

Junior teachers

South Australia, 1913-1945

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Junior teachers proved to be a considerable asset for education authorities during the straitened financial periods of World War I, the Great Depression and World War II. Apart from a brief period of prosperity in the early 1920s, untrained, lowly paid junior teachers were used extensively in South Australia to alleviate pressures arising from these events. Local factors also contributed to the pressure as authorities trained teachers and staffed schools.

With a rising birth rate and an extension of compulsory attendance by one year to age 14 in the period before the Depression, numbers in primary and secondary classes escalated rapidly. New schools and additional teachers were also needed for new suburbs in Adelaide, and the extension of settlement in country areas.

The ruinous drought of 1914 was followed by four years of war which further hindered the state's development and strained the limited finances available for teacher training. In 1917, Lutheran schools were closed on account of anti-German sentiment thus creating new teacher shortages. With the end of the war, new farming soldier settlements were established, increasing the demand for small schools in rural communities. Some 800 such schools were eventually needed. The beginning of the marked section in *Figure 1* shows the increase in student numbers in government schools over the period 1910 to 1930, before the decline associated with Depression and the new war.

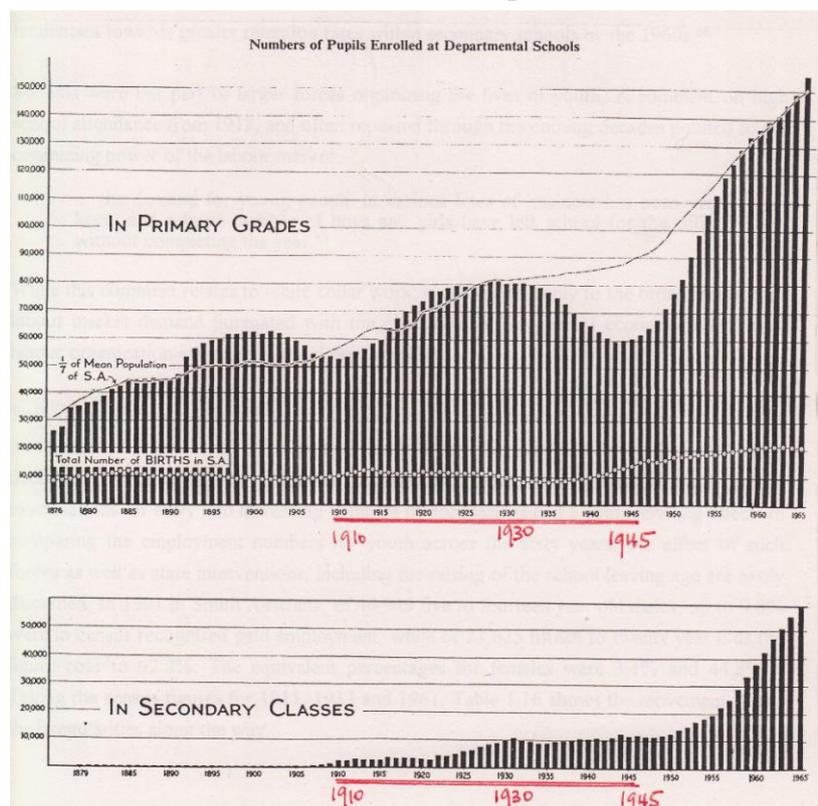


Figure 1: Enrolments in public schools, primary and secondary, South Australia, 1876-1965. Report of Minister of Education, 1965 (SAPP 1966, no. 44, p. 7)

The combined impact of world events and local factors played a significant role in undermining two major attempts to provide South Australia with an adequate teacher training system. The first of these in 1913 was the replacement of the pupil teacher system by junior teachers who were required to undergo one year of practical teaching prior to training. The second, in 1921, intended to eliminate teaching before training altogether but with the advent of the Depression and WWII, untrained junior teachers were again needed for teaching duties across all levels.

Junior teachers to 1919

In the first junior teacher system introduced in the period 1908 to 1913, junior teachers spent three years at the Adelaide High School preparing for university entrance examinations, one year in schools for practical teaching and one year at the Teachers' Training College. The regulations following the Education Act of 1915 required the principal of the Adelaide High to be responsible for the 'conduct, diligence and practical training' of junior teachers. From its beginning, however, the high school had interpreted any reference to 'practical training' as attending only to the academic subjects required for entry to the Training College rather than any instruction in the theory and practice of teaching. This led to criticism that far too much time was being spent on academic training and far too little in preparation for the life work of teaching.

The one year of practical teaching, an integral part of training and a pre-requisite for entry to the Teachers' Training College, was expected to ensure that junior teachers completed their term of service with respect to 'conduct, scholarship and practical teaching' while teaching during recognized school hours. This period required rigorous attention to both theory and practice under the supervision of a headmaster in two 45 minute lessons per week, together with a set text for private study.

However, it soon came to be seen as failing to provide trainees with the routine efficiency and power to handle a class of children as expected of beginning teachers. In 1918, the presidential report to the SA Teachers' Union expressed the view that one year hardly gave adequate time for a junior teacher to 'get into his stride' and that consequently schools were being staffed by ill-prepared teachers. He proposed that a two year period would be of greater advantage for acquiring practical knowledge and skill.

This lack of attention to practical experience would not have been such a problem if funds had been available to build the new training college and adjunct practising school provided for in the Education Act of 1915. The newly named Teachers' Training College had to make do with the limited space available within the University and so was unable to provide for professional training combined with practical teaching. The College had to concentrate on what it could do reasonably well and so came to be seen as essentially concerned with theoretical rather than with practical issues. In any case the one year at the College itself proved to be an inadequate time even for this.

A further problem was that there was not even enough space for all the students so those doing the Short Course in preparation for teaching in small schools had to be sent to the Observation School for what was generally regarded as a quite inadequate training situation. Something of the difficulties of the situation can be gauged from the comment of the principal, Dr. A.J. Schulz, who wrote in his report for 1918 that he doubted if there was a college in the Empire 'so imperfectly equipped' and that the conditions there were 'deplorable'. By 1919, with the war over and the economy improving, the President of the Teachers' Union stated that the answer 'No money available' for a properly equipped training college was no longer an acceptable response to the Union's demands for the addressing of teachers' disabilities, amongst which he listed 'inadequate training'.

Reforms, 1919-1926

At the beginning of 1919, there was a plan in hand to reform teacher training by abolishing the first three grades of junior teachers at Adelaide High School and so get value for money by supporting only those who actually taught, the monitors and the junior teachers of Grade IV. In order to ensure an adequate supply of junior teachers from the high school, 125 teacher scholarships were to be provided each year at secondary level, 75 for three years for former monitors and 50 for one year for any student who had passed the Junior Public examination.

Considerable changes at the lower paid monitor level were also in hand. Most monitors were students who stayed on at school for a year of teaching experience preparing for appointment as a junior teacher or for the Short Course. Now they were to be encouraged to remain as monitors for a further two years, then to become senior monitors for two years of teaching while receiving lessons for the Junior Public prior to a six month short course. This was expected to give them sufficient practical and theoretical experience for work in small schools. This scheme would have created a two-tiered training system and reintroduced many of the worst features of the outmoded pupil teacher system, but it appealed to those dissatisfied with the inadequate practical experience in the current junior

teacher system as well as to those responsible for financing and staffing schools. However, before it could be implemented a new Director of Education, **W. T. McCoy** (1919-1929), was appointed. McCoy believed that there should be no teaching before training, so the only aspect retained from the proposed reform was the teacher scholarship, later to be known as a probationary studentship.

McCoy arrived in South Australia just as the state was entering a brief post-war period of prosperity through increased output in primary and secondary industries and a rising population. At last funds were available for carrying out a series of reforms to training that were to last well into the twentieth century. McCoy moved quickly to resolve the unsatisfactory professional and training situations that had bedeviled the education system since 1913. By the beginning of 1921 he was able to tell students of the newly renamed Teachers' College that their training was now fundamentally different from former times 'inasmuch as you, like the doctor, the lawyer ... will complete your professional course before you are permitted to teach'. The comprehensive and extended courses which brought all training under the control of the College were set out in the relevant conspectus (*see Figure 2*).

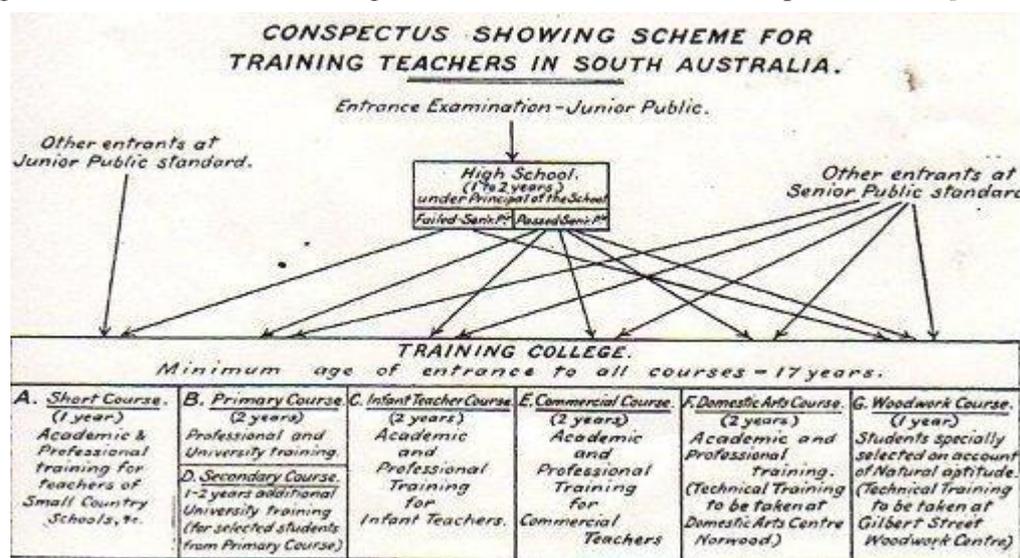


Figure 2: Conspectus, teacher training for public schools in South Australia from 1921

At the same time McCoy announced that a period of teaching was no longer a prerequisite for entry to the College, thus doing away with the untrained teaching force that had been a feature of training since the 1870s. Training was to be carried in newly established Practising Schools under the direction of Masters and Mistresses of Method and skilled demonstration teachers in close collaboration with the College to ensure that teaching methods agreed with the pedagogy taught there. With the introduction of the new training system McCoy went on to say that 'the Junior Teacher, as a teaching force, practically disappeared from that date'. Junior teachers were not completely abolished however. The role was needed mainly as a holding position for otherwise qualified entrants under the required age of 17 years. In 1923, junior teachers were removed from the official lists of teaching staff and put under a new heading: 'Students in Training'. They were grouped with probationary students and student teachers.

The removal of 185 junior teachers of Grade IV from the teaching service together with the increased course times created teacher shortages. In 1920 junior teachers had provided some 9 per cent of the teaching force but in 1921 there were just 25 of them in the system. McCoy was able to report that shortages were partly overcome 'through the loyal assistance of those teachers who undertook additional work in the schools that were understaffed' while he took steps to remedy the situation. Numbers at the Teachers' College were gradually raised to 300. Temporary quarters were found in the former Police Barracks adjacent to the University until the new college, for which funds had finally been approved in 1920, could be built. Additional short courses starting in mid year were introduced and teachers were recruited from overseas but shortages continued as the new soldier settlements required more primary and secondary schools. By 1924 the shortage had become so critical that untrained persons were once more appointed as teachers. Some 68 'supplementary' teachers were

given a short course in school routine before being sent to small schools in need and another 115 were employed while the system lasted.

Impact of the Great Depression

By 1926 South Australia was again entering a difficult financial period with falling prices for wheat and wool. Savings were needed in all areas and the first effect on training was an increase in the number of junior teachers. They became more than an insignificant group awaiting entry to the College. The instructions that had applied before the demise of the practical teaching period were reissued and from 1927, regular criticism lessons were required to be given 'by the Junior Teacher to his own class'. In the same year the Minister of Education reported that '28 Junior Teachers, shown under Division V – Students in Training, were employed in Primary Schools'. To all intents and purposes the 42 junior teachers of 1928 were again part of the teaching force. That junior teachers were expected to teach, is confirmed in the memoirs of 29 former junior teachers from 1927 to 1930, all of whom all recalled sole or shared teaching of classes up to the limit of the 30 allowed by Regulations for a junior teacher. At the same time the other group of untrained in schools was wound down with the Supplementary System being abolished in 1929 at a saving of £15,500.

The collapse of overseas markets during the Depression had a profound impact on teacher training in South Australia. Government pressure forced the Education Department to reduce expenditure on staffing and training. The First Progress Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Education of 1930/31 found that the growth of teachers was out of proportion to the number of pupils thus justifying reductions that saved £19,000. A further £15,147 was saved by suspending the probationary student system. A steady supply of future trainees was ensured by simply registering a number of those with 'evidence of the necessary aptitude and general suitability for teaching', unpaid but granted franking of examination fees. Wherever it was possible junior teachers were appointed in lieu of the remaining monitors to gain further savings.

From the beginning of 1931, more savings were obtained across the teaching service by reducing a number of positions, lowering the retirement age of 70 to 65 for males and 60 for females, cutting salaries at all levels and by lowering the entrance quotas at the Teachers' College. The number of junior teacher appointments was halved but in February a new direction was set for the placement, teaching role and instruction of junior teachers by the appointment of a further 26 to provide assistance to small schools where none had been available before, or to replace monitors or supplementary teachers. The new approach ensured a pool of suitable recruits for the College while giving them teaching experience. At the same time some of the most pressing staffing situations were relieved while further reducing costs.

The role of junior teachers changed significantly enough in 1931 for the changes to be regarded as a 'new' version of the system. Prior to this, junior teachers had been appointed to large schools where adequate supervision was available. Now they were appointed to country primary and secondary schools where head teachers coping with high enrolments and limited staff, were less likely to have the time for the necessary supervision. Junior teachers were now expected to board where they were needed, mostly away from home and often in quite remote and isolated places where contact with family was difficult. In 1932 and 1934 the College was closed to new entrants so the junior teachers had to serve a second year. Board was expensive and the allowance low. Females, the majority of junior teachers, had lower wages and allowances than males and were expected to take on extra duties such as sewing.

Most junior teachers in the small primary schools were given sole responsibility for a class of Grades I-III and the head teachers, with large composite classes of their own, had limited time to supervise and instruct. Junior teachers in small high schools were often the only specialist subject teachers. Having very recently completed their own secondary examinations, they were required to teach subjects for the same examinations. Overall junior teachers had all the responsibilities of trained teachers. In many ways the system was a return to the worst of the old apprenticeship system with quite young people being expected to learn to teach by teaching. However, inspectors reported that the new system was good for both the schools and the junior teachers located in them.

During the Depression, it is likely that young people welcomed jobs as junior teachers, no matter where it was or what teaching was involved. A head teacher trying to cope with fifty or more students over seven grades would have also be grateful for even untrained help. A further advantage for junior teachers was that they were able to use this time before college to upgrade their secondary and even begin university studies.

Slow recovery and the end of junior teachers

In 1935, the principal of the College reported that a general improvement in national prosperity had allowed for a larger intake in order to begin to deal with the effects of the restrictions of 1932 and 1934 but South Australia's debt burden remained heavy and entry numbers remained low. The beginning of World War II in 1939 imposed further financial restraint together with increased shortages as male teachers joined the armed forces. Junior teachers continued to be needed, not only for the larger one-teacher schools but increasingly for large secondary schools where enrolments were still growing. The number of junior teachers increased significantly. In the period 1936 to 1945 the yearly rate of increase on average was 105.5.

By the early 1940s it had become apparent that there had been a return to a system that McCoy had intended to do away with. The system now smacked of exploitation in much the same way as it had in earlier times. Despite the financial constraints imposed by the war, the South Australian Teachers' Union decided that such a system should end. In 1943, it took a strong and successful case for abolition to the Education Inquiry Committee (1942-1945). Despite a recommendation for abolition in 1945, junior teachers continued to be used in schools until sufficient numbers of trained teachers became available towards the middle of the 1950s. However, the title 'junior teacher' remained in use for young people either under age or under qualified for the Teachers College until the changes introduced for university matriculation in 1964 that required all teaching candidates to complete five years of secondary education. Junior teachers were no longer needed.

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