

Encounters with Sexuality: The Management of Inappropriate Body Behaviour and Body Talk in Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia Schools

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Note from Author

Since this essay's initial publication in *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* a decade and a half ago, I have fielded enquiries by letter, email, and in person respecting its subject matter. I have each time returned to the primary sources on which the essay is based to determine how they might best be interpreted. Readers have also queried the absence of a table explaining the numbers associated with the thirty allegations girding the text, which had inadvertently not been printed.

It was a recent email query from a descendant of one of the people who figure in the article that caused me to wonder whether a revised essay including the missing table warrants publication. I had come to realize that the subject matter is as relevant today as it was when the allegations were made, now over a century ago. Body behaviour and body talk are as integral to who we are as human beings, children, and adults, as they were then. It made sense for me to contact the editors of *Historical Studies in Education*—Mona Gleason and Penney Clark—to see if there was any interest in reissuing the article, and I thank them for their affirmative response.

The essay's content has been variously modified consequent on a close rereading of the primary documents, on my responses to the various queries I have received, and due to changing times. Except for some updating, the footnotes remain much as they were in the earlier version.

ABSTRACT

Of all the issues that students, parents, teachers, and schools encounter, few are as difficult to manage as sexuality. We persist in believing that the body does not belong in the classroom except as an object of study or improvement. Inappropriate body behaviour and body talk with a sexual edge intimidates us, so much so that accounts tend to be oblique or non-existent. Their scarcity makes particularly valuable a set of records that survive from British Columbia in the late nineteenth century. Even though public education was then becoming centralized, a general unwillingness to face up to issues of sexuality caused almost all of the thirty allegations

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that were located in the superintendent of education's correspondence to be resolved at the local level. The most frequent tactic used was parental boycott of the school. The allegations are divided between those against teachers and those against students. Regardless of who was implicated, the teacher was almost always caught in the middle and ended up resigning.

RÉSUMÉ

De tous les enjeux auxquels font face les élèves, les parents, les enseignants, et les écoles, peu sont aussi difficiles à gérer que ceux touchant la sexualité. On continue de croire que le corps n'appartient pas à la salle de classe sauf comme objet d'étude ou susceptible d'être amélioré. Un comportement corporel inapproprié à caractère sexuel gêne à un point tel qu'il est consigné autrement ou pas du tout. Leur rareté rend donc particulièrement précieux un ensemble de registres de la fin du XIXe siècle en provenance de la Colombie-Britannique. Même si l'instruction publique y était en voie de centralisation, le peu d'empressement des autorités scolaires à régler les questions de sexualité a fait en sorte que presque toute la trentaine d'allégations qui furent adressées au surintendant de l'instruction publique furent résolues au niveau local. La tactique la plus fréquente était le boycottage des écoles par les parents. Les accusations sont portées contre les maîtres et contre les élèves. Ceci étant dit, peu importe qui était impliqué, le maître était presque toujours pris au cœur du litige et finissait par démissionner.

Of all the issues that students, parents, teachers, and schools encounter, few are as difficult to manage as is sexuality. We have long believed that the body does not belong in the classroom except as an object of study or improvement. Body betterment has been considered acceptable, as shown in early twentieth-century initiatives to monitor student health and introduce sex education, and in more recent efforts to feed hungry bodies attending inner city schools.¹ It is when the body takes on a life of its own in order to pleasure itself that we become agitated. Body behaviour and body talk with a sexual, and possibly also a racial, edge intimidates us, so much so that accounts tend to be oblique or non-existent. Their scarcity makes particularly valuable a set of records that survive from British Columbia schools in the late nineteenth century.

The intervening century and more may have changed contexts, but the elements of ambivalence and challenges for resolution respecting appropriate body behaviour and body talk are hauntingly familiar.² We are today no less encased in physical bodies that others may perceive as sexual objects, just as we do from time to time our own body and other bodies around us. We engage in body talk almost as a matter of course, and at least from time to time in body behaviour, with the line between what is appropriate and what is inappropriate within which contexts not necessarily easily drawn. In other cases, such as with rape or attempted rape, no question exists but that the line has been grievously crossed. When the bodies with which we engage are physically different from our own, the possibilities for inappropriate body behaviour and body talk may become greater. Setting these elements within school settings, be it today or now so long ago, adds new complexities respecting appropriate and inappropriate body behaviour and body talk.

A systematic reading of the incoming and outgoing correspondence of the superintendent of education between 1871, the date when British Columbia became a province of Canada, and the end of the nineteenth century, turned up thirty allegations

of inappropriate body behaviour and body talk.³ The thirty allegations, which are summarized in the table at the end of this article, are not, it must be emphasized, the entirety of incidents, but rather only those warranting sufficient correspondence with the superintendent of education to make the circumstances explicit.⁴ The allegations are also limited by geography. None came from the provincial capital of Victoria on Vancouver Island, where such issues were almost certainly dealt with in person.⁵

Not all of the thirty allegations of inappropriate body behaviour were sexual in their impetus. Rather, they acquired a sexual edge. Part of the reason they did so persists today in our fear of bodies out of control. Another part of the reason lies in the deep ambivalence towards the body that characterized the late nineteenth century.⁶ Across much of British Columbia, everyday conditions made the sex act, for reproduction but also for pleasure, a recognized part of daily life from a young age.⁷ As Sharon Ullman describes for the United States, this everyday reality stood in sharp contrast to “middle-class arbiters of public and private behavior, who attempted to police sexuality through moral authority” and whose “opinions and ideology permeate the documentary evidence.”⁸ Such persons saw themselves as setting standards for behaviour, in British Columbia as elsewhere across North America. The sex act might be necessary for procreation, but that did not make either it or sexuality a proper topic for open discussion, except to be condemned. The thinking was gendered, in line with the patriarchal character of the times. Men were acknowledged to possess sexual desire, which was to be satisfied within the married state. Women did not. So as not to arouse their men folk, women were to behave modestly, preferably under male supervision, and to think pure thoughts. Persons in poor economic circumstances or with darker skin tones were considered more likely to behave improperly. The tendency was inherited ran the thinking. Their bodies were more highly sexed. As the century waned, more and more aspects of body behaviour acquired a sexual edge and thereby, in the guise of “moral purity,” were in need of regulation and reform.⁹ Sexualization of body behaviour was extremely convenient for a variety of reasons.

The Organization of Schooling in British Columbia

During these same years, public education was becoming increasingly centralized, but the shift only went so far.¹⁰ The attitudes of persons in charge prevented schools, as described for Ontario by Bruce Curtis, from dealing with improper body behaviour and body talk.¹¹ Shortly after British Columbia became a Canadian province in 1871, responsibility for the “order and discipline” of schools was invested in a superintendent of education.¹² Among other powers, he had the authority to charge any person who “interrupts or disquiets any Public School by rude or indecent behavior.”¹³ The routine administration of schools fell on three elected trustees, who were very often parents of students. From 1873 onwards, local trustees had the right to dismiss, as well as to hire, teachers. They could do so from 1879 “upon giving at least thirty days’ notice,” from 1888 immediately, for “gross misconduct.”¹⁴ Teachers, who until the turn of the century qualified by passing an examination, were charged

to “maintain proper order and discipline” within their school.¹⁵ As for parents, they were from 1876 responsible that their children, “from the age of seven to twelve inclusive, shall attend some School, or be otherwise educated for six months in every year.”¹⁶

For all of the administrative centralization, the superintendent of education played a far smaller role than did direct action in encounters with sexuality. Almost all of the thirty allegations during this quarter of a century were resolved through local initiative because the state proved unable or unwilling to face up to improper body behaviour and body talk, particularly when it acquired a sexual edge.¹⁷ Localities acted in two principal ways. In just over 50 per cent of the cases (sixteen out of thirty), parents, either individually or in groups, boycotted the school. They put their children’s well-being, as they perceived it, ahead of their becoming literate. Their role as parents took precedence over the state and its injunctions. Secondly, teachers and trustees used the legislation as best they could. Teachers disciplined students and, much more importantly, trustees fired teachers. Attitudes towards sexuality were so contentious that an accusation, however unjustified, even if against a student, could cause a teacher to be dismissed or to resign out of frustration.

The thirty cases have some general characteristics. The initial allegation was most often followed by direct action. Only then, if then, was there a resolution. The cases are gendered. Almost 75 per cent (twenty-two) occurred where the teacher was a man, even though 60 per cent of the thousand teachers at work in British Columbia during this quarter-century were female.¹⁸ In other words, a male teacher was four times more likely to be involved in an allegation than was his female counterpart. Even where not directly implicated, his actions could be sexualized. In general, whereas women had their reputations tarnished, men became perceived as moral threats to children and to the community. Almost 75 per cent of the cases (twenty-two) involved solely persons of the palest skin tones, individuals we consider White. So far as can be determined, all of the teachers fit into that category. So did most, but not all, of the students and trustees.

Allegations against Teachers

The thirty allegations divide evenly into two groups—those made against teachers and those made against students. All of the allegations against teachers involved persons of the opposite sex. All but three were against men, in one case, the superintendent of education. The three exceptions occurred during the early years of public schooling when independent working women were almost inherently suspect. At Stanley in the Cariboo (#6, Table 1), “some people began to pass remarks” about the young single teacher continuing to board in the home of a male trustee after his wife left for a month’s visit to Victoria.¹⁹ At the Cache Creek public boarding school (#7), established in the Interior in 1874 for children living too far away to attend day school, the music teacher, “by a determined manipulation of her shawl and by a delicate cough, which no doubt was assumed for the occasion,” managed to deceive everyone “till it was too late to prevent the evil.”²⁰ The nature of “the evil” was not

revealed. Another woman spread the story at Hope in the Fraser Valley (#8), to quote the teacher, "that something very improper had occurred between myself and a Half-breed boy about 18 years of age." The woman did so after spying on the teacher and the landlady, where they both boarded, entertaining "a young Frenchman" by dressing him "as a woman." The mere allegation, the teacher realized, turned an innocent evening into "a secret disgraceful tale."²¹ These assertions of improper body behaviour and body talk may have originated in jealousy or spite but also, it is tempting to speculate, in order to legitimize open discussion of an unattached newcomer.

Some of the dozen allegations levelled against male teachers were similarly based in gossip and innuendo, as occurred twice at Maple Bay on Vancouver Island and on Salt Spring and Mayne Islands. A local trustee lambasted the teacher at Maple Bay (#11) for "the beating of his wife [which] has been going on now for a twelve months."²² The talk there five years later (#15) was of the single male teacher "keeping company with... a widow lady that resides close by."²³ One of the two Salt Spring schools (#13) was located in an area that had been settled by Black families from the United States beginning in the late 1850s during the gold rush. The school's two Black trustees accused the Salt Spring teacher of helping their White trustee counterpart prevent his underage daughter from running away with a Black man.²⁴ A recent school-leaver on Mayne (#16) alleged that the teacher had, as well as using profane language, drawn images of "girls' nakedness on the benches and on the ceiling" of the school.²⁵

Some teachers found their use of physical discipline sexualized, as was the case at Donald in the eastern Interior and Langley Prairie in the Fraser Valley. At Donald (#22) "complaints of the teacher's brutal whipping of pupils were very common," including his having punished one girl so firmly "as to blacken both her eyes." Initially the teacher "succeeded in arousing a general feeling of sympathy on his behalf." Worried that he might be kept on, the girl's father asserted that the teacher also "had been guilty of kissing one of the older girls attending the school, a daughter of [a] Trustee,... and had been seen going home with his arm around the neck of this or other girls." At a public meeting called to consider the situation, he drew attention to a letter written a year earlier by a disgruntled former resident, with whose nineteen-year-old daughter the teacher willingly acknowledged he had "kept company," but denied "ever having had any improper relations with her." The moral reform impulse is evident from the father going on to describe how the teacher "had been in the habit of playing cards on Sunday." He "was regular in attendance at Divine Worship," but "no sooner was Service over, than the cards were again brought out."²⁶

The incident at Langley Prairie (#26) points up the fear of the body out of control. According to a worried trustee, the new teacher "proved to be very quick tempered and at the least possible offense in his fits of anger punished and pounded severely over the head or anywhere the blows might fall and pounded many of them most unmercifully and in his fits of passion whatever he might have in his hands threw it onto the floor spitefully pull their hair their ears their nose and eye brows and very frequently indulged in the following ill names such as little fools... dumheads [*sic*] miserable beings." Anxious to cement what was initially a non-sexual complaint, the

trustee tacked on, almost as an afterthought, the teacher's "more than usual attention to some of the large girls."²⁷

Not only teachers' actions but also those of the superintendent of education (#12) could be sexualized. A man disappointed on receiving a lower than expected grade after writing the annual teachers' examination demanded that the superintendent be dismissed on the grounds of his being "not worthy of his position" for having, during the exam in Victoria, "showed me the Street where women of ill fame lived."²⁸ The man approached the superintendent directly with what comes across as a crude attempt at blackmail: "You took a walk with me in the City of Victoria and pointed out to me a street in which women of ill-fame resided. If it will suit you better I am prepared to publish the particulars under oath in the [Victoria] Colonist [newspaper]."²⁹

The accusations of improper body behaviour and body talk levied against male teachers were not all just spiteful. Some were very serious indeed, as at South Cowichan and at Lakes on Vancouver Island, Vernon in the southern Interior, and Port Haney and Cheam in the Fraser Valley. A South Cowichan parent (#1) charged the teacher with "taking indecent liberties with his adopted half-breed girl aged about 9 years."³⁰ At Lakes (#10), an upset hotel owner threatened to spread reports that the teacher "had been guilty of misconduct towards the girls in school."³¹

A long-time teacher at Vernon (#18) was thrice charged over a two-month period: "One was Indecent Assault committed on or about 3rd Sept. on one girl, the 2nd Indecent Assault 26th Oct., & the third, Assault & battery on 27th Oct. on another girl."³² One of the girls "complained to her mother of his indecent conduct," who then informed the trustees. They got in touch with the teacher, who the very next day "beat her with a stick" until "the blood was almost raging." The local justice of the peace issued an arrest warrant after taking a deposition from her in which she claimed that the teacher had "put his hand under the dress... and felt her breasts, on another occasion of having felt her legs and on another of meddling with her underclothing," and another from her eleven-year-old sister that he had "on one occasion pressed her breasts with his hands and on another occasion felt her legs." Reflecting the dynamics of small communities, the justice of the peace took pains to emphasize that, before taking the girls' statements, he "precluded the idea of a family feud."³³

The allegations at Port Haney (#23) underline the difficulties of coming to grips with sexual desire. Shortly after a new teacher arrived in 1891, a trustee's child "brought the subject home that one of the pupils, a girl aged about 15 was in the habit of staying in after hours." The trustees requested that the practice be discontinued, to which the teacher responded that the girl merely stayed to take down homework. Reports continued to filter to the trustee's home of the teacher "sending girls out of school for wood and then following them out, also of his disgraceful conduct when playing with the older girls." Still nothing was done. The other two trustees opposed the teacher's dismissal on the grounds that "he brought the children on well with their studies." The teacher continued "keeping the children at night" until a young woman swore out an affidavit "that she had been seduced by her teacher when about fourteen years and five months old, when attending school; that she had had intercourse at different [*sic*] times with him up to last March and that she was with

child to him, being at present 16 years old.” The girl “afterwards stated to her sister that she had seen him making improper advances towards another girl between 11 & 12 years of age; that there were others that she was satisfied he had intercourse with all the other larger girls.”³⁴ Perhaps influenced by events at Port Haney, complaints circulated shortly thereafter at nearby Cheam (#24) “as to the teacher having improper conduct with some of the female pupils of his school.”³⁵

Allegations against Students

An equal number of allegations were levelled against students. As with the teachers, all fifteen cases involved persons of the opposite sex. General misbehaviour could acquire a sexual edge, so the teacher twice reported from the tiny lumbering settlement of Gastown or Granville, the future Vancouver, during the mid-1870s. In early fall (#2), the youngest of the recalcitrant sons of a trustee “shook his nakedness before a class of little girls.”³⁶ The next spring (#3), a nine-year-old boy who had already been disciplined for bad language “sometimes hid in the bushes and there waited” and “interfered with the little girls” as they were walking home.³⁷ A physician trustee at Yale in the Fraser Canyon (#9) considered that an expelled “halfbreed boy” who came to school after hours was “acting improperly” towards pupils being kept in, an allegation the teacher attributed to her daring to consult another medical doctor than himself.³⁸ A newly elected trustee at Silverdale in the Fraser Valley (#27) alleged that “the boys & girls in what they called play was [*sic*] having connection.”³⁹

Other incidents suggest greater deliberation on the part of students. Almost from the establishment of Cache Creek boarding school, its coeducation was a “great cause for complaint,” in part because many of the students were of mixed race by virtue of having Indigenous mothers.⁴⁰ By the summer of 1876 (#4), school officials recognized the need “to guard still more closely against such charges of immorality as have obtained currency in the past” by keeping boys and girls wholly separate outside of classes.⁴¹ Yet the very next spring (#5), as the teacher put it, “I made the discovery that the girls had, on at least two occasions in the dead of night, left their dormitory, passed down stairs, unfastened the door between the dining room and the passage leading to the boys’ dormitory.”⁴²

One of the most serious allegations of inappropriate body behaviour and body talk came from the Nicola Valley in the southern Interior (#14). A mother handed the incoming male teacher a letter detailing “the conduct of the boys with my little girl.”⁴³ She explained how “the boys had thrown her down” during the noon hour while the previous teacher was outside feeding his horse. The new teacher visited the girl’s parents, who told him that the “practices had been carried on for 2 years before I came here.” The teacher explained to the superintendent of education how “they both informed me in language that was delicate, but quite unmistakable that the children were in the habit of attempting connection with each other.” Three boys aged ten to fifteen, who were cousins of the girl’s father, had repeatedly held her “down on the floor & had laid down on top of her... had pulled up her clothes [and also] squirted water up her legs with a squirt.”⁴⁴ The girl’s parents had, at that point,

taken their daughter out of school, but were returning her now that the new teacher had arrived.

Over time, as social reform talk grew louder, teachers became increasingly perceived as accountable for children's behaviour beyond the school itself. A boy on South Gabriola Island (#17) was accused of having "committed a vile immoral act on the road home from school."⁴⁵ Events at Alberni on Vancouver Island (#19) swirled around a fifteen-year-old "Indian girl" who had eloped with an Indigenous man but then returned home. Two of the trustees gave the girl permission to go back to school—this at a time when Indigenous children were still part of many public school classrooms in British Columbia. Thereupon, "one of the parents objected strenuously, on the grounds of immorality."⁴⁶ At Golden, in the far east of the province (#21), one of the trustees "happened to be in the outskirts of the town & hearing voices proceeding from a hay shed, approached, and found the child mentioned examining, & offering herself for examination to, another member of the School."⁴⁷ A Langley parent (#28) complained that "my children has been attempted to be raped along the road home by the older scollars [*sic*] one little girl 8½ and the other 6 ½."⁴⁸

The voices of students come through vividly at Aldergrove, also in the Fraser Valley (#20). A father reported that his six-year-old daughter had been "outraged... on the road home" from school.⁴⁹ The girl described how four boys "chased me and knocked me down." She explained that "they then took off my clothes," and one "held me down" while the other "bothered me." The four accused acknowledged that, "when school was out," they decided "to ride the girl" and so "knocked her down and took off her drawers." Two of the boys held her while a third "got to her," they then traded places, and all four "got to her" before "a woman went past." Three of the boys ran off whereas the fourth stayed behind to help her put her clothes back on.⁵⁰

Newcomers who arrived in British Columbia following the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1886 sometimes brought with them very definite ideas about right behaviour. Body talk with a sexual edge came to the fore on Salt Spring Island, at Mission in the Fraser Valley, and at nearby Hope. A newcomer trustee on Salt Spring (#29) vigorously criticized the teacher for having during the noon hour left "the children to their own will & pleasure," rather than "keep[ing] a supervision over them while at their play, etc." He considered that "when the children are left alone & together they engage often in talk, which is entirely out of place for children to use."⁵¹

It is not surprising, given Protestant leadership in social reform, that a newcomer who was "strongly Methodist"⁵² denounced "a serious state of immorality existing amongst the larger children attending the Mission City School" (#25). He described their talk: "A few days since two little girls about seven or nine years of age in one of their jargons with the bigger girls, the bigger girls told them that they would take their pants off and lay them across their nee [*sic*] and slap their Lasses. They replied if you did we would tell or [*sic*] Ma out she would come and tell the teacher. They replied we would take her pants off too and slap her Lass."⁵³

The male teacher at Hope (#30) attempted to turn concern over body talk to his advantage. He deflected the gossip that he was "very badly addicted to the drinking

habit & sadly neglects the school rules in different ways” by blaming his failings, including the extensive use of physical force, on students’ “gross immorality &... obscene language” while he was out of the classroom.⁵⁴ Although both sexes were involved, it was girls’ body talk (“skunk piss,” “swing your diddle”) and their imitation of the sexual act (“she was making a ring with one finger and thumb and running her other finger through, saying this is [a boy student’s] pussy and this is mine”) that he considered absolved him of blame.⁵⁵

Direct Action

Irrespective of their merits, allegations of inappropriate body behaviour and body talk tended to precipitate direct action. Even as trustees and teachers might be sorting out a charge, parents very often took the initiative. In just over half (sixteen out of thirty) of the cases, some form of boycott occurred. Its power lay in the provincial requirement that, to stay open, schools had to enroll a minimum number of students, usually ten. Many schools were not much above that number. A decision by one or two families to keep their offspring home not only discredited the teacher, it also forced the hand of the trustees.

The boycotts are important in and of themselves, but also because they highlight the inability of individuals at this point in time, whether parents, teachers, trustees, or the superintendent of education, to confront sexuality. No structural means existed to assist alleged victims. There is no sense whatsoever in the superintendents’ correspondence that this was even a consideration. Aside from discussions concerning punishment of alleged offenders, no letters to or from the superintendents address effects, either of the acts themselves or of misplaced allegations. Parents comforted children, whether victims or perpetrators. Parents who wanted to do more sometimes saw direct action as their only recourse.

Parents who considered their children to have been victimized, either by other students or by the teacher, often instigated a boycott. Where the boycott was limited to the accused students, the effect could be beneficial to the school as a whole. The teacher at Granville (#2) breathed a sigh of relief that the trustee’s son who “shook his nakedness before a class of little girls” and who was then “lightly corrected... with a slap on the bottom with my hand” was “kept home since,” for “no patience could tolerate him.”⁵⁶ Most times the boycott was more general. The situation in Granville the next spring (#3) with the boy who “interfered with the little girls” soon became so serious “that their [the girls’] parents would not finally send them to school.”⁵⁷ Two decades later, the Silverdale trustee (#27) whose wife spied children “having connection” after school explained about his own offspring that “my wife is always objecting to sending them to school and will not send them regular but says she will send them regular when I make it fit for a child to attend.”⁵⁸ Resistance could be intended more to make a point than to disrupt a school over the long term. After the Cache Creek dormitory incident (#7), enrolment fell from twenty-six to just fifteen, but soon bounced back up as parents in remote areas, having made their point, acknowledged the lack of other educational options.⁵⁹

Boycott was most straightforward where the teacher was the accused, as on Salt Spring Island and at Vernon. The Salt Spring teacher (#13) accused of helping a White trustee prevent his daughter from eloping with a Black man soon found himself, at a meeting called by the two Black trustees, listening to Black parent after Black parent proclaim that “any Teacher that would be guilty of such action I will not let him teach my children.” As one parent put it, “he is prejudice [*sic*] to color and I do not think he is fit to teach my children.”⁶⁰ A boycott followed. The Vernon teacher (#18) accused of indecent assault soon found “children were kept at home, the week following four were kept at home, . . . this left three who were in attendance the last day I taught.”⁶¹

The anxieties to do with sexuality were such that, so far as boycott was concerned, it was not necessarily the substance of the charge but simply its existence that triggered action. The young male teacher at Lakes (#10) who came up against the irate hotelier was informed by him “that he could ruin any single man who held the position of teacher, by simply spreading reports to the effect that he had been guilty of misconduct towards the girls in school; that whether the reports were true or not, the result would be the same.” To make the point, not only the hotel owner’s two daughters, but also “two girls, who had been very regular in attendance up to that time, were suddenly withdrawn from the school for two days before the visit of the Superintendent.”⁶² No sooner had trustees at Maple Bay (#15) cleared the teacher of improper behaviour towards the “widow lady” he was courting, than his accuser, described as “a mad Methodist fanatic” who “goes around preaching and praying and making a nuisance of himself,” initiated a boycott. The man began “going around the settlement trying to induce people to keep their children at home from school and he says he would tie his up by the heels to the fence to dry before he would send them to the school.”⁶³ At Cheam (#24), complaints about the teacher’s “improper conduct” towards female students were sufficient for there to be “no girls going.” A trustee explained to the superintendent how “none of the parents will allow any of their girls to go near him on account of his ungentlemanly manner he has been acting towards them.”⁶⁴ However, when the Cheam trustees held a “meeting to investigate trouble we could not get the girls to state what they had to their parents.”⁶⁵

As was the case at Cheam, parental action was repeatedly used to force the hand of dithering trustees. At Maple Bay (#11), the teacher’s wife, “after having been beaten black and blue,” confided her plight to a trustee in the hopes he could do something. On learning of the situation, parents began a boycott. Even though the teacher was able, as the trustee who made the matter public put it, to “bamboozle the other two trustees by laying all the blame on his poor wife,” he could not so convince parents and thereby break the boycott: “There were only two (his [teacher’s] own) children present . . . and today there were only four, two of them being his own.”⁶⁶

The Hope teacher (#30) who, accused of drinking and excessive punishments, laid the blame on students’ body talk, was similarly boycotted. A former trustee whose son was “cruelly beaten with a stick & carried black & blue marks for 10 or 12 days after” declared how “he very much desired his children to have a chance to get an education but not at the risk of their lives.”⁶⁷ His five children were joined by a trustee’s five also “being kept home for a change of teachers.”⁶⁸ Another father then

declared, "I have seven Children which I cannot send to school" until the teacher was dismissed.⁶⁹

Sometimes it was trustees' actions rather than their refusal to act that precipitated a boycott. In the Nicola Valley (#14), the new teacher who, on his arrival, received the letter charging assault against a young girl "wished to administer corporal punishment, but the trustees informed or rather advised me not to do so as I would certainly be charged with assault by their father." Thereupon the teacher suspended three of the accused boys, and the trustees voted to expel the fourth, who was the oldest among them. This boy then returned to school, informing the teacher that if he "attempted to put him out he was to summon him with a charge of assault." The teacher wisely permitted him to stay as a visitor while his father sought a meeting with the trustees on the grounds that "his boys were prepared to take back all they said and substitute another story" and that the girl's father, his cousin, had been persuaded to withdraw the charges.⁷⁰ The father put the blame directly on the new teacher for raising the matter in the first place. He wrote: "My son has been going to school for about 10 years and always bore a good character and there was never any fuss in the school untill [*sic*] this master came and he raised the Devil."⁷¹ Likely to placate the father, who was a local worthy, the suspensions were lifted, whereupon boycott became the only recourse left to the school's thoroughly disgruntled parents. As the teacher sadly summed up, "on account of this affair every scholar has been taken away since the suspended boys returned," except for the boys themselves and a young male cousin.⁷² The Alberni teacher (#19) found himself similarly squeezed in respect to the "Indian girl" seeking to return to school following her short-lived elopement. After the trustees gave in to parental pressure for her expulsion, another group of parents circulated a petition to have her readmitted, whereupon the first group threatened to remove their children "should she return."⁷³

The situation at Aldergrove (#20), where a six-year-old girl was "outraged" by fellow students, seemed initially to have been quietly resolved. The guilty boys were "very severely punished by the teacher, and parents," but "allowed to remain at School, as long as they behaved themselves."⁷⁴ The decision ignored the interests of the young girl, whose parents kept both their children home so long as the attackers remained in the school. A stalemate ensued. The new teacher who arrived two years later discovered that "there is a good deal of trouble about some boys going to school which is reported not fit to attend public school and there is [*sic*] five families will not send while they attend school." The teacher considered it unfair that parents were "compelled to [keep] there [*sic*] children home on account of two or three boys."⁷⁵ Faced with an impasse, the trustees blew the situation wide open by charging the violated girl's father under the provision in the School Act requiring his children's attendance. Not only did the original accusation resurface, so did an account from the previous spring of "a girl [six years old] lying down and a boy on top of her."⁷⁶ Families remained divided. Those whose children had remained in school considered that "the charges made of immoral conduct among the pupils are false and groundless being made for malicious & slanderous purposes, and that the children should be held guiltless until proven guilty."⁷⁷

The teacher at Golden (#21) was similarly caught in the middle through no fault of her own. The two students caught in improper body behaviour and body talk on the way home were suspended by the trustees, “in the interests of public morality,” until their fathers returned home to deal with them. The father of the girl considered to have been the instigator saw matters differently. As soon as he got back, he wrote the teacher a letter describing her action as “malevolent impertinence” and “demanding the right to have the child taught.” On the trustees’ instructions, the teacher refused to take her back. The father thereupon “went with the child to school & threatened to sit there and keep the child there also, upon which the Teacher said she could not teach her, but she might remain as a guest, which she accordingly did.”⁷⁸

In frustration the teacher turned to the superintendent of education, who, in his response, put the onus back on the locality: “For gross misconduct, the teacher may suspend a pupil for a specified period, and when the example of any pupil is very hurtful, the teacher, with the approval of the trustees, can expel the pupil.”⁷⁹ By this time, other parents had acted: “One child has been kept away from school for about two months, . . . & others would sooner pay their fine [for their offspring’s non-attendance] ten times over than that the pernicious example of this youngster should exercise such an evil influence over their children, or would render them, when old enough, entitled to be classed with street-walkers & herd with the lowest of the low.” Just as had the teacher to no avail, the trustees threw themselves on the mercy of the superintendent: “We must either close the school altogether, or the child . . . must be expelled or criminally prosecuted & sent to a reformatory.” The trustees pointed out how the situation “places a kind of premium on vice for the benefit and example of the other scholars.” So far as the trustees were aware, “in the school act there is no mention of it being a reasonable excuse for a father to keep his children from school on account of fear of contamination.”⁸⁰ Nothing ensued, despite yet another request for outside assistance. The state in the person of the superintendent of education was unwilling, or unable, to rectify the situation.

Resolution

A satisfactory resolution to allegations of inappropriate body behaviour and body talk was repeatedly hindered by the state’s inability to face up to issues of sexuality to the same degree to which other aspects of the education system were being centralized. The legislation on the books might have sufficed, had superintendents of education been willing to act. Alborn (#19), where the “Indian girl” eloped, was one of the few exceptions where the superintendent intervened directly between opposing groups of parents.⁸¹ He opined that “from the facts of the case as stated, I certainly think it advisable to refuse the girl re-admission. Her presence could not but cause talk among the children that might lead to evil consequences. It is certainly the duty of both trustees and teacher to do everything in their favor to keep the moral atmosphere of the school-room pure.”⁸²

Otherwise, formal resolution fell on the locality, where the options were few. Sometimes nothing happened. The Silverdale trustee’s wife (#27) who caught two

children “having connection” in a shed was told, on reporting the incident to another trustee, that “it was boys and girls play... going home from school.”⁸³ On the other hand, the Golden trustees (#21) readily expelled a girl for “immorality” outside of school. New arrivals might make the difference: “In cases where the children have come from England, carefully raised under their mother’s care, we can see in a few months such a deterioration in behavior & even character as would appear almost incredible to an outsider.”⁸⁴ In the Nicola Valley (#14) trustees voted that the oldest of the four boys accused of assault be “expelled from the school under Section 7, Subsection 14.15 of the Regulations of Schools in B.C. because he was the leader in these things.”⁸⁵ Likely because the action was extreme, the trustees specified their reasons with some precision, saying “the nature of the offense is one of gross immorality and is such as to compel the trustees to resort to this severe measure, as a means toward preventing any recurrence of a like nature, as well as a warning to the younger children, several of whom I regret to add have been equally guilty though evidently led on by the example of their senior.”⁸⁶

The decision to discipline or expel students did not necessarily equate with resolution. Just as occurred with boycotts, it could be the teacher who bore the consequences, as at Granville, Cache Creek, and South Gabriola. The Granville trustees (#3) decided in the case of the boy who “interfered with little girls” on the way home that “for the benefit of the School it was thought necessary to expell [*sic*] him.”⁸⁷ The father countered that, rather than his son being at fault, “the lady who teaches school should find some way to stop the other children from annoying him.”⁸⁸ After the girls at Cache Creek (#5) found their way into the boys’ dormitory, it was inordinately easy to blame the staff for being, as the main trustee put it, “so taken up with themselves or each other that they have allowed things to come to a pretty pass.” In his view, “they seem to have been sleeping all winter serenely oblivious to the most scandalous conduct on the part of some of the larger pupils.”⁸⁹ The head teacher hastened to protect himself by meting out punishment “on the guilty parties” and requesting the trustees to have “the ringleaders expelled.”⁹⁰ Whatever ensued, when the superintendent visited the school later in the spring, he was informed that “all the offending girls with one exception were still at the school.”⁹¹ The South Gabriola teacher (#17) whose student “committed a vile immoral act on the road home from school” soon had the parents at his door, calling the teacher “interesting names” like liar and saying that their son was an angel.⁹²

Resolution was sometimes confounded by race. A resort to skin tones is not unexpected, given the widespread tendency to attribute sexual desire to supposedly “inferior” types. The equation was most visible in terms of students identified as Indigenous or part-Indigenous by descent.⁹³ Education of status Indigenous children was legally the responsibility of the federal government, which gave an additional basis for resolution not necessarily in students’ best interests. Their presence in some local classrooms related primarily to the need to keep up student numbers. The superintendent of education resorted to this administrative consideration in responding to the teacher at Alberni (#19) caught in the dilemma over readmitting the Indigenous girl. He said “permit me to add that as Indian children are wards of the Dominion

Government, the interests of the other children should be considered first.”⁹⁴

Children of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent were also suspect, needing, as the first superintendent of education put it, to be “under constant surveillance as to their conduct and demeanor.”⁹⁵ After the Cache Creek incident (#5), observer after observer waxed indignant that, to quote one of them, “children so young should show themselves capable of such depravity... a revelation of youthful vice for which I was not prepared. It may seem hard to say it, but I think it goes for all experienced opinions, that half-breeds are more immoral than the natives, and that the efforts made to educate them are almost a waste of energy.”⁹⁶ The teacher at Hope (#30) similarly put any failings he himself might have had on the bad language of his pupils, many of whom were of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent: “When a child becomes so polluted by home influences as to be a menace to the moral status of the school I consider some action on my part necessary.”⁹⁷

The race card could be turned on its head. The father at Granville (#3) sought to shift the blame for his son’s behaviour to the teacher on the grounds that the family was Jewish, “being a Hebrew—which someone has told the other children, some of them use bad language often used by grown up people against a race people are prejudiced against” and “to those who annoy him he returns bad language.” In the father’s view, “in a school where all races are mixed it requires strict supervision to prevent bad conduct and language.” He was not above a little prejudice of his own, observing that “some of the boys are too old to be mixed with mere children: especially as the oldest are of [the] Indian race from which very little good can be expected.”⁹⁸

The Salt Spring teacher (#13) alleged to have helped a White trustee prevent his daughter’s elopement with a Black man was considered to have “a prejudice against the colored people.” He was alleged to have said at a parents’ meeting “that the people from the South, meaning the Slaves, could not learn anything anyhow.”⁹⁹ A decade later, when a Salt Spring trustee (#29) sought to require the teacher to be ever-present with the children, the inferiority argument was turned in the other direction: “Our country districts are made up of a mixed population, & with many of them their morals are very poor, if they have any at all,” so that “for those children who have been reared in innocence it is nothing less than a cruel shame, as well as to their parents.”¹⁰⁰

Consequences for Teachers

Teachers were, and still are, on the front line in the schools. Each of the teachers caught up in these thirty encounters with sexuality bore the consequences in one way or another. In some cases, they were clearly the instigators of the incidents and deserved to be dismissed. With the South Cowichan teacher (#1) charged with “taking indecent liberties” with a young mixed-race girl, the trustees “decided unanimously that the teacher should be suspended,” whereupon he resigned his position.¹⁰¹ The music teacher said to have caused a “great scandal” at Cache Creek (#7) was immediately discharged, as was the head teacher (#5) held responsible for girls getting into the boys’ dormitory.¹⁰² The male teacher accused of undue attention to “some

of the large girls” at Langley Prairie (#26) was asked by the trustees to resign and did so.¹⁰³ On learning of the paternity affidavit against him, the teacher at Port Haney (#23) admitted his guilt.¹⁰⁴ The trustees voted unanimously that he “be summarily dismissed as Teacher of Hany [*sic*] School for Gross Misconduct,” a decision made possible by the 1888 legislation.¹⁰⁵ Acting as “the voice of the whole school district,” they then requested that the superintendent of education cancel his teaching certificate.¹⁰⁶ Two weeks later, the superintendent agreed to do so, “on account of gross misconduct.”¹⁰⁷

Other teachers were less willing to acquiesce to their dismissal, as with the Hope teacher (#30) who justified his own failings by students’ body talk. The Yale teacher (#9) accused of letting “a halfbreed boy” act improperly towards children kept after hours took the offensive and “asked the children if the boy had ever been in the schoolroom when any of them had been kept in and they all immediately answered no! never!”¹⁰⁸ The Mission man (#25) who complained to the superintendent of education about pupils’ inappropriate language reported that, when his wife talked to the teacher about it, he replied in an insulting manner.¹⁰⁹

The teachers at Maple Bay and Vernon successfully resisted, even though accusations were levelled directly against them. The Maple Bay teacher (#11) said to have beaten his wife to such an extent that, as one of the trustees put it, “she begs of us to send him away or he will kill her,” survived boycott.¹¹⁰ Whatever the fate of the marriage, he was still teaching there the next year. Similarly, the Vernon teacher (#19) accused of assaulting a female student “was very stubborn,” and, a trustee reported, refused to resign on being requested to do so but vigorously proclaimed his innocence.¹¹¹ In reference to the eleven-year-old who “told her mother I had been feeling her breasts!” the teacher explained that she had been “kept after school for an imperfect recitation” and “when she came up to recite her lessons I took her on my knee... as I had times before.” “No improvement being apparent,” he had repeatedly punished her with “a small gad, the smaller end not larger than a slate pencil (I can produce it).” Explaining why he was charged, “she having only a thin calico dress & a chemise the gad left three or four red marks.”¹¹² Like his Maple Bay counterpart, the teacher at Vernon kept his job.

Trustees did sometimes use their power to keep on a teacher they considered unjustly tainted. In a few cases, nothing much ensued, as with the Hope woman teacher (#8) linked by innuendo to a young “Half-breed boy”¹¹³ and the Langley teacher (#28) who had a parent complain of his attempted rape of her two young daughters.¹¹⁴ After the Mayne teacher (#16) charged by a recent school-leaver with drawing female images denied the charges, he was exonerated, in part on the grounds that he “was a married man at the time.”¹¹⁵ All the same, body talk mattered, and within the year, a female teacher was requested (#16). In the case of the Donald teacher (#22) whose reliance on physical discipline was sexualized in the hopes of securing his dismissal, two of the three trustees voted at the end of a very contentious public meeting to continue to employ him.¹¹⁶

Several male teachers fell victim to a boycott. The Maple Bay teacher (#15) withstood almost a month of boycott instigated by a religious zealot before submitting his

resignation. Almost as an afterthought, he noted how “it is regrettable that dissension among the people works sadly against the welfare of the school.”¹¹⁷ The teacher caught in the impasse at Aldergrove (#20) between two sets of parents over a six-year-old’s “outrage” ended up out of a job when the school was closed for low attendance.¹¹⁸ At nearby Cheam (#24), girls’ reluctance to state publicly the charges they made to their parents did not break the boycott. The trustees similarly gave the teacher a month’s notice on the grounds of falling numbers. Once the number on Salt Spring (#13) fell below the legal minimum of ten, the two Black trustees voted to close the school.¹¹⁹ The teacher, informed that “the misunderstanding which has occurred between you and the parents of the children who have been attending school being of such a nature that it does not appear probable that any arrangement can be arrived at so as to secure a reasonable attendance,”¹²⁰ thereupon wrote to the superintendent, who responded that the decision “is quite legal.”¹²¹

Where teachers were dismissed, no recourse whatsoever existed. The superintendent of education reminded the Yale woman teacher (#9) who was at loggerheads with the physician trustee that just two of the three trustees held “the power of appointing and discharging you and they can do the latter without stating any reason.”¹²² Sure enough, they did so, and there was absolutely nothing she could do.¹²³ The superintendent similarly reassured Cheam trustees (#24) that, “under the provisions of the School Act, the Trustees have full authority in appointment and dismissal of teachers.”¹²⁴

The same outcome could result voluntarily, as with the besieged teacher at Maple Bay (#15). The Stanley teacher (#6) living in the house of the trustee whose wife went off to Victoria found her only alternative to ongoing innuendo was to resign: “I scarcely knew what to do, there was no place where I could board but public houses and I did not want to go there.”¹²⁵ Among others who left, apparently of their own volition, by the end of the school year were the female teacher at Hope (#8) accused of social improprieties, the male teacher at Lakes (#10) faced with a boycott after he got into a dispute with a local businessman, the female teacher at South Gabriola (#17) who caught a student out in “a vile immoral act on the road home from school,”¹²⁶ the female teacher at Aldergrove (#20) where a girl was “outraged” on the way home,¹²⁷ the male teacher at Mission (#25) where girls were accused of indecent language, and the male teacher on Salt Spring (#29) whose students were said to have used bad language during the noon hour.

Almost 60 per cent (eighteen out of thirty) of the thirty teachers left their jobs by the end of the year in which the allegation occurred. They did so in 75 per cent (eleven out of fifteen) of the cases where the allegation was against them. The four exceptions were the male teacher (#11) accused in Maple Bay of assaulting his wife, his counterpart in Donald (#22) queried over an improper life style, the Vernon teacher (#18) charged with assaulting a female student, and the superintendent of education against whom blackmail was attempted. Both women were among those who departed. Where the allegations were against students, almost 50 per cent (seven out of fifteen) of the teachers also left, indicating how damaging even the tinge of sexuality could be. All of the women departed except the Granville female teacher

twice involved in student accusations (#2, #3). Just over 50 per cent (seven out of twelve) of the male and 66 per cent (four out of six) of the female teachers who quit or were forced out rebounded. They went on to other teaching jobs, sometimes after a year out. Of the seven who left the occupation altogether, five, all men, had had allegations levied directly against them.

Lessons from the Past

Sex and sexuality have existed within schools as long as the institutions themselves have existed. The contexts in which bodies engage in behaviour with a sexual edge may have changed, but the acts themselves resonate across time.

We know about these thirty allegations because they were communicated to the superintendent of education, his correspondence being the body of data from whence they come. The state's reluctance to act, despite having ultimate authority, continues into the present day. Centralization of schooling has tended to focus on those elements of education that can most easily be controlled by virtue of their being able to be measured and counted. We prefer to consider students and teachers to be rational beings whose bodies defer to their minds. Body behaviour and body talk is by its very nature not amenable to legislation, whose logical basis is at odds with the subtle shades of grey that colour most of our actions to do with sexuality and the body. The inability to accept sexual desire as part of the human condition put the onus in these thirty cases on localities. Very often it was parental action in the form of boycott which, directly or indirectly, precipitated a resolution. The end result sometimes had far less to do with the merits of the allegation than with excising the taint of sexuality from the school and, perhaps also, the locality. By virtue of being outsiders, teachers were expendable.

It is important to emphasize that both teachers and students sometimes woefully misbehaved. With some students, judicious handling of the situation likely prevented reoccurrence, but the situation with teachers was far more serious. The allegations represented acts of will with long-term implications for the organization of public schooling. The 1888 legislation making it possible to fire teachers for "gross misconduct" acknowledged the seriousness of such allegations. Localities sometimes struggled to reconcile their assumptions about the teacher as a role model, so central to the rhetoric of public schooling, with accusations originating with small children. All sides lost out in these encounters with sexuality. Numerous children had their lives scarred in circumstances where no one, except possibly their parents, treated their situations as seriously as they might have done.

Males are more susceptible to allegations of improper body behaviour and body talk than females. Some scholars have argued that men are by nature "more aggressive and sexually impulsive."¹²⁸ What is clear is that men were, to some extent, the victims of their gender. Not only was sexual desire considered to be the prerogative of men, the greater power they exercised in society made them dangerous in circumstances where the situation appeared to be spinning out of control. Over the last three decades of the nineteenth century the proportion of men in the classroom declined

from 60 to 40 per cent, whereas the proportion of encounters with sexuality occurring in schools employing male teachers rose from 50 per cent (five out of ten) in the 1870s to 80 per cent (eight out of ten) and then fully 90 per cent (nine out of ten) in the 1890s. Where the charges were against students, about 66 per cent (ten out of fifteen) of the teachers were male. Apart from three incidents in the 1870s, all of the fifteen allegations against teachers were levelled at men. In similar fashion, Bruce Curtis discovered for Ontario that, “despite the overwhelming numerical superiority of women in the teaching force (72 per cent by 1901), complaints of illicit sexual behaviour were far more frequently made against male teachers.”¹²⁹

Although the thirty incidents are insufficient to draw generalizations, they do suggest that the feminization of teaching occurring across North America during these same years may have resulted not only from perceptions of women as maternal and from economic and structural factors, but also from issues of sexuality. As Bruce Curtis concludes for Ontario during these same years, “one reason for the feminization of the teaching force... may then also have been the perception of trustees and ratepayers that such teachers would not make unwelcome sexual advances to students, or engage them in other forms of illicit sexual comportment.”¹³⁰ An accusation, whatever its validity, may have tipped the balance, particularly in remote localities, towards hiring women teachers. Following events at Hope (#30), a trustee implored the superintendent: “Couldn’t you send us a lady teacher who wouldn’t be liable to drink.”¹³¹ It was, at least in part, innuendo that caused a Mayne trustee (#16) to request that the superintendent of education “when you recommend us a School teacher... I think that a lady teacher would be preferable.” The trustee’s reasoning was straightforward: “We have girls grown pretty well up; and another thing the young male teachers are apt to play too much with the scholars and thereby in a measure loose [*sic*] the respect that is due to them as teachers.”¹³² The number of incidents making it into the correspondence was not that high, although the whole total is impossible to determine. Precisely because there were so few, they may have been more likely to enter into the collective memory of communities.

It is extremely important that we do not view these thirty allegations as safely hidden away in the past. As Sue Middleton reminds us, we persist in teaching minds as opposed to minding bodies.¹³³ We shy away from discussions of respectful body discipline, in and out of the schools. Children must be recognized as having bodies as well as minds in need of nourishment. However bemused we might be by the prudishness of the late nineteenth century, these thirty encounters with sexuality echo into the present day.

Table 1.
Thirty Documented Encounters with Sexuality in
Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia Schools

#1	Male teacher in South Cowichan charged with taking “indecent liberties” with “half-breed girl” suspended and resigns, 1874
#2	Female teacher at Granville, the future Vancouver, faced with trustee son’s sexualized misbehaviour, 1875
#3	The same female teacher at Granville faced with a boycott precipitated by a boy waiting in bushes to interfere with girls on their way home, 1876
#4	Cache Creek boarding school separates boys and girls outside of classes, 1876
#5	Male head teacher at Cache Creek boarding school held responsible for girls entering boys’ dormitory at night and dismissed, 1877
#6	Female teacher at Stanley boarding at the home of a male trustee resigns due to innuendo while his wife away, 1878
#7	Female teacher at the Cache Creek boarding school who causes a “great scandal” is dismissed, 1880
#8	Female teacher at Hope linked by innuendo to a “half-breed boy” keeps her job but leaves at the end of the school year, 1879
#9	Female teacher at Yale accused by a physician who is also a trustee of acting improperly over an expelled “halfbreed” boy after she consults another medical doctor is dismissed, 1880
#10	Male teacher at Lakes threatened with charge of sexual misbehaviour and with boycott leaves at the end of the school year, 1880
#11	Male teacher at Maple Bay accused of beating his wife survives a parental boycott and keeps his job, 1881
#12	Male teacher at New Westminster uses sexual innuendo to demand superintendent of education’s dismissal, 1881
#13	Male teacher on Salt Spring Island entangled with “coloured” parents loses his job consequent on school closure, 1882–83
#14	Male teacher in the Nicola Valley responding to students’ sexual misbehaviour caught up in a school boycott, 1882
#15	Male teacher at Maple Bay keeping company with a widow woman caught up in a school boycott, 1886
#16	Male teacher on Mayne Island accused of drawing female images exonerated because he was a married man, 1888
#17	Female teacher on South Gabriola Island caught up in male student misbehaviour leaves at the end of the school year, 1888
#18	Male teacher at Vernon charged with “indecent assault” and boycott keeps his job, 1889
#19	Male teacher at Alberni supports trustees permitting female Indigenous student who had eloped with an Indigenous man to return to school, 1889
#20	Male teacher at Aldergrove hired to replace a female teacher who leaves in the aftermath of student sexual misbehaviour is himself out of a job consequent on continuing parental impasse, 1890–93

#21	Female teacher at Golden is blamed by the parents of daughter caught in sexual misbehaviour on her way home from school, 1891
#22	Male teacher at Donald accused of misbehaving towards female students keeps his job, 1892–93
#23	Male teacher at Port Haney misbehaving with female students has his teaching certificate cancelled, 1892
#24	Male teacher at Cheam accused of misbehaving with female students is dismissed due to low attendance, 1892–93
#25	Male teacher at Mission denounced by “strongly Methodist” newcomer for condoning students’ indecent language leaves at the end of school year, 1893
#26	Male teacher at Langley Prairie accused of undue attention to older girls asked to resign and does so, 1893–94
#27	Silverdale trustee whose wife spied children “having connection” implicated in boycott, 1894–96
#28	Female teacher at Langley having a parent complain of daughter’s attempted rape on way home from school keeps her job, 1895
#29	Male teacher on Salt Spring Island criticized by trustee for leaving children on their own over the noon hour leaves at end of school year, 1895
#30	Male teacher at Hope with a “drinking habit” puts blame on students’ bad language, 1896–97

Notes

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- 1 Mona Gleason, “Disciplining the Student Body: Schooling and the Construction of Canadian Children’s Bodies, 1930–1960,” *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2001): 189–215; Christabelle Sethna, “Men, Sex, and Education: The Ontario Women’s Temperance Union and Children’s Sex Education, Ontario, 1900–20,” *Ontario History* 88, no. 3 (1996): 185–206; Noel Herron, *Every Kid Counts: Inner City Schools in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Vancouver Elementary Teachers Association, 2001); and Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- 2 Current interest derives in good part from Michel Foucault, especially the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). Foucault sought to move thinking away from sexed persons and their desires towards unmarked bodies and their pleasures. His writing has not transformed scholarship about children in schools to the same extent it has the field we now know as queer theory. Recent writing that attempts to open up discussion in several directions includes Robin Jenson, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870–1924* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Susan Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); D. Kirk, *Schooling Bodies: School*

- Practice and Public Discourse, 1880–1950* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998); Sue Middleton, *Disciplining Sexuality: Foucault, Life Histories, and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998); Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson, *Schooling Sexualities* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1998); Debbie Epstein, “Boys’ Own Stories: Masculinities and Sexualities in Schools,” *Gender and Education* 9, no. 1 (1997): 105–15; Debbie Epstein, Mary Kehily, Maïrtín Mac an Ghaill, and Peter Redman, “Boys and Girls Come Out to Play: Making Masculinities and Femininities in School Playgrounds,” *Men and Masculinities* 4, no. 2 (October 2001): 158–72; Mary Kehily, “Bodies in School: Young Men, Embodiment, and Heterosexual Masculinities,” *Men and Masculinities* 4, no. 2 (October 2001): 173–85.
- 3 British Columbia Superintendent of Education (hereafter BCSE), Inward Correspondence (IC), GR1445, reels B2017–B2030, and Outward Correspondence (OC), GR450, reels B8503–B8520, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA). The correspondence is incomplete for the earlier years. To compensate, the first superintendent of education’s travel diary was also examined, and one incident taken from it. John Jessup, “School Inspector’s Diary 1872–77,” manuscript C/C/30.12M/2, BCA. Many more cases could certainly be located in the superintendent’s correspondence, the effective prohibitions respecting sexuality being such that the language was often very coded. Bruce Curtis appears to have located just over fifty “complaints of sexual contact between (male) teachers and (female) students” in Ontario between 1850 and 1907 that came to the attention of “local administrative agencies” after “community regulation failed.” He also struggled with “the vague and ambiguous language used to describe sexual complaints against teachers.” See Bruce Curtis, “‘Illicit’ Sexuality and Public Education in Ontario, 1840–1907,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d’histoire de l’éducation* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 79.
 - 4 Even so, corroborating sources of information are almost always silent on the specifics, much as occurs in the present day. In just two cases did an incident make it into the annual printed report of the Department of Education, whose concern was to uplift rather than highlight shortcomings. The exceptions were Cache Creek (#5, Table 1) and Salt Spring (#13). Department of Education Annual Report, 1876–77, 63–67; and 1881–82, 209. The annual reports do list teaching staffs, making it possible to trace whether teachers in a school where an allegation occurred stayed, moved on to another job, or left teaching altogether.
 - 5 Clearly misbehaviour also occurred in urban centres, as indicated by the six-month suspension of the certificate of the first assistant in the Victoria high school in February 1895 “until the charge of gross misconduct preferred against him has been finally acted upon by the Council.” Decree of February 4, 1895, Council of Public Instruction, “Decrees,” in GR138, vol. 1, 79, BCA.
 - 6 For a general introductory discussion of nineteenth-century attitudes, see Gail Hawkes, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996).
 - 7 For general background, see Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Vancouver: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
 - 8 Sharon R. Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 2.
 - 9 These points are explicated in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University

- of North Carolina Press, 1995); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).
- 10 The essays in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), describe the shift from a variety of perspectives. Also useful is Paul Axelrod, *The Promise of Schooling: Education in Canada, 1800–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).
 - 11 Researching “Ontario through the last half of the nineteenth century,” Bruce Curtis determined that “in official documents and discussions, in the literature of educational reform and educational theory, a generalized silence about sexuality prevailed.” See Curtis, “‘Illicit’ Sexuality,” 76. Curtis describes as “purposive vagueness” the tendency of the education office in Canada West, 1836–71, to respond to queries concerning discipline “simply by citing the general provisions of the School Acts or of school regulations.” Much as occurred in British Columbia, “comment on the merits of particular cases was usually avoided.” Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836–1871* (London, ON: Althouse Press and Falmer Press, 1988), 341.
 - 12 The Public School Act (hereafter PSA), Statutes of British Columbia (SBC), 1872, s. 8 (1), but not subsequent legislation promulgated from 1879 onwards, gave the superintendent of education responsibility “for the adjustment of disputes.” The superintendent had the authority, from 1879 onwards, to enquire into “the order and discipline observed” in schools that he visited. PSA, SBC, 1879, s. 9 (6); 1888, s. 54 (3); 1891, s. 8 (3). I am very grateful to Helen Brown for sharing her copies of the school legislation with me.
 - 13 PSA, SBC, 1872, s. 36; Consolidated PSA, SBC, 1876, s. 43; PSA, SBC, 1879, s. 42; 1888, s. 60; 1891, s. 70.
 - 14 Public School Amendment Act (hereafter PSAA), SBC, 1873, s. 7; PSA, SBC, 1879, s. 34; PSAA, SBC, 1888, s. 4 (2); PSA, SBC, 1888, s. 48; 1891, s. 50. Until the provincial Board of Education was disbanded in 1879, boards had to have its agreement to dismiss teachers. The term “gross misconduct” entered the legislation obliquely in 1888 when the proviso was added that the thirty days’ notice did not apply when dismissal was for that reason. PSA, SBC, 1888, s. 4 (2); PSA, SBC, 1888, s. 48; 1891, s. 50. The number of trustees required in city schools was adjusted upwards several times.
 - 15 PSA, SBC, 1872, s. 33 (3); 1879, s. 35 (3); 1888, s. 54 (3); 1891, s. 60 (3).
 - 16 PSA, SBC, 1876, s. 38; 1879, s. 37; 1885, s. 45; 1888, s. 56; 1891, s. 66; 1897, s. 79. School attendance began to become required with the 1873 amendment, which gave trustees the power to make bylaws “requiring the parents or guardians of children of such age, not less than seven nor more than fourteen years, ... to attend School,” where one existed within three miles. PSAA, SBC, 1873, s. 2 (1), 3 (3).
 - 17 Curtis similarly notes how “the response of the central authority [the chief superintendent] to complaints about illicit sexual behaviour by teachers was usually to refer complainants to the local authority, or simply to discredit them.” Curtis, “‘Illicit’ Sexuality,” 81.
 - 18 Based on teacher lists included in Department of Education Annual Reports.
 - 19 Josephine McDonald to John Jessup, superintendent of education (hereafter SE), Quesnelle, May 4, 1878. All correspondence cited below, unless otherwise noted, comes from BCSE, IC, GR1445, BCA.
 - 20 Thomas Leduc, teacher at Cache Creek, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Cache Creek, March 16, 1880.
 - 21 J[ane] E. Trenaman, teacher at Hope, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Hope, December 11, 1879.

- 22 William Beaumont, Maple Bay trustee, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Maple Bay, February 18, 1881.
- 23 A. M. Miller to S. D. Pope, SE, Maple Bay, August 16, 1886.
- 24 S[am] G. Lewis, teacher on Salt Spring Island, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Vesuvius Landing, February 12, 1882.
- 25 Memo by D. Wilson, April 16, 1888.
- 26 Unsigned report to S. D. Pope, SE, Donald, September 5, 1892.
- 27 D. L. Stone, secretary of Belmont trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Langley Prairie, April 9, 1893.
- 28 Joseph Boag to T. B. Humphries, provincial secretary, New Westminster, July 19, 1881.
- 29 Joseph Boag to C. C. McKenzie, SE, New Westminster, July 27, 1881.
- 30 John Jessup, entry for March 13, 1874 in his "School Inspector's Diary 1872-77."
- 31 Samuel Girdlestone Lewis, teacher at Lakes, to his trustees, March 10, 1880, and left for safekeeping with C. C. McKenzie, SE.
- 32 R. S. Hanna to S. D. Pope, SE, Fairhaven, Washington, January 31, 1890.
- 33 Ward Spinks to S. D. Pope, SE, Kamloops, January 13, 1890.
- 34 Hector Ferguson to S. D. Pope, SE, Port Haney, August 28, 1892.
- 35 C. S. Payder, secretary of Cheam trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Cheam, June 7, 1893.
- 36 Mrs. Catherine Cordiner, teacher at Granville, to John Jessup, SE, Granville, September 16, 1875.
- 37 Mrs. Catherine Cordiner, teacher at Granville, to John Jessup, SE, Granville, July 18, 1876.
- 38 A[delaide] Bailey, teacher at Yale, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Yale, March 31, 1880.
- 39 Thomas Chester, Silverdale trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Silverdale, June 8, 1896.
- 40 John Jessup, SE, to provincial secretary, Victoria, July 7, 1876, reprinted in British Columbia Department of Education, Annual Report, 1876, 96.
- 41 R. M. Clemitson, deputy SE, to John Jessup, Cache Creek, October 24, 1876, reprinted in British Columbia Department of Education Annual Report, 1876, 99.
- 42 "The Cache Creek Boarding School Scandal!," *Colonist*, April 15, 1877.
- 43 Agnes Woodward to Charles J. Hamilton, enclosed in Charles J. Hamilton, teacher in the Nicola Valley, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Valley, April 22, 1882.
- 44 Charles J. Hamilton, teacher in the Nicola Valley, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Valley, April 22, 1882.
- 45 S. Ruston, teacher at South Gabriola, to S. D. Pope, SE, South Gabriola, June 7, 1888.
- 46 A. Percival Proctor to S. D. Pope, SE, Alberni, September 23, 1889.
- 47 Henry J. Sharpe and J. C. Greene, Golden trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Golden, April 10, 1891.
- 48 Mrs. H. A. Oakes to S. D. Pope, SE, Langley, July 24, 1895.
- 49 Arthur F. Goldsmith to S. D. Pope, SE, Aldergrove, April 29, 1893.
- 50 Evidence of inquiry to S. D. Pope, SE, Aldergrove, May 26, 1890.
- 51 T. W. Mouat, trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Vesuvius Bay, August 13, 1895.
- 52 Daphne Sleight, *Go Ahead or Go Home: The Trethewey Story* (Abbotsford: Vicarro Publishing, 1994), 40.
- 53 James Tretheway to S. D. Pope, SE, Mission City, June 13, 1893.
- 54 W. A. Starret, Hope trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, April 29, 1897.
- 55 S. B. Campbell, teacher at Hope, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, May 5, 1897.
- 56 Mrs. Catherine Cordiner, teacher at Granville, to John Jessup, SE, Granville, September 16, 1875.
- 57 Mrs. Catherine Cordiner, teacher at Granville, to John Jessup, SE, Granville, July 18, 1876.
- 58 Thomas Chester, Silverdale trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Silverdale, June 8, 1896.

- 59 Charles Semlin, Cache Creek trustee, to John Jessup, SE, Cache Creek, March 17, 1877; Robert Clemitson, teacher at Cache Creek, to John Jessup, SE, Cache Creek, March 26 and May 8, 1877.
- 60 Proceedings of public meeting, Central School House, Salt Spring Island, February 4, 1883, enclosed in S[am] G. Lewis, teacher on Salt Spring Island, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Vesuvius Landing, February 12, 1882; also Henry Sampson to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Salt Spring Island, n.d.
- 61 R. S. Hanna to S. D. Pope, SE, Fairhaven, Washington, January 31, 1890.
- 62 Samuel Girdlestone Lewis, teacher at Lakes, to his trustees, March 10, 1880, and left for safekeeping with C. C. McKenzie, SE.
- 63 A. M. Miller to S. D. Pope, SE, Maple Bay, August 16, 1886.
- 64 H. Proctor, Cheam trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Cheam, May 2, 1893.
- 65 C. S. Payder, secretary of Cheam trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Cheam, June 7, 1893.
- 66 William Beaumont, Maple Bay trustee, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Maple Bay, February 18, 1881.
- 67 W. A. Starret, Hope trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, April 29, 1897.
- 68 W. A. Starret, Hope trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, June 18, 1897.
- 69 James Corrigan, secretary of Hope trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, June 29, 1897.
- 70 Charles J. Hamilton, teacher in the Nicola Valley, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Valley, April 22, 1882; also Henry Woodward to Emerson Woodward, Nicola, March 18, 1882. From the materials, it is clear there was also an earlier affidavit.
- 71 Henry Woodward to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Lake, March 12, 1882.
- 72 Charles J. Hamilton, teacher in the Nicola Valley, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Valley, April 22, 1882.
- 73 A. Percival Proctor to S. D. Pope, SE, Alberni, September 23, 1889.
- 74 R. Shortreed, secretary of Aldergrove trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, May 12, 1893.
- 75 Gilbert Lawrence to S. D. Pope, SE, Aldergrove, April 28, 1893.
- 76 Arthur F. Goldsmith to S. D. Pope, SE, Aldergrove, April 29, 1893.
- 77 Petition from Shortreed residents to S. D. Pope, SE, Shortreed, May 11, 1893.
- 78 Henry J. Sharpe and J. C. Greene, Golden trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Golden, April 10, 1891.
- 79 S. D. Pope, SE, to M. E. Halliday, Victoria, April 13, 1891.
- 80 Henry J. Sharpe and J. C. Greene, Golden trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Golden, April 10, 1891.
- 81 PSA, SBC, 1879, s. 9 (6); 1888, s. 54 (3); 1891, s. 8 (3). See note 13.
- 82 S. D. Pope, SE, to G. A. Huff, secretary of Alberni trustees, Victoria, September 16, 1889.
- 83 Thomas Chester, Silverdale trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Silverdale, June 8, 1896.
- 84 Henry J. Sharpe and J. C. Greene, Golden trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Golden, April 10, 1891.
- 85 Charles J. Hamilton, teacher in the Nicola Valley, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Nicola Valley, April 22, 1882.
- 86 M. Armytage, secretary of board of trustees, to Henry Woodward, Nicola Lake, February 7, 1882.
- 87 Mrs. Catherine Cordiner, teacher at Granville, to John Jessup, SE, Granville, July 18, 1876.
- 88 L. Gold to John Jessup, SE, n.d.
- 89 Charles Semlin, Cache Creek trustee, to John Jessup, SE, Cache Creek, March 17, 1877.
- 90 "The Cache Creek Boarding School Scandal!," *Colonist*, April 15, 1877.
- 91 John Jessup, entry for May 22, 1874, in "School Inspector's Diary 1872-77."
- 92 S. Ruston, teacher at South Gabriola, to S. D. Pope, SE, South Gabriola, June 7, 1888.

- 93 See Jean Barman, "Schooled for Inequality: The Education of British Columbia Aboriginal Children"; and Jean Barman, "Families vs. Schools: Children of Aboriginal Descent in British Columbia Classrooms of the Late Nineteenth Century," both in *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 2nd ed., ed. Jean Barman and Mona Gleason (Calgary: Detselig, 2003); and reprinted in Jean Barman, *On the Cusp of Contact: Gender, Space and Race in the Colonization of British Columbia* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2020), which contains other articles on the general topic.
- 94 S. D. Pope, SE, to G. A. Huff, secretary of Alberni trustees, Victoria, September 16, 1889.
- 95 British Columbia Department of Education Annual Report, 1874, 10.
- 96 George Murray to John Jessup, SE, Cache Creek, March 21, 1877.
- 97 S. B. Campbell, teacher at Hope, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, May 5, 1897.
- 98 L. Gold to John Jessup, SE, n.d.
- 99 S[am] G. Lewis, teacher on Salt Spring Island, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Vesuvius Landing, February 12, 1882.
- 100 T. W. Mouat, trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Vesuvius Bay, August 13, 1895.
- 101 John Jessup, entry for March 13, 1874, in "School Inspector's Diary 1872-77."
- 102 Thomas Leduc, teacher at Cache Creek, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Cache Creek, February 26, 1879.
- 103 D. L. Stone, secretary of Belmont trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Langley Prairie, April 9, 1893.
- 104 Hector Ferguson to S. D. Pope, SE, Port Haney, August 28, 1892.
- 105 H. H. Ansell, secretary of Haney trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Haney, August 24, 1892.
- 106 Port Haney trustees to S. D. Pope, SE, Port Haney, August 17, 1892.
- 107 Decree of August 31, 1892, Council of Public Instruction, "Decrees," GR 138, vol. 1, 45, BCA.
- 108 A[delaide] Bailey, teacher at Yale, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Yale, March 31, 1880.
- 109 James Tretheway to S. D. Pope, SE, Mission City, June 13, 1893.
- 110 William Beaumont, Maple Bay trustee, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Maple Bay, February 18, 1881.
- 111 E. J. Tronson, secretary of board of trustees, to S. D. Pope, SE, Spring Farm, Okanagan, February 4, 1890.
- 112 R. S. Hanna to S. D. Pope, SE, Fairhaven, Washington, January 31, 1890.
- 113 J[ane] E. Trenaman, teacher at Hope, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Hope, December 11, 1879.
- 114 Mrs. H. A. Oakes to S. D. Pope, SE, Langley, July 24, 1895.
- 115 Memo by D. Wilson, April 16, 1888.
- 116 Unsigned report to S. D. Pope, SE, Donald, September 5, 1892.
- 117 H. W. Graves to S. D. Pope, SE, Maple Bay, August 31, 1886.
- 118 S. D. Pope, SE, to R. Shortreed, Victoria, May 25, 1893.
- 119 Henry Sampson to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Salt Spring Island, n.d.
- 120 J. P. Booth, secretary, to S. G. Lewis, February 10, 1882.
- 121 C. C. McKenzie, SE, to S. G. Lewis, n.d.
- 122 C. C. McKenzie, SE, to Adelaide Bailey, Victoria, March 31, 1880.
- 123 A[delaide] Bailey, teacher at Yale, to C. C. McKenzie, SE, Yale, August 15, 1880.
- 124 S. D. Pope, SE, to H. Proctor, Victoria, May 22, 1893.
- 125 Josephine McDonald to John Jessup, SE, Quesnelle, May 4, 1878.
- 126 S. Ruston, teacher at South Gabriola, to S. D. Pope, SE, South Gabriola, June 7, 1888.
- 127 Arthur F. Goldsmith to S. D. Pope, SE, Aldergrove, April 29, 1893.
- 128 David T. Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 16.
- 129 Curtis, "'Illicit' Sexuality," 87.

130 Curtis, 88.

131 W. A. Starret, Hope trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Hope, April 29, 1897.

132 W. T. Collinson, Plumper Pass trustee, to S. D. Pope, SE, Plumper Pass, June 27, 1888.

133 Middleton, *Disciplining Sexuality*.