

*'Much exertion of the voice
and great application of the mind':*¹

**TEACHER EDUCATION
WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF
THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF TORONTO, CANADA,
1851-1920**²

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Through their work and resistance, women teachers were involved in the construction of meaning. Indeed, both the idea and reality of the 'woman teacher' in history is proving evocative in ways far more complex than most of us first imagined could be the case.³

In the introduction to their recent collection of essays on the experience of women teachers in North America, Britain, and Australia, Prentice and Theobald comment on the complexities involved in documenting and analyzing the historical experience of women who taught in both private and public schools. The research reported in their collection substantiates the opening statement: the history of women who taught is indeed a complex one. The editors' candid observations about what is known and what remains unknown about the working lives of women who taught and their call for ongoing research likewise validate the opening quotation.

This article concerns a doubly marginalized group of teachers: women religious who taught in both the private and public schools of Ontario. It begins to address Prentice and Theobald's challenge that these teachers need to be

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1. Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, *Constitution and Rules of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Archdiocese of Toronto* (Toronto, 1881), 91 (hereafter *Constitution of 1881*).
 2. This article is part of an ongoing study of communities of teaching sisters. The author acknowledges the support of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in the data collection.
 3. A. Prentice and M. Theobald, 'The Historiography of Women Teachers: A Retrospective,' in *Women Who Taught*, ed. A. Prentice and M. Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 15.

'rescued from the hagiographic historical tradition in which they are customarily presented'⁴ by providing a case study of the evolution of teacher education within one community of teaching sisters in English Canada: the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Archdiocese of Toronto. Utilizing a framework of documentary analysis, the article sets both a theoretical and historical context against which to examine communities of teaching sisters. It concludes by suggesting further avenues for research which, in themselves, indicate the complexity of analyzing the historical experience of women who taught in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Communities of Women Who Taught: Context for Analysis

At present, education in the Western World is in the process of restructuring and engaging in activities of planned change. Among the theoreticians leading the way in this movement ranks Michael Fullan. In his study *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, Fullan writes:

Moral purpose and change agency synergize care and competence, equity and excellence. In the teaching profession these two facets of educational development have not come together. When teachers work on personal vision-building and see how their commitment to making a difference in the classroom is connected to the wider purpose of education, it gives practical and moral meaning to their profession...Ultimately moral purpose and change agency place the individual teacher on a different plane where one can find personal meaning in a collective enterprise.⁵

Fullan's comments pose a challenge to historians of education. His contention that moral purpose and change agency have not come together in the teaching profession negates the experience of many generations of teachers: secular men and women who taught in a variety of learning environments and communities of men and women religious whose mission was teaching.

Communities of religious, both men and women, have both practical and moral purpose. They are erected under Codes of Canon Law—the law of the Roman Catholic Church. Religious are groups of individuals who freely come together to enter into a vowed life within a community which is both formally recognized and regulated by the church. Generally, members take vows of

4. Ibid., 23.

5. M. Fullan, *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (London: Falmer, 1993), 144.

poverty, chastity, and obedience, pledging to uphold the charism, or mission, of the community. This shared vision of mission and the personal commitment to work collaboratively towards it within community life are fundamental characteristics of religious life.

By analyzing historical sources common to communities of religious, one can see how this vision of moral purpose, actualized through practical activities, shaped daily community life. The orders' constitutions elaborate on how the charism is to be realized. The books of customs describe adaptations to local circumstance. The annals of the order, the records of daily activities, document its development.

That teaching sisters came to lead lives of moral purpose expressed through involvement in the world of education represented an evolution in the roles played by women within the Roman Catholic Church. Neal has observed:

What characterized the life of early medieval nuns as distinct from that of sisters today was that the whole valued purpose of the dedicated life was fulfilled by prayer and praise of God...education was provided...for a select few young women, children of the gentry, most of whom were expected to remain as religious members once they were old enough to make that choice.⁶

Medieval nuns led their lives in cloister, meeting the conditions imposed under a pontifical decree of 1298:

Nuns, present and future, to whatever order they belong and in whatever part of the world, shall...remain perpetually enclosed within their monasteries; so that no nun tacitly or expressly professed in religion shall...have or be able to have the power of going out of these monasteries for whatsoever reason or cause, unless perchance any be found manifestly suffering from a disease so great and of such nature that she cannot without danger or scandal, live together with others...that so, altogether withdrawn from public and mundane sights, they may serve God more freely and diligently preserve for Him in all holiness their souls and their bodies.⁷

It was a changing sense of what constituted 'serving God,' especially the need for engaging in education and in works of charity such as caring for the sick and

6. M.A. Neal, *From Nuns to Sisters: An Expanding Vocation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 21.

7. Boniface VIII, *Periculosus*, as quoted in Neal, *From Nuns*, 21.

the poor, that led to challenging these canonical restrictions, establishing uncloistered communities of women and instituting a new role for women: the sister.

The precursor to contemporary communities of teaching sisters was the Company of the Virgins of St. Ursula. Established by Angela Merici in Brescia, Italy, in 1535, this company came to be known as the Ursulines. The Ursulines dedicated themselves to serving the poor and educating young girls. Initially, the Merici and her companions defied the norms which defined the lives of women religious as nuns: they neither lived in community nor took public vows. As the company grew, the members began to live in community and lead a more regulated life. By the early eighteenth century, the Ursulines yielded to ecclesiastical pressure and began to live in cloister, taking solemn vows. However, to ensure their charism of education would continue, the Statutes of the Ursulines contains a recognition of their vow of teaching through their statement of aim:

Article I: The Ursuline Ladies have for their objective the gratuitous instruction of children and the education of young ladies,

and through their statement of qualification:

Article IV: The necessary qualifications for admission to the Company are: Legitimate birth, good health of mind and body, unblemished reputation, talent for teaching, a character that is gentle, humble, submissive, obedient and confiding in Providence.⁸

The Ursulines were the first to defy tradition. They were certainly not the last. However, it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that a successful experiment in non-cloistered life became tolerated and eventually accepted within the Catholic Church. Louise de Marillac, supported by Vincent de Paul, launched the Daughters of Charity as an uncloistered community of women religious bound by simple vows to undertake works of charity. Thus, sisters, as well as nuns, became canonically constituted.

With the age of European expansion, many communities of women religious, both nuns and sisters, migrated into the overseas possessions of European powers. As dioceses were erected, bishops encouraged the establishment of new orders to meet the needs of the expanding populations. Between 1600 and 1900, over 500 new communities of women religious were established world wide.⁹ Many of these new orders were communities of sisters which took as their charism education of children and youth, and of girls and young women.

8. 'Statutes of the Sisters or Ursuline Ladies, authorized by Royal Ordinance May 24, 1635,' reprinted in M. Pray, *Pilgrims in Service: The Chatham Ursulines, Volume One: 1860-1896* (Chatham, 1991), 117.

9. Neal, *From Nuns*, 25.

In Canada, the first communities of women religious arrived in New France in 1639: Les Augustines de la Miséricorde de Jésus, who opened a hospital, and the Ursulines, who opened a school. In the following three hundred years, 103 orders of women religious and 51 male orders established themselves or were established across Canada to work in schools. These figures can be compared to those cited by Burley, who states that 'in the 1880's thirty orders of Sisters entered the Australian diocese, compared with only four of Brothers and three of Priests.'¹⁰

What is more noteworthy is the extent of the involvement of women religious in Canadian education. Between 1639 and 1939, communities of religious operated some 3,100 educational institutions in Canada, which ranged from infant school to degree-granting universities.¹¹ Some 2,345 of these, or 76 percent, were run by women religious. Yet, as Burley contends for Australia, and reviews of the standard works of the history of education in English Canada document,¹² the contribution of communities of teaching sisters has been seriously neglected.

This article addresses one aspect of the educational experience of religious communities: how communities prepared their members to teach in elementary and secondary schools. Through a case study approach, this article presents a methodology to analyze materials related to the complex experience of teaching sisters.

Documenting Teacher Education within a Community of Women Religious

Teaching sisters are members of both a religious order and an occupational class. Their lives are an overlay of vocation and employment, governed by both religious and secular regulation. This section of the article examines the experience of teaching sisters within the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto as seen through six lenses. The Congregation's history will be traced, detailing how it came to be an order of teaching sisters within the province of Ontario. The order's constitutions will be examined, documenting how the role of the teacher came to be framed through the order's internal stratification and through the creation of a detailed image of the teaching sister. Finally, through a

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10. Stephanie Burley, *Reproduction, Resistance and Recollections: Girls' Catholic Schooling in Australia* (Unpublished research paper, University of Adelaide, 1987).
 11. C. Lacalle, *L'apport social des communautés religieuses catholiques présentes au Canada avant 1940* (Unpublished internal report prepared for Parks Canada, 1987), 88.
 12. See E. Smyth, 'A Noble Proof of Excellence,' in *Gender and Education in Ontario*, ed. R. Heap and A. Prentice (Toronto: Scholars' Press, 1991), 289-90.

discussion of the development of professional growth as a community goal and the increasing adherence to state regulations for teacher qualification, the article will demonstrate how, by the early years of the twentieth century, potential sisters had to meet both religious and state qualifications in order to become a teaching sister within the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.

Tracing the Origins of the Order

It is useful to begin the study of a community of teaching sisters by examining how the order came into existence: who were its founders, what was its purpose, and how was its governance structured. In many instances, one will observe that it is a collaborative effort among a named bishop, a named priest (often himself a member of a religious community), and one or more frequently unnamed women. Collectively, a need is identified and after a period of informal exploration of the concept and experimentation with living in community, steps are taken to formalize the intent of the group and begin the process of ecclesiastical recognition.

The subject of this case study is the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto. The Congregation was chosen because between 1854 and 1920 it administered a significant portion of the educational enterprises of women religious in English Canada.¹³ The Congregation was also actively involved in health care, education of health professionals, and social work.

The order is an uncloistered order of women religious which had its origins in seventeenth-century France. It was established through the collaborations of a bishop, Henri de Maupas of Le Puy, a Jesuit priest, Jean Pierre Medaille, and five French women: Françoise Eyraud, Claua Chastel, Marguerite Burdier, Anna Chalayer, Anna Vey, and Anna Brun.¹⁴

The Congregation has as its mission 'Christian perfection and...service of their neighbour,'¹⁵ which, when translated into practice, means that it is an order whose members are engaged in teaching, health care, and social service.

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13. By 1892, the Sisters of St Joseph represented over 80 percent of the teaching Sisters in the Toronto Separate Schools: J.F. Teefey, *Archdiocese of Toronto: Jubilee Volume* (Toronto: Dixon, 1892). Teefey reports that there were thirteen separate schools staffed by 56 teaching Sisters: 45 were Sisters of St Joseph, 11 were Loretto Sisters. Although beyond the period under study, it is noteworthy that by 1939, the order administered 188 schools which included elementary, secondary, and one post-secondary school. In addition, the order had nursing schools attached to many of its hospitals and in the 1960s was responsible for a bilingual teachers' college in Quebec.
 14. M. Nepper SJ, *Origins: The Sisters of Saint Joseph* (Villa Maria College, 1975), 20.
 15. *Constitution of 1881*, 11.

From their French foundation, the Sisters of St. Joseph were structured along diocesan lines into diocesan communities.¹⁶ They were essentially a network of independent communities governed by a similar constitution and set of customs. The initial Canadian foundations followed this structure. There was no central governance by a superior general and her council. Instead, each diocesan community elected its own mother superior and community officers who oversaw the administration and spiritual life of the motherhouse and its mission (or local) houses. Each diocesan motherhouse accepted potential members (postulants); assessed their suitability; elected those to receive the religious habit and admitted them to the community as novices. After years of preparation, the novices took their final vows and became fully professed members of the community. The final stage in their development as religious took place five years after final profession, when they became eligible to stand for election for community office.

In 1836, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Le Puy made its initial North American foundation. Six sisters journeyed from France to Carondelet, Missouri to teach deaf children and to undertake charitable activities in the diocese of St. Louis. From there, the Carondelet community was invited by bishops to establish foundations throughout the United States. At the request of Toronto's Bishop Armand de Charbonnel, members of the Philadelphia foundation came to Toronto, Canada in 1851 to staff an orphanage. The year after their arrival, de Charbonnel asked the sisters to teach in the Toronto separate schools.¹⁷

In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their educational enterprises grew to include elementary and secondary schools, schools for exceptional children, boarding schools/academies for young women, normal schools for teacher education, schools of nursing, schools of music, and women's colleges. The focus on teaching sisters within the order's constitutions shows how central teaching was to the actualization of the charism of the order.

16. A diocese can be defined as the area presided over by a bishop.

17. The Catholic schools in Ontario are called Separate Schools. Created in 1841, by 1883 some 30,000 pupils in Ontario attended Separate Schools: R. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 26. Separate Schools were government funded, regulated through a provincial inspectorate system, and, after the turn of the century, all teachers were required to hold government-issued teaching certificates. At present, Ontario has two fully funded parallel systems of public education, beginning at junior kindergarten (age four) and ending at university entrance (age seventeen): one nondenominational and one Catholic.

Examining the Constitutions of the Order: Institutionalizing the Role of the Teacher

The evolution of an order's mission can be analyzed through its constitutions. The constitution which initially governed the Toronto community was the 1847 *Constitution of Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph* [of Carondelet].¹⁸ This document 'scarcely mentioned the instruction of young women...Hence, no rules were written for teachers.'¹⁹ By 1881, when the Toronto Congregation published its own constitution, education had become one of the community's major activities. As a result, the Constitution and Rules of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Archdiocese of Toronto (1881) sets out, in considerable detail, regulations for teachers, directions for the operations of the convent-academy, and instruction on the further education of teaching sisters. The emphasis given to teacher selection and education in the Constitution of 1881 illustrates that the congregation was rapidly progressing toward the formalization of instruction in its schools and academies.

Internal Stratification

Before the twentieth century, most communities of women religious were internally stratified into two or three classes of members. Within communities of women who taught, the classifications were generally Choir Sisters and Lay Sisters. Although they were both bound by the same vows, the two classes differed in their responsibilities and their rights. The Toronto community's *Constitution of 1881* clearly illustrates this stratification. The Choir Sisters held the power in the order. They 'shall be chiefly employed in teaching or in the works of charity' and given a 'voice in chapter but [are] allowed to vote for the election of the Mother Superior and her counsellors only after they have been five years professed.'²⁰

Lay Sisters, on the other hand, 'shall be employed in the domestic duties of the house.'²¹ While the *Constitution of 1881* assigned Lay Sisters no role in governance, these sisters served an essential function in the operations of the community. The Lay Sisters managed the daily operations of the motherhouse, thereby freeing the Choir Sisters to undertake the broadly defined mission of the order in education, social service, and health care outside of the convent walls.

18. Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, *Constitution of Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph* (St. Louis: Mullin, 1847).

19. *Constitution of 1881*, 9.

20. *Ibid.*, 16.

21. *Ibid.*

The *Constitution of 1881* gave a role in the governance of the community to the Choir Sisters alone. Only Choir Sisters could vote on accepting new members to the community. Only Choir Sisters were eligible to both stand for and elect community officers. Only a Choir Sister could hold the community's highest office—mother superior.

The mother superior was elected to a three-year term of office and was charged with the management of 'affairs of the whole Congregation and welfare of each sister [was] entrusted to her maternal care.' In consultation with her four-woman elected council, she appointed the local superiors and the community officers, which included the mistress of novices, the woman responsible for guiding young women through the process of becoming a sister, and the school officials: the directress of the order's private schools—the academies; and the community's school inspectors—the 'visitors.'

The 'visitors' were directed to report to the mother superior on the operations of the houses, schools, and academies and to indicate 'whether the teachers conform themselves to prescribed methods of teaching.'²² The presence of the 'visitors' demonstrates that communities of religious operated parallel inspection systems, even within the state-regulated school system.

The description of the internal stratification of a community of women religious documents the complexities of the enterprises which they administered. What was said about the characteristics of a teaching sister likewise highlights issues which historians studying the world of teaching sisters would find useful to explore.

Image of the Teaching Sister

Much can be learned from the constitutions of an order about the way in which the community defined the image of its members. In the case of the Sisters of St. Joseph, the constitutions describe in detail the qualities associated with a teaching sister.

The Choir Sisters, assembled in Chapter, elected new members of the Congregation. The Constitution of 1881 explained that great care should be taken in their selection. Teaching was 'one of the most important works for the service of neighbour and the progress of religion' and required 'peculiar qualifications of those who are employed therein.' Thus, 'the choice and education of the sisters who are destined to be teachers should be to the Congregation a special object of solicitude.'²³

22. *Ibid.*, 83.

23. *Ibid.*, 32.

Those personality traits essential in a potential teaching sister were set out in great detail:

...common sense and good judgement...Those persons shall not be received who are found to be narrow-minded, without judgement and incapable of understanding the obligations of religious life...Their natural disposition must be mild and inclined to virtue; hence those shall not be received who have a violent temper, are haughty, stubborn, frivolous, inconsistent, proud, idle and insensible to the things regarding God and their salvation.²⁴

The *Constitution of 1881* systematically outlined the duties and responsibilities of the women engaged in teaching within the separate schools and the convent-academies, and gave special attention to the Directress of the Academy: the principal of the order's secondary school for young women. The office of the Directress was 'one of the most important [charges] of the Congregation.' She was responsible for the administration of the school and for the progress of both the pupils and their teachers. She was the Registrar who admitted or dismissed pupils. She supervised instruction, ensuring that 'the teachers use the books and follow the methods of teaching that have been pointed out to them.' She assessed the pupils' growth, '[interrogating them] in regard to what they have learned,' and she rewarded excellence where she found it. She held weekly meetings with her staff 'to confer with them concerning the general good of the academy.'²⁵

The *Constitution of 1881* also set out specific expectations for those sisters teaching in both the separate schools and the convent academies. By their presence in the classrooms, they were to model 'religion and science,' a phrase which is used throughout the *Constitution of 1881* as a code for both moral and secular purpose. They would be given their teaching assignments by the superior or the directress and were instructed to

previously prepare the lessons they are to give their classes so that while understanding perfectly what they teach, they may be able to communicate it to their pupils with clearness and precision.²⁶

Vowed by obedience, teaching sisters were to

devote to their own improvement all the time that is necessary, but they shall not study any other than those prescribed by the Superior or

24. Ibid., 43.

25. Ibid., 87-88.

26. Ibid., 90-91.

Directress in order that their progress in science may be accompanied by their progress in humility and obedience.²⁷

This almost contradictory mixture of encouraging intellectual curiosity while maintaining a pious humility is perhaps one of the most salient features of the *Constitution of 1881*. The sisters were to celebrate and reward achievement in their pupils but also teach them humility and love of God. For themselves, they were to 'refer to God all glory resulting from any talent with which he may have gifted them...seeking humility, not pride from it.'²⁸ Just as the order's mission was to achieve 'Christian perfection and service of neighbour,' so too were these virtues to be developed within their pupils.

Two final points should be made in relation to the regulations for teachers set out in the *Constitution of 1881*. The teachers were instructed to 'take proper care of their health' as their job required 'much exertion of the voice and great application of the mind.'²⁹ At the first sign of any fatigue or illness, they were to notify the superior. These noteworthy items indicated that the community was concerned about not overworking its women and making them useless to themselves or to the order.

Second, the *Constitution of 1881* directed the teachers to attend conferences, organized by the mother superior, on 'the methods of teaching.'³⁰ This statement signalled the commitment of the order to the ongoing professional development of its members.

Documenting Professional Growth as a Community Goal

In France and the United States, the preparation of teachers was an integral part of the activity of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The sisters who journeyed from France, and established the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, a group which included Delphine Fontbonne, the founding superior of the Toronto community, came to their new tasks equipped with professional literature. One example of such a work is the *Méthode d'enseignement pour les classes des Soeurs de St. Joseph du Diocese de Belley* published in Lyons in 1832.³¹

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 91.

29. Ibid., 90.

30. Ibid., 91.

31. This 297-page manual (with an additional six pages of checklists, observational reports, and wall charts) is divided into two sections: 'la première partie...traite de différens exercice qui se font dans les classes et de la manière de les faire...La seconde partie...dont on doit se servir pour exciter l'émulation des élèves, et divers

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Carondelet community published a number of methodological texts. These texts were not confined to catechisms but included works on history, geography, penmanship, and elocution. The community clearly documented their methodologies for education of the deaf, which was the focus of their initial mission in North America. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, like their European counterparts, were committed to education and wished to ensure, through internal regulation, that there was consistency in their instructional strategies. Their Toronto foundation did the same.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *Annals* of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto record an array of professional development activities and learning opportunities which the Congregation arranged for its members. There were lectures by visiting clerics, former students, and parents of the pupils on topics ranging from astronomy, politics, and comparative education through the higher education of women.³² The order sponsored numerous multi-session seminars and training institutes for the sisters, including courses on mathematics, musical theory, penmanship, and fine arts.³³ Mothers superior sent sisters to specialized programmes to gain advanced training.³⁴

More formal professional development, in the form of conventions for teaching sisters, began toward the end of the nineteenth century. One of the powers granted by the order to the mother superior in the *Constitution of 1881* was the authority to hold annual teachers' conventions. Accurate records of the annual conferences commenced in 1890. The conventions lasted for four days, offering sessions for professional development which read very much like a contemporary programme: behaviour management, strategies for reluctant read-

avis aux institutrices sur la manière de s'acquitter dignement et avec succès de leur noble emploi.' Soeurs de St. Joseph, *Méthode d'enseignement pour les classes des Soeurs de St. Joseph du Diocese de Belley* (Lyons: Rusand, 1832), ix.

32. Examples of these events can be found throughout the *Community Annals, Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto 1851-1956*, 3 volumes, continuous pagination, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Morrow Park, Toronto (hereafter *Annals*): 'The Latest Discoveries in Astronomy,' *Annals*, 10 Dec. 1882, 131; 'Home Rule and the Irish System of Education,' *Annals*, 23 Jan. 1898, 225; 'Higher Education of Women,' *Annals*, 22 Sept. 1905, 392. Teresa Korman Small, a philanthropist and advocate of women's rights, and Gertrude Lawler, the first female Senator of the University of Toronto, were among the many former pupils to speak to the community. *Annals*, 28 Aug. 1877, 73.
33. Penmanship, *Annals*, 14 June 1902, 315; Harmony, *Annals*, 28 Aug. 1877, 73; Mathematics, *Annals*, 30 Sept. 1877, 74.
34. One notation records sisters attending a Quebec summer school 'to acquire knowledge of a new system of teaching music.' *Annals*, 6 Sept. 1889, 97.

ers, new methods in classroom instruction. Government officials frequently are listed as conference keynote speakers, and as convent guests.³⁵

With the advent of the teachers' conferences, there is evidence of a growing relationship between the order and the officials of the Department of Education—a relationship which focuses on the issue of teacher certification.

State Certification of Teachers

Examining the relationship between communities of women religious who taught in both public and private schools and the officials who oversaw state certification for teachers is an important aspect of documenting the complexity of the experience of women who taught. Although the Sisters of St. Joseph were taking their own steps to help teaching sisters advance in methodology and knowledge, they also had to deal with changing Ontario government regulations throughout the period from 1882 to 1907.

To say that teacher certification in the province of Ontario has been both complex and controversial is an understatement. Certification raises questions of control between secular and religious authorities, and between federal and provincial jurisdiction. For many members of religious orders, it seems that both they and their bishops felt that

the Confederation agreement [of 1867] allowed...[members] of Religious Orders to teach without the Ontario Certificates demanded of laymen in both separate and public schools.³⁶

By the 1870s, the separate school inspectors of Ontario felt that it was

unfair to separate school children to allow the members of Religious Orders to escape certification and [the inspectors] used their influence both on the Department of Education and the bishops to uphold the policy of teaching certificates for all.³⁷

35. The *Annals* record condolences sent to provincial premier George Ross on the death of his wife, noting that, 'when Minister of Education, Dr Ross was kind and courteous to us always...he visited the Convent to address our Teachers' Convention.' *Annals*, 14 Mar. 1902, 310.

36. F.A. Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Ontario* (Toronto: Federation of Catholic Education Associations of Ontario, 1976), II: 192.

37. *Ibid.*, 193.

There is evidence to support the fact that from the beginning of the community's involvement in the schools of Toronto, some of the teaching sisters held provincial certification. Obituaries of sisters list them as graduates of the Provincial Normal School. With the order's decision to align their curriculum to meet the requirements of the province, thereby enabling their graduates to sit the teacher certification examinations, one can see that this issue is central to the educational policy of the order. Second, one can document through the *Annals* an increasing number of meetings between the administration of the order and government officials over admission of potential postulants to the provincial colleges of teacher training.³⁸

By 1905, the *Annals* note that those postulants who wish to teach academic subjects are advised to complete some level of state certification before they enter the convent. The annalist writes of a pupil who wished to receive the habit but was refused admission since 'she failed by 16 marks to obtain her Second Class Certificate at the Mid-Summer non-Professional Exams, she must resume her study.'³⁹

As the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph more formally took as one of their foci engagement in education, their policy on admission of young women as postulants who wished to teach reflected a growing concern to meet the increasing requirements set by the state. Potential teaching sisters had to meet two sets of standards: the order's and the state's. The issue of teacher certification has tremendous implications for international communities. In the time period under study, the Sisters of St. Joseph was national in scope and trans-border qualifications (and trans-provincial for that matter) was not a major issue. However, for another Toronto-based order, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it was. Writing to her brother the Archbishop of Toronto, a Toronto-based, Ontario-certified member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary asked for advice on gaining additional Ontario teaching certification and questioned what good it would do her in the United States:

I would not miss last year's chance for anything...I think that it is hardly worth the trouble in my old age to undertake anything further...I am teaching in the house for three last years and have likely retired from public life for good...You see we are so far away from Toronto...The four books which we are supposed to have read very carefully at least before presenting ourselves came only a few weeks ago.⁴⁰

38. *Annals*, 3 Oct. 1902, 320.

39. *Annals*, 5 Jan. 1905, 378.

40. Sister M. Evangetista O'Connor to Archbishop Dennis O'Connor, 4 June 1908, O'Connor Personal Papers, General Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Box I, Folder II.

For other communities whose members staffed world-wide missions, these questions became even greater and point to a fascinating historical problem in the experience of teaching sisters: how did different communities handle the complex regulations concerning teacher qualifications? In the case of the Sisters of St. Joseph, the community made a decision to meet the state requirements and co-operate with the state in the criteria they set for admission of postulants who wished to become teaching sisters.

Researching Teaching Sisters: Some Concluding Observations

This study is a preliminary investigation of teaching sisters within one community of women religious. While it documents that there is a significant amount of information about teaching sisters available through privately held archival sources, it only briefly begins the process of historical analysis. In many ways, this article raises more questions about the teaching sister than it begins to answer.

Undertaking the research for this article presented several challenges which are inherent in the study of women religious. The archives of religious communities are private archives. The researcher is using the sources as a guest of the community and must abide by the community policies. Further, while the archival holdings may be rich, they are often informally catalogued. The researcher is directly dependant upon the archivist for the identification of and access to relevant materials. Materials are brought to the researcher and browsing through the collection is frequently prohibited. To undertake research on women religious, one must accept these challenges and work within the regulations established by the community.

A second archival challenge evolves from the governance structure of the religious community under study. Central administration generally means that sources are housed in one area. One can trace decision-making through the relevant channels and gain an overview of how the individual community houses acted within the framework of a unit. For diocesan communities, sources become scattered, adding complexity to the study of the operations of an order. In the case of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, there are eight independent communities—six which developed from the Carondelet foundation and two others—each coming from two separate French foundations. To undertake a study of the Sisters of St. Joseph requires that the researcher work in each of these independent archives.

In spite of the challenges, there are many benefits to be derived from exploring the life experience of teaching sisters. Such a study enriches contemporary understanding of the complexities of the history of teachers. In addition to gaining new knowledge on many topics including administration of schools, curriculum development, and expansion of the school system, the study of teaching sisters gives a opportunity for insight into the lives of another type of

teacher. Teaching sisters represent a unique cohort among women who taught. Unlike their secular counterparts, teaching sisters dedicated their lives to the service of God and neighbour through a life-long career in education. Teaching was neither a temporary venture into public employment between their own schooling and their lives as wives and mothers, nor a means to gain economic independence or social advancement. Teaching was the actualization of their vocation.

Nor was teaching a solitary occupation. The life of a teaching sister was a life lived in community: a life spent with other women who shared a common vision and a common set of values. Within the convent walls, teaching sisters dwelled among beginning teachers and expert teachers. As postulants, many entered the community with some teacher training. As novices, the stage in spiritual formation between receiving the habit and becoming a fully vested member of the order, they had structured opportunities to gain increased knowledge and skills. As fully professed members of the order, they were supported by the community in the acquisition of additional qualifications and degrees. Convents can be studied as communities of life-long learners, comprised of members who represent an array of age and experience.

Research on the history of teaching sisters is just beginning. Studying this cohort of teachers presents many opportunities for in-depth analysis. Among the issues open for study are the experiences of women religious in the male-dominated world of school administration. In the nineteenth and for the most part of the twentieth century, being a woman religious offered a woman administrative opportunities virtually unknown to her secular counterpart—opportunities to serve as principals, senior supervisory officers, presidents of universities. The relationships which existed between women religious and secular teachers in Catholic schools and the laicization of the teaching staffs in these schools would be a topic worthy of study. The influence of teaching sisters on their pupils and the ways in which these relationships contributed to the growth of new organizations dedicated to women's learning need to be explored. Further, how the teaching sisters branched into other areas, especially higher education and education in health sciences and social work, must be analyzed.

Only after this basic research has been completed for one geographic area can significant comparative questions be asked of the commonality of the experience of the teaching sister. Public expectations of the role of the teaching sister and the image of the teaching sister may have differed quite dramatically in different localities. Similarly, many communities of teaching sisters had a presence throughout the English-speaking world. An international comparative analysis of the experience of teaching sisters of one religious order would be a fascinating venture. Communities such as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Madames of the Sacred Heart, Ursulines, Presentation Sisters, and Mercy Sisters operated schools in Europe, Australia, and North America. To explore how they moulded their entrance requirements and novitiate curriculum to meet the needs of a number of educational jurisdictions would be a fruitful study.

An Australian graduate of a convent school commented on the role played by teaching sisters in the development of Australian education:

They had no money because of their vow of poverty, yet the Australian education system would have collapsed without the exploitation of this group of women.⁴¹

As this article has indicated, the validity of this observation extends beyond Australian shores. Ongoing analysis of the contribution of these 'exploited women,' their trials and achievements, will likewise further validate the observation of Prentice and Theobald: the experience of women who taught is indeed a complex one. The history of communities of teaching sisters demonstrates yet another aspect of this complexity.

41. Germaine Greer, quoted in J. Bennett and R. Forgan, eds., *There's Something About A Convent Girl* (London: Virago, 1991), 94.