

Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools

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In North America, supporters of public education express their faith in superlatives. Superintendent of Education Alexander Robinson proved no exception. When B.C.'s first Provincial Normal School opened at Vancouver High School in 1901, he rejoiced. It was, he declared, "the most important event in many years in the history of Education in this Province."¹

Robinson had good reason for optimism. Up to his time, the 1872 Public Schools Act ruled all teachers subject to certification. But this legislation guaranteed nothing, since rigid observance would have closed a dozen schools for want of legally certified teachers. During the tenure of the first superintendent, John Jessop, qualified teachers came to B.C. from eastern Canada and Britain. Native or resident British Columbians could sit challenge examinations or periodically attend teachers' institutes. These were informal gatherings aimed at regularizing teaching methods. Under 1876 laws, moreover, minimal funds were generated in aid of pupil teachers to be trained in the Vancouver and Victoria High Schools. In Jessop's view, however, what was principally needed was a normal school like the one at Toronto from which he had graduated in 1855.

With Jessop removed through political contretemps in 1878, others took up the cause, justified in part by the assumption that it was possible to teach people how to teach. Superintendent C. C. Mackenzie believed this. He warned in 1885 that so long as B.C. had no normal school, it would falter under a defective education system.² His successor, S. D. Pope, agreed. A normal school, he explained, was a wise economy. It would produce devoted, methodical teachers, "an earnest band of workers equipped with ability to control."³ In the legislature, politicians

¹ Superintendent of Education, *Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia* [hereafter ARPS] (Victoria, B.C.: King's Printer, 1901), p. 227.

² ARPS, 1885, p. 156.

³ ARPS, 1890, p. 128.

joined in the discussion. Then in 1890, private member for Victoria, Simeon Duck, introduced an act respecting the University of British Columbia⁴ which received assent within two months. Section 11 stated that "in connection with" the university, there be "a Normal School for the training of teachers for the Public Schools of the Province."⁵ It appeared that the professionals and their political allies had prevailed. But Education department reluctance to relinquish its hold on teacher training and rivalry over the location of the proposed normal school contributed to the removal of the normal school clause.⁶ At the same session, the Council of Public Instruction was authorized to set up a normal school independent of university management.⁷ Even so, the council took no action.

Dismayed at this perceived void in B.C. public education, superintendents, inspectors, school principals and editors continued to appeal for a normal school. Failure to provide it, they argued, left B.C. the only Canadian province without at least one such institution, thereby condemning many B.C. children to indifferent instruction at the hands of novices groping their way toward competence without benefit of professional preparation.⁸ Inspector in Nelson, William Burns, put the case this way. Many experienced teachers, he observed, had left the profession, to be replaced by untrained, inexperienced beginners. Were a normal school to be established, "it would not be requisite to send our tyros to some isolated district to find out whether they have the ability to teach."⁹ The press further aided the normal school lobby. Considering children "a commercial value . . . of no small importance,"¹⁰ the *Colonist* called on Education Minister J. D. Prentice to establish a normal school at Victoria.¹¹ Conversely, the *Province* praised the Vancouver School Board's

⁴ Province of British Columbia, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* [hereafter JLA], Session 1890, vol. XIX, p. 42.

⁵ "An Act respecting the University of British Columbia," chap. 48, 26 April 1890, *Statutes of the Province of British Columbia* [hereafter SPBC] (Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer, 1891), p. 283.

⁶ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver, B.C.: Macmillan, 1958), p. 311; F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver, B.C.: Publications Centre, UBC, 1964), p. 75; Harry T. Logan, *Tuum Est: A History of the University of British Columbia* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC, 1958), p. 4.

⁷ See "An Act respecting the Public Schools," chap. 40, 20 April 1891, SPBC, 1892, p. 305.

⁸ For these and other observations, see ARPS, 1891-1901, *passim*.

⁹ ARPS, 1901, p. 213.

¹⁰ *Colonist*, 7 September 1900, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

initiative in offering to house a normal school for which Superintendent Robinson was understood to have prepared "a complete scheme."¹² Responding, the *Colonist* went so far as to acknowledge Vancouver's alertness in supporting a plan calculated to improve teaching throughout the province and help maintain discipline in B.C. classrooms so that "all slips and laxities are at once pounced upon. . . ."¹³

Robinson did, in fact, have a teacher training scheme. It would start early in 1901. The superintendent himself was to be principal pro tem, assisted by Vancouver inspector David Wilson, and David Blair, formerly of New Zealand and later a Victoria teacher. Admission required prior third-class certification or an entrance exam. Persuaded, the Dunsmuir government implemented the decade-old enabling legislation. On 17 and 18 December 1900, applicants sat entrance tests at Victoria, Vancouver, Kamloops and Nelson. Many of them, plus practising teachers with third-class certificates, made up the group of forty-two entrants who took part in that most important event, the opening of the Vancouver Provincial Normal School in the Vancouver High School on Wednesday, 9 January 1901, at 9:30 a.m.¹⁴

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Robinson's scheme cost little. Vancouver supplied space; Robinson and Wilson were already on the government payroll; potential model teachers were already at work for the Vancouver board. At first glance, the maiden expense of formal teaching training was one salary, Blair's. No such economy could long endure. Robinson, after all, was still superintendent. He had counted on residing in Vancouver and running the superintendency by correspondence and occasional visits to Victoria.¹⁵ But broader educational responsibilities obliged him to reverse his priorities.¹⁶ At length, the Council of Public Instruction saw fit to appoint full-time staff. Blair continued. A New Westminster teacher, J. D. Buchanan, replaced Inspector Wilson. And Inspector William Burns of Nelson relieved Robinson as principal.¹⁷

From the start, normal school students were mostly women. Some had

¹² *Province*, 4 September 1900, p. 4.

¹³ *Colonist*, 25 December 1900, p. 8.

¹⁴ See accounts in the *Province*, 24 December 1900, p. 3; *Colonist*, 23 December 1900, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Province*, 4 September 1900, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 January 1901, p. 9.

¹⁷ Blair resigned in 1910; Buchanan died in 1912.

taught before, but the majority were young, some to qualify at 17. For young women early in the century, normal school had certain inducements. Schoolteaching offered a career or a socially acceptable way station between school and marriage. Preliminary training was short, only six months at first, and it was free, as was transportation to and from normal school for out-of-towners. City room and board could be had for \$4.50 to \$5.00 per week.¹⁸ Granted, low salaries, primitive living and teaching conditions, local politics or loneliness rendered teaching difficult at times, especially in remote rural areas. Summers, though, were at liberty. They could be spent back at normal school to upgrade certification, within the decade¹⁹ at the Victoria Summer School of Education, or, for the lucky few, in travel and relaxation. Sixty-one women had enrolled by the end of the opening session in June 1901. Twice that number attended, 1908-1909, and by August 1909 Burns was already talking of overcrowding.²⁰

At the Vancouver Provincial Normal School, the idea was "to acquire information, but also to see how much information should be imparted to others."²¹ In aid of this idea were class lectures and practice in various Vancouver schools. Burns taught psychology, pedagogy, literature and nature study; Blair, theoretical and practical drawing; Buchanan, teaching methods. Burns and Buchanan criticized candidates' practical lessons, and Blair supervised drawing instruction at the Lord Roberts Model School.²² Other subjects — paper-folding, cutting, weaving, educational history, physical geography, first aid, vocal music and physical drill — were introduced in the course of time. Not all students appeared ready for such a varied curriculum. Burns reported on candidates arriving from high school unenlightened in subjects they were required to teach,²³ some having failed these school courses, others having actually passed them at high standing.²⁴ Among legitimately admitted students were ignorant,

¹⁸ ARPS, 1909, p. A63.

¹⁹ The first such summer school was opened in Victoria High School on 6 July 1914. Over 500 B.C. teachers enrolled in rural science, manual training, manual arts, household economics, art and vocal music.

²⁰ See Provincial Normal School, Report of Principal [hereafter PNSRP], in ARPS, 1909, p. A35.

²¹ PNSRP, ARPS, 1901, p. 277.

²² The "Model School" was initially several rooms in the eight-room Lord Roberts Elementary School occupying the city block bounded by Comox, Pendrell, Bidwell and Cardero Streets.

²³ PNSRP, ARPS, 1904, p. A57.

²⁴ PNSRP, ARPS, 1906, pp. A50-A51.

uninspiring persons incapable of legible handwriting²⁵ and quite unable to keep discipline in their practice classrooms.²⁶ Such problems were compounded by frequent change of location, from Vancouver High School (1901) to Lord Roberts (1902) to the new [King Edward] High School in Fairview (1904) to the new Model School nearby (1907). Burns also spoke of overwhelming demands on instructional time and, somewhat at odds with earlier statements about what normal schools could achieve, “the many points in discipline and management that cannot be taught or tested in any Normal School.”²⁷

Confronted with these initial challenges, Burns and his staff persevered. In 1909 they issued a prospectus outlining entrance requirements, preliminary and advanced sessions, courses of study, examination procedures, as well as particulars on diplomas and certificates.²⁸ Complex and demanding, these stipulations articulated two principles that have since governed B.C. teacher education, notably, encouragement of extended training through promise of permanent certification, and government prerogatives in the certification process itself. Intended to complement ambitious programs of instruction at the Vancouver Normal School were free texts. Some, such as psychology, were left to staff selection. Most were prescribed. Since management and discipline occupied centre stage at the normal school, two were of vital interest. One, Joseph Landon’s *The Principles and Practice of Teaching and Class Management*, was a 500-page hortatory work for beginners promising that with effort, most could “learn to become sensible and useful teachers.”²⁹ The other, for advanced students, was William Chandler Bagley’s *Classroom Management: Its Principles and Techniques*. Less an outpouring of advice than a “compendium of precepts” based on “psychological prin-

²⁵ PNSRP, ARPS, 1903, p. C59.

²⁶ PNSRP, ARPS, 1907, p. A44. Burns’ accompanying adage “teachers are born, not made” at first glance appears logically self-defeating for a teacher educator. It provides, however, an early instance of a nagging problem, namely, screening teacher candidates for suitability.

²⁷ PNSRP, ARPS, 1908, p. B37. Again, the argument seems circuitous. If one can learn discipline and management elsewhere, why attend normal school at all? It is, however, a legitimate argument when based on the assumption that training subsequent to field experience could mean more to the trainee.

²⁸ For a full statement of these requirements, see *Provincial Normal Schools*, ARPS, 1909, pp. A61-A63. Minimum prior required schooling consisted of two years of high school beyond seven elementary grades, or about Grade IX on today’s scale. For full details of elementary and high school curricula, circa 1909, see ARPS, pp. A47-A56.

²⁹ Joseph Landon, *The Principles and Practice of Teaching and Class Management* (London: Alfred M. Holden, 1898), p. 3.

principles," it aimed at a "coherent and fairly comprehensive system,"³⁰ consistent with fitting the child for "life in civilized society."³¹ Its precepts stemmed from psychology, social psychology, sociology, philosophy and history — disciplines which North American educators would increasingly borrow, modify and offer as "educational foundations."³²

How did initial achievements appear to interested parties? Burns himself said results fully justified expenditures, noting that many school boards preferred normal school graduates to others. He also believed the normal school would improve the educational chances of children not just within easy range of Vancouver but in all parts of B.C. as well.³³ At graduation ceremonies and upon other formal occasions, normal school students expressed gratitude for the training they had received.³⁴ From two sources, however, support or criticism appeared less sporadically.

One source was inspectors and school principals. On the positive side, some saw the normal school as a distinct advantage, its graduates performing excellent teaching in drawing and manual work. These teachers were said to move their pupils along, organize, systematize, and create interest and enjoyment even among children who customarily found school work tedious.³⁵ There was a negative side, though. Other administrators contended that the teaching of language and composition lacked excellence.³⁶ Normal school training in these subjects, they stated, did not go far enough. There remained as a result continuing problems of idleness, lateness, irregular attendance, even poor discipline,³⁷ the very malady for which Landon or Bagley were supposed to be the textual antidote. Inspector A. C. Stewart posed a far broader criticism. On account of social and economic imperatives in B.C., he argued, few country parents could afford to meet their daughters' normal school costs. Accordingly, rural schools fell increasingly in charge of young city women

³⁰ William Chandler Bagley, *Classroom Management: Its Principles and Technique* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1907, 1913), p. v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³² In an ironic way, foundations and methodology eventually parted company as a result of ensuing professional politics of North American teacher education.

³³ PNSRP, ARPS, 1901-1910, *passim*. Though rarely negative, Burns was never extravagant in his assessment of how well the Vancouver Normal School was doing. His style was essentially that of using the Annual Report as a vehicle for transporting various requests for change, addition or modification.

³⁴ For instance, the *Province*, 26 September 1901, p. 2; *ibid.*, 4 August 1908, p. 7.

³⁵ For these and similar assessments, see as examples inspectors' comments, ARPS, 1902, pp. A32, A39; 1903, p. C24; 1905, p. A45.

³⁶ ARPS, 1902, p. A39.

³⁷ ARPS, 1905, p. A45.

who neither shared nor understood rural values and who seldom stayed on beyond a year.³⁸

The other source of comment on the newsworthy normal school was the press. There occurred initial bursts of enthusiasm. The educational stigma removed, said the *Colonist*, B.C. was now brought into line "with sister provinces of the Dominion."³⁹ The normal school would bring uniformity to a system to date sustained by teachers trained elsewhere in Canada, the U.S.A., England, Ireland, Scotland and various British colonies.⁴⁰ It would also screen out the unfit.⁴¹ According to the *Province*, teachers would be much better prepared in future to impart information.⁴² Moreover, both *Colonist* and *Province* wrote accounts of normal school opening and closing, diploma assemblies and sundry social gatherings at which Education department officials, normal school staff, prominent guests and normal school students enumerated the advantages of an institution they had created, run, admired or attended.

As the years went by, press focus shifted to other related issues fraught with long-standing Island-Mainland rivalry. Astute observers were quick to spot both the prestige and the business benefits of the normal school to its immediate community. At first, their observations seemed general enough. There was talk of a "handsome stone building" that would bring to Vancouver a number of people who otherwise would not be there.⁴³ Such a building would symbolize B.C.'s esteem for education while serving as a civic component of serious commercial importance.⁴⁴ It would be, the *Province* exulted, an edifice "of Oxford design," an "architectural gem," a building "equal to any in the east," built of B.C. materials.⁴⁵ This benign boosterism was eventually followed by acrimonious debate over ultimate location of a permanent structure. Which city — Vancouver or Victoria — should host a permanent teacher training school of

³⁸ ARPS, 1907, p. A32. For a persuasive analysis of this problem as of a decade later, see David C. Jones, "Creating Rural Minded Teachers," in David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan and Robert M. Stamp (eds.), *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises, 1979), pp. 155-76.

³⁹ *Colonist*, 25 December 1900, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Province*, 13 April, 1901.

⁴³ *Province*, 27 April 1901, p. 7, report of a special meeting of the Vancouver Board of School Trustees.

⁴⁴ *Colonist*, 7 September 1900, p. 4. See also reference to "a handsome and thoroughly up-to-date structure," *Colonist*, 20 May 1908, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Province*, 26 September 1908, p. 26.

such evident civic attractiveness? Vancouver School Board accommodation notwithstanding, Victoria interests had never admitted that provisional use of Vancouver High School and other board facilities settled the location issue for all time.⁴⁶ Eventually they were forced to do so. After many exchanges in the legislature and much public debate in the press, in 1908 the McBride administration committed itself for demographic reasons to construct the permanent provincial normal school in Vancouver.⁴⁷ Jubilant, the *Province* now speculated that this decision would substantially strengthen its city's claim to the provincial university as well.⁴⁸

Faced with these political realities, the Victoria Normal School lobby shifted ground. The location debate beyond redemption, it called instead for a second normal school situated in the provincial capital. Mayor Morley, aldermen, trustees and prominent citizens petitioned Acting Premier Tatlow.⁴⁹ In the legislature, opposition member for Alberni H. C. Brewster "bewailed at some length" (as the *Province* put it)⁵⁰ the lack of an Island teacher training school. By 1909, Victoria Trustees McIntosh, McNeill and Jenkins had again raised the question, McIntosh contending that the government's very satisfactory fiscal status removed all excuses regarding inadequate funds.⁵¹ The *Times* endorsed these sentiments, adding more. Their daughters in training across the Strait of Georgia, it said, working men would face Vancouver boarding costs they could ill afford. Their children would be "separated from home influence at a most critical period in their lives,"⁵² and girls, if not boys, vulnerable to certain dangers "out among strangers."⁵³ It was up to Victoria's mayor, council, school board and tourist association to lead the protest against such a virulent form of educational discrimination.⁵⁴ As for Education minister H. E. Young's retort that a normal school at Victoria

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 April 1902, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1905, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1908, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Province*, 16 April 1907, p. 1; *Colonist*, 16 April 1907, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Province*, 2 February 1910, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Colonist*, 15 April 1909, p. 2; *Times*, 16 April 1909, p. 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15 April 1907, p. 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16 April 1907, p. 1. This reference to "girls" and "boys" and anxiety over "children" away from home provides some clues as to a concept of normal school as an extension of high school. It also heralds certain personal and professional difficulties some of these "boys" and "girls" would experience in a teaching world of men and women.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1907, p. 4.

would attract few students, the *Times* pointed out that a healthier surrounding, climatic advantage and cheaper living would ensure students from all parts of B.C. except greater Vancouver.⁵⁵

At intervals the *Times* pursued its crusade, but for the moment in a lost cause. In the fall of 1908 Principal Burns laid the cornerstone of the permanent Vancouver Provincial Normal School. Two years later Premier McBride affirmed his one-normal-school-for-now policy. Recriminations lingered amid charges of class bias, regional affronts, lack of patriotism and overall injustice, but to no avail. By 1909 a three-storey, fourteen-room, enduring normal school building had risen above the level of Burns' cornerstone and was in full use. Not for another five years would Victoria residents behold their own teacher training building taking shape on the slopes of Mount Tolmie.

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Principal William Burns had "every reason to be satisfied."⁵⁶ The Vancouver Normal School was, by the standards of his day, a splendid building rising from the mud — a bit of old Oxford set down in Fairview, according to the *Province*.⁵⁷ Nor was Burns without resources, especially faculty. He, Buchanan and Blair collectively offered psychology, management, literature, history of education; reading, language, arithmetic, geography, history; drawing, stencilling, modelling — a curriculum substantially enriched beyond its 1901 origins. As of 1907, Ivy Abercromby taught nature study. John Kyle, ex-superintendent of drawing in the Vancouver schools, replaced Blair upon Blair's retirement in 1910, and for a brief period, Harry Dunnell also taught drawing. In 1911 E. H. Murphy, former principal of Vancouver Model School, took charge of practice teaching and under provisions of the Strathcona Trust, Q. M. S. I. Patterson, RCR, taught physical drill.⁵⁸ Enrolment increased. During 1910-1911, 120 registered for the preliminary session and 160 for the advanced.⁵⁹ Students came not just from Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria but from other Island, Fraser Valley and inland communities as well. Contrary, moreover, to the *Times*' charges of class discrimination, family backgrounds of these students, whether Island or

⁵⁵ *Times*, 17 April 1907, p. 4.

⁵⁶ PNSRP, ARPS, 1910, A40.

⁵⁷ *Province*, 26 September 1908, p. 26.

⁵⁸ This arrangement therefore placed one aspect of the normal school's program under the supervision of the Canadian Army.

⁵⁹ PNSRP, ARPS, 1911, p. A44.

Mainland, urban or rural, proved broadly representative of a working class. Indeed, while the well-to-do did not send their daughters and sons in any numbers to the Vancouver Normal School, Cumberland, Lady-smith and Nanaimo miners, Chilliwack, Langley and Hatzic farmers, Victoria warehousemen, grocers and carpenters did.⁶⁰

To be sure, in those early years at Vancouver, Burns confronted problems not unusual for an institution such as the one he ran, outlining them in various reports and other public statements. Promotion, illness, resignation, retirement and demise necessitated staff shuffles. City facilities for practice teaching in ungraded classrooms of the sort most normal school graduates would encounter in rural B.C. during their novitiates were unavailable.⁶¹ Candidates lacking full entrance standing continued to arrive despite regulations, and overcrowding became a matter of growing concern. Nevertheless, Burns publicly acknowledged what he considered notable gains. A new gymnasium provided better space for Swedish drill and first aid. A literary society, an athletic club and after-hour games furnished mental as well as physical recreation, together with a chance at learning how to organize social and athletic events — skills highly relevant to future teachers.⁶² With the co-operation of the Vancouver board, practice teaching became “the chief test of a student’s worth as a teacher.”⁶³ Meantime, normal school instructors delivered addresses and papers at teacher institutes around the province,⁶⁴ and appear to have been well received.

Although Burns’ public observations on the new normal school were largely positive, more private correspondence revealed something of the pressures caused by institutional development without local precedent, and of the uncertainty over B.C.’s emerging political, civil service and bureaucratic style. It also showed Burns struggling to discover and apply

⁶⁰ Home addresses for a sample of students who attended Vancouver Normal School, 9 January 1911 to 16 June 1911, were noted in a ledger entitled *Vancouver Normal School, January, 1911 - June, 1938*, currently located in the vault of the Division of Teacher Services, Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia. I am indebted to Dr. Bruce Andrews, Director of Teacher Services, for his re-discovery of these and related materials. Home owner occupations were noted in Henderson’s *Vancouver City and Suburban Directory, 1905-1906* (Victoria, B.C.: Henderson Publishing Company, 1906), and *Victoria City Directory Including Vancouver Island, 1914* (Victoria, B.C.: Trecillus Thompson, Ltd., 1914).

⁶¹ PNSRP, ARPS, 1912, p. A52.

⁶² PNSRP, ARPS, 1913, p. A60.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See H. H. MacKenzie, *Report* [hereafter R], ARPS, 1913, p. A45; J. B. DeLong, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A49.

a philosophy of teacher education consistent with what he took to be the educational purpose of the public elementary school in British Columbia.

Overall, Burns' administrative reach seemed total. His letter book reflected the range of anxieties from vandalism, accounts and recruiting to general public relations and more specific articulation with the Vancouver schools and the public education system as a whole. The superintendent and his inspectors, ministers and their deputies, merchants, faculty, parents, engineers, contractors, architects, telephone and transport executives alike received his missives. The "architectural gem" itself at first consumed much of Burns' administrative time, what with his attempting to hold builders and suppliers to contractual agreements and generally to protect the elegant new normal school from the sea of mud surrounding it. Appearing to obtain what he required by seeking verbal commitments from the highest ministerial authority and resolutely following up through the offices of lower-echelon functionaries, he strove to acquire needed physical and human resources and justified as well several instances of serious budgetary overrun.⁶⁵ In addition, as principal he stood very much *in loco parentis* with normal school students. His letters indicate he believed the younger women under his supervision to be especially impressionable. Accordingly, he corresponded with parents concerning their welfare, with Robinson about morality, and with students themselves regarding boarding arrangements and general comportment. All things to all people, he appeared "wrapped up"⁶⁶ in the institution he directed.

⁶⁵ Burns to Thomson Stationery Co., Vancouver, 20 September 1909, *Vancouver Normal School Letter Book, 1908-1915* [hereafter VNSL], p. 39, B.C. Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C.; Burns to Dr. F. C. MacTavish, Vancouver, 27 March 1911, VNSL, p. 120-21; Burns to H. E. Young, Minister of Education, Vancouver, n.d., 1910, VNSL, p. 53; Vancouver, 12 August 1910, VNSL, p. 77; Burns to Thomas Taylor, Minister of Works, Vancouver, 15 November 1910, VNSL, p. 100; Vancouver, 8 January 1915, VNSL, pp. 216-17; Burns to W. Allison, Auditor-General, Vancouver, 19 October 1904, VNSL, p. 205; Burns to A. Robinson, Superintendent of Education, Vancouver, 26 November 1908, VNSL, pp. 7-8; Burns to Robinson, Vancouver, 27 November 1908, *ibid.*, pp. 9-11; Burns to F. C. Gamble, Deputy Minister of Works, Vancouver, 18 September 1909, *ibid.*, pp. 37-38; Burns to W. F. Gardiner, Vancouver, 17 November 1909, *ibid.*, p. 41; Burns, partial note, VNSL, p. 56; Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 17 June 1910, *ibid.*, p. 59; Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 11 August 1910, *ibid.*, p. 74; Burns to F. C. Gamble, Vancouver, 26 September 1910, *ibid.*, p. 84; Burns to Gamble, Vancouver, 4 October 1910, *ibid.*, p. 87; Burns to Gamble, Vancouver, 12 October 1910, *ibid.*, p. 91; Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 10 March 1911, *ibid.*, p. 117; Burns to J. E. Griffith, Deputy Minister of Public Works, Vancouver, 2 February 1915, *ibid.*, p. 221; Burns to Taylor, Vancouver, 8 January 1915, *ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

⁶⁶ Burns to M. McTaggart, Vancouver, 9 September 1910, VNSL, pp. 80-81; Burns to W. H. Dandy, Vancouver, 13 November 1914; *ibid.*, p. 206; Burns to Mr.

Among Burns' many letters were also to be found the makings of a philosophy of teacher preparation resting on an image of good teachers and belief in the normal school's capacity to produce them. Good teachers knew their facts. To their pupils they could put productive, connected, logically consecutive questions. They were clear. They knew how to enliven a lesson. Good teachers avoided colloquial speech. They could spell. They could write legibly on a blackboard. They avoided digressions. They encouraged children to answer. Above all, they prepared their lessons, made their pupils work and kept good order.⁶⁷ Training to these specifications called for collaboration with the best available model teachers capable of inspiring student teachers.⁶⁸ Connected with this vision of what good teaching entailed and how to develop it was Burns' conception of the nature of good normal school instructors. In Burns' time, they would be predominantly men. They would have demonstrated superior ability in the public system, B.C. or elsewhere. Often they would have gained prior experience as principal or inspector. Their lectures would be related to other subjects on the curriculum.⁶⁹ Their lessons would aim at helping future rural teachers. Normal school instructors would be professionally resourceful with respect to development and modification of their year-to-year teaching assignments.⁷⁰ In short, they were to be general practitioners, not specialists, practical rather than theoretical, able to show how, eager to supervise practice teaching.

While Burns wrestled with such administrative and educational challenges, provincial and city inspectors continued to monitor the quality of teacher the normal school was producing. For the most part, they welcomed these novices. That many were British Columbians impressed some. Their willingness to work hard and ability to organize and handle

McCorkell, Vancouver, 11 April 1914, *ibid.*, p. 201; Burns to General Manager, B.C. Electric Railway Co., Vancouver, 12 November 1912, *ibid.*, pp. 159-60; Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 12 March 1915, *ibid.*, p. 223; Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 20 August 1910, *ibid.*, p. 78; Burns, letters to Miss Annie Kenyon, Miss Dockrill, M. Robertson, Vancouver, 22 August 1910, *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁷ This reconstruction is extrapolated from recorded criticism of a teacher candidate referred to in Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 28 April 1909, VNSL, pp. 18-20. It squares fairly well with the Langdon and Bagley models of method and management.

⁶⁸ See Burns to C. R. Evans, Principal, Cecil Rhodes School, Vancouver, 12 March 1914, VNSL, p. 198; Burns to W. P. Argue, City Superintendent of Schools, Vancouver, 19 January 1911, *ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

⁶⁹ Burns to A. Robinson, Vancouver, 4 June 1909, VNSL, pp. 22-25.

⁷⁰ This last view is reflected in Burns to Miss Abercrombie, Vancouver, 2 January 1911, VNSL, p. 106.

their classes pleased others, and their "thorough instruction" and "excellent training" in drawing, art and physical education substantially offset their inexperience. The best of them knew the school curriculum, came prepared to teach it, set high standards, roused interest and were sympathetic to the rural school. By definition, of course, not all could be the best. Some seemed just to have slipped through, as inept in subjects like nature study as they were insensitive to a higher order of educational aim such as "strengthening and developing the child." Bearing in mind that the normal school launched hundreds of teachers into provincial classrooms, what inspectors wrote about these less-able normal school graduates betrayed some slippage between Burns' ideals and certain field realities.⁷¹

In this last regard, the sorts of shortcomings thus identified contrasted very sharply indeed with Burns' institutional objectives. Many who held normal school diplomas, the inspectors reported, could not properly manage a classroom. Neatness, order and the "courteous conduct of the pupils" lacked due care. Legibility, spelling and punctuation received inadequate stress. Timetables were ignored, work was unsystematic, careless and unreviewed, and proper ventilation was disregarded. Management defects included faculty questioning, unrestrained calling out, too much teaching, too little seat work and an "absolute lack of method" in teaching history and composition. Classification of pupils for instruction left much to be desired. In the ungraded rural school, many teachers foundered hopelessly, revealing a serious training gap. Nobody questioned the fundamental concepts underlying normal school training and the educational and social benefits it promised. In the matter of detail, however, inspectors envisaged room for improvement.⁷²

In 1914, there was added to this official appraisal a statement outlining the quintessential teacher. She would be diligent, yet lively, alert to inattention, quick to question, her "finger upon the mental pulse of each student." This teacher would demand neat, concise writing, clear think-

⁷¹ Thomas Leith, R, ARPS, 1911, p. A33; D. L. MacLaurin, R, ARPS, 1911, p. A37; Albert Sullivan, R, ARPS, 1912, p. A36; W. P. Argue, R, ARPS, p. A40; John B. DeLong, R, ARPS, 1913, p. A32; G. H. Gower, R, ARPS, p. A40; H. H. MacKenzie, R, ARPS, 1913, p. A45; Leslie J. Bruce, R, ARPS, 1913, p. A48; John Martin, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A54; Bruce, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A57; H. P. Hope, R, ARPS, 1915, p. A41; Martin, R, ARPS, 1916, p. A36; W. N. Winsby, R, ARPS, 1912, p. A39; MacKenzie, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A51; Leith, R, ARPS, 1911, p. A33.

⁷² MacLaurin, R, ARPS, 1911, p. A37; MacLaurin, R, ARPS, 1912, p. A33; J. T. Pollock, R, ARPS, 1912, A36; Winsby, R, ARPS, 1912, p. A39; DeLong, R, ARPS, 1913, p. A32; MacKenzie, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A51; Sullivan, R, ARPS, 1911, p. A34; Pollock, R, ARPS, 1913, p. A42; Sullivan, R, ARPS, 1912, p. A37.

ing and careful recapitulation, pacing the work steadily throughout the year and keeping accurate records of student progress. Under her encouragement, children would develop their imaginations, growing at length to enjoy their compositions, and appreciate — even love — the literary selections to be read. She would help children speak and draw well. But the key attribute of this teacher would be her ability and desire to see to the “true work of the school — the development of character.”⁷³ So wrote Inspector Donald L. MacLaurin. It was soon to be his turn to try to realize for the public good the ideal teacher he so eloquently described.

* * *

Unlike William Burns, Donald Leslie MacLaurin was appointed not just to a post but to a permanent building as well. That a second normal school was a provincial necessity had of late attracted little direct challenge. Indeed, since quite early in his tenure at the new Vancouver teacher training school Burns had become uneasy over high enrolment. In time the government responded,⁷⁴ and had by 1915 completed in Victoria a superlative facility the relative size and sophistication of which, compared with its Vancouver counterpart, immediately attracted Burns' attention.

By late November 1914 Victorians waited impatiently for news of a principal's appointment. D. L. MacLaurin got preferment. Teacher, principal and inspector, he enjoyed respect among students and colleagues alike and, following a full career, was described as a man whose knowledge of B.C. combined with teaching skill and executive ability enabled him to direct the training “of many of our most valuable teachers.”⁷⁵ Like Burns at Vancouver, MacLaurin shared with his staff the broad range of subjects and activities required by the Education department. MacLaurin himself cut a remarkably wide swath — English literature, composition and grammar, junior and intermediate grade language, primary and advanced reading, practice and principles of school law, psychology and history of education. Transferred from Vancouver, First

⁷³ MacLaurin, R, ARPS, 1914, p. A31.

⁷⁴ See JLA, Session 1914, vol. XLIII, p. 94. Cost entailed was a preliminary sum of \$332,382 and a supplement of \$64,000. See JLA, Session 1915, vol. XLIV, p. 15. Compare with \$54,000 initial and \$15,000 supplementary grants for the Vancouver Provincial Normal School, see JLA, Session 1909, vol. XXXVIII, p. 69; *ibid.*, Session 1910, vol. XXXIX, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Dr. F. T. Fairey, Superintendent of Education, cited in Henry C. Gilliland, *Notes on MacLaurin*, p. 2, “Provincial Normal School Principal's Office,” University of Victoria Archives, Box 80-56.

Assistant David M. Robinson handled primary and advanced arithmetic, intermediate and senior grade history and geography, and class management. Drawing master and technical instructor Harry Dunnell (also ex-Vancouver Normal School) taught drawing and writing during the first session, later adding manual training, including modelling and woodwork, as tools and supplies became available in the autumn of 1915.

Since it functioned under regulations common to Island and Mainland institutions, MacLaurin's Normal School in many respects matched Burns'. Students at the two provincial normal schools met common admission, examination, diploma and certification requirements. Their successes prompted similar annual press coverage, and accounts of their work appeared in the superintendent's yearly reports on the public schools of B.C. Nevertheless, several differences from the start distinguished the Victoria from the Vancouver enterprise. Although the more accommodating building, Victoria Normal School consistently recruited fewer students, in the order of 45 to 237, January to May 1915,⁷⁶ and 252 to 396, 1924-1925.⁷⁷ Victoria catered to all but Lower Fraser Valley and greater Vancouver candidates, these generally attending William Burns' normal school.⁷⁸ Victoria taught household science and manual training, subjects not available in Vancouver. Burns resented this curricular inequality and voiced his displeasure time after time,⁷⁹ particularly since Victoria's offerings in these disciplines could not possibly satisfy provincial demands, as each year was demonstrated by substantial registration in them at the Victoria Summer School for Teachers, operative since 1914. Concerning practice teaching arrangements, too, differences emerged. The two normal schools had at their disposal classrooms under the jurisdiction of their respective municipal school boards. In addition, though, the Victoria Normal School housed its own two-room model school. Though it came nowhere near meeting all MacLaurin's practice teaching requirements, it enabled colleagues and student teachers, on the spot, and at relative leisure, to discuss the many problems of practical work. A clear advantage in this respect, in MacLaurin's opinion it could not, however, offset yet another institutional difference detrimental to his

⁷⁶ Compare MacLaurin, PNSRP, ARPS, 1915, p. A54 with Burns, PNSRP, ARPS, 1915, p. A53.

⁷⁷ See PNSRP, ARPS, 1925, pp. M49, M50.

⁷⁸ ARPS, 1915, p. A54; 1916, p. A52; 1917, p. A53. This essential division of registrants proved a source of constant anxiety for Burns, whose job it was to dissuade, later forbid up-country students to attend the Vancouver Normal School.

⁷⁹ Examples include Burns, PNSRP, ARPS, 1918, p. D48; Burns, PNSRP, ARPS, 1920, p. C46.

efforts — the fact that the Vancouver School Board allowed “extra remuneration”⁸⁰ for service as a critic teacher, whereas the Victoria School Board did not.

It was in matters such as the Victoria Normal School’s relations with those professional teachers who helped student teachers plan, deliver and review practice lessons that MacLaurin’s persistent administrative style showed most favourably. He informed Superintendent Robinson that a modest outlay for honoraria would achieve parity with Vancouver’s policy and encourage Victoria teachers to furnish assistance beyond the “farcical” minimum of one practice lesson per week. He also persuaded Inspector E. B. Paul to approach the Victoria board on the subject, but as of early 1917 nothing had resulted.⁸¹ A little later he advised Robinson that after co-operating two and a half years, one city principal — J. A. Cunningham of Boys’ Central — had withdrawn support of the practice teaching program because of the burden of extra work for which his staff received no tangible recognition. The urgency of the difficulty, MacLaurin urged Robinson, was surely worthy of the Education minister’s immediate attention.⁸² Within three months Robinson had the matter in hand. The Victoria board was to establish the George Jay School as a model school whose “thoroughly competent” staff would receive for their participation an extra \$60 each per year, the Education department paying half. Victoria Inspector Paul likewise agreed to the further use for practice teaching of North Ward and Bank Street Schools⁸³ and invited MacLaurin to help select assisting teachers. By such tenacity, MacLaurin achieved three important goals: equivalence with procedure in Vancouver; the trust of practising teachers; and a voice in their selection as mentors for student teachers.

No less tenacious was Alexander Robinson, major engineer of that most important event, the establishment of B.C.’s first provincial normal school. Himself an ex-teacher and sometime principal of Vancouver’s

⁸⁰ MacLaurin, PNSRP, ARPS, 1916, p. A52.

⁸¹ MacLaurin to A. Robinson, Victoria, 18 September 1915, University of Victoria Archives [hereafter UVA], Box 80-56; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 20 September 1915, UVA, Box 80-56; MacLaurin to E. B. Paul, Victoria, 18 January 1917, UVA, Box 80-56; W. S. C. Pope, Secretary of the Board, to MacLaurin, Victoria, 31 January 1917, UVA, Box 80-56.

⁸² MacLaurin to A. Robinson, Victoria, 31 December 1917, UVA, Box 80-56.

⁸³ A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 19 March 1918, UVA, Box 80-56; Edward B. Paul to A. Robinson, Victoria, 14 March 1918, UVA, Box 80-56; MacLaurin to A. Robinson, Victoria, 20 March 1918, UVA, Box 80-56; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 22 March 1918, UVA, Box 80-56; Paul to MacLaurin, Victoria, 23 March 1918, UVA, Box 80-56.

first high school, for twenty years he drove the Education department tight-reined. Prodigious correspondence⁸⁴ over his signature as superintendent revealed a civil servant with a rational sense of his professional, if not his political, environment, and a profound loyalty to the cause of public education. He addressed premiers and ministers, deputies and their assistants, inspectors and principals, as well as a vast array of teachers, parents, students, board secretaries, contractors — anybody, in fact, who wrote him about anything, or to whom, unprompted, he was inclined to issue instructions. Ever present for the duration of this voluminous communication was concern for the affairs of the normal schools he helped create and the efforts of the two men, Burns and MacLaurin, to direct them.

Though the Education department's senior civil servant, Robinson remained a stickler for detail. He appeared ill-disposed toward minor slip-ups,⁸⁵ and waste, especially during wartime shortages, he refused to countenance,⁸⁶ not merely because of unnecessary costs but as well on account of procedural principles ignored in incurring them.⁸⁷ Responsible to his minister for well-run classrooms in B.C., he in turn kept meticulous watch over who and how many entered which normal school. He dealt with interminable exceptions to regulations in judgment of applicants who had passed matriculation exams at Columbia College in New Westminster but had not yet taken junior grade tests; mature students with non-professional studies outstanding; students who had passed 3rd-year commercial exams; those who had taught successfully in rural districts but held no provincial certification; those who had advanced course (junior grade) exams yet to sit; who were only 16 but wise beyond their age; those who missed much work during the influenza epidemic of

⁸⁴ See Superintendent of Education, *Letterbooks* [hereafter SEL], B.C. Provincial Archives. These are fairly complete for outgoing letters, 1873 to 1919 and constitute a splendid resource for B.C. social and educational history. For the period in question, *circa* 1915-1919, vols. 138-91 number close to 53,000 pages of letters touching on every aspect of B.C. public education.

⁸⁵ See, for example, A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 1 November 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 8987.

⁸⁶ A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 7 December 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 10010; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 27 February 1917, SEL, vol. 161, p. 1570; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 19 December 1917, SEL, vol. 170, p. 10339.

⁸⁷ A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 20 May 1918, SEL, vol. 173, p. 3435; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 12 April 1919, SEL, vol. 183, p. 2757; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 2 November 1915, SEL, vol. 147, p. 10121; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 20 April 1917, SEL, vol. 162, p. 2917; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 3 October 1917, SEL, vol. 167, p. 8193; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 11 October 1918, SEL, vol. 178, p. 8113.

1918-1919; or returned veterans with missing limbs.⁸⁸ In fact, despite his request that Burns interpret conditions of admission “as liberally as possible,” Robinson decided on many perplexing admissions cases himself.

Eventually, though, the administrative press of so many individual rulings proved too heavy even for Robinson. Regarding admissions, he filed Burns’ proposal to send advanced students to Vancouver and preliminary candidates to Victoria, pending further discussion on this politically sensitive subject with Education minister J. D. MacLean. Ultimately, the minister decided that beyond the standing arrangement whereby Vancouver Normal School admitted greater Vancouver and Lower Fraser Valley trainees and Victoria Normal School enrolled the rest, Burns and his staff should “ascertain what students have no particular reason for attending the Normal School at Vancouver,”⁸⁹ and instruct them to go instead to Victoria, exceptions to be treated on their merits.

Subsequent correspondence showed the social and political problems besetting anyone attempting to implement such vague instructions to the satisfaction of a superintendent still prone to take personal action in certain trying cases. In the B.C. interior, some students and their parents were in no way indifferent to which normal school best served their purposes. In Kelowna, for example, one group of acquaintances went ahead with house arrangements⁹⁰ in Vancouver so that their children could attend the Vancouver Normal School according to published regulations. Robinson told Burns to refuse them admission at Vancouver on the grounds of defiance.⁹¹ Yet shortly afterwards, he himself wrote to a Kelowna mother assuring her that Burns would “no doubt . . . allow” her daughter to live in Vancouver with an aunt while attending normal school there.⁹² These apparent inconsistencies hinged on fine distinctions

⁸⁸ A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 1 June 1915, SEL, vol. 142, p. 4101; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 21 June 1915, SEL, vol. 142, p. 4857; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 5 August 1915, SEL, vol. 144, p. 6260; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 10 August 1915, SEL, vol. 144, p. 6431; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 28 August 1917, SEL, vol. 165, p. 6913; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 23 August 1918, SEL, vol. 176, p. 6515; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 17 January 1918, SEL, vol. 170, p. 448; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 27 November 1918, SEL, vol. 179, p. 9307; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 7 October 1919, SEL, vol. 189, p. 8656; H. H. MacKenzie, R, ARPS, p. D29; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 1 June 1915, SEL, vol. 142, p. 4102.

⁸⁹ A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 1 February 1915, SEL, vol. 138, p. 818; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 6 December 1916, SEL, vol. 159, p. 10272.

⁹⁰ A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 24 July 1917, SEL, vol. 165, p. 5608.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² A. Robinson to Mrs. J. E. Reekie, Victoria, 10 August 1917, SEL, vol. 165, p. 6253.

between living with relatives as opposed to boarding with friends or making "house arrangements." At crisis point, Robinson ordered Burns "not to be guided by any political aspect. . . ." Swamped with appeals, Burns found it difficult to identify and reject every "political" argument for special treatment since many such appeals were shrouded in seemingly legitimate compassionate terms. Relentlessly, Robinson pressed him to state "at once" the reasons in each case that had induced him to admit "upper country" applicants, until Burns' retirement, hounding him to carry out to the letter the terms of the minister's understanding. Robinson, meantime, continued to handle certain constitutional subtleties himself. The St. Joseph's Convent authorities at Nelson, he wrote to Burns in 1918,

have been in communication with the office and I have informed them that since they have no branch of their institution in Victoria this Department would have no objection to allowing the pupils of their school to attend the Normal School in Vancouver on the distinct understanding that while in Vancouver they must remain in the house and under the charge of the Sisters of St. Joseph's Convent in Vancouver.⁹³

Beyond these internal administrative complications surrounding admissions policy, during the Great War and early post-war period, the provincial normal schools became well known as teacher training centres to which, for one reason or another, thousands of British Columbians could relate. Their senior personnel served on the Provincial Board of Examiners, setting as well as reading high school entrance examinations, or organizing and supervising these tests at various provincial localities. Some normal school staff carried out incidental inspectorial work and, under Robinson's direction, MacLaurin at one time investigated educational affairs at Victoria High School. Normal school staff also provided model timetables for inclusion in the *Manual of School Law*, addressed institutes, conventions and public meetings, and upon request wrote newspaper articles on various aspects of public education. Though constantly occupied with heavy administrative responsibilities, Burns and MacLaurin tried to keep alive their vision of good teachers. In aid of

⁹³ A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 15 August 1917, SEL, vol. 165, p. 6425; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 16 August 1917, SEL, vol. 165, p. 6456; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 16 January 1918, SEL, vol. 170, p. 407; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 21 January 1918, SEL, vol. 170, p. 532; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 25 January 1918, SEL, vol. 170, p. 721; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 6 February, 1919, SEL, vol. 181, p. 968; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 2 September 1919, SEL, vol. 187, p. 7251; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 8 August 1918, SEL, vol. 176, p. 5945.

producing them, the pace in and about their training centres continued brisk. Newspapers made much of graduation news. Near-graduates were eager to secure jobs and clamoured for vacancy listings. Conversely, board secretaries asked Robinson to help them find new teachers, especially for isolated rural schools. MLAs themselves took recruitment initiatives; on behalf of Mr. Yorston of Cariboo, Robinson asked MacLaurin if he had a "young woman graduating in a few days" and a good disciplinarian, "since the former teacher was virtually run out by some of the older boys." Amid these accounts and exchanges regarding their students' futures, principals and faculties pursued their surrogate parental roles, dealing with complaints over perceived injustices such as failure to grant diplomas, too-severe grading or disciplinary dismissal from class. In politically delicate cases, Robinson himself arbitrated, sometimes summoning staff to his Victoria office for explanations, but in general supporting his principals, though demanding of them convincing clarifications and reasons whenever public trust was at issue.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ This section is compressed from a great deal of correspondence. Comments refer only to items within the sentences of which the comments form a part. A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 5 November 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 9102; A. Robinson to D. M. Robinson, Victoria, 5 November 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 9105; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 9 August 1919, SEL, vol. 186, p. 6249. In 1915, A. Robinson appointed Burns presiding examiner, Abbotsford and Chilliwack Centre. "That you will accept this appointment," he wrote, "has been taken for granted." See A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 9 June 1915, SEL, vol. 142, p. 4435. A. Robinson to E. H. Murphy, Victoria, 27 April 1915, SEL, vol. 141, p. 3058; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 16 June 1916, SEL, vol. 153, p. 4249; Minutes, Council of Public Instruction, Box 1. Robinson requested through his principals that either Miss E. M. Coney (Vancouver) or Miss Ida Morris (Victoria) provide an article entitled "The Future of Music in the Schools." Miss Coney obliged. See A. Robinson to Burns and MacLaurin, Victoria, 13 September 1918, SEL, vol. 177, pp. 7154, 7155; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 18 September 1918, SEL, vol. 177, p. 7404; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 11 November 1915, SEL, vol. 147, p. 10412. Reference to teaching vacancy listings are made in A. Robinson to E. H. Murphy, Victoria, 11 January 1915, SEL, vol. 138, p. 237; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 4 December 1916, SEL, vol. 158, p. 10156; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 12 December 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 10168; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 25 November 1919, SEL, vol. 190, p. 10321. Examples of schools in need of teachers were the Giscombe School on the "Fraser River Grand Trunk Pacific, East of Prince George," and the Blue River School. See A. Robinson to Burns and MacLaurin, Victoria, 3 May 1917, SEL, vol. 163, pp. 3247, 3250; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 8 September 1917, SEL, vol. 167, p. 7255. The Giscombe authorities specified a man to teach. Robinson replied it was "almost impossible to secure a male teacher at present owing to the large number who have gone to the front." See A. Robinson to Leo Bower, Secretary, School District, Giscombe, B.C., Victoria, 3 May, 1917, SEL, vol. 163, p. 3258; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 3 February 1919, SEL, vol. 181, p. 856; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 24 August 1915, SEL, vol. 145, p. 7997; A. Robinson to J. D. MacLean, Minister of Education, Victoria, 20 February 1917, SEL, vol.

During these early years, too, Burns and MacLaurin eyed one another with a view to equal treatment for colleagues and students. Burns continued to urge the establishment at Vancouver of domestic science and manual training facilities to match Victoria's. MacLaurin asked that Victoria employ a stenographer-librarian like Vancouver's, that his assistant master's salary be made equivalent to Burns', and that, for consistency's sake, Victoria's drawing master, technical instructor, domestic science mistress, model school principal and model school teacher all receive salary raises. With their principals' support, staff at either normal school were eligible for subsidies aimed at professional development through attendance at Berkeley, Columbia, Stanford, Chicago, UBC and other centres of higher education in order that they might "keep in touch with the most advanced and approved methods of instruction, as well as with modern techniques in Education."⁹⁵

In August 1920, after twenty years as principal at Vancouver, William Burns retired. Toward the end of his career, he had joined MacLaurin in pushing for certain reforms, in particular complete non-professional standing as a condition for normal school admission and practice teaching arrangements for future high school teachers. With Burns' successor, D. M. Robinson, MacLaurin continued to press for further improvement, apparently to some avail. By 1920, junior grade standing became minimal for applicants. By 1921, as a means of more effective staff deployment, preliminary and advanced courses were conducted during alternate sessions. As of 1922, all but university graduates were required to finish nine months of continuous training in order to graduate. Under new arrangements in 1923, a normal school standing of "fair" earned an interim certificate only, valid for just two years. The same year, King Edward High School started to provide practice facilities and future high school teachers began a split training program of fifteen weeks at Vancouver Normal School and fifteen weeks at the University of British

161, p. 1386; A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 27 September 1917, SEL, vol. 167, p. 7988; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 30 October 1919, SEL, vol. 190, p. 9546; A. Robinson to MacLaurin, Victoria, 17 October 1919, SEL, vol. 189, p. 9031.

⁹⁵ See A. Robinson to Burns, Victoria, 23 October 1917, SEL, vol. 168, p. 8752; A. Robinson to A. E. Foreman, Public Works Engineer, Victoria, 5 February 1919, SEL, vol. 181, p. 936; A. Robinson to J. D. MacLean, Victoria, 27 January 1919, SEL, vol. 181, p. 517. Memoranda, resolutions, etc. (some undated) pertinent to the department's support of the professional development of its personnel may be found in the B.C. Provincial Archives, Council of Public Instruction, Box 1.

Columbia. Also announced in 1923 was junior matriculation as the preferred admissions standard.⁹⁶

By 1925, too, the normal schools had become vital parts of a burgeoning education system. In 1901, the year of that "most important event," as Superintendent Robinson had termed the Vancouver Normal School's opening, the government cost of teacher education was \$1,944.30, including Blair's salary of \$750. By 1925, two dozen staff including engineers, gardeners and janitors drew salaries amounting to over \$51,000 which, added to other teacher education costs, reached more than \$75,000,⁹⁷ about 4 percent of total expenditures for B.C. education. Though enrolment had peaked somewhat earlier, during 1924-1925, 548 candidates sought diplomas at the two training institutions, each trainee teaching about thirty-five practice lessons, thanks to the co-operation in Victoria of the North Ward, Oaklands and George Jay Schools and in Vancouver of the Vancouver Model, Cecil Rhodes and Lord Tennyson Elementary Schools (practice), and the Lord Roberts, Dawson, Central, Strathcona, Mount Pleasant and Simon Fraser Elementary Schools (observation).⁹⁸ Citizens, moreover, appeared proud of their provincial normal schools, whose surroundings as of 1925 had achieved horticultural maturity, rendering the buildings themselves popular civic attractions. Newspaper editors wrote of new instructional plans, explained the advent of fees, announced raised standards, congratulated students for their splendid showing, quoted Education minister MacLean on good teacher education and its connection with the dignity of labour and the value to the state of developing character in children, and told of enrolment nearly doubled, teacher supply strongly augmented and entrance requirements perceptibly tightened.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, ARPS, 1921, p. F44. Note that while J. B. DeLong, Inspector of High Schools, conceded the advantages to pupil teachers of practice teaching at the high school level, he observed that the plan interfered with the progress of the high school pupils themselves, see J. B. DeLong, R, ARPS, 1924, p. T36. References to sundry adjustments of normal school requirements occur sporadically in much correspondence. For consolidated information, see for instance ARPS, 1918, pp. D48, D49; ARPS, 1919, p. A45; ARPS, 1920, pp. C45, C47; ARPS, 1921, pp. F44, F45, F46; ARPS, 1922, pp. C11, C48, C49; ARPS 1923, pp. F11, F12, F48; ARPS, 1924, p. T36.

⁹⁷ ARPS, 1924, p. T29; D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, ARPS, 1921, p. F44; D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, 1922, p. C48. Note the reduction from sixty practice lessons reported by MacLaurin in 1916, PNSRP, ARPS, 1916, p. A53.

⁹⁸ MacLaurin, PNSRP, ARPS, 1924, p. T70; D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, ARPS, 1925, p. M49.

⁹⁹ *Province*, 11 April 1925, p. 26; *Times*, 21 November 1922, p. 7; *ibid.*, 25 July 1923, p. 9; *Colonist*, 26 July 1923, p. 5; *Times*, 23 January 1925, p. 9; *Colonist*, 26 October 1923, p. 5; *Times*, 30 May 1924, p. 7; *ibid.*, 29 May 1925, p. 9;

To this optimism reflected in the press was added confidence from within the education system itself. D. M. Robinson and MacLaurin each wrote of instructors thoroughly trained and experienced, schoolteachers co-operative in all respects, normal school students willing to work, model schools offering cheerful assistance, good morale all round, and weeding out of those who did not measure up.¹⁰⁰ In this last respect, Vancouver appeared to rule more severely. In 1924-1925, D. M. Robinson reported that of 396 candidates, 34 withdrew, 5 discontinued, 33 failed and 61 earned interim diplomas only, compared with MacLaurin's account of 174 trainees among whom 8 discontinued, 6 failed and 64 obtained interim status.¹⁰¹ Whether or not aware of these double standards, those who survived their training wrote affectionately of their time at normal school. They owed much to his example, some said of D. M. Robinson, "for if you had trod less loftily we might never have had to look so high."¹⁰² To him they owed "much of whatever success has been ours during our brief association with this institution," others declared of MacLaurin.¹⁰³ Principals reciprocated. D. M. Robinson congratulated students for "most satisfactory work and a splendid spirit."¹⁰⁴ And MacLaurin concluded it was "the unanimous opinion of the Faculty" that candidates were, "with few exceptions, admirably adapted to the work of teaching."¹⁰⁵ From the field, too, inspectors added their appraisal. The more sanguine among them thought new teachers had received at the normal schools "excellent preparation for their life-work," were fully capable of creditable efforts, appeared intimately knowledgeable of both subject and method, and were preferred by the average school district. Such criticism as did arise ranged from the mistakes of inexperience, through need for more thorough courses in English, management and school curriculum, to one charge that just a few normal school

Colonist, 8 September 1922, p. 5; *ibid.*, 27 May 1923, p. 29; *ibid.*, 24 January 1925, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ For details of these intramural perspectives, see ARPS, 1923, pp. F47, F48, *ibid.*, 1924, pp. T69, T70; *ibid.*, 1925, pp. M49-M51.

¹⁰¹ See D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, ARPS, 1925, p. M49; MacLaurin, PNSRP, ARPS, 1925, pp. M50-M51.

¹⁰² P.N.S. Class 1927-28, Provincial Normal School, Vancouver, B.C., *Annual*, 1927-1928, p. 7.

¹⁰³ *The Normal School Annual (Victoria)*, 1923-1924, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ D. M. Robinson, PNSRP, ARPS, 1924, p. T69.

¹⁰⁵ MacLaurin, PNSRP, ARPS, 1921, p. F45.

graduates were immature and irresponsible.¹⁰⁶ On the whole, though, inspectors seemed professionally well disposed toward qualified neophytes teaching in their districts.

Though more indicative of their own enthusiasm for the “new education” abroad in North America than of their particular reaction to products of the normal schools, occasional inspectors reminded beginning and veteran teacher alike to keep up with the literature and with changing times, educationally speaking. Their suggested reading lists attained impressive proportions, as did their fervour for mental measurement, standard tests, silent reading, psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, the project method, child study and socialized recitation. To help place this sort of reading within professional reach, they urged that district libraries be developed and school principals give inexperienced teachers “a training-in-service by directing their reading and study to the literature of the new education, and by demonstrations and periodical consultations. . . .”¹⁰⁷ In short, when they wrote of normal school graduates as such, by the mid 1920s B.C. inspectors described teachers who *did* well or who *could* do well, given broader, more intense attention in terms of what the two normal schools were already doing. And when they told of normal school graduates subsumed as beginners, observers like Inspector H. H. MacKenzie and his colleague J. T. Pollock wrote eloquently of the “new education,” not as a function of the normal schools’ curriculum but rather as “training-in-service” and summer school. Though closely interested in teacher training, as of 1925 B.C. inspectors had thus left the overall reputation of the provincial normal schools largely unchallenged. Such confrontation would be left to two prominent Canadian educational administrators who would soon prove singularly forthright at taking radical issue with the performance of British Columbia’s normal schools.

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In his 1924 annual report to Education minister J. D. MacLean, Superintendent S. J. Willis spoke of a “request made to your Department by many public bodies” for a public education stock-taking in the prov-

¹⁰⁶ See the following reports from inspectors, ARPS, 1915, p. A41; *ibid.*, 1916, pp. A29, A36; *ibid.*, 1917, pp. A24, A35; *ibid.*, 1918, pp. D23, D25, D33; *ibid.*, 1920, p. C26; *ibid.*, 1921, pp. F17, F21, F23, F27, F28, F34; *ibid.*, 1922, pp. C22, C26, C27, C28, C32, C40; *ibid.*, 1923, pp. F27, F28, F29, F30, F35, F39; *ibid.*, 1924, pp. T41, T50; *ibid.*, 1925, pp. M31, M35.

¹⁰⁷ For instance, MacKenzie, R, ARPS, 1923, F28.

ince.¹⁰⁸ One such request had come in 1922 from the B.C. Teachers' Federation, a proposal later endorsed by both the Provincial Trustees' Association and the Provincial Parent-Teacher Association. At the 1924 BCTF annual convention, Willis announced the department's decision to act.¹⁰⁹ Principal commissioners were to be Dr. J. Harold Putman and Dr. George M. Weir. At the time of their appointment, Putman was Ottawa's top school inspector. Formerly a normal school instructor in English and psychology, he held an earned doctorate in pedagogy, was active in the Dominion Education Association¹¹⁰ and was a leading figure in Canada's version of the child study movement. On the eve of their educational survey, his associate Weir (D.Paed.) was *the* Professor of Education at UBC's recently established Department of Education, coming there from Saskatchewan, where he had served successively as teacher, inspector and normal school principal. Also an enthusiast for the "new education,"¹¹¹ future B.C. Education minister G. M. Weir joined J. H. Putman in generating the most quickly executed, most comprehensive and exacting report on education the province had up to that time witnessed. Assisting them were experts on general education, finance, testing, administration and statistics.¹¹²

Under their terms of reference,¹¹³ Putman and Weir listened to and/or accepted in writing "resolutions, opinions, and conclusions,"¹¹⁴ from a remarkable if not complete spectrum of the B.C. public.¹¹⁵ They also

¹⁰⁸ See S. J. Willis, ARPS, 1924, p. T10.

¹⁰⁹ J. H. Putman and G. M. Weir, *Survey of the School System* (Victoria, B.C.: King's Printer, 1925), p. V.

¹¹⁰ In 1917, A. Robinson had supplied him with a statement of "the conditions of education affairs in B.C." See A. Robinson to J. H. Putman, Victoria, 6 June 1917, SEL, vol. 163, p. 4029.

¹¹¹ Despite such enthusiasm, others have argued that though the survey which Weir helped produce was a "condemnation of traditional concepts and practices," it was nonetheless "essentially a conservative document" in that it did not seek to achieve through improved schools "a new, better, or radically changed society." See Jean Mann, "G. M. Weir and H. B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?" in J. Donald Wilson and David Jones (eds.), *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary, Alberta: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980), p. 93.

¹¹² Putman and Weir, *Survey . . .*, p. V. The experts were Mr. J. L. Paton, sometime High Master, Manchester Grammar School; Professors H. F. Angus and S. E. Beckett, UBC; Professor Peter Sandiford, University of Toronto; Professor F. C. Ayer, University of Washington; and Mr. A. W. Cocks.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. Included were "school boards; boards of trade; councils of city and rural municipalities; trade and labour councils; associated property owners;

made over 150 visits to B.C. schools and spent ten days inspecting the two normal schools.¹¹⁶ These visits, complemented by 215 conferences (some lasting six hours) held in city and rural municipalities and rural districts, laid the basis for a critique of the B.C. teacher, *circa* 1924, severe beyond public expression on the subject up to that point. This was how the commissioners summed up their findings:

Too many unmarried teachers; the immaturity of the teachers, especially in rural schools; lack of vision and professional pride; deficient academic and professional qualifications; unwillingness to take additional professional training beyond the legal minimum; lack of experience; inability adequately to profit from experience; tendency to change schools too frequently; lack of special preparation for teaching in ungraded schools; lack of sympathy with, and appreciation of, problems of rural life; dogmatism; lack of personality.¹¹⁷

This dismal rendering prefaced a preliminary consideration of an ideal normal school. Instead of learning tricks at it, the commissioners said, beginners ought to leave in possession of a philosophy of education as a guide to classroom practice. Instructors should deal with principles of educational psychology, not dictate notes on “tricks of the trade.” For it was the job of the normal school “to make” the teacher in the sense that method was “largely individual” and would fall into place once more general education was attended to. Looked at this way, normal schools became “strategic centres” deserving tangible support. They taught “rural sociology, applied educational psychology . . . and rural administrative problems. . . .” They also provided practice teaching for rural, ungraded school conditions, not just as a means of rehearsing the minor and manipulative functions of one-room school management, but rather as preparation on a sound theoretical basis for that “interaction of mind upon mind” which every child, urban or rural, deserves as a right. In sum, the ideal normal school had seven emphases: child study; ethics or social psychology; methods and curriculum; practice teaching; liberal education; social sensitivity; and physical health. Overall, it was a

ratepayers' associations; local councils of women; university clubs; Canadian Clubs; Chapters of the I.O.D.E., Rotary, Kiwanis, Gyro, and Lions Clubs; librarians' associations; Native Sons of Canada; Native Sons of British Columbia; boy scouts' associations; ministerial associations; child welfare associations; and representatives of other organizations.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

“laboratory for child study — a place for the observation of child growth.”¹¹⁸

Against this glittering image, B.C.’s normal schools paled by comparison. A few minimal reforms aside, said Putman and Weir, the normal schools’ inexcusable aberration was their conception of teaching as a trade dependent on definite methods; thus definite instruction in these definite methods became their preoccupation. But, Putman and Weir contended, teaching *wasn’t* a trade — it was a science. And since only this premise could justify any normal school’s existence, British Columbia’s normal schools should fall into line with it insofar as it affected their organization and administration, curriculum, ways of imparting knowledge, course duration and practice teaching.

On the first count — organization and administration — Putman and Weir took a most careful look at staff recruitment, qualifications and deployment. They assessed the best instructors as really satisfactory, the next best as fairly good under careful direction, and the balance “lacking in the scholarship and professional training necessary for normal school work,” in all very faint praise indeed. Unfortunately, they continued, meagre budgets hampered quality staff recruitment. School principals, for instance, considered themselves financially better off staying put. Accordingly, the normal schools had been appointing in their place poorly qualified instructors willing to accept reduced, even minimal remuneration. One adverse consequence was that intramural discussions assumed administrative rather than intellectual patterns. Another was that those too young or too old or too specialized had dropped out of touch with the “actual school problems of the Province.” Yet another was that for want of pedagogical ingenuity, many normal school teachers were addicted to dictating notes instead of having their students read educational texts.¹¹⁹

The second area of criticism — curriculum — the commissioners introduced by outlining the 1921 syllabus and then enumerating its manifold shortcomings. In brief, the normal schools’ program called for school course of studies, methods, psychology, management and history of education, in addition to observation and practice teaching. Collectively, their curricular faults were assessed as including a lack of tests and measurements, inadequate texts, neglected educational psychology and rural sociology, vague, anachronistic and poorly scheduled educational

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 175, 189, 194.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 204.

history, understocked libraries, and students too immature in any event to benefit from what little intellectual stimulation such a lean curriculum might possibly produce.¹²⁰

Closely linked with curriculum was the third subject of concern — knowledge transmission by indiscriminate use of lectures. Not that the commissioners denied the rightful place of the lecture for introducing or summarizing a topic or series of discussions. For several reasons, though they deemed lecturing inappropriate as the unique teaching device. For one thing, few who delivered lectures actually excelled in the art. For another, lectures denied students an active part in an intellectual transaction. Then, too, student teachers themselves nurtured on the lecture method in all probability would inadvisedly adopt it as their own way of teaching in the public school classrooms of B.C. More threatening than all of these reasons was the fact that lectures stressed subject matter, whereas the ideal normal school, that “laboratory for child study,” necessarily placed its emphasis on the child.¹²¹

A fourth subject of disapproval — length of the teacher training program — followed. In this section, Putman and Weir reacted to the 1924 B.C. Normal School Instructors’ Association resolution that the pre-service teacher training term be substantially extended. The Association had based its resolution on three contentions: that there was never sufficient time for practice teaching; that some candidates graduated too young; and that with longer preparation, students could better assimilate relevant subject matter and relate it more closely to method. Responding negatively to this more-of-the-same route to improvement, the investigators said they believed additional subject matter ought to be taught in the high schools and that brilliant younger students should be encouraged to complete senior matriculation before entering normal school, thereby avoiding under-age graduation. With respect to a two-year course, as an alternative, they proposed tightening the institutional rigging; that is, reorganizing “to do more efficient work in the one year now devoted to professional training” before seriously considering a second year. They approved, however, of a short extension from thirty-six to forty weeks, provided the month thus gained was used for practice teaching and “experimental education.”¹²²

A fifth matter — practice teaching — also came in for censure. Instead of being a laboratory where a candidate’s “theories and . . . mettle” were

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-14, *passim*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-17, *passim*.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 217-19, *passim*.

“put to the proof” said the commissioners, the practice classroom often became the site of an artificial, stage-set “performance” during which children, confused by the presence of two teachers, one of them a student herself, tried to cope with a set lesson the success or failure of which depended upon imponderables. These lessons were often as short as twenty minutes and not necessarily related to other lessons in a sequence. Accordingly, they precluded experience in that continuity necessary to developing good classroom management, a subject supposedly central to the normal school curriculum, but actually lacking systematic application. Practice teaching, moreover, called for specially qualified teachers and excellent schools. But, the commissioners observed, participating boards, especially in Vancouver, did not always seek normal school approval of their critic teachers, nor did teachers themselves seek these training assignments in any numbers or with particular enthusiasm.¹²³

At an earlier juncture in their report, Putman and Weir had emphasized that their remarks on the normal schools were not intended as “a sweeping indictment.”¹²⁴ Yet the sheer scope and intensity of their argument, plus the number, complexity and sensibility of their recommendations, stunned not a few. In his 1925 annual report Superintendent S. J. Willis acknowledged only briefly the suggestions which, if carried out, he thought would improve teacher training.¹²⁵ Reaching, it seemed, for even a fragment of optimism in the commissioners’ survey, the *Province* declared that there had been “some praise” but composed its headline to the effect that the normal schools had lost their case for proficiency.¹²⁶ In a lengthy editorial the *Colonist* reminded its readers how difficult it was to keep educational institutions in phase with discernible social change and, musing “we get the kind of educational institutions we deserve,” invited the Department of Education and the general public to sample the “food for thought” the educational survey had prepared.¹²⁷ In response, Vancouver Normal School instructors and their Victoria colleagues called on Education minister J. D. MacLean, later conferring privately at the Strathcona Hotel. What they discussed at either meeting they were for the moment unwilling to share with the press.¹²⁸ In the wake of the Putman-Weir assessment, however, there could have emerged

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-22, *passim*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹²⁵ See ARPS, 1925, p. M10.

¹²⁶ *Province*, 14 October 1925, p. 30.

¹²⁷ *Colonist*, 10 November 1925, p. 4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 November 1925, pp. 1-2.

few easy solutions for the problems they might have addressed. The proof is that over half a century later similar problems continued to haunt British Columbia teacher educators who in many respects worked under far more favourable conditions.

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What had gone wrong? How was it that B.C.'s provincial normal schools, since 1901 respected components of the public education system, should in 1925, with apparent suddenness, become the targets of such fundamental discredit? Why had the "most important event" — establishment of the first normal school at Vancouver — not led to better things? Were the normal schools really that badly off, or was there something basically amiss with the survey itself? Did it in fact reflect a province at odds with its teacher education facilities and programs, or simply the predetermined opinions of two dynamic, articulate progressives?

Had there developed, for instance, an unbridgable gap between the Putman-Weir blueprint for thoroughly professional teacher education and the powerful social, political and economic motives driving certain normal school promoters towards goals somehow abstracted from any educational function? To be sure, politicians, editors, civic officials, local suppliers, boarding house proprietors, property developers, architects, contractors, realtors and tourist planners were caught up in promotional activities that had very little to do with the educational workings of the normal schools they so ardently supported. No doubt they gave those who ran, used or benefited from the normal schools the impression that all was well. Indeed, they had good reason to do so. The normal schools, after all, constituted impressive monuments to the west's ability to match the east when it came to constructing important public buildings. They inspired civic pride. They stood, moreover, as evidence of equal treatment at a time when so many Island-Mainland, Victoria-Vancouver, Coast-Upper Country rivalries still persisted. In the legislature, too, questions arose not in relation to what was taught at the normal schools, how and by whom, but regarding what they cost, or the propriety of disbursements to those involved with their construction and maintenance. In the press as well, journalists explored their indirect importance, not as educational institutions in their own right, but as pawns in the larger game of locating a provincial university. Or they covered occasions such as closing ceremonies featuring sentimental exchanges among normal school teachers, graduating students and official guests, and wrote effu-

sively of how splendidly the teacher training centres were doing. Little wonder that where quality of instruction or recency of educational theory were concerned, the more general politics of early B.C. teacher education proved hugely distractive.

Alternatively, did the graceful normal school buildings themselves subdue, if not extinguish, the impulse to relate critically their inner life to the day-to-day problems of B.C. provincial schools, let alone to research findings at prominent American graduate schools of education? For in their day, B.C.'s normal schools were no ordinary buildings. At Vancouver an arched entrance, mock battlements, square corners trimmed with New Zealand white stone, and a complex roof line, together with sturdy towers and chimneys, signalled an educational enterprise of some considerable importance. So did the interior rooms and furnishings, particularly the assembly hall with its sloping floor, double aisles, raised platform, stained glass windows and delicate, bowed balcony.¹²⁹ At Victoria, too, a structure of elegance, symmetry and pleasing horizontal reach, complete with impressive clock tower, graced Mount Tolmie. Inside, a superb assembly hall likewise set a serious tone. In this spacious facility the plaster busts of Shakespeare, Goethe, Virgil and Homer viewed with empty-eyed serenity an arched platform facing a classical curved balcony. Midway, a high window decorated with B.C.'s coat-of-arms in vivid stained glass cast a mellow light upon those gathered within.¹³⁰ Certainly, the supposition that what went on in places such as these two magnificent training schools must have been educationally sound — even excellent — is natural enough.

Or could it be argued that the Putman-Weir critique of B.C. teacher education startled so many because provincial inspectors as a group had up to 1925 rarely confronted the normal schools with any searching challenges? In their most congratulatory moods during this period, inspectors had instead reported consistently that rural boards liked to hire teachers trained at the normal schools. They wrote, also, of individual successes as normal school graduates took with them into the field new subjects such as domestic science, physical education, manual training and commercial studies. Admittedly, inspectors were not always so sanguine, and in their grimmer frames of mind they lamented the scandal of a few incompetents who had somehow run the gauntlet of normal school

¹²⁹ For striking photographs, see ARPS, 1910, *passim*. For plans, see Pearce and Hope, Architects, April 1908, *Blueprints*, Provincial Normal School, Sheets 1, 2 and 3. Originals in Vancouver City Archives.

¹³⁰ *Provincial Normal School, Victoria. Specifications*. B.C. Provincial Archives.

requirements to the educational detriment of children now under their inept charge. Yet to most inspectors, even these fugitives seemed not to indicate that the normal schools were seriously out of touch with educational innovation so much as that these institutions should afford more "attention" to important components of a long-established program. Indeed, the inspectors' point of view was clearly valued in teacher training circles. By 1925 there had been or yet remained on the normal school staffs at least seven ex-inspectors of schools or services.¹³¹ During their tenure, those of their inspector colleagues in the field who occasionally flirted with the ideals of the "new education" did not ask the normal schools to teach these beliefs, recommending instead systematic in-service training for teachers, which inspectors and their principals would conduct, as the most promising ameliorating factor in the education of British Columbia children.

Again, was it that the normal schools administratively engulfed the educational reformers — Superintendent Robinson and Principals Burns and MacLaurin — most directly responsible for their advent and early management? It would be reasonable to expect that their pre-appointment statements in favour of normal schools, plus their direct understanding of education in the field, would have laid the foundation for up-to-date teacher training institutions. Nor, as their subsequent reports, public statements and correspondence revealed, were they unaware of a developing need for longer terms, stiffer admission requirements, expanded curricula, increased practice, augmented libraries, preparation for rural teaching and improved building facilities — all concerns reflected in the Putman-Weir recommendations.¹³² Yet at the time of the educational survey, the normal schools seemed, after all, little changed from their initial policies and routines, and perhaps only modestly altered with respect to program. Somehow the day-to-day preoccupation with getting paper off desks — invoices, vouchers, incidental reports, records, requisitions, testimonials, complaints, assessments, contracts, inquiries — together with certain seasonal events such as sessional openings, ceremonial closures, examinations and annual reports, stood in the way of longer-range, more sustained exchanges over aims or ideals or learning or

¹³¹ Burns, MacLaurin, H. H. MacKenzie, A. Anstey, A. R. Lord (from April 1925), H. Dunnell (*Manual Training*), and V. L. Denton.

¹³² As A. W. Rogers notes, many of the Putman and Weir recommendations had been subjects of concern to Normal School personnel in the years leading up to the 1925 survey. See his "Riding Out the Storm: The Normal Schools and the Putman and Weir Survey of the School System," unpublished manuscript, UBC, 1982, p. 4.

childhood. In an ironic way, this administrative busyness perhaps isolated the normal schools. Having heralded an educational panacea — normal schools — which their government had seen fit to inaugurate and leave to their collective professional care, three educational leaders apparently discovered they had little time to explore essentially educational issues. In office, they were swallowed up in the bureaucratic particulars of institutional life. Though Putman and Weir did not conceive of the problem in quite this way, it is not unlikely that administrative imperatives in fact reduced the level of intellectual activity at the normal schools.

Looked at yet another way, could it have been that up to 1925, B.C.'s normal schools were justifiably confident that through their respective efforts over these years, their teacher candidates were actually satisfied with the training they received? As in the case of one who paid homage to MacLaurin's lectures with their "clearcut notes on arithmetic and class management,"¹³³ yearbook esprit de corps must be tempered with the caution its sense of occasion demands. And, of course, not all were so kindly in their praise. On the other hand, future teachers continued to arrive by the hundreds seeking certification through attendance at Vancouver or Victoria normal schools. One might assume that either they were indeed content with their instruction or, in the credentialist society they inhabited, willing to take in their stride whatever curriculum, organization, length of study, practice teaching arrangements or mode of instruction at the time obtained. Further, were not their parents satisfied to leave educational matters to the professional discretion of instructional staffs — delighted, in short, that their daughters or sons should qualify, regardless of how, for a respected means of self-support in uncertain times?

Finally, is there a case for supposing that dramatic differences separating the normal schools' generally good reputation from the Putman-Weir account of their perceived ineptitudes were functions not of the schools' actual shortcomings in 1925 but of the commissioners' own visitation schedule and overall progressive outlook while carrying it out? Concerning schedules, Rogers¹³⁴ has reminded us that Putman and Weir called on the normal schools only in September 1924, "when the year had barely started" and their staffs were occupied with settling hundreds of beginning students into courses and routines "totally new to them." Understandably, here was an occasion for "explicit instruction with strong direction." But it was scarcely representative of teaching methods

¹³³ *The Normal School Annual (Victoria), 1925-1926*, p. 9.

¹³⁴ Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

pursued throughout the year. As for educational outlook, normal school pioneers Robinson, Burns and MacLaurin had been educational general practitioners entering teacher education from posts in public school systems. They held no earned advanced degrees. From the start, they, their staffs, and immediate successors served educationally conservative teacher training institutions stressing the supremacy of practice teaching. Conversely, Putman and Weir arrived on the scene in possession of earned doctorates in pedagogy, their enthusiasm for child study, measurement, psychology and advanced studies for normal school personnel reflecting both the substance and level of their own academic achievements and educational leadership roles. As their 1925 *Survey of the School System* clearly shows, what they were looking for in a normal school was a "laboratory for child study." That they did not find one in British Columbia is hardly surprising. As official critics, though, it was their task to criticize. They did so in generous measure.