



Women teachers and the feminisation of the teaching profession in a Finnish journal for primary school teachers (*The Teacher*), 1915–1920

Marjo Nieminen

To cite this article: Marjo Nieminen (2020): Women teachers and the feminisation of the teaching profession in a Finnish journal for primary school teachers (*The Teacher*), 1915–1920, *Paedagogica Historica*, DOI: [10.1080/00309230.2020.1818797](https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1818797)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1818797>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 28 Sep 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 187



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

ARTICLE



Women teachers and the feminisation of the teaching profession in a Finnish journal for primary school teachers (*The Teacher*), 1915–1920

Marjo Nieminen

Department of Education, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the discussions about the feminisation of the teaching profession that were covered in the Finnish journal of primary school teachers, *The Teacher* (*Opettajain Lehti*), during the years 1915 to 1920. *The Teacher*, a weekly trade union journal, published the writings of various stakeholders (for example, teachers, school inspectors, the counsellor of education representing the National Board of Education, the editors of *The Teacher*, and teachers' local trade unions). First, this article examines the arguments of the writers who took part in the discussions. Second, this article explores how the teaching profession was represented by these writings. The article explores how the discussions took a stand on the process itself, its reasons and its consequences, and also highlighted the gendered assumptions and ideas about the teaching profession and the characteristics associated with women and men teachers. The proponents of women teachers' expertise and professionalism employed these public discussions successfully when claiming and defending their right to be a part of the teaching profession. Even though the discussions included opposing interests and claims of superiority, they also had a strong, constructive tone with arguments of gender equality amongst teachers and solidarity between women and men teachers.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 September 2019

Accepted 7 June 2020

KEYWORDS

History of education; primary school teachers; teaching profession; gender

Introduction

... we stated a supposition that attention will quite soon be paid to the question of what extent the outcomes of contemporary education will suffer from the fact that primary education will with a greater extent fall into the hands of women.¹

This provocative statement began *The Teacher*, a Finnish journal for primary school teachers, in 1915. The writing commenced a discussion in which participants debated the issue of the feminisation of the teaching profession and its consequences for the profession and primary education. As the cited statement indicated, the issue awakened controversial opinions about how the duties of women and men teachers, and their place in primary education, were valued and appraised. The focus of this article is to examine the debate that took place in *The Teacher* during the years from 1915 to 1920.

CONTACT Marjo Nieminen  marjo.nieminen@utu.fi  University of Turku, Department of Education, Turku 20014, Finland

¹Anon., "Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta" [Due to the Feminisation of Teachers], *The Teacher* 10, no. 1 (1915): 8–9.

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

The gender perspective in teacher training and the teaching profession has interested historians of education for decades. Previous studies explore the feminisation process, for example, from a comparative perspective, or they focus on women teachers' opportunities and highlight the strategies used by these teachers to improve their positions in education. In addition, the gender perspective towards the teaching profession discusses the question of whether teaching was regarded as a profession or a vocation. When analysing women teachers and the teaching profession, researchers highlight ideas about women's nature, their abilities and societal roles, and discuss the essentialist assumptions regarding women and men. The gender perspective has been addressed from various viewpoints – for example, researching the personal and professional lives of teachers,² and studying education and teaching as a profession for women.³

This article concentrates on the second viewpoint and approaches the teaching profession in the era of the last phase of the feminisation of the teaching profession in the Finnish primary school system. First, the article analyses the writings published in the journal of primary school teachers, *The Teacher*, aiming to describe the arguments of writers who took part in the debate. The interesting feature of the debate was that although *The Teacher* can be categorised as a trade union journal, it represented the different voices of the various stakeholders who influenced the ongoing debate. The second aim of this article is to examine how these writings represented the teaching profession.

The Teacher was established in 1900 when primary school teachers set up a limited company, *Valistus (Education)*, whose purpose was to be the publisher of the teaching profession. Permission to publish was granted in 1905 and the first number came out in January 1906. The weekly journal defined its aim as being an independent nexus between primary school teachers, and it became the forum for debate for teachers. The chief editor of the journal was also the director of *Valistus* and the chair of the Finnish Trade Union

²E.g. Kate Rousmaniere, "Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903," *Paedagogica Historica* 39, no. 1–2 (2003): 5–18; Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education, 1800–1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Linda Mahood, "Elementary Teaching as Toil: The Diary and Letters of Miss Eglantyne Jebb, a Gentlewoman Schoolmistress," *History of Education* 35, no. 3 (2006): 321–43; Joyce Goodman, "Cosmopolitan Women Educators, 1920–39: Inside/Outside Activism and Abjection," *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 1–2 (2010): 69–83. See also Philip Gardner, "Oral History in Education: Teacher's Memory and Teachers' History," *History of Education* 32, no. 2 (2003): 175–88; David Crook, "Teacher Education as a Field of Historical Research: Retrospect and Prospect," *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 57–72.

³E.g. J.C. Albisetti, "The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Perspective," *History of Education* 22, no. 3 (1993): 253–63; Christina Florin, *Kampen om katedern. Feminisering- och professionaliseringsprocessen inom den svenska folkskolans lärarkår 1860–1906* [Who Should Sit in the Teacher's Chair? The Processes of Feminisation and Professionalisation among Swedish Elementary School Teachers 1860–1906] (Umeå University: Umeå, 1987); Carol Dyhouse, "Signing the Pledge? Women's Investment in University Education and Teacher Training before 1939," *History of Education* 26, no. 2 (1997): 207–23; Mineke van Essen, "Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920: Feminization in Dutch Elementary and Secondary Schools from a Comparative Perspective," *History of Education* 28, no. 4 (1999): 413–33; Susan Trouvé-Finding, "Teaching as a Woman's Job: the Impact of the Admission of Women to Elementary Teaching in England and France in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *History of Education* 34, no. 5 (2005): 483–96; Kay Whitehead, "Vocation, Career and Character in Early Twentieth-Century Women Teachers' Work in City Schools," *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (2005): 579–97; Marc Depaepe, Hilde Lauwers, and Frank Simon, "The Feminization of the Teaching Profession in Belgium in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on the Feminisation of a Profession*, ed. Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 155–83; Narciso de Gabriel, "The Entrance of Women into the Teaching Profession in Spain (1855–1940)," *History of Education* 43, no. 3 (2014): 334–54; Roy Fisher, "Gender, Class and School Teacher Education from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1970: Scenes from a Town in the North of England," *History of Education* 48, no. 6 (2019): 806–818.

for Primary School Teachers. Besides overseeing the interests of teachers, the journal concentrated on issues related to the teaching profession.⁴

The Teacher has been digitised and the database is archived in the digital collections of the National Library of Finland (<https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi>). The database includes the journal in facsimiles, and it has been employed when collecting writings for the sources of this article. All the writings published from 1915 to 1920⁵ in *The Teacher* concerning the feminisation of the primary teaching profession are included for the analysis. The writers taking part in the discussions represented various interest groups – teachers, school inspectors, the counsellor of education representing the National Board of Education, the editors of *The Teacher*, and the local teacher unions. Even a school doctor took a stand on these issues. Some of the writings in *The Teacher* were anonymous or marked only with initials.

The debate about the feminisation of the teaching profession was not only limited to *The Teacher*, but awakened interest widely amongst the Finnish press, especially during 1915 and 1916. Besides the local newspapers all over the country,⁶ the question was commented on particularly in the women's magazine *Women's Voice* (*Naisten ääni*) and the journal *Upbringing and School* (*Kasvatus ja koulu*). In *The Teacher*, some of these discussions in other papers were cited and commented on, and the sources of this article have been supplemented by these debates. *Women's Voice*, established in 1905, was an official magazine of one of the unions of the Finnish women's movement (*Suomalainen Naisliitto*). In its early days, it was closely attached to the right-wing party (*Nuorsuomalaiset*). *Upbringing and School* was established by a small group of pedagogues in 1914 in order to discuss the educational issues of primary and secondary schools.

In order to elucidate the historical and temporal context in which the debate took place, the history of the Finnish primary school teaching profession and the process of its feminisation is highlighted briefly in the next section. It is followed by sections in which the results of the analysis are presented in detail.

A glance at the feminisation of the Finnish primary school teaching profession

The legislative grounds of the Finnish popular education system were established during a brief period in the 1860s which included establishing the teacher training seminary in Jyväskylä in 1863.⁷ The new seminary for teacher training was co-educational, with separate departments for women and men, and the training lasted for four years. The

⁴Antti Henttonen, "TVK:n ja Akavan ammattijärjestölehdet" [Trade Union Journals], in *Suomen lehdistön historia 9. Aikakauslehistön historia. Erikoisaikakauslehdet* [History of Finnish Press 9. The Periodical Press, Special Periodicals], ed. Päiviö Tommila (Kuopio: Kustannuskiila Oy, 1991), 501–20; "Opettajain Lehti" [The Teacher], *The Teacher* 1, no. 1 (1906): 1–2.

⁵Duties of women and men teachers and their place in primary schools were also widely discussed in the writings concerning salary questions. These writings created a complex and manifold issue of their own and they were not included for the analysis of this article.

⁶In 1915 to 1916, there were over 80 published writings in which the feminisation of the teaching profession was commented on.

⁷The School Act 1866 implemented a school system that consisted of lower primary schools (classes 1–2) and upper primary schools (classes 3–6; i.e. junior classes 1–2 of upper primary school and senior classes 3–4). Towns were obligated to establish schools (both lower and upper) from 1871 and in 1898, a law was enacted that obligated rural municipalities to establish upper primary schools in every school district in which there were at least 30 school-age children. Compulsory education was enacted in 1921.

distinguishing features of the seminary were the strict Christian spirit of a boarding school and the syllabus, which emphasised pedagogical subjects and physical culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, the development of the teacher training system was swift with seven seminaries – co-educational or single-sex – established around the country.⁸ Most of the seminaries were located in small, rural towns, spread over Finland from southern to northern areas.⁹ Rinne and Jauhiainen note that the aim of the seminary system was to strengthen the social status of the primary teaching profession – teachers were given legitimacy and authority to teach, and were advised not to separate themselves from the ways of thinking of common people.¹⁰

At the end of the 1800s – in the early phase of the teacher training seminary in Jyväskylä – most female students came from the gentry and bourgeois families, meeting the expectations of the founders of the seminary system. It was hoped that the students with upper class backgrounds would bridge the gap between the gentry and the working class and bring the manners and customs of the upper classes to rural areas. The state-municipal education system, with its teacher training system, was intertwined with nation-building, state-making projects and ideas of citizenship. In addition, the teaching profession was one of the first occupations to be regarded as suitable for bourgeois and gentry women, and although it meant reduced social mobility, it liberated these women from the guardianship of men and gave them an opportunity to work as independent individuals.¹¹ The teaching profession in primary school or grammar school signified a path to the labour market and, therefore, occupational emancipation for women.¹² In primary schools, for example, women's work was the same as men's, although their salary was lower.¹³ There was a parallel with Britain in views on social maternalism. Martin and

⁸Risto Rinne and Arto Jauhiainen, *Koulutus, professionaalistuminen ja valtio. Julkisen sektorin koulutettujen reproduktioammattikuntien muotoutuminen Suomessa* [Schooling, Professionalisation and the State] Series A:128. (Turku: University of Turku. Faculty of Education, 1988), 201–12; Arto Jauhiainen, Joel Kivirauma, and Risto Rinne, "Status and Prestige through Faith in Education: The Successful Struggle of Finnish Primary School Teachers for Universal University Training," *Journal of Education for Teaching* 24, no. 3 (1998): 261–72; Jukka Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat" [Primary School Teachers], in *Valistus ja koulunpenkki. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa 1860-luvulta 1960-luvulle* [Enlightenment and School Bench. Upbringing and Education in Finland from the 1860s to the 1960s], ed. Anja Heikkinen and Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 266–99; Risto Rinne, "Luokanopettajakoulutuksen akatemisoituminen ja yliopistopolitiikka pitkänä historiallisena projektina" [The Academicising of the Primary School Teacher Training and the Change of Higher Education Policy as a Long Historical Project], in *Opettajankoulutus. Lähihistoriaa ja tulevaisuutta* [Teacher Education. Recent History and Future], ed. Esko Paakkola and Tapio Varmola (Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus, 2017), 16–49.

⁹Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat"; Rinne, *Luokanopettajakoulutuksen akatemisoituminen ja yliopistopolitiikka*.

¹⁰Rinne and Jauhiainen, *Koulutus, professionaalistuminen ja valtio*, 205.

¹¹Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat"; Heli Valtonen, "Seminaariyhteisö opettajien kouluttajana" [The Society of Seminary as an Educator of Teachers], in *Jyväskylän yliopiston historia. Osa 1. Seminaarin ja kasvatusopillisen korkeakoulun aika 1963–1966* [The History of University in Jyväskylä. Part I. The Time of Seminary and the Jyväskylä College of Education], ed. Piia Einonen, Petri Karonen, and Toivo Nygård (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2009), 19–109; Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen, "Introduction: Education and the Making of the Nordic Welfare States," in *Education, State and Citizenship*, ed. Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola, and Heli Valtonen (Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence Nordwel, 2013), 7–30; see also Marjo Nieminen, "Tyttöoppikoulusta ammattiin – Turun suomalaisessa jatko-opistossa 1800–1900-lukujen taitteessa opiskelleiden urapolut" [The Education and Career Paths of the Graduates from the Upper Secondary School for Girls in Turku in the 1890s–1910s], *Kasvatus & Aika* [Education & Time] 6, no. 3 (2012): 5–24.

¹²Nieminen, "Tyttöoppikoulusta ammattiin." De Gabriel, "The Entrance of Women," notes that patriarchal society of Spain took for granted that a woman's main role was to raise and educate her children and that the teaching profession was perceived as a kind of extension of a woman's "natural" role as an educator.

¹³Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat." The salary of women teachers was also lower for example in Scotland, England, the Netherlands, and Sweden: Jane McDermid, "Catholic Women Teachers and Scottish Education in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *History of Education* 38, no. 5 (2009): 605–20; Trouvé-Finding, "Teaching as a Woman's Job," van Essen, "Strategies of Women Teachers," Johannes Westberg, "How did Teachers Make a Living? The Teacher Occupation, Livelihood Diversification and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Sweden," *History of*

Goodman note that in Britain, social maternalism became an important rhetorical strategy sanctioning women's rights to respectable economic independence, and that teaching offered the best combination of public service and motherhood.¹⁴

In contrast to that of women, the social background of men in the Jyväskylä seminary was lower at the end of the nineteenth century. While female students came from families of the gentry, clergymen, civil servants, and grammar school teachers, the male students were often sons of farmers.¹⁵ A seminary education and a primary school teacher's post offered farmers' sons an opportunity for social mobility and a secure financial future.¹⁶ Putting it simply, the women in the seminary represented wealthy and educated urban classes, and men represented the farming population of rural areas.¹⁷

In the Jyväskylä seminary, differences in the social backgrounds of students gradually levelled.¹⁸ The same phenomenon took place in smaller seminaries.¹⁹ Employing the application records of the seminary and teacher college archives, Risto Rinne conducted a study in which three teacher training institutions in Turku, Rauma, and Raahe were investigated. During the studied period, 1896 to 1986, the social background of primary school teachers in the institutions was found to be largely middle class. Until the Second World War, the daughters and sons of farmers composed the largest group of primary teaching students in comparison with other social groups. When college and university-based teacher training increased and established itself, the number of upper-class students rose again. The number of students of working-class backgrounds remained low during the studied period.²⁰

Rinne notes that male or female domination of the teaching profession is an interesting phenomenon to study because it is bound to the gender-segregated model citizenship, to the practises used in educating the cohort, and to the social position of the profession itself.²¹ In the 1860s, during the first years of the new national primary education system with its teacher training seminary, the old tradition of male parish clerk teachers and parish school masters still dominated in primary schools. Although most primary school teachers were men in the school years from 1871 to 1872, both women and men were nearly equally represented in the teacher seminary. Since 1875 women have been the majority of all primary school teachers. The posts of lower primary school teachers have always been monopolised by women. In rural upper primary schools, most of the teachers were men until the period from 1915 to 1920. This signified a turning point in the gender balance of teaching staff.²²

Education 48, no. 1 (2019): 19–40. In Spain, the equal salary law was passed in 1883: de Gabriel, "The Entrance of Women."

¹⁴Martin and Goodman, *Women and Education*, 76. See also Anne Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus. Virkanaisena 1800-luvun lopun Suomessa* [Noble Duty. As a Career woman at the end of the 1800s in Finland] (Helsinki: SKS, 1998), 43–5.

¹⁵Valtonen, "Seminaariyhteisö opettajien kouluttajana."

¹⁶Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat."

¹⁷Valtonen, "Seminaariyhteisö opettajien kouluttajana."

¹⁸Ibid.; Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat."

¹⁹Risto Rinne, *Mistä opettajat tulevat? Suomalaisen kansanopettajiston yhteiskunnallinen tausta sekä kulttuurinen ja sosiaalinen pääoma 1800-luvun puolivälistä 1980-luvun lopulle* [Where do Teachers Come from? Series A:135 (Turku: University of Turku. Faculty of Education, 1989); see also Rantala, "Kansakoulunopettajat."]

²⁰Rinne, *Mistä olettajat tulevat?, passim*.

²¹Risto Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena: opettajuuden laajeneminen ja opettajuuteen rekrytointimekanismit Suomessa 1851–1986 virallisen kuvausaineiston ilmaisemana* [Primary Teacher as a Model Citizen] Series A:108 (Turku: University of Turku, Faculty of Education, 1986), 59–60.

Another noteworthy feature in the primary school system was that most of the countryside teachers were men until 1915. Nine out of ten male teachers worked in rural areas. The situation levelled at the beginning of the twentieth century – in the urban upper primary schools, there were almost as many men as there were women in the school year 1910/11 and the rural upper primary schools had a slight female majority in 1920/21. Since 1925, the proportion of male teachers in rural schools has been around 30%.²³

With regard to the marital status of teachers, 40% of the oldest cohort of women teachers²⁴ were married. It was typical that women teachers married inside their own social status. Nevertheless, around 40% of teachers married outside their own social status. When women teachers married above their own social status, they had an opportunity to raise their social position, thus the teacher training produced the facilitation of the social mobility for some women teachers. In addition, getting married to a colleague was rather popular amongst the teaching students – the oldest cohort included 343 couples. Around 28% (60 marriages) were so called “classmate marriages” and around 25% (88 marriages) were those in which spouses had studied at the same time in teacher training seminaries. Many teacher couples were acquainted with each other when they were appointed to teach at the same school. Schools that were run by teacher couples were regarded as offering a high educational standard. Teacher couples embodied the idea of school as a community with mother and father figures. In addition, around 51% of women teachers who were holding a post married a non-teacher. Most of them married priests, farmers, and merchants. After their marriage, around 70% resigned. The 30% who continued teaching were mostly the wives of low-paid office-holders.²⁵ According to the population census concerning Finnish major cities in 1930, the number of married female workers had increased during the previous decade and 24% of urban working women teachers were married.²⁶

After introducing the historical and temporal context in which the debate in *The Teacher* occurred, the following sections of this article concentrate on the debate itself – the views and arguments of the participants from the beginning of the debate to the finale are elaborated, and the representations of the profession of teachers are further illuminated.²⁷

²²Rinne, *Kansanopettaja mallikansalaisena*, 63–7, 76, Appendix 18. During the school year 1915–16, there were 2.270 men teachers in rural primary schools and 2.162 women teachers. Five years later, there were 2.395 men teachers and 2.901 women.

²³*Ibid.*, 75–7.

²⁴The oldest cohort of teachers included teachers who were recruited to teacher training in 1863–1898 and graduated as teachers in 1867–1902. The cohort included 1.322 women teachers and of them 635 were married and 687 unmarried.

²⁵Aimo Halila, *Suomen vanhin kansakoulunopettajisto* [The Finnish Oldest Cohort of Primary School Teachers] (Helsinki: Suomen kansakoulunopettajain liitto, 1949), 95–6, 114–16.

²⁶Aarre Tunkelo, “Naimisissa olevat naiset ammatinharjoittajina” [Married Women Practising Professions], *Tilastokatsauksia* [Statistical Reports], no. 10 (1933): 37–43. The statistics are insufficient with respect to the early decades of the 1900s.

²⁷Kay Whitehead notes, in “Vocation, Career and Character,” concerning the early twentieth century Australian context, that there were tensions between the discourse of career that focused on “income,” and the discourse of vocation which privileged “service” in the world of teachers’ work. The concept of vocation can also have a connotation that refers to essentialist and gender-segregated ideas in which women teachers’ roles are tied to motherhood and men teachers’ roles to fatherhood. Therefore, the concept of vocation differs from the concept of profession, which contains the idea of occupation that could be taught. In the Finnish context of the late

The beginning of the debate in 1915

The debate started at the beginning of 1915 when *The Teacher* published an article in which concerns over the feminisation of the primary teacher profession were expressed. The writings included two opposite views: first, there were writings which brought up the question of the negative consequences of feminisation, and second, there were those which responded to accusations and defended women's abilities and professionalism as qualified teachers. These two viewpoints were frequently addressed in the journal, and the participants of the debate eagerly commented on the writings of the opposing side.²⁸

The first article began the whole discussion. It included the opinion of a school inspector of the National Board of Education who argued against feminisation. His comments were a response to a note in which women teachers asked for clarification on a point he had made in his annual school report. According to the article, in his annual report the inspector had expressed his worry about the ever-increasing number of women teachers compared to men teachers. The inspector's message was not targeted at women teachers, but against the "monopolisation"²⁹ of the teaching profession by women. In his response, the inspector repeated his stand on the negative consequences of the feminisation of the teaching profession. He also invoked an idea of gender difference in which the roles of women and men were considered equal but complementary. His argument was based on the gender-segregated roles in family life: "As in the home, that is to say in good homes, and in good schools, men and women work as equal colleagues to guide and develop children. We need both men teachers and women teachers . . ."³⁰

The other argument against feminisation was made from the perspective of society and the blame was put on women teachers for the unwanted behaviour of boys. This opinion was published in one newspaper and it was widely cited and commented on in other papers and in *The Teacher*.³¹ The views expressed in *The Teacher* contained two points of view: the stated opinion against feminisation was either condemned utterly or the opinion was accepted and women teachers were assessed to not have the necessary ability regarding the upbringing and education of older boys.³²

The writings in which the capability of women teachers was justified were mostly written by women teachers. They evaluated the scepticism about women's expertise and professional skills in teaching older boys as insulting and diminishing.³³ As 28 women

nineteenth and early twentieth century, the teaching profession included both these ideas: a vocation and a profession.

²⁸ Anon., "Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta;" "Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu" [The Correction from Women Teachers of Vaasa], *The Teacher* 10, no. 3 (1915): 40–41; "Nyt sen tiedämme!" [Now We Know It], *The Teacher* 10, no. 3 (1915): 41; "Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta" [The Opinion of the Inspector of Primary Schools in Turku about the Feminisation of Teachers], *The Teacher* 10, no. 3 (1915): 41–2; "Opettajiston 'naisistumisasia' Tampereella" [The Issue of the Feminisation of Teachers in Tampere], *The Teacher* 10, no. 3 (1915): 42; "Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista" [Little about Primary Schools in Vaasa], *The Teacher* 10, no. 7 (1915): 95–6.

²⁹ Anon., "Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta," 8.

³⁰ Ibid., 8–9.

³¹ E.g. *Uusi Suometar* 47, no. 8 (1915): 6; *Raahen Sanomat* 10, no. 4 (1915): 2; *Karjala* 12, no. 13 (1915): 3; *Helsingin Sanomat* 12, no. 17 (1915): 2; *Suomen Nainen* 3, no. 3 (1915): 42–43; *Pohjalainen*, no. 67 (1915): 1–2; *Uusi Suometar* 47, no. 151 (1915): 6; Anon., "Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu;" Anon., "Nyt sen tiedämme;" Anon., "Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta;" Anon., "Opettajiston 'naisistumisasia' Tampereella;" Anon., "Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista."

³² Anon., "Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta;" Anon., "Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu;" Anon., "Nyt sen tiedämme;" Anon., "Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta;" Anon., "Opettajiston 'naisistumisasia' Tampereella;" Anon., "Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista."

³³ Anon., "Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta;" Anon., "Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu;" Anon., "Nyt sen tiedämme!"

teachers quoted in the article said: “Bringing up the feminisation of the teaching profession together with boy gangs ... is generally regarded as a serious and undeserved insult towards women as pedagogues and persons.”³⁴ The same opinion was expressed in writings describing the activities of some local teacher unions. In these short summaries, the local teacher union expressed its irritation and protested against the thought of the incompetence of women teachers.³⁵

The writings in *The Teacher* in which doubts about women’s ability to teach boys in senior classes of primary schools were pointed out, embodied the thoughts of some school inspectors. The writings highlighted that the inspectors appreciated the skills and capabilities of women teachers when teaching younger children and junior classes of primary schools, attributing women’s success in their work to the essential features of their sex. With regard to teaching older boys in primary schools, the inspectors emphasised the thought that the task should be left to men teachers.³⁶ As one inspector expressed it: “... a woman, so excellent an educator she can be, splendidly meets the expectations of junior classes ... but men should be responsible for the education of senior boys.”³⁷ In *The Teacher*, the inspectors expressed their anxiety that, when educated solely by women teachers, the education of boys remained inadequate and limited and led to the lethargic behaviour of boys: “If women solely or predominantly take care of the education of boys, the physical education of boys will no doubt be neglected and also there is a reason to fear that young people will become lethargic.”³⁸ The standpoint of the inspectors reserved the education in senior co-educational or boys’ classes for men teachers. The interesting question is how much inspectors’ negative views on the feminisation of the teaching profession were influenced by patriarchal attitudes and values and by their own sex. Although the inspectors were men, it cannot be argued that their standpoints represented the views of all male inspectors because in the school inspectors’ annual reports, women teachers’ expertise and skilfulness were praised.

Besides these opinions, *The Teacher* included writings in which the reasons for the feminisation process were pondered. Both were written under pseudonyms and one of them had been published in another paper. Two explanations were mentioned when writers tried to comprehend and analyse the phenomenon: first, the question of salaries and the low pensions of women teachers and second, the principle of coeducation.³⁹ The question of salaries was a controversial and much-debated issue, which had influenced the discussions in *The Teacher* since 1906.⁴⁰ In the writings, it was pointed out that the question of salaries created a situation in which women teachers were favoured when employing new teachers. Due to the complex and unequal payroll system, they usually

³⁴ Anon. “Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu.”

³⁵ Anon., “Opettajayhdistyksen asioita” [Matters of the Teacher Union], *The Teacher* 10, no. 9 (1915): 123–5; “Opettajayhdistyksen asioita” [Matters of the Teacher Union], *The Teacher* 10, no. 24 (1915): 310.

³⁶ Anon., “Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta;” Anon., “Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta;” Anon., “Opettajiston ‘naisistumisasia’ Tampereella.”

³⁷ Anon., “Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta.”

³⁸ Anon., “Opettajain naisistumisen johdosta;” Anon., “Turun kansakoulujen tarkastajan lausunto opettajiston naisistumisen johdosta;” Anon., “Opettajiston ‘naisistumisasia’ Tampereella.”

³⁹ Anon., “Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista;” “Muut lehdet” [Other Papers], *The Teacher* 10, no. 9 (1915): 120–21.

⁴⁰ E.g. Anon., “Sama työ, sama palkka” [Equal Work, Equal Pay], *The Teacher* 1, no. 32 (1906): 297–8; “Uno Gygnaeuksen jälkiäkö” [The Traces of Uno Cygnaeus], *The Teacher* 4, no. 4 (1909): 46–7; “Naisopettajien oikeus perheellisyysperusteella korotettuun palkkaan” [Women Teachers’ Right to an Increased Salary on the Basis of Having a Family], *The Teacher* 7, no. 20 (1912): 249–51.

earned less than men and were cheaper labour in the eyes of municipalities. Intertwined with the salary question was the issue of the low pensions of women teachers. It was also argued that older women teachers were reluctant to retire, which expanded the gender imbalance of teaching staff.⁴¹ What is more, one writer quoted earlier writing in which some doubts were raised about whether the higher salaries of men teachers was behind the situation, and noted that there were not enough qualified men teachers in the labour market in the first place: "... it is never worthwhile to pay such high salaries to get capable men teachers for schools in the city and there is, in any case, limited opportunity to find good men teachers ..."⁴² The earlier writing questioned the opinion about men's higher salaries. It argued that due to the senior position of women teachers amongst teaching staff, salary inequality was not that wide, and municipalities were encouraged to employ men teachers in order to avoid the feminisation of the teaching profession.⁴³

The second reason for the increased number of women teachers was the principle of co-education, which had grown in popularity since the end of the nineteenth century. Co-education, per se, did not necessarily lead to a gender-biased situation, but when it dismantled the practice of dividing teaching staff into gender-segregated senior boy and girl classes, it enabled municipalities to employ women teachers and reduce salary costs. The writers in *The Teacher* favoured co-education – or at least expressed neutral positioning towards it – but their views contained negative attitudes towards the monopoly of women teachers.⁴⁴

The debate on supremacy

At the very beginning of the debate, the trade union for women teachers in Helsinki sent an inquiry to people involved in primary education. The inquiry concerned whether the feminisation of the profession had negatively influenced primary education. The inquiry boosted the debate and the discussion spread during the spring of 1915 to *Women's Voice* (*Naisten ääni*), enlarging the subject from women's abilities to the substantiation of women's supremacy in educational matters.⁴⁵

The first response to the inquiry quoted the school inspector who explicitly praised women teachers' capability and even emphasised women's superiority to men. The inspector based his arguments on his experience and knowledge as an inspector in several school districts. According to him, women teachers were in most cases more skilful and proficient than men in the field of education: "Women teachers usually know exactly characteristics of children, understand them easily, are more considerate towards children, are more empathetic, perform their duties as educators more conscientiously than men ..."⁴⁶ The abilities of women were attached to women's role as mothers as in earlier writings, but in addition to that, the inspector gave them a supremacy position in primary education:

⁴¹ Anon., "Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista," Anon., "Muut lehdet."

⁴² Anon., "Muut lehdet," 120.

⁴³ Ibid., 120–21.

⁴⁴ Anon., "Vähäsen Vaasan kaupungin kansakouluista," Anon., "Muut lehdet."

⁴⁵ Anon., "Opettajiston arvostelua sek. I." [Criticism against Teachers. I.], *The Teacher* 10, no. 25 (1915): 314–15; "Eräs kiertokysely" [An Opinion Poll], *Women's Voice*, no. 18 (1915): 181–82.

⁴⁶ Anon., "Opettajiston arvostelua sek. I," 315.

The position that has naturally been given to women as a rearer and educator of mankind, the important position as a mother is so natural and undeniable that school work cannot be thought about without feminine work ... A school or a class that do not receive motherly care is always deprived, it is like a motherless family ...⁴⁷

With regard to men as educators, the inspector reserved the role of educator after primary education for them, with the age of 13 as the turning point: "... man teacher whose impact on education of boys does not become necessary until the age when young people (i.e. boys) do not participate in primary schooling any longer."⁴⁸ The inspector rejected the necessity of men teachers in primary education, delegating them to more advanced areas within the education system.

The views of the inspector received an immediate response in the next number of *The Teacher* in which the editors of the journal commented on it. The response included two main points: (1) the debate had become overheated and (2) the argument about the supremacy of women in primary education was misleading. The dispute had produced some opinions in newspapers and magazines that the editors of *The Teacher* believed to be overstated and destructive:

The question of the feminisation of the teaching profession came up in public in such a way that it brought with it fanaticism and exaggeration from various sides. It has been harmful to this matter which is of significant value to our teachers.⁴⁹

The editors wanted the issue to be settled without delay. They emphasised the good will amongst teachers when solving the problem: "We know from experience that women and men teachers are not only capable of discussing this calmly, but can reach a unanimous outcome. It is our opinion that it is necessary to reach a conclusion."⁵⁰

Although the beginning of the response adopted a conciliatory approach, the latter part included rather harsh criticism against the writing of the inspector, including arguments such as "idle nonsense" and "the attempt to insult half of the teachers on purpose".⁵¹ The view of the editors of *The Teacher* was understandable, as the journal's readers and the members of the teachers' trade unions represented both sexes, and the number of unionised workers was even higher amongst men than women teachers. *The Teacher* attempted to adopt a problem-solving attitude and an intermediary role but, at the same time, bluntly condemned writings in which the superiority of women teachers was praised. The chief editor of *The Teacher*, who was also the director of a publishing company and the chair of the Finnish Trade Union for Primary School Teachers, held an influential position when deciding the line of *The Teacher*. He did not hold on to male-dominated views, but rather gave space for various standpoints in the journal. The line of *The Teacher* attempted to avoid views that emphasised either men's or women's superiority in the teaching profession too much.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Anon., "Opettajiston arvostelua sekín. II." [Criticism against Teachers. II.], *The Teacher* 10, no. 26 (1915): 322.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 323.

A school doctor joined the debate in 1915

The debate was boosted for the second time at the end of 1915 when *The Teacher* published a commentary on the writing of a school doctor⁵² under the title “Peculiar Criticism”.⁵³ The school doctor had expressed his views on women and men teachers in his report on school healthcare. This episode of the debate saw an extension of the participants involved in discussions and solidified tensions within primary education. According to *The Teacher*, the doctor emphasised the good learning results that women teachers had achieved in girls’ and co-educational classes compared to men teachers in boys’ classes. He argued in favour of women teachers on two grounds. First, men teachers had substantial alternative incomes, which interfered with their concentration on their teaching work. Second, men teachers came from the lower social classes:

... the salaries of men teachers are so low that they have to get extra income to get by and the job can often be the kind which catches one’s attention more than schoolwork itself ... Due to low salaries, men from more cultivated homes very rarely entered upon a teaching career. Therefore, the majority of men comes from homes where the culture is not yet very far developed.⁵⁴

The salary issue had been under discussion from the beginning of the debate, but the extra income of men teachers and their somewhat different backgrounds were new elements. The views of the doctor immediately raised an angry response from the editors of *The Teacher*.

In their commentary, the editors of *The Teacher* not only rejected the opinion of the doctor but questioned his expertise in this matter:

To be able to give an opinion on the accomplishments of school and on school life generally, naturally one has to know them thoroughly. As far as we can see, the school doctor has not achieved that during his calls which lasted only a few minutes.⁵⁵

The argument of *The Teacher* was based on the inadequate views which the doctor had presented concerning the behaviour and the learning results of pupils. The standpoint of *The Teacher* emphasised the difficulty of the comparison between girls and boys because of differences in their maturation process and upbringing:

The research has already substantiated that the maturation of girls is years ahead compared to boys of the same age ... If the boys in co-educational classes are brought up in the same way as girls, those poor boys will certainly be pitied. They lack the best qualities of boys.⁵⁶

The Teacher stressed the biological and educational distinctions of the sexes and give them intrinsically different natures. When drawing a line between girl and boy pupils and the most suitable teaching for them, the editors of *The Teacher* repeated the notion that women and men teachers were not equal, as men teachers were regarded as better teachers for boys, especially older boys.

The debate continued when *Upbringing and School (Kasvatus ja koulu)* published a detailed article written by the doctor which included opinions about the primary school

⁵²The school doctor published several books concerning healthcare, hygiene, and education.

⁵³“Omituinen arvostelu” [Peculiar Criticism], *The Teacher* 10, no. 47 (1915): 531–2.

⁵⁴Ibid, 531.

⁵⁵Ibid, 532.

⁵⁶Ibid, 532.

system as a whole, and in which the feminisation of the teaching profession was one of the topics. In this article, the difference between women and men teachers was elaborated further and the qualities of women as good teachers were again linked to motherhood. The extra incomes and backgrounds of men teachers were also repeated. The doctor outlined a primary school system in which co-educational classes were favoured and women teachers were positioned to take care of the teaching in lower primary schools (classes 1–2) and in the “junior” classes of upper primary schools (classes 1–2). With regard to the “senior” classes of upper primary schools (classes 3–4), the doctor defined a solution in which teaching was shared by women and men teachers, but a special duty was reserved for men teachers for disciplinary reasons. He suggested that:

... a woman teacher and a man teacher would teach two classes together, sharing subjects with each other so that each of them will have an opportunity for the educational leadership of children in both classes. Some subjects suit the duties of women teachers and some others suit men ... In the third and fourth classes in upper primary schools are children around 12–13 years old. The presence and the manly leadership of a man teacher might already be necessary for the sake of boys’ discipline.⁵⁷

This suggestion envisioned an upper primary school system in which co-teaching was executed, and the system combined class and subject teacher practices in a gender-segregated way.

Once again, the writing generated a fast response from a man teacher and the commentary was published in *Upbringing and School* and *The Teacher*. The response followed the same pattern as before – the writer tried to disprove the doctor’s argument concerning extra incomes, the different backgrounds of teachers, and above all the superiority of women as teachers. The emphasis was on the role of men teachers as fathers who it was argued have the same value and importance as mothers:

In my opinion, the comparison of women teachers’ work with mothers’ work is not successful. In homes, a mother indeed carries out most of the upbringing of the children but if there are boys, the authority of a father is very necessary.⁵⁸

The writer disregarded the suggestion by the inspector for co-teaching in senior classes, and concentrated instead on pinpointing issues he disagreed with, and affirming the need for men teachers in primary education, especially when it came to boys.

The end of the debate: the report about teachers

The dispute faded during 1916 when two writings were published in *The Teacher* and in *Upbringing and School*. The first one based its argument on the historical background of primary school. It commented on the dispute with a conciliatory tone reminding readers about the views on the place of women teachers in the early years of primary school. The writer relied on the ideas of Uno Cygnaeus who was named as a founder of the primary school and who influenced the establishment of the teacher-training system in the 1860s.

⁵⁷“Mietteidä kansakoulujemme kehityksestä” [Thoughts about the Development of our Primary Schools], *Upbringing and School* 2, no. 4 (1915–16): 139–50. The writing was published 12 January 2019.

⁵⁸“Kansakoulun kasvatukselliset voimat” [Educational Powers in Primary School] *Upbringing and School* 2, no. 5 (1915–16): 189–94; “Kansakoulun kasvatukselliset voimat” [Educational Powers in Primary School] *The Teacher* 11, no. 4 (1916): 42–4.

The writing positioned women and men teachers, as Cygnaeus had done, as equals but their work as of different types. The writer pinpointed also that the social background of teachers had levelled in comparison with the time of Gygnaeus, which had homogenised the teaching staff:

They had to be properly trained to be educators and teachers who for their part and alongside men teachers would carry out that significant educational work of which Cygnaeus had planned at primary school It would be unnecessary to argue that the work of women teachers at school and outside of it is similar to that of men. It is and probably always will be of a different quality. It is also too bold to define whose work is richer from its results.⁵⁹

The second article in *Upbringing and School* looked at the facts based on the research of the school inspectors' assessments of teachers' abilities. It maintained its perspective on the research conducted by its author, the research employed as sources, and the reports of the school inspectors, which assessed 2,318 teachers. The tone of the writing was different to earlier writings. It also based its explanations on studied facts instead of assumptions. The author called the writing a thesis and, as a result, an academic orientation ran through the text. The author based her reasoning on her own study and examined each claim or argument that was published in the journals – the abilities of women teachers in general, teaching skills (for example, consistency of teaching and interplay with pupils), issues of discipline, and the role of extra incomes.

The writing presented concrete facts and percentages on the differences between women and men teachers. For example, with respect to success in teaching, the writer divided teachers into two categories according to the valuations of the school inspectors: excellent or well done (group I) and moderately well done or badly done (group II). Based on the results, 68% of women and 58% of men teachers belonged to group I.⁶⁰ The writer came to a conclusion that favoured both men and women teachers:

From what I have presented, I believe that it would be unnatural, even in fact harmful to take some action ... in order to decrease the number of women teachers. On the contrary, it can be regarded as a fortune to our country when progress means that municipalities establish many positions for women teachers in their schools. It still remains an area for men teachers to work, men teachers who are eager for their vocation.⁶¹

Her message was to strengthen the idea of the primary school system in which women teachers had a firm place and to dispel doubts regarding their capabilities. The representations of women and men teachers that was created nearly avoided the assumptions regarding gender despite the fact that the writing constantly compared men and women with each other. There were only two mentions that linked women to domestic duties and their character to meticulous behaviour. The writing presented women and men teachers as equals in the teaching vocation⁶² and promoted the viewpoint of the equality between sexes.

⁵⁹"Naisten osuus kansakoulutyössä. Uno Cygnaeuksen ajatuksia" [Women's Role in Primary School. The Thoughts of Uno Cygnaeus] *The Teacher* 11, no. 19 (1916): 241–2.

⁶⁰"Naiset ja miehet kansakoulunopettajina. Tutkielma piiritarkastajain lausuntojen nojalla" [Men and Women as Primary School Teachers. Thesis Based on the District School Inspectors' Reports] *Upbringing and School* 3, no. 3 (1916–17): 107–17.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 117.

⁶²The concept of vocation is used, because the writer employed the word "calling," thus emphasising the calling nature of the profession.

The dispute changed when developments in society and in the education system transformed circumstances in schools. The early days of an independent state were immediately followed by civil war, which jeopardised the normal and regular activities of schools and created a shortage of teachers. In addition, compulsory education enacted in 1921 increased the shortage. Discussions changed from pondering the abilities of women and men teachers to fears that competent teachers would leave their work on account of better-paid jobs (in the case of men teachers) or marriage (in the case of women teachers), and that young men would not choose to become teachers.⁶³

Conclusions

The debate concerning the feminisation of the teaching profession, which was covered by *The Teacher* during the years 1915 to 1920, not only took a stand on the process itself, its reasons, and its consequences, but highlighted the gendered assumptions and ideas about the teaching profession and the characteristics associated with women and men teachers.⁶⁴ The debate emphasised the people skills of women and the authority of men, especially regarding teaching older boys. Several historians of education point out the same phenomenon in other countries – gendered definitions were common in feminisation debates when the participants of the discussions justified their opinions.⁶⁵

Some of the Finnish writings created representations of the familial school system where women and men teachers were regarded as the mothers and fathers of schools. These opinions included views that reserved teaching positions for men and married women, thereby sidelining unmarried women from the profession, particularly in the senior classes of the upper primary school. The familial school system introduced in the writings was based on assumptions about the different characteristics of the sexes in which the equality of the sexes rested on the acknowledgement of these dissimilarities and teaching positions were divided according to the essential features of men and women.

When the writers addressed the supremacy of women teachers over men teachers, they gave legitimacy to women teachers and allocated to them the monopoly on teaching positions in primary schools. In these writings, men teachers were ignored and edged out of primary education to teaching duties after primary schooling.

In the writings, the foundation of the reasoning in the arguments had a wide scope – from the historical background of primary schools to the current situation and problems of that time. During the debate, some of the different interest groups took a neutral and conciliatory position. The editors of *The Teacher* represented all members of the teachers' trade union and they obviously defended both women and men teachers' rights to the profession. *Upbringing and School* published views that were both in favour of and against the feminisation of the teaching profession, ending with the neutral and academically oriented writing that argued against the actions to limit the number of women

⁶³"Onko suomenkielisiä seminaareja lisättävä?" [Does the Number of Finnish-speaking Seminaries need to be increased?] *The Teacher* 17, no. 2 (1922): 17–18; "Kansakoululaitoksemme tila tällä hetkellä" [The Stand of our Primary School System] *The Teacher* 17, no. 48 (1922): 810–11.

⁶⁴Whitehead, "Vocation, Career and Character," notes that in the Australian state school context, a set of "natural" qualities and positive dispositions towards teachers' work was embedded in the discourse of vocation.

⁶⁵E.g. van Essen, "Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920;" de Gabriel, "The Entrance of Women;" Depaepe, Lauwers, and Simon, "The Feminization of the Teaching Profession;" Florin, *Kampen om katedern*.

teachers. The local teacher unions' comments, which were published in *The Teacher*, had the same constructive tone. The writings praising the abilities of women teachers were the majority in *Women's Voice*, and the journal endorsed equality between the sexes and promoted women's right to the profession. Amongst the writers who took a stand on the issue of feminisation in *The Teacher*, there were some teachers and school inspectors who expressed the opposing opinions. The counsellor of education representing the National Board of Education did not comment on the issue until the beginning of the 1920s when the transformed system of education and the shortage of teachers altered the whole debate.

One feature of the debate was that the monopoly of women teachers that prevailed in lower primary schools was considered as a self-evident fact that was not argued against. When concentrating on upper primary schools and their teaching positions,⁶⁶ the debate defined the issue unique to the specific teaching duties. In addition, the proponents of women teachers' expertise and professionalism employed the public debate successfully when claiming and defending their right to the teaching profession.⁶⁷ Women who actively participated in societal and women's organisations had an opportunity to question the gendered attitudes and assumptions about women's and men's roles in society and in the labour market. Despite the fact that the debate included arguments of opposing interests and claims of superiority, the debate also involved a strong, constructive tone with discussion of gender equality and solidarity between women and men.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Marjo Nieminen, PhD, is a senior university lecturer in the Department of Education, University of Turku, Finland, and she has worked earlier as a researcher at the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning and Education (CELE). Her recent empirical studies have covered the history of education from primary schooling to the upper secondary and university levels, and they have included methodological reflections on various historical sources, such as archives, written narratives and visual sources. Her special interests are in issues of women's history.

⁶⁶The Finnish debate about the feminisation of the secondary school teaching profession took place a little later: Jukka Rantala, "Oppikoulunopettajat" [Secondary School Teachers], in *Valistus ja koulunpenkki. Kasvatus ja koulutus Suomessa 1860-luvulta 1960-luvulle* [Enlightenment and School Bench. Upbringing and Education in Finland from the 1860s to the 1960s], ed. Anja Heikkinen and Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 304–11.

⁶⁷e.g. Anon., "Vaasan naisopettajain oikaisu;" "Nyt sen tiedämme!;" "Opettajayhdistyksen asioita;" "Sama työ, sama palkka;" "Eräs kiertokysely."