



Research Reporter

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Research on Education

In this issue of Research Reporter, we profile some of the research on teachers, schools, and school systems that is undertaken by Brock faculty and students. June Corman's study of women teachers in Saskatchewan details the intersections of the personal and the public, the shifting demographics of the teaching profession in the first half of the twentieth century, and the ways in which individuals responded to social pressures and employment opportunities, often while committed to a vision of what public education could be. Her research illustrates well the shifting contours of the educational landscape in an era in which the content and organizational structures were contested vigorously in the public forum.

Similarly, in an era in which content and authority over education are debated, Anne Elliott and her research team are contributing to our understanding of the influence of various media on children, aged 6 to 13. The anticipated outcomes of this study will inform parents on the patterns of use and impact of various media on children's social and educational development, advise teachers on strategies to adapt curriculum to new forms of literacy and skill development into the curriculum, and influence public debate over the ways in which children and youth use media and what are the short, medium, and long term consequences of such use. These are two Brock faculty research programs, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, that contribute to our understanding of educational institutions and processes in Canada.



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Trailblazing women in Saskatchewan: 1910 to 1955

In her award-winning book, *Getting By in Hard Times: Gendered Labour at Home and on the Job*, which she co-authored with Meg Luxton, Professor June Corman, Chair of Brock's Sociology Department studied women employed in non-traditional jobs. In her account of women working in Hamilton's steel industry, Corman detailed how the women who wanted the wages and stability that the steel industry offered exclusively to men, had to first organize and then work to get their voices heard. Due in part to their efforts, a law that no candidate could be turned away on the basis of gender was passed.



"These women who were married and took work unknowingly paved the way for the rest of us."

Dr. June Corman

In her current work, supported by SSHRC (Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council) Corman is once again examining a group of trailblazing women. This time, she is conducting a study of the experiences of female teachers who worked in rural Saskatchewan. The study covers the years from 1910 to 1955, which is a large time period from which to study, but it presented a unique challenge.

"Carrying out a random sample of this group was impossible, because many of the teachers have died or moved," Corman explains. As a result, Corman is using 130 first hand accounts, supplemented with archival material such as government reports and the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation quarterly newsletter, which documented the prevalent issues of the day.

Corman has found that working with individuals who chose to participate in her study has proven interesting. "I

must constantly remind myself that the women who are involved in my project were 'keeners'; teachers who loved to teach and gained a great deal of satisfaction from their work." In addition

to their common love for teaching, the rural teachers also worked in isolation, which made for an uncommon range of experiences. "The different experiences of these women lend a broader perspective from which to

research, allowing me to examine the similarities and differences between them," Corman explains.

Corman divided the 45-year period of her study into three unique and important sub-groups which she organized into the years encompassed by the First World War, the Depression Era and World War II. "Dividing the research into sub-groups allowed me to target particular sociological factors. For example, I am interested in looking at the impact that the depression had on working conditions of teachers," Corman says. What she discovered was that the dedication of the women teachers was uncanny. Many continued to teach even though they were paid very little or not at all. "It was up to the homesteaders in Saskatchewan to set up a school in their community," Corman notes. "The 3,000 to 4,000 school districts set their own pay for teachers. When the depression coincided with droughts, farms and entire communities were hit hard. There wasn't any money to pay the teachers."

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Corman encountered a similar dedication of the schoolteachers once more in women teachers during World War II. At that time, many of the male teachers were conscripted or had joined the armed forces, creating a sudden shortage of teachers. Former teachers who were now married and raising children were asked by school boards to go back into the classroom. Explains Corman, "It was not socially acceptable for married women to work. However, it was a great advantage to the community because the married teachers in the classroom had teaching experience and tended to stay in their post

for longer." Interestingly, Corman discovered that the married teachers rationalized their return to the classroom as a community service. "These women who were married and took work unknowingly paved the way for the rest of us," notes Corman.

Another preliminary finding is the difference in the way the women thought about their experience then and now. For example, a local married farmer was sexually harassing one of the teachers that Corman interviewed. "At that time," Corman clarifies, "there wasn't a concept of sexual harassment and the language did not exist. Instead, the teacher described it as 'Let's play chase the teacher around the

desk.'" The teacher eventually 'resolved' the situation by leaving her contract and worked as a secretary until she could get a job at another school in the new school year. Looking back, the teacher realized that she would have handled the confrontation very differently today.

While Corman's study is still underway, one fact from her research is clear, "We must give a lot of credit to the women who took jobs when it was not acceptable to do so," she says. "We have choices that are acceptable, they had choices that were not acceptable."

~Kimberley Lee

Brock Research Team explores Ontario school children's perceptions of media

Dr. Anne Elliott, an Associate Professor with the Faculty of Education at Brock University, is researching the influence of media on Canadian children between the ages of six and thirteen. Funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Elliott is in year two of a three-year research project. Leading a team of six Brock cross faculty researchers – Sandra Bosacki, Merle Richards, Vera Woloshyn, Deborah Mindorff (Research Officer) (all of Education), and Nancy Murray (Physical Education), – Elliott is looking at fourteen different Ontario and Quebec schools longitudinally. Following the same students for three years, Elliott explains that she will examine, "the influential impact of popular culture as featured through media on the world views, beliefs, values and self-concepts of Canadian children." Elliott's research aims to articulate implications of children's media habits for Canadian parents and educators.

This is the first time this kind of study has been done on Canadian children. Elliott's research has inspired a large amount of interest, particularly among the parents and teachers at the participating schools, resulting in workshops and presentations for school councils and staff.

Elliott hopes her research will inform parents and help educators to adapt the current curriculum to include media literary skills. Elliott explains, "in Ontario, the curriculum includes critical

viewing, yet little is being done in classrooms to help children be critical media consumers." Considering that media share children's socializing environments such as their homes and schools, Elliott's research will assist Canadian parents and educators respond to the realities of the media drenched lives of children.



Back Row: Left to Right:
Anne Elliott, Vera Woloshyn, Deborah Mindorff, Snezana Ratkovic

Front Row: Left to Right:
Nancy Murray, Merle Richards, Sandra Bosacki
(Absent: Dawn Pollon)

Elliott and the team have already discovered some predominant patterns. Elliott reported: "We found what we call 'fractured focus'; children multi-tasking or regularly interacting with two or more media simultaneously. We also found that children communicate with each other over the Internet in preference to use of the phone." The nature of these interactions is significant "because they're missing some layers of communication available on the phone, such as voice inclination, enthusiasm and voice-over."

Elliott noted other trends in their findings: "There were gender differences in terms of playing video games. Boys are more likely to play video games than girls. A number of these boys were playing particularly violent games and were talking about violence quite dispassionately. Another group, again mostly boys, identified

a single focused interest, such as skateboarding, across all media which often dominated their media choices."

Findings also include the autonomy experienced by preadolescents when choosing and playing video games and when on the Internet. Interestingly, parents believe they know what their children are doing, while some preadolescents keep some of their video games and Internet activities private from adults. Teachers were much more likely to declare they were not aware of the activities of their students in these media venues.

It appears that television remains the most dominant of all media. Children, almost exclusively, identified watching T.V. daily.

Their viewing activities including watching movies, videos and television, yet these remain family social activities.

One of the study's goals is to identify the characteristics of particular media icons that make them important to elementary students: "We're looking for their favourite media icons and *why* they were identified as favourites."

Elliott's research will culminate in at least one book, multiple papers both academic and popular press, as well as various presentations to teachers, parents, and the academic community.

~Julie-Ann Elliott



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