status, age, and so on.<sup>12</sup> The division of pedagogical and administrative responsibilities by gender in schools presents an area of investigation in which researchers have asked how women might succeed in overcoming gender barriers to achieve positions of leadership in public school employment.<sup>13</sup> Within all these published works, many of them based on ethnography and interviews, we hear the dissenting voices of women, organized during some periods of history while at other times audible only through the voices and writings of women reformers. But in spite of their efforts, even today the issue of gender is not addressed in many programs that prepare new teachers for the profession. Nor is the question of how the cultural construction of teaching as a gendered occupation influences the identity of teachers as they enter the classroom.<sup>14</sup>

The stratification of employment by gender within education, or the process of feminization, occurred because of two parallel trends. While on the one hand a transformation of social values took place—a situation that opened new spaces for women in the labor market—on the other hand conventional gender roles remained intact. The supervision and control of women's work remained in the hands of men, as principals and supervisors, while the work of women teachers was limited to the space of the classroom.

In the cases described within the studies collected in this volume, we can observe that the feminization of teaching was not solely due to abandonment by men and an influx of women, since in many countries the teaching profession was feminized since its inception. These case studies underline the importance of understanding political power and the political discourse that shaped to the development of public educational systems and encouraged the entrance of women into the teaching profession.

How, when, where, and why did women teachers begin to enter schools on such a large scale? In contrast to English-speaking countries, Catholic countries in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean saw the entrance of women into schools specializing in the training of teachers during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This incorporation coincided not only with the institutionalization of teaching on a national scale, but also with the resulting secularization and centralization of educational systems by the State. It would be only later, as a result of policies to expand public educational systems—a phenomenon that occurred in most countries in the first half of the twentieth century, which coincided with the influx of women into teaching—that the feminization of the profession was produced.

The accelerated growth of universal education entailed a transformation of the political discourse to support the growth of the economy and deal with the demands that arose once national systems of education were established. Politicians, legislators and intellectuals were responsible for creating an environment favorable to the incorporation of women into teaching, and of convincing these women of their innate calling as teachers.

The chapters of this volume explore how the demand caused by the opening of schools for girls, together with the resulting political and social needs, led to the hiring of educational personnel at low cost. Given this situation, the woman teacher became an economical option in the eyes of the authorities in charge of hiring them. With such a decrease in cost, these authorities obtained an important economic benefit because the salary of women teachers (legislated in only a few countries by law) was, in fact, lower. As the field expanded in the first half of the twentieth century, men gradually abandoned teaching because it did not compensate them adequately. In this way, and as a result of the same economic development, there were new possibilities to enter the job market for men or new possibilities for public service and political action. Such was the case in Mexico, where men left the schoolroom to become school administrators or participate in union and political parties, while women for the first time had the opportunity to enter the labor market with a skilled and remunerated job.

The educational hierarchy, which is differentiated by grades, opened spaces to accommodate women teachers at the bottom of the educational pyramid, that is, in the early grades, which have the least status and lowest pay. While in some countries laws were passed mandating that preschool be taught by women, in others this requirement also included the early grades of elementary school. In certain countries, this requirement made it necessary to open teacher training schools specializing in preschool and primary education only for women, which clearly contributed to the feminization of this educational level. Along with that pattern, we find that in many countries, teacher training schools for preschool and elementary grades, and all the positions for principals in these schools, have been reserved for women, a tendency documented on several occasions by international organizations.<sup>15</sup>

The historical and comparative research that studies the process of feminization in teaching explains, in part, the dynamics that set in motion women's entrance into the field of education. In countries such as Costa Rica, Spain, or Mexico, wives, mothers, and daughters were enlisted to help men teachers, a highly economical solution to



respond to demands placed by central policies that decreed universal schooling. These women teachers entered teaching by way of kinship without receiving any remuneration for their work, while at the same time, in the absence of teacher training schools for women, men teachers gave them basic instruction in reading and writing. The social image of the profession was overwhelmed by its female composition. It was widely assumed that the presence of a woman teacher in the schoolroom was required as a natural complement to the man teacher in order to contribute a maternal quality. Denying women teachers the professional level required of men teachers, schools became a convenient institution to socialize young children in traditional gender roles. Years later, these gender differences were still maintained within the teacher training schools themselves. While the “practical” schools trained women for primary school education, as in the case of the Dominican Republic and Brazil, the schools for upper-grade teachers were set aside for men.<sup>16</sup>

The social function fulfilled at home by women, the agent to whom the care for young children was delegated, supported their absorption in schools. Thus the role that women traditionally occupied in the domestic space began to extend itself into the public sphere. That is to say, the demand for women did not occur because of requirements for professionalization; on the contrary, their entrance into teaching should be understood as a result of the glorification of the so-called feminine nature that made a woman a suitable candidate to be put in charge of young children in her role as social mother. The presence of women was required once their maternal qualities were exalted and they were placed on the pedestal of “substitute mothers” or “a mother made conscious” (a term coined by Friedrich Froebel),<sup>17</sup> or even more preferably, widows, who were delegated a space of power for the first time to carry out a skilled job in the school.

The establishment of coeducation in schools marked a fundamental transition for women in teaching. For moral and religious reasons, women had not been previously allowed to teach both girls and boys, which meant that school authorities had to make a double outlay, hiring men teachers for boys’ schools and women teachers for girls’ schools. But after coeducation was customary, the woman teacher no longer worked strictly in girls’ schools. She could now also teach boys and adolescents of both sexes. Keeping in mind that coeducation occurred due to political pressures for universal compulsory education—and was not obligatory in all countries—it becomes possible to understand why this process took place primarily in public schools. Private and religious schools resisted, an opposition led by the Catholic

Church and reinforced by traditional families who understood that it was necessary to maintain a differentiated socialization within the classroom and the school to keep gender roles intact.<sup>18</sup>

It is necessary to make a distinction between coeducational and mixed schools. While the system of coeducation was established during modernization in the early twentieth century as a political requirement—which gives it a positive cast—mixed schools were opened due to economic factors in municipalities lacking the resources to offer separate schools for girls and boys. Significantly, in some countries two separate entrances were used in the same building, and there were even two sessions in order to offer segregated education for the two sexes despite economic scarcity. An interesting and more recent case is that of Belgium, where the practice of educating girls and boys in different schools also gave rise to separate teacher training colleges for men and women. It was not until 1983 that coeducation in Belgium was mandated, due to pressure placed by the European Union in light of demands for equal admissions for men and women in vocational and professional schools.

## FEMINIZATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN

Certain relationships between feminization and professionalization must be underlined. One of the conclusions of the studies presented in this volume on the phenomenon of feminization during the twentieth century points toward the lack of professionalization within the teaching field. This profession is associated with a low social status, low salary, lack of authority and discipline in the character of the woman teacher, loss of accumulated experience as married women left teaching, or the mentality of the inspectors, who demanded that the female teaching staff display maternal qualities, such as patience, a sweet disposition, and love for young children, to the detriment of their professionalism.

In the specific case of women teachers, the studies continue to highlight the asymmetries that exist between men and women in their organizational participation within schools. The incorporation of women into the teaching field was due, in great part, to the belief that their presence would offer young children the “innate” feminine qualities that men lack. As a consequence, women are still considered today as the bearers of these qualities, which are related to their “feminine condition.” Such a social demand limits the requirements of professionalism and at the same time fills the woman teacher with

anxiety as she faces pressure from families and authorities to carry out a function that is more maternal than professional.

When convinced that their maternal qualities make them irreplaceable agents to be put in charge of young children, women have been the essential element through which the State has achieved the expansion of public education over the past century. The price of achieving such a goal has been detrimental to the levels of professionalism extended to women, as these demands for maternal-like behavior do not advance the woman teacher's technical-pedagogical knowledge. Moreover, this requirement limits women teachers to the preschool and primary school grades, impeding their access to secondary or higher levels of education.

A correlation also exists between the admission requirement for teachers and the need of the State to extend universal schooling across the nation. To satisfy this demand, the State utilized women, a cheaper source of labor entering the field in massive numbers once the entrance requirement—years of schooling, professional requirements, and wages—were lowered. For this reason it can be observed that levels of feminization have been at their highest during the historic moments when more teachers are needed. During these periods, women teachers are used to fill the required spaces. The achievements made by the State in expanding its educational services have been obtained thanks to the definition of teaching as feminine, which permits the recruitment of women at relatively low cost in response to the demands of education.

The role of the Catholic Church, the pillar upon which social structures and traditional gender roles rest in Spain, Belgium, Latin America, and the Caribbean, must be emphasized in discussing the process of feminization. Its message has helped to preserve a mentality that accepts women only in professional jobs that are compatible with motherhood. Thus the division of functions within schools is guaranteed, despite the efforts undertaken by the State to secure coeducation and the equal insertion of women in the job market.

The studies included in this book offer keys to understanding how women teachers experience a feminized profession; how this experience affects the development of school culture; how women teachers educate girls and boys with a view toward their future job participation; how women teachers participate in unions; how gender patterns are incorporated within schools; the way in which teachers assume their profession; and the extent to which this gender identity affects the teaching profession.

The educational policies sponsored by international development agencies in the last decade are also an important factor to consider. International agencies select policies that devalue practical and pedagogical knowledge, profoundly damaging the contribution of women as educational professionals and detracting from their job competence. These agencies have deemed that professional work in a preschool is at the same level as the care that a neighbor provides for children while their mothers and fathers work.<sup>19</sup> The new educational reforms continue with this policy of submission and docility, and utilize new means to continue the deprofessionalization of women's work in education by proposing that a neighbor or a young adult who has taken quick courses in pedagogical training<sup>20</sup> can be put in charge of the youngest or the poorest children.

When women are concentrated in the lower grades of schooling without access to administrative and leadership roles, the feminization of teaching presents the danger of destroying their aspirations to take part in the political process regarding educational policies that affect them. Without such participation, the mandates from political agencies and governments are thrust upon teachers without warning and make them change their activities in school from one day to the next, creating confusion and stifling their professional expectations. To the extent that administration and policy-making become arenas closed to their participation, a division is created between the woman teacher and the management and direction of schooling. As a result, in most countries, women are the ones who teach, while men occupy positions in administration, planning, and in the areas that promote and strategize educational reforms.

In certain historical moments of social change during a process of political transition, political militancy and an increasing aspiration to occupy administrative positions within schools can be observed among women teachers. In the case of Spain,<sup>21</sup> the teachers from the generation of 1968—the transition period before the consolidation of parliamentary democracy—went on strike and demonstrated in favor of their political rights. They literally “wore the pants,” a symbol of masculinity, as they entered their classes and broke with the submissive image required by the inspector. Such behavior, which began to contradict the conformist image the authorities demanded of women teachers, helped to modify the political ideology from that space of power represented by the classroom. In the case of Mexico, women teachers in the 1930s organized and fought for their political rights, promoted coeducation in public schools, and achieved equal labor rights as government workers.<sup>22</sup>

## CONSEQUENCES OF FEMINIZATION ON THE TEACHING STAFF AND STUDENTS

One of the conclusions from studies included in this book refers to how the feminization of teaching affects the culture of schools. In some cases the preponderance of women in schools creates a feminized atmosphere that favors working in groups and fosters a team spirit between the teachers. But in most cases this climate leads to an isolation that reflects women's distance from spaces of power. When the professional identity reinforced by educational institutions does not support aspirations among women teachers for professional and political influence, it is more difficult to create a school culture that fosters participation and collaboration.

In addition, the feminized atmosphere infiltrates schools and gives rise to gender patterns that also affect men. To the extent that women's work is identified with school at the early childhood level, men are not considered socially and emotionally suitable to carry out this work. They exclude themselves from teaching at preschool and primary levels and channel their professional aspirations in other directions. Beyond the threshold of feminized work in these early grades, an atmosphere charged with masculine symbols and patterns opens up in the upper grades. These patterns are reflected once again in the structure of the job market. The attainment of equal opportunities can be achieved only by eliminating the rigid gender hierarchies that are in the very air that young children breathe inside schools, or by placing women and men teachers at an equal rank.

Despite the predominance of women teachers in schools, the standards of behavior to be followed are set by the senior administration, the majority of whom are men. For example, we attended an event at a public school in New York City to listen to a talk by a well-known researcher (a woman) about Mexican immigration to the borough of Queens. The educational center intended to inaugurate the school year with this event and the entire teaching staff was assembled. To our surprise, the principal burst into the auditorium and went up to the platform, there to keep more than two hundred women teachers, the invited guest included, seated on the benches in the room. He opened his speech by ordering the teachers to begin classes by writing the objectives of that day's lesson on the blackboard, warning them that he himself would walk the hallways to monitor their compliance with his orders. After that he referred to the studies of Howard Gardner<sup>23</sup> about multiple intelligences to demonstrate his superior knowledge to an auditorium of women whom he appeared to regard

as relatively ignorant. Finally, he offered to give them a formal lesson explaining how to maintain discipline in the classroom. The strangest part was that the middle-aged women listening to him had many years of teaching experience and a high degree of professionalism. Nevertheless, the principal wielded his masculine presence, accompanied by a tone of authority and power, and seemed to be strengthened by the submissive audience, who without making a sound endured such treatment in courteous silence. In this way, much like the Foucault's microphysics of power,<sup>24</sup> he maintained for an hour and a half a discourse of masculinity, power, and authority. Once it was the researcher's turn to speak, the principal made a point of interrupting her several times during her presentation.

The feminization of teaching, which without a doubt influences the socialization of children, has an effect on the equality of opportunities between the sexes, above all in the transition from primary to secondary school—a process that takes place between the ages of eleven and twelve, at which time the children no longer have women teachers in subjects like mathematics and natural sciences.<sup>25</sup>

Why do girls receive better grades in certain subjects? While in English-speaking countries there are abundant studies examining this question,<sup>26</sup> the absence of studies in Spanish-speaking countries shows the degree to which researchers have not assigned importance to studying the effect that the feminization of teaching has on the performance of children and the professional expectations held for them.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, we concur with those studies that have examined how as a result of the feminization of teaching the performance of girls and boys is affected due to possible gender identification. This situation leads girls to receive higher grades in areas such as languages, humanities, music or art, while at the same time having negative repercussions on the configuration of their professional expectations. We believe that one way to understand why women opt for a profession that is compatible with motherhood is to investigate the school itself. The levels of feminization of teaching, although they vary from country to country, remain stable in those countries once the profession is feminized, except in times of severe economic dislocation when more men return to the profession until they can again secure other opportunities.

Surprisingly, the success experienced by girls in school does not correspond to their workforce participation or to the managerial spaces they occupy outside school, where they collide with a social atmosphere that relegates them to subordinate positions.<sup>28</sup> An unemployment line or "labor queue"<sup>29</sup> determines that women are

unemployed at higher rates than men even when their academic preparation is higher, and they more frequently must perform jobs that they find much below their educational level. Thus, while school presents itself as the “promised land” for women,<sup>30</sup> the labor market moves them toward spaces in the lower ranks, which are traditionally considered as feminine and compatible with their maternal role.

In university classrooms there is, more and more, a greater presence of women in majors traditionally considered masculine, despite the fact that the labor market may not necessarily reflect this tendency. Only in the case of the so-called semi-professions<sup>31</sup>—such as teaching, nursing, or social work, among others—is there an equal percentage of women students who major in these fields and women professionals who work in them. Today, when there is presumably no impediment that bars a woman from choosing any profession she wishes, the fact that women continue to opt for these fields points to a significant degree of self-exclusion.

All evidence seems to indicate that the responsibilities and functions that the woman assumes in the home, arising from her role of mother of the family, leads her to understand motherhood not only from a biological point of view, but also as an exclusive sphere of feminine social identity. And that is how women over time develop abilities that allow them to enter certain spaces of the labor market with ease. From this perspective, it is possible to understand why women teachers themselves strongly defend women’s qualities in carrying out their jobs. But in this respect we would also warn that by prioritizing the value of love toward young children, the ascending line of professionalization in the teaching field is put in danger. In effect, the feminized space that is experienced in the school creates a climate that favors her incorporation at the bottom of the educational system. As a result, the relations between early childhood and motherhood still condition the social function of the women teachers in the public school.

## DESCRIPTION OF CHAPTERS

For the purpose of expanding the contributions of historical and comparative studies on the causes that produced the feminization of teaching and maintaining it to the present day, we have selected the following case studies about specific countries. The different inquiries that comprise this book are divided into three sections.

In the first section, the way in which women teachers experience and construe their feminized profession is explained. To study the

meaning of the term *vocation* and understand how women teachers from two historical–generational spaces have assumed the feminization of schools, Sonsoles San Román employs a qualitative focus to interpret key aspects of professional identity among women teachers in Spain during the transition toward democracy. In the first case that examines the generation of women teachers from the conservative culture of the middle years of Franco’s regime (1950–1960), we observe an assumed vocation linked to religious sentiments that clearly agreed with the ideology of national Catholicism and that demanded from women a spirit of sacrifice and devotion, accompanied by the absence of expectations of economic reward. In the second case, women teachers from the post-1968 period denounced the “vocational” nature of their profession by pointing out the lack of possibilities for women from rural villages to enter other professions. The comparative focus of this author’s sociological study shows the level of power held by religion over the labor distribution of men and women in Spain.

The feminized culture of the school, particularly its effects on the professional development of teachers, is the focus of the three case studies that follow. Sandra Acker’s previous research emphasizes the degree to which the high percentage of women concentrated in the lower years of the educational system are insufficient, in and of themselves, to explain the kind of feminized patterns that exist in school culture. By thus distancing herself from what is obvious from a purely quantitative vantage point, Acker shows the extent to which gender models—which affect both men and women teachers—emerge from the same societal expectations that lead us to presuppose that the individuals who work with young children should display a set of characteristics appropriate to what has traditionally been associated with the qualities demanded of women: patience, gentleness, flexibility, and the like.<sup>32</sup>

In chapter 2 presented in this volume, Elisabeth Richards and Sandra Acker analyze two case studies, exploring the reasons for what appear to be contradictory findings in the two settings. Sandra Acker’s study took place in a primary school in England, while Elisabeth Richards interviewed core French elementary school teachers in Ontario, Canada. The authors were interested in the degree to which the environment inside these institutions, whose teaching staff is predominantly female, encourages caring, collegiality, and cooperation among the teachers. One of their findings is that while British teachers enjoyed a close, collaborative culture, Canadian teachers did not have the same experience. These teachers taught French to English-speaking



children, and in the process moved from classroom to classroom, and often from school to school. Thus they were not in a position to be incorporated into a close teacher culture, and instead they were marginalized.

Following the same line of research, but in Argentina, Graciela Morgade shows how women's incorporation into teaching represented both an area of autonomy that allowed them to leave the home and undertake remunerated work, as well as a space where they were subjected to subordination and kept at the base of the pyramid of the school system, where they found only limited possibilities for professional development. Morgade examines how the feminized culture experienced in the classroom did not foster self-esteem among women teachers. This trend creates a mentality that favors incorporation into the lowest paid, least prestigious jobs, and leads women to the lowest levels of the system, thus reinforcing their self-exclusion from positions with greater power, higher prestige and better salaries, which are reserved for men.

The second section of the book includes several interpretations of the feminization of the teaching profession from different disciplinary perspectives. To explain how the image of the woman teacher is created through political discourse, and to explain the gender ideology that assigns certain hierarchical spaces to men while reserving others for women in both the profession itself and in the teachers' union, Regina Cortina examines writings and political discourse that define the social identity of women teachers and the work they do on the basis of a "vocation to serve."

During the years when the Mexican nation was consolidated and, as a result, public education expanded, José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Education, took advantage of Gabriela Mistral's visit to Mexico to promote the participation of women in teaching as a dignified, useful profession, thus legitimizing their participation in a salaried occupation. Cortina affirms that Mistral's legacy still endures in Mexico, where the conception of teaching as "women's work" has never been modified and, consequently, the professionalization of teaching has progressed very little.

In addition, Mexico's political economy has had a devastating effect on the teaching profession, which has lost its status and position as a middle-class occupation. As a result, the praise routinely directed at the work of both men and women teachers is merely rhetorical, given the lack of support needed to strengthen their functions in the classroom and to improve their opportunities for professional development and increased salaries. Though the first feminist teachers at

the turn of the twentieth century fought to achieve coeducation and better working conditions for women in teaching, in the twenty-first century we now find a profession that is impoverished, lacking in opportunities for professional advancement.

In the case of Brazil, Fúlvia Rosemberg emphasizes the impact of the expansion of educational reforms on men's and women's education. She then inquires into how the dynamics of femaleness and maleness are preserved through schools. After looking into factors such as gender inequality between white and black women and the average years of schooling in both groups, the author analyzes the divergent specializations of men and women in disciplines and areas of knowledge, as well as their participation in different levels of the educational system as teachers. Her research supports the hypothesis that their marked segregation in the labor market makes it difficult to change the professional formation that men and women receive. The distinct trajectories of the two groups at different levels of the educational system cannot be explained only by focusing on salary and the type of educational training.

Rosemberg concludes that the trajectories followed by men and women teachers can be explained by considering the age of the students, for while she found that women teach mostly children, adults tend to be taught by men. For this reason, most women teachers have only a high school education, while men have advanced to college levels. However, differences in the level of education are not sufficient to explain salary differences, because we find disparities at each level of instruction as well. Apparently, there exists an "invisible ceiling" that impedes women from gaining promotions to careers that are socially considered as 'male,' while an "invisible escalator" benefits men in professions defined as "female." Rosemberg's objective is to widen the agenda of research in order to identify tendencies in the interaction of gender, class, race, and age in schools, and their repercussions for the future prospects of the students in the labor market.

In an effort to comprehend the process of feminization beyond percentages and statistical tables and using the case of Belgium, Marc Depaepe, Hilde Lauwers, and Frank Simon propose a series of hypotheses that address an important gap in the research. Their quantitative historical analysis shows a rise of inequalities and an increasing vertical segregation of the profession—the presence of men in authority and administrative positions and the concentration of women in classrooms. Not only does the gender segregation increase, but the jobs of men and women become more and more distinct. While men pursue managerial and policy-making careers, women are

concentrated in teaching roles, and their percentage as part-time workers also rises, which de facto limits their possibilities for promotion. The authors argue that to the extent that the level of feminization increases during periods of modernity, it is related to the transmission of gender patterns through education. The traits of the teaching profession as institutionalized in society coincide with the feminine characteristics demanded of the women teacher.

The chapters in the final section of the book attempt to understand the factors that cause the feminization of teaching from a historical, social, political, and economic standpoint. Using an economic perspective, Iván Molina analyzes the Costa Rican case, where the State searched for an economical solution to satisfy the demand for teaching personnel and thus deal with the growth that schools experienced after the reforms of 1886. The State, putting demands for professionalism to one side, decided instead to look for an economically feasible solution, and it was thus by virtue of their low-wage status that women gained access to the field of education. At the same time, the expansion of the urban economy offered better-educated men options to improve their positions at the level of primary education, a process that benefited from the differences in public perceptions about the type of work that men and women could perform. As a consequence of this situation, men controlled the best jobs. Molina also identifies kinship as another factor that explains the process of feminization. Because of the low salaries men teachers received, they invited their wives, mothers, and daughters to participate in teaching, and these allies became key to the feminization of the teaching profession.

In the case of the Dominican Republic, Juan Alfonseca explores how society and the curriculum contributed to the historical causes and politics that triggered the feminization process. His study focuses on the period during the nineteenth century when the schools switched from being an institution defined by the presence of men to one in which women became the main actors in teaching. His findings point to the differences between urban and rural zones and indicate that the increase in the number of women teachers in urban areas was closely related to the expansion of the middle class, while in rural areas the cause of this phenomenon was the abandonment and desertion by men of the teaching field.

Mexico is examined once again, but this time in light of the social figure of the woman teacher in Mexico in the late nineteenth century through letters they sent to President Porfirio Díaz. Luz Elena Galván uses these documentary sources to describe the ethos of women teachers in that era: their anxieties, their successes, their weak, sickly

bodies, their hairstyles and fashions, and their condition of widowhood and poverty. The contrast between women teachers of humble origins, who in Mexico, at least, embody the vast majority of teachers, and the achievements of a small number whose access to culture and education favors them, allow Luz Elena Galván to affirm that the differences among women teachers are determined by their unequal access to culture.

### FURTHER ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AND ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

We wish to conclude this introduction by encouraging other researchers to continue studying the social construction of women teachers in different socio-historical and political periods in each nation. The chapters included in this book point to interesting trends, showing how the feminization of teaching affects women's roles and employment in education. But the ways in which gender interacts with other social characteristics of women such as race, class, and socioeconomic status can only be illuminated through detailed social histories that include the historic, political, social, and religious contexts that shape the participation of women teachers in the educational profession.

A common focus of many studies is to examine why women are not represented in positions of power and authority. Our point of view inverts the perspective and studies the base of the pyramid, not the apex of the social division of work. The chapters in this book widen the social and political landscape within gender studies. Our concern is a feminized profession that is burdened by a lack of social status, which relegates women to work considered to be feminine.

This book does not aim to provide a detailed study of women teachers during a specific historical moment. Rather, our purpose is to integrate gender into the study of education. The chapters in this volume explain the historical, political and cultural reasons for what Sandra Acker has called "the gender script," or the way in which the work of men and women teachers is influenced by societal expectations about women's work and the caring capacity of female teachers when working with children.

There is a tension built into the study of teaching as a feminized profession. Many of the topics addressed in researching this phenomenon involve teachers' work and equal pay, vertical segregation of the profession, difficulties women find in expanding their academic training, low participation of women in teachers' unions, and in managing

schools and school systems across different countries. Moreover, in an era of economic globalization, this tension increases as there is a significant growing drive of part-time employment among women in teaching (no benefits, no job security); rising differences in professional credentials between men and women in teaching; and segregation of women and men teachers by the age of the students they teach and the professional requirements for their jobs.

Our purpose in organizing this book is not to criticize or praise women and men for the choices they made to enter a feminized profession. Our main purpose is to further the knowledge of a pressing educational issue and highlight the existing inequality in the past and present organization of teaching as a “feminized profession.” The chapters included in this book open a distinctive perspective on the historical and social research about the development of educational systems across nations. We hope this book will succeed in focusing attention on the gendered culture in the schools and the unique social and political events that led in each country to the universal presence of women in classrooms and to serious limitations in their autonomy and professionalization as teachers.

## NOTES

1. Rosemary Deem (ed.), *Schooling for Women's Work* (London; Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); see chapter 2 by Richards and Acker in this book for additional sources on history in Britain; see, Sandra Acker, “Gender and Teachers’ Work,” in Michael W. Apple, (ed.), *Review of Research in Education*, 21 ( Washington DC: American Educational Research Association, 1995).
2. Rosemary Deem, *Women and Schooling* (London; Boston, MA: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1978).
3. See chapter 2 by Richards and Acker in this book on history in Canada see also, Alice Prentice and M. Theobald, *Women who Taught* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
4. Josephine May, “Des—religieuses dans le siècle—et des homes de ce monde. Les élèves australiens de deux établissements d’enseignement secondaire non mixtes se souviennent de leurs professeurs (1930–1950),” *Historie de l’Education* 98, Lyon, France: Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique, 2003: 167–185.
5. Nancy Hoffman, *Woman’s “True” Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2003, 2nd ed.); Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women’s Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650–1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
6. *Historie de l’Education* 98 (2003).