

between the two organizations resumed, and, as we have seen, amalgamation was delayed until 1951.<sup>47</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

In some ways the material benefits of the Guild's first five years were small: a boarding allowance for country teachers and a few more promotion positions. However, the significant achievement was that women teachers' views and issues were placed on the Education Department and Union agendas in ways hitherto unguessed. To women teachers, the 1937 breakaway seemed the only logical course of action after years of unsuccessful negotiations with men for support of their causes. The issues underlying the breakaway ran deeper than sectional conflict. Women teachers were challenging the system of patriarchal relations as it operated in the Union. From 1937 to 1942 the Guild succeeded in forcing the Department and the Union to deal with women teachers seriously as a force to be reckoned with in education and union affairs. The struggles and conflicts outlined in this article highlight the complexity of gender relations during this period. The Guild's activists were single and mostly senior teachers in age and promotion position. They defended their interests in ways that challenged, however, the traditional role of women in society. Their defence of the interests of other women, for example, country teachers and married women, effectively supported the patriarchal order. Finally, their battles with the Union and in their own organization show that gender, age, teaching experience, qualifications, and marital status were more important lines of division than was sectional conflict.

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<sup>47</sup>File on the Amalgamation of SAPTU and WTG, N91/792.

# Teachers' Work and the Social Relations of School Space in Early-Twentieth-Century North American Urban Schools

*Kate Rousmaniere*

In the 1915 American novel *The Crayon Clue*, the teachers of the Bartown school system were suffering the pains of a corrupt school superintendent who forced principals to buy school books that teachers didn't want, closed classrooms in the overcrowded schools in the poorest section of town, added children of different grade levels to already filled classrooms, and left teachers feeling like exhausted "factory hands" working in the "deadening and smothering" atmosphere of mechanical, impersonal schools. One final incident led Billie, the heroine of the story, at last to fight back: the superintendent purchased new, cheaper, chalk for the schools. The chalk had an oily feel to the touch and it left a dull, greasy trace on the blackboard that could not be covered with even the hardest writing. By the end of the first week of the new chalk, Billie was

in the most nervous condition she had ever known. She was practically deprived of the use of the blackboard . . . This with fifty children in the classroom, of different grades. The boards were covered with an appalling mass of dull, grayish marks, impossible to erase, stretching to the utmost corners, high and low, where the exasperated children had sought clean space, as yet undimmed by previous writings. It required harder and harder pressure to make fresh writing visible.

Billie could not write the simplest lesson on the board, and students who liked to step up to the blackboard were demoralized by the chalk problem, and became irritable and unruly. Billie felt as if she was "a tailor set to make a coat with a broken needle; a carpenter required to build a house with nicked tools." On the last day of the week, a dreary, rainy afternoon, as Billie and her class dully waited for school to end, they heard a shriek from another classroom. It was Miss Harcourt, an older teacher, who had collapsed in a nervous breakdown, worn out by her large classroom and a critical comment by the superintendent about her teaching. But in the end, she cried to Billie later, "it was the chalk did it. It nearly drove me crazy all week." This incident inspired Billie

to organize her fellow teachers, uncover the superintendent's graft, and save the city schools from financial corruption and poor management.<sup>1</sup>

Teachers in urban schools across North America in the same period may have had less dramatic crises and catharses about their working conditions, but certainly most teachers shared Billie's frustration about the management of their physical workplace. The physical characteristics and the organization of school space and facilities touched teachers on a day-to-day visceral level, affecting their physical strength, their personal comfort, and their use of time. These same problems raised tempers and temperatures in school hallways and wove in and out of the local histories of individual schools, of social relations between teachers and local administrators, and of the traditions of teachers' work cultures. Indeed, the intensity of the debate over the condition and management of school space surpassed any other topic in teachers' daily politics. Teachers commented on the mundane problems of their physical working conditions far more readily than on school reforms in curriculum, administration, philosophy, or even on personnel policy. Curriculum policy could come and go, but the broken window that took weeks to be replaced, the greasy chalk, the chronically filthy bathroom, or the schedule that demanded a teacher to climb five flights of stairs six times a day was an immediate grating problem, made all the more obnoxious when teachers' grievances were not heard, when their suggestions for improvement were ignored, or when their concerns were belittled.<sup>2</sup>

Teachers in early twentieth-century urban schools described the frustrations of their physical workplace as being of two kinds: first, the limitation of physical facilities in rapidly growing urban school districts, and second, the methods that local school management used to control teachers' work in those

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<sup>1</sup>Minnie J. Reynolds, *The Crayon Clue* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), 9, 22–37. I am grateful to Wayne Urban for introducing this book to me.

<sup>2</sup>My argument about physical workplaces draws upon insights and narrative accounts of teaching as labour: Martin Lawn and Jenny Ozga, "Schoolwork: Interpreting the Labour Process of Teaching," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 9 (1988): 323–36; Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "'Teachers' Work': Changing Patterns and Perceptions of the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Central Canada," in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, edited by Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 136–59; and Marjorie R. Theobald, "The 'Everyday World' of Women Who Taught," *History of Education Review* 19 (1990): 15–23.

facilities.<sup>3</sup> Teachers complained bitterly about their physical working conditions, including the use of old school buildings with broken or outdated facilities, dangerous and filthy work spaces, and overcrowded schools and classrooms. The maintenance and administration of facilities also affected teachers' working conditions. Managerial practice made the difference between a safe, functioning, and flexible workplace and one that was dangerous, frustrating, and restrictive. Teachers' lack of authority to influence or to control any part of the management of their workplace was the most frustrating part of their daily experience. Administrators' control over the conditions of teachers' physical presence in the school created in and of itself a dynamic of power and powerlessness between management and teachers.

Teachers' experience of powerlessness in their physical workplace paralleled their powerlessness in other aspects of their job. The bureaucratic organization of modern urban school systems located power in the central administrative office and embedded hierarchical control mechanisms in the very social relations of the workplace: the good teacher was one who followed standard rules from the central office.<sup>4</sup> In consolidated urban school systems, teachers' work was monitored and controlled by standardized testing, personnel supervision, and an increasing array of administrative procedures and regulations. But teachers were subject not only to administrative rules. Early twentieth-century curriculum reformers expanded teachers' responsibilities to include students' social, civic, and moral education with a diversified curriculum, interactive classroom pedagogy, and extracurricular activities. Teachers were caught literally in the middle: they were expected to follow regimented work rules while expanding their work into social service areas. Powerless to deny administrative and curricular demands, teachers in many urban school districts were also subject to specific demands on their classroom pedagogy

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<sup>3</sup>I emphasize teachers' experience of physical facilities inside school buildings. Other historical writings on the symbolism of and ideological dynamics behind classroom design and school architecture include William W. Cutler, III, "Cathedral of Culture: The Schoolhouse in American Educational Thought and Practice Since 1820," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1989): 1–40, and Malcolm Vick, "Building Schools, Building Society: Accommodating Schools in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Australia," *Historical Studies in Education* 5 (1993): 231–50.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Michael Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1989); and Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

and their own dress and behaviour, personal lives, and social and political activities.<sup>5</sup>

Of all the demands made on teachers, it was the physical working conditions that controlled the individual teacher at the most intimate level, and that had the most significant effect on the culture of the occupation at large. Teachers' experience of their physical facilities always had to do with questions of power: the power over the control, management, and accessibility of physical resources.<sup>6</sup> School management maintained the power literally to construct and to monitor workplaces, from the shape, size, and condition of classrooms, to the accessibility of resources, to teachers' authority (or lack thereof) to use those resources in certain ways. The ramifications of such control for teachers' working experiences was pervasive: working conditions shaped teachers' social relations and decided the extent of teacher resistance, solidarity, and identity. The pattern of isolation, individualism, and relative political passivity that historically shaped teachers' work culture grew up in the physical workplace.

Certainly the dynamics of power and control in teachers' workplace were shaped also by institutionalized gender, race, and class inequities in the school organization. Racial, ethnic, and class divisions characterized both the formal and informal organization of teachers' working experiences in all urban school districts.<sup>7</sup> Gendered divisions were particularly obvious in teachers' work. City

<sup>5</sup>Teachers in urban school districts were less subject than rural teachers to policies such as the marriage bar (for women only), political affiliation requirements, and regulations on dress and social behaviour, but such sanctions were often imposed in the individual urban school regardless of city board of education policy. For evidence of urban teachers' restrictions see: David Wilbur Peters, *The Status of the Married Woman Teacher* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1934) and Howard K. Beale, *Are American Teachers Free?* (New York: Scribner's, 1936). Studies of rural teachers' restrictions include: Frances R. Donovan, *The SchoolMa'am* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1938); Willard Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961); and J. Donald Wilson, "I Am Ready to Be of Assistance when I Can': Lottie Bowron and Rural Women Teachers in British Columbia," in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, edited by Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 202–29.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 23.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman, "Who Will Teach? Historical Perspectives on the Changing Appeal of Teaching as a Profession," in *Review of Research in Education*, edited by Ernst Z. Rothkopf (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1987), 93–131; John L. Rury, "Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," in *American Teachers: Histories of a*

teaching staffs were predominantly female and administrative staffs were predominantly male, and to a great extent male administrators controlled a largely passive female teaching staff.<sup>8</sup> Yet the structure of administrative hierarchy also superseded some gender roles: women principals exercised their power over their teachers as much as male principals did. Further, where teachers did organize to resist, they were often led by women, as in the case of the female-dominated Chicago Teachers Federation, and in the case of the teachers in the elementary school building in Queens discussed below. The institutionalized gender division of labour in bureaucratic school systems did not preclude some women from claiming masculinist authority or other women from rejecting feminine passivity in the day-to-day workplace.<sup>9</sup> Of particular concern here, however, is that all teachers' individual and collective identities developed in a particular physical workplace which also contributed to daily social relations and work culture.<sup>10</sup>

This article centres on teachers' working conditions in New York City schools in the early twentieth century, drawing upon sources from Chicago and Toronto in the same period. It is both a case study of New York City teachers' work and a comparative survey of the kinds of problems that affected all urban teachers throughout North America in the first decades of the twentieth century, a period of significant organizational development in urban schooling with radical effects on the ordinary experience of teachers, students, and administrators in schools.

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*Profession at Work*, edited by Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 9–48.

<sup>8</sup>David B. Tyack and Myra H. Strober, "Jobs and Gender: A History of the Structuring of Educational Employment by Sex," in *Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials*, edited by Patricia Schmuck and W. W. Charters (San Diego: Academic Press, 1981), 131–52; Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto," *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (Spring 1984): 75–100.

<sup>9</sup>Jill Blackmore, "'In the Shadow of Men': The Historical Construction of Educational Administration as a 'Masculinist Enterprise,'" in *Gender Matters in Educational Administration and Policy: A Feminist Introduction*, edited by Jill Blackmore and Jane Kenway (London: Falmer Press, 1993), 27–48; and R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

<sup>10</sup>Louise Lamphere, "Bringing the Family to Work: Women's Culture on the Shop Floor," *Feminist Studies* 11 (Fall 1985): 519–40; Susan Porter Benson, "'The Clerking Sisterhood': Rationalization and the Work Culture of Saleswomen in American Department Stores, 1890–1960," *Radical America* 12 (March–April 1978): 41–55.

## URBAN SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the turn of the century in North American urban schools, the common understanding of the schoolhouse had changed from a collection of simple classrooms equipped with little more than a blackboard, globe, and readers to a large and complicated building providing a variety of services with a range of facilities and equipment. Two major developments in school reform policy and practice were behind this change.

First, early twentieth-century school reformers promoted expanded compulsory education laws that led to an unprecedented increase in school enrolments and demands on urban school facilities. In New York City in the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, school enrolment increased 60 percent, over twice the rate of increase of the overall city population.<sup>11</sup> Driven by ever-increasing enrolment rates, city school boards were forced to increase their funding and construction of school buildings, and to build larger, more complex facilities to accommodate the flood of new students in emerging suburbs and overcrowded urban districts.<sup>12</sup> The City of Chicago built 70 new schools during the decade of the 1920s; New York City's Board of Education built 154 in the same period. These new schools were huge institutional structures, four or five storeys tall, holding fifty to one hundred classrooms, with the capacity of housing up to 3000 students and over one hundred faculty and staff.<sup>13</sup>

But such massive construction projects could not accommodate the flood of new students, and in both Chicago and New York through the 1920s, up to one-third of all school buildings in use were old, outdated, and dilapidated structures, and an equal number of buildings were overcrowded with students or ran on double- or triple-session schedules.<sup>14</sup> In Toronto, too, teachers worked in buildings no better than "shacks," with overcrowded classrooms

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<sup>11</sup>Board of Education of the City of New York, *The First Fifty Years: A Brief Review of Progress, 1898-1948*, Fiftieth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1948, 48.

<sup>12</sup>William H. Gompert, "New York's Colossal Schoolhousing Problem," *American School Board Journal* 69 (September 1924): 51.

<sup>13</sup>Cutler, "Cathedral of Culture."

<sup>14</sup>W. Carson Ryan, "The Case of Public Schools vs. John F. Hylan," *New York Evening Post*, 2 July 1921, 15; Allen Raymond, *A Study of New York's Public School System* (New York: New York Herald Tribune, 1931); George Strayer and N. C. Englehardt, *Report of the Survey of the Schools of Chicago, Illinois*, 5 vols. (New York: Teachers College, 1932).

where students were forced to double up on seats; classes were held in dank basements, in dark hallways, and on auditorium stages.<sup>15</sup> Teachers in all three cities reported working in old schools with no hot water, modern heating or electricity, telephone service, screens, or functioning ventilation or plumbing systems.<sup>16</sup> Small windows in old school buildings made classrooms hot and congested in the summer, and dark and foul smelling throughout the winter.<sup>17</sup> Classrooms were so darkened by windows clouded by urban filth, by inadequate gas or electric lighting, and by dingy walls that on a cloudy day in many city classrooms, students worked literally “in the dark.”<sup>18</sup> A coalition of women’s clubs in New York City in the early 1920s discovered schools marked by:

no basins and towels . . . twelve toilets for twelve hundred boys, old, bad conditions, bad odor . . . paint and repairs needed on walls; stairs worn down to danger point . . . insufficient lighting and ventilation; two rooms with only one window, eight rooms with only two windows . . . wooden buildings, no fire escapes.<sup>19</sup>

So stressed were large city school systems, and so complicated by bureaucratic management, that repairs and reconstructions to school facilities might take months. In Chicago, a simple work order for repairs followed a trail of twenty-six routine steps; approval for the requisition took twenty-four days, and the

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<sup>15</sup>“Visiting Principal Attacks Toronto School Conditions,” 19 April 1927, Toronto Board of Education Archives, Press Clippings Books, Reel 5 (January 1927–December 1930). For descriptions of similar problems in Toronto in the 1860s, including broken doors, chairs, and windows, and stolen and vandalized property, see “In the Matter of Miss Magee’s Thermometer,” in *The Status of Women in the Toronto School System, Case Study #1*, edited by Bruce Vance (Toronto: Toronto Board of Education, Affirmative Action Office and Records, Archives and Museum, 1990), 1–21.

<sup>16</sup>School Survey Committee, *Survey of Public School System, City of New York* (New York: Board of Education, 1924) [hereafter, *1924 Survey*], 1575–1580; “Survey of a Group of School Buildings by Outside Organizations,” *Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York* (1925): 868–73; “Classrooms were Smoked Out, Several Pupils Taken Ill” (11 February 1927), Toronto Board of Education Archives, Press Clippings Scrap Book, Reel 5; Strayer and Englehardt, *Report of the Survey of the Schools of Chicago*, vol. 4.

<sup>17</sup>John Rankin McLure, *The Ventilation of School Buildings* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1924), 2–13; John Duffy, “School Buildings and the Health of American School Children in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Healing and History*, edited by Charles Rosenberg (New York: Science History, 1979), 161–78.

<sup>18</sup>“Says Classrooms are Poorly Lighted,” *School*, 29 December 1921, 351.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Upton Sinclair, *The Goslings: A Study of American Schools* (Pasadena, Cal.: Upton Sinclair, 1924), 63–64.



median time required to perform the work was forty-four days—or over two months from the initial request.<sup>20</sup>

The second pressure on early-twentieth-century school buildings came from internal changes in the school curriculum that emphasized the school as a social service agency. In an era of increasing immigration, urbanization, and perceived social and political disorder, reformers heralded the school as the potential centralizing force of the community, unifying a diversified immigrant population into a culturally homogenous nation, and socializing modern urban youth towards traditional values and behaviours. Progressive era reformers promoted a curriculum of “social efficiency” designed to extend the social function of the school from academic learning to social, civic, and vocational education.<sup>21</sup> Because the school was a single public institution with trained leadership, facilities, and supplies that was physically located in the midst of blighted urban neighbourhoods, reformers charged that the school should provide the one beam of light connecting the ghetto with the larger society by becoming a “department store of community service.”<sup>22</sup>

Modern school facilities became the physical representation of the ideal to expand the social role of the school, the school building itself providing a kind of hidden curriculum of those social ideals. The school became an expanded house: architects designed new schools which boasted miniature apartments for home economics classes, manual training shops, kitchens and dining rooms, health clinics, play yards, and the new “home room.” In the most bleak and despairing urban districts, the new school was designed to act as “a peoples’ club house,” standing as a central resource and beacon of culture in the community.<sup>23</sup>

In the revised view of the school as something akin to a social service agency, all school employees were encouraged to address the problems of the modern urban child. Social efficiency curriculum proponents urged teachers to expand their teaching role from that of pedagogue to social servant, from purveyor of knowledge to a more creative, worldly social advisor and

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<sup>20</sup>Strayer and Englehardt, *Report of the Survey of the Schools of Chicago*, vol. 4, 129.

<sup>21</sup>Herbert Kliebard, “The Rise of Scientific Curriculum-Making and Its Aftermath,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 5 (1975): 27–38; Barry M. Franklin, *Building the American Community: The School Curriculum and the Search for Social Control* (Philadelphia: Falmer, 1986), 85–114.

<sup>22</sup>Harry Manuel Shulman, *Slums of New York* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1938), 85–87; Morris Berger, “The Settlement, the Immigrant and the Public School” (Ph.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956).

<sup>23</sup>Mary Gilpin Armstrong, “Community Needs Role in New School Buildings,” *New York Evening Post*, 23 April 1921, 13.

information source on health, behaviour, civics, and culture. The new teacher worked not only in the classroom, but also in the recess yard, the lunch room, auditorium, hallway, study hall, and outside the school building on field trips.

But expanded expectations were not so easy to accomplish in early-twentieth-century school buildings; indeed, physical conditions in modern city schools made it particularly difficult for teachers to get their job done, much less take on extra responsibilities around the school. The modern curriculum that dictated a variety of schooling experiences during the day required students and teachers to move constantly between different classrooms. Such mobility was complicated in large school buildings, in overcrowded buildings scheduled along split sessions, or in antiquated buildings with dilapidated facilities. The sheer bulk of the student body in modern schools presented significant problems of crowd management. At one New York City high school in the 1920s, student monitors were assigned to a "traffic squad" to prevent students from colliding in the halls as they moved about the big building.<sup>24</sup> The physical size of the building also presented problems with timing and physical stamina: Detroit school children in the 1920s walked between one-half and three-quarters of a mile a day on their way to and from classes inside their school building.<sup>25</sup> Teachers, too, raced around the building, leading their classes to and from their assigned places and attending to their multiple duties as yard monitor, cafeteria supervisor, homeroom teacher, and club coordinator.

Teachers who worked in older buildings found few of the specialty rooms and equipment needed for their modern curriculum, including laboratory facilities for physical or domestic science, equipment for industrial arts or secretarial studies, or open spaces for dramatic exercises, group projects, or club work. Older schools, built for a prior generation of students, provided few of the most basic modern amenities such as electrical outlets, blackboards, bulletin boards, and storage places for books, papers, and other teaching aids. Old classroom desks and chairs were usually bolted to the floor, permanently facing the teacher's desk, and sliding walls originally designed to create

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<sup>24</sup>Margaret Goreth Hunt, "My Days at Evander Childs," in *The Bronx in the Innocent Years, 1890-1925*, edited by Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 102.

<sup>25</sup>F. C. Holy, "Actual Traveling Distance of Elementary School Pupils," *Educational Research Bulletin* [Ohio State University, College of Education] (November 1928): 1-21.

recitation halls became permanent classroom walls too flimsy to keep out noise from adjoining classrooms.<sup>26</sup>

Nor were facilities for teachers any better. In many older buildings, teachers had no lunchroom, office space, or lounge in which to prepare classes or take a break from their increasingly busy day. In one elementary school in New York City, there were two toilets for forty-seven women teachers and one for seventeen men teachers—all located so close to the teachers' lounge that when the door opened, the odour drifted into the larger room. This lounge doubled as the teachers' lunchroom, a "small, bleak, drab room" made all the less appealing by the fact that it was often crowded with teachers lining up to go to the toilet between classes. According to one observer, this lunchroom was, "to say the least, unappetizing."<sup>27</sup>

Poor facilities presented teachers with more than a nuisance. Teachers commented on the physical danger and threats to their health caused both by poor physical working conditions and by the demands placed upon them. They reported chronic illnesses caused by leaky gas furnaces and faulty ventilation systems, and broken bones caused by tripping through dark hallways, basements, and murky stairwells.<sup>28</sup> The use of oil on the wooden floors of schools not only stained the lower hem of teachers' skirts, but also made floors so dangerously greasy as to cause accidents.<sup>29</sup> Every year in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s there were three or four cases of teachers breaking bones by slipping on oiled floors or tripping on worn stairs in dark hallways. One Chicago teacher broke her hip from sliding on a recently oiled floor and was

<sup>26</sup>J. E. Fearon, "What Teachers Want in School Buildings," *American School Board Journal* (January 1928): 76; Ethel M. Gardner, "The School Building in its Reaction on Teachers' Work," *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association*, 1921, 404.

<sup>27</sup>"Questions and Suggestions on the Physical Conditions to the Public Schools," 1926, unprocessed United Federation of Teachers [UFT] papers, Box 1, UFT Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

<sup>28</sup>Gardner, "The School Building in its Reaction on Teachers' Work," 405; Federation of Women's Teachers Associations of Ontario [FWTAO], Minutes, 1892–1914, Box 8E, FWTAO Archives, Toronto; *Proceedings of the Board of Education, City of Chicago, 1917–18*, 1186, 1483.

<sup>29</sup>Chicago Teachers Federation [CTF] General Files, Box 48, Folder August–October 1921. Reports of Group Councils 36 and 31, Chicago Historical Society; FWTAO Minutes, 19 November 1907, 22 September 1908, Box 8E; Alison Prentice, "Themes in the Early History of the Ontario Women Teachers' Association," in *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work*, edited by Paula Bourne (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985), 104–7.

disabled for five months, and still on crutches after nine months.<sup>30</sup> Another teacher slipped on an oiled floor and smashed her head against the desk with such force that she split her skin to the bone.<sup>31</sup>

Worse even than physical problems was the intensity of teachers' physical labour in these unhealthy work spaces. Medical inspectors warned that teachers were prematurely aged by incessant work in the stale airless tomb of the modern urban classroom, a breeding ground for tuberculosis, bronchitis, and consumption, where teachers spent their days stooped over desks, barely gasping a moment of fresh air, and hurriedly eating cold meals in a cramped corner of a room.<sup>32</sup> The overcrowding of schools, the manipulation of schedules to accommodate more students, and teachers' extended work hours sent many teachers home at the end of the day little better than "half dead."<sup>33</sup>

#### PHYSICAL CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Difficult physical working conditions were not, in and of themselves, an insurmountable problem. Indeed, as we shall see later in this article, such physical problems could be compensated for with good management and positive social relations in the workplace. But for many teachers, the problems of their physical workplace were exacerbated by the ways school management solved those problems. The management of the physical space of schools meant more than the maintenance of facilities; it spiralled out to questions of purchasing supplies, staffing, scheduling, and the daily social and political dynamics of the workplace. In the increasingly chaotic and disorderly modern urban school, teachers found their own physical movement severely restricted by administrative controls. Stranded in their classroom, teachers received orders from a distant bureaucrat who regulated their daily schedule, physical movement, and physical comfort. The disparity between administrators' image of physical order and teachers' demand to have independent judgment on their

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<sup>30</sup>Report of J. A. Graham, M.D., on Miss Mathilda Jaeger, CTF General Files, Box 49, Folder January 1922; Letter to Mr. Mortenson from Mathilda Jaeger, CTF General Files, Box 50, Folder November–December 1922.

<sup>31</sup>*Proceedings of the Board of Education, City of Chicago*, 1914–15, 1030.

<sup>32</sup>Charles J. Drucek, "Tuberculosis Among Teachers," *Chicago Teachers Federation Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (1905): 5; Louis I. Dublin, *Physical Disabilities of New York City Teachers* (New York: Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., 1916); J. K. McBroom, "How to Save the Teacher," *Chicago Teachers Federation Bulletin* 3, no. 37 (1904): 1–5.

<sup>33</sup>Alice O. Vaughan, "Teaching Load," *National League of Teachers' Association Bulletin* 11, no. 3 (February 1928): 22.

physical work space created tense and long-standing disputes between teachers and administrators.

The absence of even the most basic facilities and supplies limited the potential creativity of teachers' work, and could only have furthered the dreary atmosphere of the daily classroom, particularly a classroom in an older building. An observer of an elementary classroom in New York City in 1930 described old desks stained with ink, no wall maps or globe, and only three potted plants and a small aquarium to brighten the room. Tacked on the bulletin board were two old notices, a current events announcement, a children's weight chart, and a few health posters. "There was nothing, tho, of immediate and active interest," noted the observer. "I saw no handwork such as clay or plasticene, and I don't recall seeing any drawings or paintings. I felt the teacher lacked inspiration. She was a good teacher but the work, I gathered, was without incentive."<sup>34</sup>

The principal of this school, the observer noted, was an aggressive, capable woman, sure of herself, and with a "self-centered personality" which made her likely to "fill . . . the foreground completely." She was like a distant autocrat, not one to nurture teachers; indeed, teachers would probably fear crossing her path, and they seemed to maintain a kind of "freedom" in the classroom as long as they abided by the principal's wishes and followed the prescribed curriculum. In such an environment of physical and pedagogical limitations, it is little wonder that the teacher was seen to "lack inspiration."

Administrators' control of classroom facilities also created potentially explosive power dynamics between teachers and their supervisors. Teachers' struggle over the maintenance of classroom temperature epitomized the extent of miscommunication between teachers and administrators about working conditions. In an attempt to create a healthy environment in schools, early-twentieth-century electrical engineers and school health professionals designed scientific systems to control classroom temperature. The installation of modern electrical ventilation in many urban school districts promised a centralized method of controlling the ventilation of classrooms, one that would prevent teachers from making independent (and presumably wrong) judgments about the air quality of classrooms.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the electric fans and steam heating systems were designed to work only if teachers followed strict guidelines about keeping windows shut. But if the ventilation system did not work in the first place—and one study in New York City in the 1920s showed

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<sup>34</sup>"Report of Visit to P.S. 90, January 27 1930," unprocessed UFT papers, Box 1.

<sup>35</sup>John Rankin McLure, *The Ventilation of School Buildings* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1924), 2–13.

that only 2 percent of classrooms had functioning systems—teachers threw open their windows in attempts to air out stifling classrooms.<sup>36</sup> Both school principals and supervising engineers admonished teachers sharply for this, and derided them for claiming some expertise over scientific issues of health and air quality. A Toronto principal nailed classroom windows shut in a war with teachers over who would control the classroom ventilation system and teachers' most immediate physical environment.<sup>37</sup>

The attempt to control teachers' daily movement within the school space was another bone of contention between teachers and administrators. Principals continually reminded teachers about the proper way of lining up students for fire drills, recess, and the beginning and end of the school day. The control over *both* students and teachers was implicit in these regulations about school space. It was a teacher's fault if a student was caught running through the hallways, if a student was caught in between classes without a pass, or if student desks were found to be messy. One cause for dismissal in Chicago schools was the failure of a teacher to maintain the classroom "in a neat and orderly fashion."<sup>38</sup> In one New York City school, a teacher remembered that student disorder was often cause for blaming the teacher for failing to maintain order.

In our school there were up and down staircases. It was a "sin" if a child got caught on the wrong staircase. There was a wooden pass that a child had to carry in the hallway. The teacher was responsible if a child got caught on the wrong staircase or in the hall without a pass. How did that child get out of class?<sup>39</sup>

What principals asked of students, they often asked specifically of teachers. In a stern lecture to his staff about hallway practices, a Toronto principal demanded the exact same behaviour of teachers and students: "Teachers are not to allow talking in line or pupils running up and down stairs," he warned. And with no change in tone, he added, "Teachers should not talk in the halls when the lines are passing."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>1924 Report, 347.

<sup>37</sup>FWTAO Minutes, 4 March 1912, Box 8E; Mary V. Enright, "Good Ventilation," *Chicago Teachers Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 16 (1902): 7.

<sup>38</sup>Board of Education Trial to Determine Removal from Service—Jane Huntress, CTF General Files, Box 53, Folder July–December 1925.

<sup>39</sup>Isabel Ross, interview by author, Brooklyn, N.Y., 12 October 1989.

<sup>40</sup>Dovercourt Public School, Minutes of Staff Meetings, 29 September 1913, Toronto Board of Education Archives.

The school schedule also controlled teachers' work while furthering the interests of a school management intent on fitting as many students as possible into the school for minimal cost. Overcrowded urban districts adopted double- and triple-session scheduling of classes where students and teachers attended school for only half or one-third of the school day. Multiple sessions cramped teachers' schedules so that they had no free periods to prepare lessons, give special labs, lead field trips, or give students the individual attention or special services that the modern curriculum demanded. Even if teachers had the energy to tutor after school, scheduling would not permit it under the monumental traffic problems that occurred at the end of each session, when up to 2000 students tried to leave one building to be replaced by another 2000 within a ten- to twenty-minute turn-around period.<sup>41</sup>

Many overcrowded schools ran on two or three overlapping schedules—also known as the platoon system—where classes or platoons of students moved around the school between different rooms, thus keeping all rooms of the school occupied at the same time. The platoon system's effect on teachers was cruel both in physical terms and in the creation of a tense, tightly scheduled day. The constant rotation of classes kept teachers in almost constant motion, leading their class of forty students around a building that could be as large as five storeys high with seventy-eight classrooms. Teachers raced around large school buildings to meet classes or supervise students, rushing up and down dark stairwells and through long hallways with their students to meet their next class. The supervision of such a schedule was ripe for conflict between administrators and teachers. A New York City teacher described the dynamics of her elementary school's platoon plan:

The first class [started] at 8:10; the later session began at 9:10 and the first person took her class to the auditorium until the other person came in . . . I had an assistant principal who was not too bright. He would say: why are you waiting outside that room? I'd say: that class hasn't finished yet. And he'd say: there's an empty in 409. And I would hesitate to go up there with a class of 2nd or 3rd graders because often there wasn't an empty room up there at all and you had to go all that way with your class.<sup>42</sup>

The key to the platoon system was reliance on the use of specialty rooms by certain classes while other classrooms were used by another platoon of students. According to progressive curriculum reformers, the time spent in

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<sup>41</sup>*Journal of the Board of Education of the City of New York* (1922): 2025–31; Frank M. Quance, *Part Time Types of Elementary Schools in New York City* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1926).

<sup>42</sup>Isabel McNab, interview by author, Bronx, N.Y., 25 October 1989.

these specialty rooms was intended to broaden the curriculum by providing students with a variety of innovative group activities. The auditorium period, in particular, was promoted as a time for spelling bees, artistic performances, or student presentations. But in desperately overcrowded schools, the auditorium could become a catch-all location for classes temporarily displaced from their classroom. Teachers found that the emphasis was more often on precise scheduling of students than on actual programming, leading to antagonism between administrators in charge of scheduling and teachers. One New York City elementary schoolteacher remembered:

Then they would put us in the auditorium—the whole grade, maybe six or seven classes and they would tell us to use the time . . . Once we used slides and the teacher complained that there were no names on the slide and she couldn't tell whether it was a wolf or a fox. And the Assistant Principal said: "what difference does it make?" Things like this would hurt you because you were standing there trying to teach the children and all they wanted to do was to keep the children in their seat.<sup>43</sup>

A Chicago teacher in the same period described the often absurd conflict that part-time systems created between teachers and administrators. The administration thought staffing and supplies more important than the lives of students or the interests of teachers.

I am in a double shift school and [the administrators] came in and complained because there were two teachers' desks in a room, and at the same time they are not thinking of these children in the corridor or the auditorium. They are particular about the little things. They reported to Mr. McAndrew [the city superintendent] and to my own superintendent because I had an empty desk there that was not being used, and they complained about me, sent three letters, one to Mr McAndrew, one to Mr. Hitch, and one to my own principal at the same time.<sup>44</sup>

Teachers described not only the physical strain of the platoon system, but also the way in which their professional self-esteem was undermined by a schedule that dislocated teachers from their colleagues and precluded the existence of a home-base classroom or a common meeting time. "Wandering teachers" moved from classroom to classroom and had difficulty finding free rooms in which to prepare lessons because all classrooms of the building were

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<sup>43</sup>Isabel McNab, interview by author, Bronx, N.Y., 25 October 1989. The Chicago Teachers Federation also questioned whether the auditorium was used for "real auditorium work" or merely as a holding tank for students; see CTF General Files, Box 5, 14 February 1925, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup>CTF General Files, Box 5, 14 February 1925, p. 139.



continually in use. And because teachers were required to supervise the newly introduced student activities outside of the classroom, they rarely had time to meet with each other, thus discouraging the development of teachers' collective identity or the organization of protective associations.<sup>45</sup> One New York City teacher drew a direct connection between the absence of a teacher's own classroom and teachers' sense of professional identity by noting that "one's room and one's desk are one's home in the world of work." Not having such a home caused unhappiness and poor morale among teachers.<sup>46</sup>

#### TEACHER RESISTANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS

Administrators often interpreted teachers' complaints about the condition of the most basic facilities in their workplace as insolence and insubordination. What teachers saw as simple solutions to irritating problems, administrators saw as a challenge to their authority in a hierarchical system. When teachers asserted their most basic needs about their physical comfort at work, they were essentially challenging both their principal's individual power and the authority of the larger administrative system. This daily, often individual struggle for power over the local workplace differed from teachers' organized attempts to challenge administrative rule through teacher unions.

Teachers in early-twentieth-century New York, Chicago, and Toronto organized in response to the newly consolidated power of central city school administrations. Although unions made a significant mark on urban school politics, they were not particularly popular among most teachers, in part because of the union focus on economic issues like salaries and the political machinations of school boards and city government.<sup>47</sup> Rank-and-file teachers

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<sup>45</sup>1924 Survey 1363, 1392–96; Report of AFT Local 3 (Chicago Women's Teachers Union), 1924, Folder entitled "Chicago Women's Teachers Union, 1916–34," American Federation of Teachers Collection, Series 6, Box 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit.

<sup>46</sup>1924 Survey, 1579.

<sup>47</sup>Teachers were also actively prohibited from joining unions by laws and social and political pressure, but my emphasis here is on the ways that teachers articulated their own ambivalence to unions. The argument that most rank-and-file teachers were not drawn to unions because of the organizational emphasis on economic concerns has been most effectively promoted by Wayne Urban in *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1982) and again in "New Directions in the Historical Study of Teacher Unionism," *Historical Studies in Education* 4 (Spring 1992): 1–15. Other studies of the history of teacher unionism debate Urban's point but also contribute to a fuller discussion of the gender and class dynamics behind the historical development of teacher unions in North American cities. See in particular Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT*

who were burdened daily by their immediate working conditions were not drawn to these larger issues. Teachers came to union meetings exhausted and distracted by daily problems in their individual schools—problems like oversized classes; excessive paperwork; interruptions by janitors; administrators, and special events; broken clocks; field trip regulations; and recess and lunch duties. Even in the Chicago Teachers Federation, which boasted a membership of over half the city's teaching staff, teachers showed their ambivalence by attending meetings during which they “knit and sewed, . . . chewed gum, and . . . powdered and fixed up and sneaked out whenever they got a chance and went home.”<sup>48</sup>

Another significant reason for teachers' unimpassioned attitude to organizing was that unions required a sense of collective identity all but pre-empted by working conditions in schools. Teachers were alienated from one another by administrative distinctions between grade levels and subject areas, by the peculiar working conditions created by principals, and by physical isolation. Teachers were separated by building, floor, and classroom, and distanced from one another by scrambled and hectic schedules that offered no common lunch time or free time to meet and talk about shared concerns and issues at work. Thus teachers' very working conditions discouraged the possibility of a collective identity.

Outside teacher unions, teachers responded to the working conditions of their school buildings in day-to-day interactions with supervising administrators. Rather than being formal political battles between representative agencies, these struggles over the control over the school physical space could be intensely personal and explosive and could affect the social relations of an entire school staff. Teachers who crossed their administrators' paths faced not only a personal price, but also potentially the full force of administrative retribution. Two cases from two American cities in the 1920s illustrate the risks teachers took when challenging administrative control over their workplace.

At a five-storey elementary school in Queens, New York in the 1920s, many older women teachers were assigned to teach on the fifth floor of the

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and the NEA, 1900–1980 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Richard A. Quantz, “The Complex Vision of Female Teachers and the Failure of Unionization in the 1930s: An Oral History,” *History of Education Quarterly* 25 (Winter 1985): 439–58; Harry John Smaller, “Teachers' Protective Associations, Professionalism, and the ‘State’ in Nineteenth Century Ontario” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1988); and Prentice, “Themes in the Early History of the Ontario Women Teachers' Association.”

<sup>48</sup>Minutes of a Conference Called to Formulate a Plan of Educational Councils for Elementary Teachers, 3 June 1920, CTF General Files, Box 48, 3 June 1920, p. 26.

building. The school schedule required these teachers to climb these stairs three or four times a day, as described by their colleague, Alice Marsh, in a rhythmic, if exhausting, litany:

[You went up the stairs] in the morning and down again at noon, and up again at one o'clock, and down again at three o'clock. But if you had assembly that day, you had to come down again. The assembly was on the first floor. The gym was on the first floor. So if you had gym also, it was up and down, up and down.

Some teachers tried to limit the strain by not going up to their class first thing in the morning. But by cutting corners, teachers cut short their productive work time, reducing exhausting physical exercise but along with it, job quality. Alice Marsh recalled how many of the older teachers who worked on the top floors of the building saved their strength by limiting their class preparation.

I know I used to like to get into my room before the kids get there and I'd get the board straightened out and I'd put something on the board for the kids when they got in. And these teachers, they'd have to sit there in the office and do nothing, just gossip . . . Because they didn't want to go up and down and up and down.

This practice was apparently permitted by the principal, who saw the teachers sitting around the office at the beginning of the day.

The staircase problem in this school was so disturbing to teachers that they devised a system of monitors, whereby each teacher who had a classroom near a staircase would stand at the top of the stairwell in between periods, and oversee lines of students walking the stairwells. This would solve the problem of the supervision of students without requiring teachers to follow their students up and down the stairs. Alice Marsh talked with all the teachers in the building, arranged a schedule, wrote up a chart, and approached the principal with the plan. The plan was received in the following way:

So I walked into [the principal's] office, and she was very polite, she listened to me until I was finished and then she looked at me with her cold blue eyes and she said: "Miss Smith, *I* am the principal of this school and *I* will decide." And she tore up this thing I had worked so carefully on. Well! She might just as well have slapped my face. I was just so shocked that she was so adamant to have her own way, which was not a good way, which was so hard on the teachers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Alice Marsh (née Smith), interview by author, Jackson Heights, N.Y., 7 January 1991.

In a Chicago elementary school in the same period, a similar struggle occurred when a teacher presented what she believed to be a simple request to salvage her health by controlling a small piece of her workplace, an attempt which administrators received as nothing less than legal insubordination deserving of firing.

For her first seven years as a teacher in Chicago schools, Ida Calhoun worked in an old, small school where teachers evenly shared the four periods of daily yard duty. When the school moved to a new and larger building, the principal assigned only the regular teachers to yard duty, exempting teachers of special subjects like kindergarten, braille, household art, and physical education. Some of these special teachers had classrooms on the first floor of the new building, only a few steps from the yard. But Ida Calhoun's new classroom was on the third floor in a building with high ceilings and long stairwells. With her responsibilities for yard duty, she climbed sixty steps five times a day, five days a week. One Friday, in her second year in the building, after five consecutive days of climbing stairs, Ida Calhoun, who suffered from hay fever, collapsed at the top of the stairs, wheezing. When she skipped the next few days of yard duty, her principal accused her of insubordination and began proceedings to fire her. Ida Calhoun appealed to the superintendent for relief, requesting that the principal equalize the teachers' share of yard duty responsibilities. She spoke not only for herself, but for other teachers on the top floors of the building who were "a wreck" after such physical demands. She recounted that teachers and visiting adults were so winded after reaching the top floor that they had to sit down and catch their breath. One teacher allowed an extended eraser fight between students because she "could hardly speak" from exhaustion. Teachers at the school faced other excessive duties too, claimed Ida Calhoun: they were required to fill the students' inkwells and clean the board erasures, although Board policy required the janitors to do this work. The school was closed too early in the day to allow teachers to stay late to catch up on work, the floors were swept during the day, making the air dusty, and when teachers complained that the ventilation system shot cold drafts into the rooms, the principal blamed the teachers for being too finicky. The physical demands of the school were thus exacerbated by poor management and, in this teacher's view, a vindictive and manipulative principal.<sup>50</sup>

For both Alice Marsh and Ida Calhoun, the original problem of the staircases was one issue; the simplicity of the solution to this problem was another issue; and the vituperative response of their principals became yet another issue which, in the end, most severely affected their social relations at

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<sup>50</sup>Testimony of Ida Calhoun, CTF General Files, Box 52, Folder November–December 1924.

work and their political response. After Alice Marsh's interaction with her principal, she began to keep files of every report and evaluation of her, and she eventually joined the Teachers Union. Ida Calhoun filed her grievance with the Chicago Teachers Federation. For both teachers, the incident radically changed their originally positive attitude about their workplace.

#### THE COMPENSATORY SOCIAL RELATIONS OF SMALL SCHOOLS

Poor physical conditions did not in and of themselves ensure a poor working environment for teachers. If poor social relations in a school could exacerbate difficult working conditions, so could positive relations mediate otherwise difficult working conditions. The size of a school was a significant variable in the extent to which teachers, administrators and students could create a climate of flexibility and cooperation that could compensate for otherwise glaring physical problems.

In many overcrowded urban school districts, old small elementary school buildings and portable buildings were used to house classes. Teachers who worked in such schools often struck a bargain between the problems of old dilapidated facilities and the benefit of small size. The collegial relationships that could develop in small schools helped teachers accommodate to and improvise in otherwise inadequate school facilities. In a small building, teachers were more likely to know every student, and teachers and administrators were more likely to interact personally than at large schools.

Three cases from New York City reveal the possibility for moments of personal contact and collegial work culture, even in North America's largest, most cumbersome school district. When Margaret Jamer started teaching high school in Brooklyn in 1926 she was assigned to teach in an old wooden country schoolhouse—hardly the place to teach courses in modern science, home economics, or secretarial studies to growing adolescents. But Margaret Jamer enjoyed the experience of working in a small building where teachers worked together to accommodate their strange conditions. "There was a good feeling there," she remembered. "We would go out to lunch sometimes. It was very friendly and we made deep friendships."<sup>51</sup>

In Rose Stern's old school building in Brooklyn in the same period, a former large recitation room had been divided into classrooms with temporary walls, creating four classrooms with no linking corridors. Teachers and students had to walk through the front classroom to get to a back classroom. When Rose Stern taught high school secretarial studies in this old building,

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<sup>51</sup>Margaret Jamer, interview by author, Huntington Station, N.Y., 18 November 1989.

she found the practice of teachers walking through her class distracting at first. But the curriculum in secretarial studies was tightly scheduled and she could not afford to stop talking every time she was disrupted, so she learned to get used to teachers passing through. In fact, because of the small size of the annex, teachers and students created a friendly atmosphere that allowed for such informal practices. The small size of the building created the kind of working environment that compensated for its physical defects.<sup>52</sup>

Students also seemed to appreciate smaller schools, despite physical disadvantages. Between 1913 and 1924, Julia Richman High School, a girls' vocational high school in Manhattan, was housed in six separate annex buildings and one main building. Students and teachers complained vociferously about the inadequate conditions in the annexes: in May 1918 over one hundred Julia Richman students took their case to the mayor. In a litany of complaints about overaged buildings, the students claimed that at Julia Richman:

We have poor lights. We have bad air. We have worn-out equipment. We have insufficient equipment. We have poor sanitation. We have no lockers. We have no gymnasiums. We have no libraries. We have no auditoriums. We have no rest-rooms. We have no lunch-room. We eat in the hall or in the basement. We eat standing up. We must carry all our books and papers all day. In some rooms we have no walls, just curtains.<sup>53</sup>

Yet in spite of the poor facilities, students wrote about a special unity and spirit within each annex. With the construction of the new high school building in 1924, students wrote that while they were eager to join together in one big building, "we shall miss the close relationship between teachers and girls that we have had in our small annex."<sup>54</sup> Students specifically valued the close relationships between teachers and students fostered in each individual annex. One student described the wonders of the new building with its library, swimming pool, restrooms, and laboratories, and suggested how the enormous size of the building might end the casual relationships between students and teachers.

When we were at the annexes we really didn't mind  
Going round and round the halls until our rooms we'd find.

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<sup>52</sup>Rose Stern, interview by author, Forest Hills, N.Y., 31 October 1989.

<sup>53</sup>*The Blue Bird: 1913-24*, Julia Richman High School Student Yearbook, 51.

<sup>54</sup>*The Blue Bird*, 50.

The annexes were really small and passing made no fuss  
But now we think in this huge place, the teachers should come to us.<sup>55</sup>

## CONCLUSION

One reason teachers preferred a small school, even if outdated and overcrowded, was that it was easier to make sense of difficult working conditions if teachers had connections with colleagues. Friendship was part of this collective work culture in many small schools. Teachers also turned to each other to develop plans and procedures for sharing work load, supervising and advising students inside and outside of class, and adapting and accommodating to problems raised by physical facilities, curriculum, and the unpredictable dynamics of children's moods and behaviours.

The work space of most early-twentieth-century urban teachers discouraged a collective teacher work culture. Collaboration was less likely in large schools, where teachers floated around huge hallways, disconnected from any working community or culture of colleagues. Teachers were alienated from one another by the physical shape and size of school buildings and by the nature of the facilities. Their physical movements were closely monitored and tightly controlled by a self-consciously expansive administrative bureaucracy. Their voices of complaint, protest, and suggestion were silenced by a hierarchical structure that ignored or belittled their concerns.

The political implications of such alienation and disunity were explicit. Indeed, the near-absence of teachers' complaints about even the most abysmal working conditions was itself a consequence of those conditions. At one New York City school, the physical training supervisor requested teachers to write the temperature of the classroom on the board four times a day. The principal enforced the order at a meeting, and a few teachers protested weakly. One single teacher, a member of the fledgling Teachers Union, protested more audibly about the extra work added on to the school day, but she was reprimanded by the principal, who identified her as a troublemaker. Her colleagues apparently remained passive and disunited, now even more separated from each other by an additional requirement to keep them in their classroom.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>“Our New Building,” *The Blue Bird*, 74.

<sup>56</sup>Letter from Cecelia Lepetes to Henry Linville, 4 February 1919, Henry Linville Papers, Box 3, Folder 1, 15 February 1919 (Correspondence), Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

Thus the organizational structure and political motivations of an emerging administrative bureaucracy reinforced each other by excluding teachers from decision making, from holding any voice of authority, or from even being able to articulate their most basic needs in the workplace. Teachers' passivity at work was ensured by both the authority structure of urban school systems and the physical environment that alienated them from one another. The story that began this article—of Billie's organization of her colleagues to oust a corrupt superintendent—was truly fictional. Although Billie and her colleagues felt like "factory hands," most teachers were physically prevented from gaining that collective politicized identity of organized industrial workers even as they struggled under factory-like conditions.