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THE ECONOMICS OF "EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK" IN THE SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK CITY

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FOR some time the Interborough Association of Women Teachers in New York City has conducted a vigorous agitation under the banner "Equal pay for equal work". This motto has won wide acceptance. Taken literally "Equal pay for equal work" is self-evidently just and reasonable, and persons or governing bodies who oppose it are put on the defensive. But in connection with the schools the phrase is not to be taken literally.

It is a factory phrase. For manual workers equal pay for equal work is embodied in the piece-work system, a system generally preferred when the work is of a routine character and when the output of each worker under exactly the same conditions can be measured with precision. A fixed piece price is paid for spinning a yard of cotton, for cutting a dozen coats, for rolling a ton of steel, for making a gross of paper boxes, for stitching a score of shirtwaists. Though in fact men and women rarely perform the same process, even when they work in the same factory, yet the pay per unit is fixed regardless of the age, sex, color, or competence of the worker. There is equal pay for equal work. Superior skill means superior speed and increased output, and pay is proportioned simply to output.

But nobody has ever found a satisfactory way to measure the output of a teacher. In England one way has been tried. In the early seventies, when the public schools were made in part an imperial charge, the manufacturers, who were dominant in Parliament, were anxious lest the imperial grants should be so awarded as to encourage laziness among teachers. Somebody hit on the phrase, "Payment by results." That settled the matter. The phrase caught the fancy of men who ran woolen mills and iron works, men who wanted some rule of thumb by

which to measure whether the nation was getting what it paid for. So every year an imperial inspector visited the schools and put to each boy and girl a test in reading, writing, arithmetic, and so on. The exact number of sums worked without mistake, and of misspelt words in the dictation exercises, the precise number of errors each youngster made in reading—all were written down, and the money paid by the government to help that school was proportioned to those returns.

Sometimes a teacher's salary consisted of the grants so obtained; always the teacher's professional standing and promotion were determined by these miscalled "results." In consequence the teacher who was most cruel, who kept children late in school, who sacrificed most relentlessly the finer parts of education, who drove the helpless youngsters at the bayonet's point, as it were, who wasted no precious moments in merely training the faculties—that teacher got the most money and the most rapid advancement. To their honor be it said that the teachers of England for decades combated the hideous system. At last they convinced legislators that the growth of a child's mind, the emanations of a teacher's spirit, cannot be measured by yard stick or quart pot, and the system of "payment by results" was relegated to museums of instruments of torture.

America has been free from any factory method of attempting to gauge the teacher's work. Nobody has ever seriously proposed to establish piecework in schools and so give equal pay for equal work. The battle cry, like most political catchwords, is inexact and misleading. The Interborough Association means by the "equal pay" principle the merging of the salary schedules where the schedules now distinguish between men and women, so that, whatever other differences of qualification the schedules take into account, they shall ignore differences of sex in the teachers.

To determine the economic and pedagogical results which would flow from the adoption of this principle it is necessary to examine first the system upon which the existing schedules are constructed. Why are thirty-one complicated schedules, which group teachers by a variety of standards, adopted at all? Why is not each teacher judged individually? Because, in New

York, where the army of teachers, instructors, directors, principals and superintendents numbers 17,073, individual treatment is physically impossible, and, if it were tried, the schools would be permeated with politics. Perforce the army is divided into a few groups and the members of the same group are paid upon principles which ignore their individual differences of quality.

In constructing salary schedules what elements are taken into account? A number can be detected, of which the chief are: 1. A living wage. 2. Years of experience or age. 3. Length and quality of preparation for the work. 4. Responsibility of the duty performed. 5. Total demand upon the taxpayer which the schedules entail and willingness of the taxpayer to meet the demand. 6. Adjustment over a long period of the supply of teachers to the demand.

Consider these elements separately.

1. A teacher is expected from the first month of work to be self-supporting and to live in a manner befitting the dignity of the profession. Not simply a bare subsistence, but refined recreation and continued culture as well as freedom from economic anxiety about the future are essential to the discharge of the teacher's high duties. On what sum can a young person in New York secure these advantages? That sum must fix the minimum paid even though stark necessity would force sufficient unfortunates to accept less, temporarily, if less were offered. For some years the New York minimum has been \$600 for the first year, an amount, as I shall show later, admitted to be inadequate at present.

2. Normally, by added experience, a teacher for several years becomes more valuable year by year. Therefore an annual increase of salary is granted automatically, falling like the rain upon the just and the unjust, except that the eighth and thirteenth increments are given only upon satisfactory reports of the teacher's work. In practice the increment is hardly ever withheld. But no attempt is made to determine at what age a teacher reaches maximum efficiency. Maximum salary for grade work in the elementary schools is reached by women in 16 years and by men in 12 years, not because the men reach their maximum efficiency more rapidly than women, but be-

cause a more rapid advance to their highest salary has been judged necessary to hold them in the profession. Probably most men and women are as efficient after five or six years' service as they ever become for grade work.

3. A minimum qualification of scholarship, character and experience is set for all teachers, but the minimum for a teacher of the graduating class in the elementary schools is higher than for the lower grades and for the high schools higher than for the graduating class. Therefore the salaries for these upper positions are also higher.

Even if additional academic preparation be not requisite for teaching higher grades, it is desirable to have some "plums" in the schools, that can be given to the pick of the staff for encouragement. Some breaks in the monotony of equal pay for equal age stimulate a body of workers to do their best in competition for the "plums." Therefore extra emoluments have been given to teachers of the seventh and eight years.

4. Further, the greater the responsibility the higher the pay. Principals are paid more than class teachers, superintendents more than principals.

5. Schedules must be so adjusted as not to make upon the taxpayer a larger gross demand than he will honor. Quite properly the cost of education mounts ever higher; but, in any year, there is a maximum which the taxpayer will allow without rebellion, a highest measure compounded of his ability to pay, the value he sets upon education and the influence of the most enlightened citizens upon him. Presumably if teachers were paid the salaries of ambassadors the highest talent in the country would be attracted to the profession. But ambassadorial emoluments, however desirable they might be both for the nation and for the teachers are practically unattainable. Taxpayers will not adopt, thus far, Froebel's injunction: "Let us live for our children."

6. Over a long period the supply of teachers of requisite quality should equal the demand, and salaries that will attract the supply must be paid. What is the requisite quality? There's the rub. Examinations tell only part of the truth; college training cannot make "silk purses out of sows' ears." Only

roughly can the expert superintendent tell whether the quality among ten thousand teachers is as good today as it was ten years ago. Teaching is an art for which the elusive quality of personality—the product of heredity, early surroundings, home influences, native gifts—is as essential as for painting. Of two painters who have had precisely the same masters and the same experience, one may produce masterpieces fit for an imperial gallery and the other daubs fit for a saloon; just so of two teachers of equal academic training, one may radiate noble, the other ignoble influences. Who shall measure the personality of the teacher or compass the growth of the pupil's intelligence? No radiometer can register the emanations of a teacher's spirit, no X-rays expose the buddings of a child's mind.

When the refined daughters of Massachusetts left the cotton mills of Lowell and their places were supplied by peasant immigrants who could not read the "Lowell Offering" which their predecessors published, the quality of the cotton sheeting did not deteriorate, because the character of the operator is not embodied in cotton goods. But, should the same change occur among teachers, the quality of the children at graduation would inevitably run down; for the teacher's spirit, partly reproduced in the children, is the most precious element of their education. Therefore, no requirement for the schools is more sternly peremptory than that salaries for teachers shall be sufficient to attract a high quality of persons.

At this point we encounter the central claim of the Interborough Association of Women Teachers. For reasons over which the educational authorities have no control men teachers of as high a personal quality as women teachers cannot, over a long period, be secured and held for the same pay. That fact is demonstrated by the present experience of the high schools.

After extended investigation Mr. Frederick H. Paine says:

The board of education appointed during the period September 1909 to February 1910, 100 men, of whom 22 refused appointment, leaving a total of 78 places filled, while 116 vacancies still exist.

The eligible list now contains 61 names, of all classes, who will accept appointment, but, as experience shows, a large proportion will not

be available by the time appointment here is offered them. Examinations for license have been held frequently. The last examination, held in November, 1909, added but sixty-four men to the lists, a totally insufficient supply.

Substitutes, an inexperienced teaching force, must be used in boys' schools, and only women can be appointed to mixed high schools.

An inquiry of the deans of various New England and New York colleges shows that the number of graduates of those institutions who enter the teaching profession has greatly diminished within ten years. At Yale University the decrease is from 12 per cent to less than 2 per cent.

On the average, private schools pay higher salaries to men than the public high schools, although paying lower salaries than do the public high schools to women, and, accordingly, women are more attracted to the public high schools.

It is plain, therefore, that more is involved in the request of the Interborough Association than the removal of artificial, irritating distinctions. The recognition of the element of supply and demand involves the recognition of sex among teachers.

Before examining the effects, economic and pedagogic, which would follow upon the adoption of the suggestions of the organized women teachers it must be reiterated that salary schedules, in point of fact, are not and cannot be constructed in conformity to any abstract principle. They are necessarily a resultant of many forces, the best solution of a vexing problem by the authorities, after due consideration of all the factors. Salaries are settled by the pragmatic method. Whatever schedules work out best in practice, not so much for the teachers as for the children, those schedules are most "just," most "moral," most in harmony with the will of the universe.

That the Interborough Association found the problem insoluble upon ideal principles is shown by the latest schedules which they themselves have presented for adoption. These schedules maintain all but one of the elements which appear in the existing schedules; and, even that one, sex, is acknowledged by the provision that teachers of boys' classes shall receive \$180 a year more than teachers of girls' classes. This acknowledgment strips their contention of that moral quality with which some have endowed it. "A new commandment I give

unto you, that you pay men and women of the same age the same salary" has been presented as the twentieth century addition to the decalogue. But if the priestesses who announce this amendment to the moral law themselves assert that it is harder to teach boys than girls, perhaps educational authorities are not altogether wicked when they acknowledge that it is harder to secure boys than girls as teachers, when they grow up.

Neither do the schedules proposed by the Interborough Association, any more than the official schedules, "provide but one salary for one and the same position." On the contrary, under them any position between the kindergarten and the seventh grade may be filled by teachers with salaries varying from \$720 to \$1,515. One teacher of the graduating class may receive less than a thousand dollars (the scales are not definite enough to show the exact minimum), another \$2,400. Positions in high schools of exactly the same character and difficulty may be filled by assistant teachers at salaries varying from \$1,300 to \$2,400. The only positions for which the schedules of the Interborough Association "provide but one salary for one and the same position" are the city superintendent of schools, the associate city superintendents, the members of the board of examiners and some directors of special branches.

If the principle of the same salary schedules for men and for women were mandatory, either the women's salaries might be raised or the men's salaries reduced. Either process would have palpable consequences, economic and pedagogic. Consider the results of each method separately.

1. To equalize the salaries of all women who were teaching in the same grades as men, with those of the men employed in such grades, in May 1909, would have entailed a cost that year of \$7,837,662. But since that date men who were teaching in grades below the sixth have been transferred, so that today, it is estimated, the cost would be below seven million dollars per annum. A large part of that increase would be of the nature of a "bonus" to the women, a bonus, say some legislators, no more justifiable than would be an extra price paid for goods by city officers to women because they were charming.

If the board of education, when appointing new teachers,

would save no money by appointing women in preference to men, it is certain that the proportion of men appointed, supposing the rates of pay were high enough to attract men at all, would be much increased. Men would drive out women, just as women when they were cheaper have driven out men. Most authorities would agree that such a result would be beneficial to the schools, which sadly need more men; and some approve the dogma of "equal pay" because they desire such a result. The same result could be won at much less cost if the board of education determined to ignore the savings to be made by appointing women and, for the sake of keeping the virile elements in the school, should appoint under its own schedules the dearer men.

2. If the salaries of men were reduced so as to conform to the salaries of women the effects would be considerable.

The cost for teachers would decrease by an amount which nobody has cared to waste labor in estimating, because nobody imagines that either the authorities or the men teachers would permit that experiment and the women teachers would be no more content than anybody else to see it tried. Naturally they do not wish the "equal pay" principle to be applied in a way to put no more money into their pockets. Primarily and properly they seek higher salaries; they would burn no incense to a dogma which promised them no increase.

The pedagogical results of lowering the schedules for men would be disastrous, for, unless the standard of quality in candidates were shamefully lowered, new men would not enter the system and the little band of 2,099 men teachers who now add the male influence to the female influence of their 14,974 women colleagues would fast diminish and soon approach extinction. Then the schools would be entirely feminized, an outcome so bad that even enthusiasts for economy hardly dare openly advocate reducing the men's pay.

Is the agitation of the women teachers, then, altogether unjustifiable and doomed to be fruitless? Not at all. Already it has had two good effects.

1. It has called public attention to what Governor Hughes styled "glaring inequalities" in the salary schedules. Since the

schedules embody the judgment of their builders on a variety of elements, some of them, such as "personality", quite impalpable, none of them measurable with instruments of precision, the schedules can never satisfy every critic. Always the critic's judgment of the relative values of academic scholarship, experience, technical skill and so on, may differ from the judgment of the authorities. However, the women teachers have convinced the board of education that the existing differentials between men and women are generally too heavy. For example, of the teachers in elementary schools women start at \$600 a year and by yearly increments of \$40 go up to \$1,240 and men start at \$900 a year and by yearly increments of \$105 go up to \$2,150. That difference is not demanded by the circumstances.

But the differences between salaries of teachers of different ages, which are conspicuous in the schedules framed by the Interborough Association, are equally flagrant and open to attack. In fact any schedules which assume that teachers of different ages who are doing analagous work should receive pay for their years as well as for their effort are vulnerable to a logician's spear.

One teacher of two years' experience may possibly do better than another twelve years her senior. The younger may have the divine gift of teaching which comes only by nature; the older be a mere drudge, a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. Yet the older, under the schedules of the Interborough Association, would continue to receive a much higher salary than the younger. That may be proper, and is certainly unavoidable, but it mocks at logic and at "equal pay for equal work."

In a large system like New York's there is always here and there an old teacher, who though getting the maximum salary, is well known to be doing the feeblest work. The logic of equal pay for equal work would require that the salary of such a veteran be pared down to the bone as is done in manual industries, where, under the piece-work system, no account is taken of the age of the worker, but relentlessly the older man or woman is challenged to keep the pace of colleagues in their prime. When sorrow, sickness or old age weakens the powers nobody proposes to increase the rates to make up for lessening speed, but the worn-out worker is thrown aside.

More humanely and with higher logic the worn-out teacher in New York is retired upon a pension. It is known that old age gradually brings weariness and ossification, and the veteran, whose strength has been sucked by successive generations of youngsters, must yield the leadership, for the good of the service, to the younger generation that, in Ibsen's phrase, is "knocking at the door". One year the veteran is assumed to be worth the highest salary; the next year she is pensioned off, as if from one week to the next her efficiency had dropped from maximum near to minimum. Actually the powers may have been declining for some years before the teacher's withdrawal and the strict logician would object, therefore, to the size of the salary received. But abstract logic is no guide. Teachers must be paid and pensioned on pragmatic principles; whatever system works out best for the schools is most desirable.

2. The agitation of the Interborough Association has forced part of the public to admit the need for a general increase of teachers' salaries, an increase which shall be so distributed as to minimize the inequalities. After the legislature in 1907 had passed a law embodying the women teachers' demands and re-passed it over the veto of Mayor McClellan, Governor Hughes in turn vetoed it, but showed that he thought the schedules should be revised. In 1907 and again in 1908 a special committee of the board of education, after careful deliberation, recommended tentative new schedules, which were approved by the board. In 1908 and in 1909 the board included in the budget as presented to the board of estimate and apportionment requests for appropriations which would enable it to put the amended schedules into effect. Its request was denied.

Altogether the proposed schedules would entail salary increases for 1910 aggregating \$2,639,762 to 14,751 women and aggregating \$206,215 to 582 men, a total increment, for the first year of operation, of \$2,845,977. Of all the men educators the salaries of 28 per cent would be raised. Of all the women educators the salaries of 98 per cent would be raised. The mass of the women teachers would have their salaries raised about twenty per cent.

This schedule, like all others, is vulnerable at points. Kinder-

garten teachers will complain because they are treated less generously than grade teachers, for hitherto they have been under the same schedule. But kindergartners have recently glutted the market and one way to persuade them to prepare for other work, where they are more needed, is to make their increases smaller.

The Interborough Association of Women Teachers criticizes the proposed schedules. The salaries of male teachers should not be raised, says the Association, "because these men are already receiving higher salaries than women occupying the same position."

Since no men are employed in the lower five grades, the so-called principle does not affect the majority of the women teachers, those who teach these grades. The board, recognizing that their salaries are inadequate, proposes to enlarge the salaries generously. But the Interborough Association says in effect: "We will not approve an addition of \$2,639,762 to the salaries of women, because at the same time you add \$206,215 to the salaries of men. We demand that the women who, being in the majority and now receiving the smallest salaries, will receive under the board's schedules all the increases which they expect, shall forego these increases until the board approves further increases, exclusively for the better-paid women teachers, aggregating another three or four million dollars."

So long as the majority of the women teachers, those in the lower grades, by their silence approve the assumption that they desire to sacrifice some two million dollars a year for the sake of the abstract doctrine which their richer sisters propound, so long the board of estimate, always vigilantly watched by the organized tax payers, will have a good excuse for keeping things as they are. Why should any guardians of the public purse incur the dislike of tax payers for the sake of teachers who show no eagerness for the attainable and promise neither gratitude nor contentment? The policy of all or nothing is heroic, but unbusinesslike.

Should the teachers, men and women in harmony, unite with the board of education in a campaign of enlightenment in favor of the tentative schedules, perhaps amended in spots, they

might convince the tax payers that the proposed increases are necessary for the following reasons :

1. The cost of living has notoriously increased since the present schedules were established, increased by at least the fifteen to twenty per cent by which the new schedules would increase most salaries. Therefore, in reality, the teachers who secure increases would be getting no higher "purchasing power" than the old schedules were meant to give them. The 1500 men whose salaries would be unaltered, are peacefully accepting a reduced purchasing power.

2. While at one time teaching was the most desirable work open to well-educated women in large numbers, the occupations now open to them are happily increasing. The schools must now compete with commerce, law, medicine, literature and journalism, for women of the best type. Unless the schools offer a career as lucrative as the office, the bar and the desk, the quality of women entering the teaching profession will deteriorate and the children suffer.

3. For men and women of the same ability the standard of living, in all classes, is rising. Each year the nation, and especially New York City, grows richer, luxuries become comforts and comforts necessities. Everybody, from immigrant to millionaire, expects to live better today than he did two or three decades ago. Houses, food, clothing, holidays, culture, travel—the son demands all of better quality than satisfied the father. Teachers should share this general rise in the standard of living, or their profession will lose caste, and the rising generation will lose the influence of teachers who command public respect.

A survey of the whole situation, then, indicates that the cry, "Equal pay for equal work" is as misleading to the teachers, who understand its import, as to the casual hearer, who takes it literally. In the latter it arouses false ideas; in the former false hopes. Like a will o' the wisp it lures into a morass. Only those who, ignoring its gleam and earnest to make whatever advance is practicable, march steadily along the beaten highway, each year come nearer their goal.