

# Social Welfare and Vocational Education – in Progressive Era Cincinnati

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## Synopsis

Previous studies on the origins of the field underplay Progressive era reforms in the formation of occupational education for girls and boys. Two social welfare reformers in Cincinnati, Edith Campbell and Helen Woolley, using research they gathered on sex-typed jobs, influenced local policymakers to establish industrial training programs for females. Today's vocational educators should recognize the historic precedence for gender analysis while attempting to create job training programs that really work.

This article offers an opportunity to assess the contributions of two social welfare reformers, Edith Campbell and Helen Woolley, in the emergence of local vocational education policy regarding child laborers, specifically working-class girls. Female middle-class reformers, like Campbell and Woolley, tended to view their labor from two perspectives: as an avenue to self-fulfillment and an opportunity to contribute to social change. Despite their class differences, these women shared a commonality of gender with working-class girls. In other words, their middle-class privileges did not insulate them from a sexually-segregated workforce which demeaned women by paying them less than men's wages and limited their advancement within careers.

The Progressive era signaled the entrance of an unprecedented number of working-class girls and middle-class women into paid positions. Demographically a lower marriage rate coupled with an increased divorce rate as well as higher educational opportunities provided the impetus for such a large influx of workers (Oppenheimer, 1970; Weiner, 1985; Rury, 1991).

Working within the confines of male-dominated professions, Campbell and Woolley carved a niche for themselves that was distinct from men's careers. Their interest in the vocational education reform movement was largely inspired by their own personal experiences as first-generation career women. That is, they moved into social welfare work at a time when access to other occupations for women was limited. They joined the vocational education movement in its earliest years when there was a particularly keen attention to child labor reforms (Powers, 1992). Their interest derived in part from an intellectual orientation that professional women adopted in college and was reinforced by a broader "social feminist" orientation toward human welfare issues. According to O'Neill (1968), social feminism is a feminist activity directed towards reforms affecting the health and welfare of women, home, and family rather than towards women's rights, such as suffrage.

As social welfare reformers, Campbell and Woolley brought a distinctly feminist philosophy to their understanding of the problems of disadvantaged youths. For instance, they believed that the socioeconomic problems of child labor were systematic, due to gender

and class inequalities in the workplace. As social feminists, these two women sought protective labor legislation for female factory workers. Additionally, their presence in Cincinnati educational reform movements suggests that feminists worked to gain greater control of male-dominated policy issues and began to set political agendas for themselves (Chambers, 1986; Cumber, 1980).

Historians readily acknowledge the important contributions of female social welfare workers in reform movements in the Progressive era (Lubove, 1965; Crunden, 1982). Except for a few isolated case studies, such as in Buffalo (Shelton, 1984), in Cincinnati (Lakes, 1988), in Milwaukee (Kean, 1983), and in the state of California (Kantor, 1988), investigations into the political networks of vocational educators and social welfare reformers still need to be written.

This article describes the extent to which two female social welfare reformers influenced school-based educational practices shaping vocational education in Cincinnati during the Progressive era. The next section provides a very brief overview of child labor legislation in Ohio, setting the stage for local educational reforms precipitated by Edith Campbell and Helen Woolley.

### **Child Labor Legislation in Ohio**

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Ohio legislators recognized the potential academic problems of child labor and enacted the first of a series of compulsory attendance laws. Ohio had a compulsory school attendance law as early as 1877 (Bossing, 1931). That law mandated schooling for children from ages eight to fourteen for twelve weeks per year during which attendance for six weeks had to be consecutive. Yet a series of loopholes, one of which allowed school boards to excuse working school-age children of indigent parents, served to undermine the effectiveness of this statute. In 1889 a more extensive compulsory school law mandated that all Ohio school-age children from eight to fourteen, in city school districts, must attend public or private school for twenty weeks per year, ten weeks consecutively, and to begin within the first four weeks of the term. Parents and guardians were heavily penalized if they failed to enroll their children or removed them during the school year. The law required employers to verify the literacy level of their under-age employees. Minors from fourteen to sixteen who could not read or write were required to attend school half-time during the day or at night. Finally, truant officers, commissioned with police powers, were organized to enforce the law by entering homes and shops to monitor school absences.

The next child labor law went into effect in Ohio in 1908, and retained the provisions of the 1889 compulsory school law relating to attendance but mandated strict compliance with an eight-hour work day for children aged sixteen to eighteen. The work day for these students was limited to the daylight hours of 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with a maximum of forty-eight working hours per week. Although supported by the Ohio Federation of Labor, Ohio manufacturers strongly opposed Reynolds on the grounds that the regulation of hours was "paternalistic" and "un-American." Businessmen claimed the bill created a widespread reduction in the employability of minors leading to "child-idleness."

A child labor law in 1910 required the establishment of part-time schools (continuation schools) for working minors, who had not already completed an eight-grade education or reached sixteen years old (Lovejoy, 1910). The continuation schools in Cincinnati, designed for compulsory attendance for four-hours weekly, began service in September, 1911, with three full-time teachers and forty part-time staff, and with a budget of \$15,000. Over 1,100 students attended the school that first month, registering with the school system the place and time arranged by their employer. The students were grouped by the last grade completed and arranged into classes averaging twenty-five students. A course of study was formulated with two-thirds of the time devoted to academic study in math, spelling, English, hygiene, civic and moral instruction. The remainder of the time was set aside for manual training and domestic science related to the students' present occupation.

Compulsory continuation school attendance rose steadily every month. Despite impressive enrollment figures, however, local educators admitted that these schools offered little academic incentive for youths because child labor essentially was temporary, low-paying employment. Many youths were forced to contribute their meager earnings to the family income. Local public school educators knew that the continuation schools could never offer these youths saleable skills, much less change the social and economic conditions that drove children into the workplace.

The next section introduces Edith Campbell and Helen Woolley, and describes their work in establishing the Vocation Bureau within the Cincinnati Public Schools. Both social welfare reformers promoted increased vocational training and career education for girls in order to counteract the pernicious effects of child labor on early school leaving.

### **The Vocation Bureau**

A supplemental provision of the 1910 child labor law provided relief for indigent youths forced to attend school. The Child Labor Relief law, as it was called, authorized local truant officers to report cases of indigency to the school board. Then, the school board was required to supply these youths with free textbooks or personal items, such as eyeglasses, shoes, and clothing needed for school (Cincinnati Board, 1910).

Edith Campbell was instrumental in influencing such reforms and in resolving the conflicting networks of city support services (Campbell, 1910; Bliss, 1970). She was a progressive activist – and social feminist – who devoted her life to social service and educational work in the city. In 1906, after completing the master of arts degree at the University of Cincinnati (UC), Campbell was asked by the banker and philanthropist Jacob Schmidlapp to direct a fund for the education of young girls. The Charlotte R. Schmidlapp Fund, established in memory of Schmidlapp's nineteen-year-old daughter killed in an auto accident in France, was a scholarship loan program and, later, an employment bureau for needy girls and working women in Cincinnati. Campbell, a former research assistant in the UC Department of Economics, served as "investigator" of local educational and employment conditions of girls and women, as well as loan interviewer for the Schmidlapp Fund. In 1911, Campbell was elected to the Cincinnati board of education as member-at-large, receiving a last-minute political endorsement from fellow Cincinnati and U. S. President, William Howard Taft. In 1912, Campbell helped organize the Grand Rapids, Michigan, meeting of the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA), and she served on its executive council as well. In 1921, Campbell became director of the Cincinnati Vocation Bureau of the public schools—an office she helped create in 1910 (Zapoleon, 1985). In later years, she was appointed to numerous executive boards devoted to social welfare and vocational education.

From its earliest years, the Vocation Bureau issued work certificates; however, Campbell realized that the office could also collect valuable data on working youth – more than the usual vital statistics. In 1915, for instance, the Vocation Bureau of Cincinnati Public Schools opened an office for career counseling and job placement; the office registered over 1,000 students and found jobs for about one-half of them that year. In most cases, a placement officer reviewed each student's case history, family background, and guidance record card in order to assess job potentiality. At other times, students were requested to participate in mental testing as well. Vocation Bureau officials conducted monthly follow-up studies on each students' wages and advancement in industry for a period of three years (Cincinnati Board, 1915).

In March, 1911, Helen Woolley, a trained psychologist was hired to conduct assessment tests of working youths. Woolley received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, where she studied philosophy and neurology. Her dissertation "Psychological Norms in Men and Women," was a pioneering study of sex differences. By subjecting fifty university undergraduates (two equal groups of males and females) to a battery of laboratory tests for manual dexterity and sensory awareness, Woolley concluded that, overall, men and women

were "less unique," that is similar to both emotionally and intellectually. After a post-doctoral fellowship in Paris and Berlin, Woolley returned for a promising academic career at Mt. Holyoke College. Yet she left after one year to follow her husband-to-be on a succession of jobs furthering his medical career. In 1909, Woolley finally settled in Cincinnati with her husband, then newly-appointed to the staff of the UC medical school (Rosenberg, 1982).

Helen Woolley's work at the Vocation Bureau consisted of administering psychological and physical tests to working children. With a staff of assistants, she examined almost 1,000 fourteen and fifteen-year-olds over a five-year period. From her study of the comparison between working and non-working children, Woolley believed that there was a relationship between children's mental and physical tests and their success or failure at work. She subdivided the total population of tested pupils into two equivalent groups and immediately began testing the "treatment" group of working minors. In November, 1912, one-and-one-half years later, she began testing the "control" group of full-time students. Each child was given a battery of mental tests, and a case history was compiled on his or her age, physical characteristics, industrial history, home and occupational life. Additionally, she noted exactly how much manual training and domestic science (in continuation schools) each working student had received prior to leaving school (Cincinnati Board, 1911).

The Woolley (1926) study was published as *An Experimental Study of Children*. Woolley (1913a) concluded that the majority of children entering an occupation are "inferior mentally and physically" to the control group of school children. Her tests helped to explain the elements of school "elimination" at the point-of-departure from school which, at that time, was age fourteen. However, she did not assess the degree to which pre-vocational education (i.e., compulsory continuation schooling) affected job performance, since additional schooling, to her, was an ex post factor circumstance.

Using a variety of construction puzzles and scientific apparatus, Woolley ascertained the levels of motor coordination in both groups of children. "If the schools could lay more stress from the start on training manual dexterity of various kinds," she wrote half-way through her study (Woolley, 1913a, p. 606), "children of the class who leave the schools early ... would be the gainers in many ways." Furthermore, Woolley (1913b, 1914) used the test data to evaluate manipulative skills based upon gender differences and, most importantly, to offer predictions on vocational success. For instance, the results of a card sorting test (an index was obtained by dividing the time on completion by the accuracy in percent) laid the scientific basis, she claimed, for the employment of girls in occupations "requiring steadiness of hand, or fine motor control." "For positions requiring strength, or for mere rapidity of motion ... boys would be better" (Woolley, 1914, p. 247). Thus, Woolley's experimental study illuminated the problems of vocational guidance to a newly established profession in which she played a major role.

### **Child Labor Violations in Cincinnati**

In 1913, the Ohio School Survey Commission initiated a study of over-age elementary school youth in Cincinnati. With the assistance of the Vocation Bureau, the commissioners calculated the rate of retardation of children who, they assumed, began first grade at age six and progressed at the normal rate of one grade per year. The commissioners reported that approximately 56 percent of the 31,000 school children in Cincinnati were retarded. The highest percentage of retardation, they claimed, were in the third to seventh grades. Higher retardation rates, however, existed among working school children of both sexes; approximately two-thirds of all applicants for work certificates in the years between 1911 and 1913 were classified as retarded. The state commissioners were alarmed at the figures and strongly recommended that Cincinnati educators reduce the number of over-age children in the city schools (Cincinnati Board, 1915).

"Pushing up the age limit at which pupils may leave school has increased the percentage of retardation in the group of pupils who apply for work certificates," claimed Helen Woolley (*School Index*, 1916, p. 76) in reference to the 1913 Ohio child labor law (the Greenlund Code) which raised compulsory schooling for boys and girls to age fifteen and

sixteen respectively. Work certificates were required for both sexes as well: one year, for boys from age fifteen to age sixteen; and two years, for girls from age sixteen to eighteen. Within one year after enactment of the Greenlund Code, the retardation rate of females receiving work certificates rose 24 percent. Additionally, the code's non-renewal of the compulsory continuation schools (as established in the 1910 Ohio child labor law) meant that over one-half of the 3,245 students enrolled in the Cincinnati continuation schools in 1912 would return to school full-time the next year (Cincinnati Board, 1913).

"There are hundreds of children working in factories in violation of the law," claimed Edith Campbell before an audience of labor unionists (*Labor Advocate*, 1916, December 9). Campbell, too, blamed the inadequacies in the 1913 child labor law which, she believed, failed in several important instances: first, as previously stated, the compulsory continuation school provision in the 1910 law was not renewed; second, there was an insufficient number of factory inspectors to police child labor violators; and finally, there was widespread non-compliance both among employers and minors in regard to the requirements for work certificates. City social workers and educators alike were concerned with the large number of violations among under-age females. For example, A. J. Willey, director of attendance for the board of education, estimated that in 1916 alone there were 1,800 girls employed under the legal age of sixteen. Under-age females desiring work often chose to list a fictitious Kentucky residence—across the Ohio River—that caused inspectors difficulty in unearthing the deception. In addition, employers often violated the provisions of the law that restricted the hours of female labor to fifty-four per week (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1916a).

Candy manufacturers, in particular, complained that the law unjustly discriminated against them by claiming that an exemption from the hours statute for female laborers was justifiable on the grounds that they were dealers of perishable goods. On December 11, 1916, one such employer, the Dolly Varden Chocolate Company, told the board of education that they were inconvenienced by the requirement that their female employees acquire work certificates. The board of education confirmed that, indeed, the names of sixty girls at Varden's had been sent to the school for age verification (Cincinnati Board, 1916b). The school authorities determined that only sixteen out of the sixty youths had proper papers and requested the company send the remaining girls to the bureau. When instructed to do so by company officials, however, the girls never arrived there or returned to work. This firm was reprimanded by school officials for employing females without prior age and schooling certificates.

Other manufacturers who directly violated the provisions of the child labor law were prosecuted. Beginning in the fall of 1916, a special corps of state inspectors reported several child labor offenses in Cincinnati. Violators eventually were brought to trial, including a clothing manufacturer who employed a fifteen-year-old girl in his mill, and a former Democratic councilman and his business partner who employed two under-age youths as pin setters in their bowling alley (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1916b, 1918).

The next section describes educational opportunities for working-class girls. Both Campbell and Woolley were instrumental in advising local school board officials on vocational training: the systematic occupational preparation of females, these women argued, would help girls better provide for themselves financially, so that they would not have to be dependent upon males for economic support.

### Industrial Training for Girls

"We have made little advance in the vocational training of women ... we will have to have a change of attitude toward the girl," claimed Edith Campbell (School Index, 1915b, p. 235) in a March, 1915, address before the National Education Association Department of Superintendents meeting in Cincinnati; she told the predominately male audience: "You have to decide whether the woman's place is in *a* home or in *the* home." The training of girls for industrial careers, according to feminist Campbell, was an important component in female social, political, and economic independence.

Industrial classes for girls were established in the public schools, in part, due to the 1913 Ohio child labor law which required females to remain in school until age sixteen: female applications for work certificates rose 14 percent that year and, as a group, females represented almost two-thirds of all child laborers in the city (see TABLE 1). Five industrial centers offered day instruction for females. Girls were given courses in office occupations, garment-making, and other industrial trades. On March 10, 1915, a school for the sewing trades was authorized by the school board. The two-year vocational curriculum provided girls over fourteen years of age shop training in hand and machine sewing, power machine operations, trade dressmaking and millinery, art needlework, and textile design. Shop equipment consisted of fourteen single-needle, heavy-duty industrial sewing machines and twenty electric or treadle-operated domestic sewing machines. Operating along the lines of an industrial shop, the school director accepted customer orders for dressmaking and embroidery, such as sewing swimming suits for the physical education classes of the public schools and uniforms for a local hospital (Cincinnati Board, 1914, 1915, 1916a, 1917).

**TABLE 1**

*Work Certificates Issued by the Cincinnati Public Schools*

Year	# Certificates	% Boys	% Girls
1912-13	2,450	51.4	48.6
1913-14	1,207	37.9	62.1
1914-15	1,044	56.7	43.4
1915-16	1,878	45.5	54.5
1916-17	2,102	40.4	59.5

SOURCE: Adapted from annual reports of the work certificate office in the Vocation Bureau, Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Reports* (1912-1917).

Eighty-five girls signed up for the Sewing Trade School that first year (which increased to 113 the next year) with almost three-fourths of the students enrolled in power-machine operations. With the release of the local chamber of commerce industrial survey on garment-making in 1917, local school authorities felt justified in promoting power sewing for girls, even though there was a long standing prejudice against factory employment for females (Cincinnati Board, 1916a, 1917).

Almost one-quarter of the juvenile occupations for females with certificates in 1915 involved employment in the local garment industries, but an even larger number of girls were employed as sales clerks. In the academic year 1916 to 1917, for instance, 360 girls were employed in department stores compared to 292 in the sewing trades (Cincinnati Board, 1917). Throughout this period, however, shoe, paper, candy, and cigar factories employed more females with work certificates than industrial sewing or department store work (see TABLE 2).

In 1911, the compulsory continuation schools offered salesmanship classes to two-hundred girls employed in local department stores. Several years later—following the 1913 child labor law—the school board created a visiting teacher position for bi-weekly salesmanship classes in several local stores. This measure was meant to accommodate the training needs of girls who were over the compulsory school age of sixteen and required to hold work certificates until age eighteen. Each participating employer supplied a classroom (for a minimum of twenty girls) on their own premises. The curriculum consisted of principles of merchandising, marketing, and sales, as well as, customer relations and

employee conduct. In the former category, the girls were instructed in "pushing profitable lines," "forcing the sale," and "pleasing fussy customers," while in the latter there were lessons on "working with the right spirit," "using tact," "earning confidence," and "loyalty." The local board of education sanctioned the salesmanship schools even though private trade training traditionally generated hostility from organized labor. These corporation schools—or vestibule schools, as they were called—were a significant departure from prior vocational practices that operated within the city's public school system (Cincinnati Board, 1914, 1915).

**TABLE 2**

*Occupations of Child Laborers with Work Certificates  
(in Percentages)*

Occupation		1912-13	1913-14	1914-15	1915-16	1916-17
ERRANDS <sup>a</sup>	(M)	42.4	48.9	52.2	46.2	44.8
ERRANDS <sup>b</sup>	(F)	2.8	0.5	3.5	3.6	4.0
FACTORY <sup>c</sup>	(M)	25.8	21.3	18.6	24.6	22.6
FACTORY <sup>c</sup>	(F)	24.8	30.7	29.6	36.2	29.0
DEPT ST.	(M)	10.6	6.9	12.3	8.7	9.9
DEPT ST.	(F)	22.6	26.6	26.6	25.6	28.8
OFFICE	(M)	6.4	3.9	6.5	10.0	10.5
OFFICE	(F)	2.2	8.1	7.9	6.7	10.7
SEWING	(M)	1.5	2.2	0.6	1.7	2.7
SEWING	(F)	16.6	22.4	23.8	24.0	23.3
MISC <sup>d</sup>	(M)	10.3	16.8	9.7	8.7	9.5
MISC <sup>d</sup>	(F)	31.0	11.7	7.1	3.5	3.9

SOURCE: Adapted from annual reports of the work certificate office in the Vocation Bureau, Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Reports* (1912-1917).

<sup>a</sup> messenger boys, newsboys, or wagon boys;

<sup>b</sup> indoor messengers for private firms;

<sup>c</sup> shoe, paper goods, candy, metal goods;

<sup>d</sup> home industry, trade apprentices, engraving & printing, laundry & domestics (female only).

Vocational training for girls did not come cheap. Vocational shops were costly enterprises because operations, maintenance and equipment purchases, shop supplies, and teacher salaries required unprecedented expenditures. By the end of the decade, greater allocations of funds for expanding industrial education programs arose due to matching Smith-Hughes monies. Yet, when a national post-war recession hit the local economy in 1918, retrenchment measures in education were initiated. By the 1920s, taxpayers were reluctant to approve additional expenses for vocational education, and most local school board members advocated fiscal and pedagogical conservatism. The heady days of progressivism had ended.

### Conclusion

Nationally, feminist women operated in policymaking arenas through an interlocking directorate of like-minded progressives, widely represented in organizations such as the National Child Labor Committee, a reformist group investigating conditions of under-age

children at work in the country. Edith Campbell and Helen Woolley followed in the footsteps of other prominent and outspoken social welfare reformers, such as Jane Addams and Ella Flagg Young, who used their influence to secure national recognition for the educational problems of their gender.

Though industrial training for girls had been articulated to some degree in the executive council meetings of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (Lloyd, 1979), Campbell and Woolley addressed those issues at a local level and refined an approach related to solving problems within their own venue. For instance, the use of a scientific research approach using local youths in controlled experimental settings helped legitimize their social welfare and vocational education reform agendas—as did their connections with power-holders at all levels of city government, school board, and social service arenas.

The early feminist, social welfare reform movement should not be lost upon today's vocational education policymakers. Despite past efforts, occupational segregation by sex still exists, subjecting female employees to discriminatory wages and unfair laboring practices. Since the beginning of this century, women have continuously increased their representation within the labor force. Yet females are marginalized by gender, still unable to access higher paying positions of authority within each occupational sector (Blumberg, 1991; Bose, Feldberg, & Sokoloff, 1987; Kelly, 1991).

Vocational educators need to address inequities in the workplace, and illuminate for policymakers curricular reforms that address social and structural conditions of job segregation (Ahola-Sidaway & McKinnon, 1993; Burge & Culver, 1990, 1994; Carter, 1994). By elevating gender and class to a level of critical social analysis that reveals bias in organizational settings, vocational educators can raise the levels of current reform discourse about education for work, and build upon the progressives' advancement of economic and industrial democracy (Lakes, 1994).

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