



A Nice, Jewish Teacher: How American Elementary Education Became “Women’s Work”

Dr. Shira D. Epstein

Dr. Shira Epstein is dean of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education and an assistant professor of Jewish education. She joined the JTS faculty in 2004 and during her time here has taught courses to master’s and executive doctoral students and served as coordinator of the Pedagogy and Teaching Concentration. She has received multiple fellowships, grants, and awards in the field, and has published numerous articles and lectured widely about issues in Jewish education and gender equity.

Dr. Epstein’s research explores ways to support educators in reflecting upon their practice through a gender lens. She was founding project director for Addressing Evaded Issues in Jewish Education and she codeveloped Evaded Issues in Jewish Education: A Resource Guide for Jewish Educators, and the Educational Jewish Moments methodology. She authored two curricula for Jewish Women International: “Strong Girls, Healthy Relationships: A Conversation on Dating, Friendship, and Self-Esteem” and “Strong Girls! Friendships, Relationships, and Self-Esteem.”

Source 1

*Fifty years a toiling teacher
Many pangs she knew!
Sacrificed a happy fireside!
Asked for pleasures few!
Proudly she, when duty beckoned,
Rendered service true!*

Maltz, J.I. (1926). A tribute. *Brooklyn Teachers Association Fifty-Second Annual Report*. p. 20.

As cited in: Rousmaniere, K. (1997). *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective*. New York: Teachers College Press. (p. 41)

Source 2

“We are expected to be an arithmetician, a historian, a grammarian, a disciplinarian, a librarian, a sociologist, a penman, an artist, a musician, a model, a moralist, an attendance officer, a clerk, a nurse, a banker, an athlete, a dancer, a supervisor of play and recreation, an engineer, a community-center worker, a farmer, a housekeeper, a medical and sanitary inspector, a host or hostess. We are expected to discover the mentally deficient, the deaf, the feeble-minded, the exceptional and a few more just such. Besides the three R’s we are expected to teach thrift, self-government, [and] sex hygiene... We must be resourceful, display initiative, have confidence in ourselves, make our teaching attractive... In fact the demand is so great, teachers hardly know what to slur or what to stress in teaching” – Isabel Ennis, first woman president of the Brooklyn Teachers Association

Ennis, I. (1918). *What the public owes the teacher*. In Forty-fourth annual report of the Brooklyn Teachers Association, pp. 13-18

As cited in: Rousmaniere, K. (1997). *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective*. New York: Teachers College Press. (p. 54).

Source 3

“The candidate was judged on her appearance, neatness, ‘breeding’, energy and alertness. Her voice was supposed to be audible, pleasant, and very well modulated, without being nasal, high pitched, monotonous, strident or noisy; and ought to inspire confidence, not fear. In other words, a teacher’s voice had to be capable of being heard with pleasure, not with pain. Her speech was to be clearly articulated, grammatical, and free from vulgarisms and foreignisms. Any student whose speech was deemed defective, of poor quality, or having a foreign accent was screened by officials in the teacher training programs. Sometimes her admission was contingent upon losing her accent”

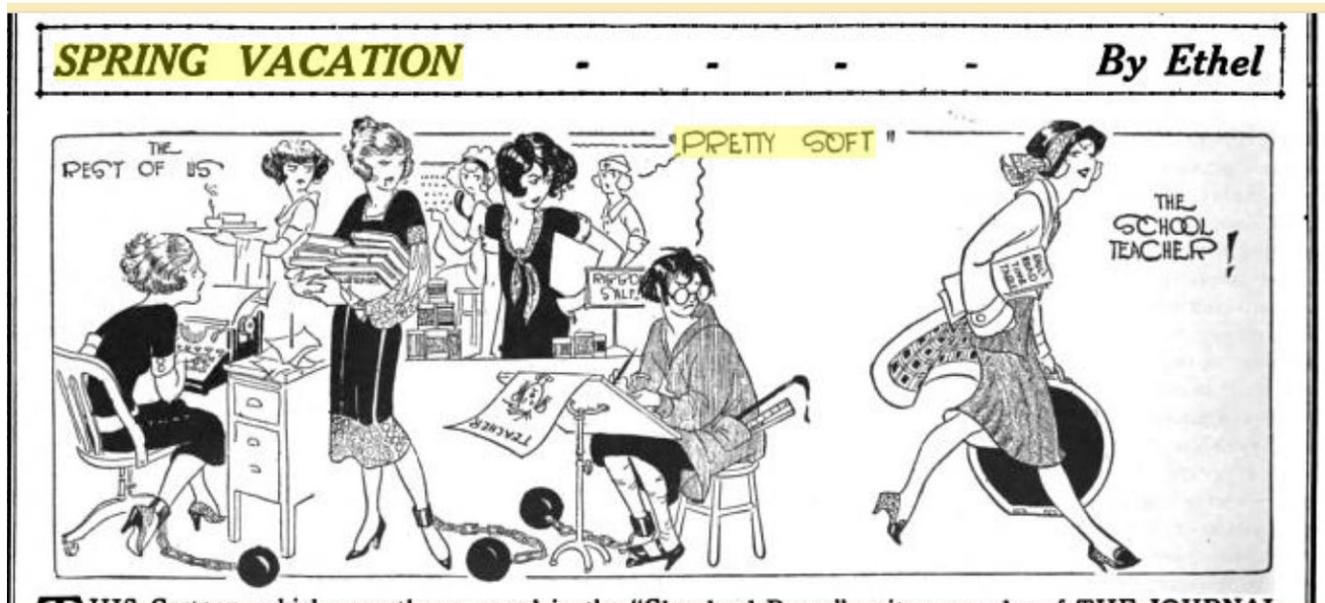
Markowitz, R. J. (1993). *My Daughter, The Teacher*. New Brunswick, N.J. Rutgers University Press. (p. 79).

Source 4

“Ruth Gold had hoped to teach high school chemistry, but a Hunter College dean told her that because she was only four feet, nine inches, she would never obtain a such a position, but should, instead, teach kindergarten, where the height regulation was also waived. A too youthful appearance could also be a detriment, and Etta Ginsberg was also prevented from teaching in the high schools because her appearance belied her age...Her advisory claimed that the Examiners would be prejudiced by her appearance, which was closer to that of a student than a teacher; nor would they believe she could maintain discipline, so she, too, was slotted to teach kindergarten...Alleged obesity also barred many from teaching, as it did one woman who, at five feet, two inches and 165 pounds, was denied a license”

Markowitz, R. J. (1993). *My Daughter, The Teacher*. New Brunswick, N.J. Rutgers University Press. (p. 83).

Source 5



National Education Association Research Bulletin, Fall 1926

Source 6

From the New York Times, September 6, 2014

Why Don't More Men Go Into Teaching?



For decades, teaching was one of the few fields open to women, and they still dominate. Lambert/Getty Images

By **Motoko Rich**

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