‘Venturing in Education’: teaching at the University of Chicago’s Laboratory School, 1896–1904

Anne Durst*

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Educational Foundations, USA

(Received 18 December 2007; final version received 26 September 2008)

In 1896, John Dewey opened the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. While much is known about this legendary school and its founder, the teachers whose daily work brought the school to life remain mostly anonymous. This essay attempts to remedy this historical invisibility by investigating four of the Laboratory School teachers – Anna Camp, Katherine Camp, Althea Harmer and Mary Hill – in order to more fully understand this experimental school. The teachers’ personal correspondence and published writings evoke a vital collection of educators whose interests and passions connected them to other centers of innovation in Chicago and elsewhere in the nation. This investigation of the teachers thus fills out our understanding of the history of this innovative institution and of the developing pragmatist ideas of its time, and establishes their centrality to the ideas and practices of the Laboratory School.

Keywords: history; progressivism; reform; teachers; women

In The Dewey School, their 1936 volume on the University of Chicago’s Laboratory School, teachers (and sisters) Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards wrote that a teacher at the school, ‘whatever her specialty, should have had the fertile life experience that is the result of experimental living guided by intelligent thinking’. While much is known about this legendary school and its founder, philosopher John Dewey, the teachers whose daily work brought the school to life remain mostly anonymous. This essay attempts to remedy this historical anonymity by investigating four of the Laboratory School teachers – Anna Camp, Katherine Camp, Althea Harmer, and Mary Hill – placing their experiences in the historical context of Progressive-era

*Email: dursta@uww.edu

1One of a list of ‘suggested titles’ for the manuscript of The Dewey School. In box 15, Katherine Camp Mayhew Collection (6561), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.


experimentation and the emerging philosophy of pragmatism. Experimental living’ for these teachers extended out to the wider world of Chicago and the nation, as they pursued their intellectual interests at some of the most innovative social institutions of their time. By ‘venturing in education’ at the Laboratory School, these teachers joined a community of Americans dedicated to creatively making sense of a changing world.

The Laboratory School, first known officially as the University Elementary School and popularly referred to as the Dewey School, opened in January of 1896 in the Hyde Park neighbourhood surrounding the University of Chicago. Beginning with 16 students and two teachers, the school would grow to include 140 students, 23 teachers, and 10 assistants. John Dewey, appointed head of the university’s Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy in 1894, seems to have begun thinking about such a school soon after his arrival in Chicago. He wanted a new kind of school, and a laboratory for philosophical ideas. In an 1894 letter to his wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, Dewey articulated his aims: ‘The school is the one form of social life which is abstracted & under control – which is directly experimental, and if philosophy is ever to be an experimental science, the construction of a school is its starting point.’ Alice Dewey encouraged him in this effort to try out ideas in practice. Indeed, as Dewey’s former student Max Eastman wrote, ‘Mrs. Dewey would grab Dewey’s ideas – and grab him – and insist that something be done’.

As John Dewey set out to create his experimental school, which he directed until he left Chicago in 1904, he was accompanied by a number of colleagues and friends. Among those supporting him, in addition to Alice Dewey, were philosopher George Herbert Mead and his wife Helen Castle Mead, educator and administrator Ella Flagg Young, and settlement leader Jane Addams. Scholars have explored what Ellen Condliffe Lagemann calls the ‘creative community’ that John Dewey found in America’s

---


second city.10 This constellation of figures, along with their innovative aims and ideas, called for teachers capable of working in an environment of experimentation. Certainly Dewey recognised this. In an 1896 letter to Frank Manny, a former University of Michigan student who assisted Dewey in the school’s early years, he wrote:

I am getting anxious about finding some good teachers for our school next year: I want to find a union of three things if possible: 1st a good thorough education, especially on the scientific sides so as to be able to face the problem of the adjustment of the scientific material to primary grades. 2nd some experience with little children, enough at least to demonstrate naturalness, ease and sympathy in relations to them. 3rd some amount of practical and executive ability. I might add a fourth point, sufficient mental scope to be able to relate special and technical acquirements to a general plan and aim.11

The teachers were essential to the daily testing of ideas that was the centrepiece of this venture. As Laboratory School teacher Laura Runyon wrote in 1930, ‘I sometimes wonder if Dr. Dewey appreciates the fact that the work of individual teachers in that school, and the personality of those there, had much to do with his own fame! We contributed something, but the fame and fortune have been his alone!’12 Runyon was right – Dewey was the major recipient of the ‘fame and fortune’ that came from the national and international attention paid to the school (and of the criticism from its opponents.) This was due, in part, to his overall renown as a philosopher, and also to prevalent gendered notions of male predominance in the world of ideas, with the corresponding female role in the realm of practice. As I will show here, the Laboratory School and its associated philosophy challenged the dualism of thought and action, thus contributing to an enhanced awareness of the significance of the many female teachers to the experimental practices and ideas that came out of the school. Dewey did seem to appreciate the ‘work of individual teachers’. In a January 1899 manuscript of ‘Three Years of the University Elementary School’, he took the ‘opportunity to say that’:

… the actual conduct of the School, as well as the administration, – the selection of subject matter and the working out of the courses of study, have been almost entirely in the hands of the teachers of the school; and whatever progress has been made in the development of the curriculum, has been done by the teachers. They started with certain question-marks, and if any answers have been reached, it is the teachers in the School who have supplied the answers to the questions.13

11John Dewey to Frank Manny, 16 March 1896, The Correspondence of John Dewey (electronic resource) (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999–2004). In this letter, I have left out some editing notations that are included in the letter as it appears in the Correspondence.
12Laura Runyon to Katherine Camp Mayhew, 14 July 1930, box 44, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
13John Dewey, ‘Three Years of the University Elementary School’, Katherine Camp Mayhew Collection (6561) formerly held in Teachers College Archives, now in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. On the demands made of the teachers, see Alan Ryan, John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 147; and Westbrook, Democratic Hope, 90.
John Dewey’s lifelong commitment, well in evidence in these words written during his Chicago years, was to ‘democracy as a way of life’.14 My research on the school’s teachers indicates that this philosophical dedication to a daily and homely democracy meant that at the Laboratory School the participants at the ground level were centrally involved in key decisions. Years after her time at the school, teacher Katharine Andrews Healy remembered ‘Dr. Dewey’s attitude of working with us and his respect for the opinion of the least experienced of us, when his own great pedagogic knowledge might well have made us seem very insignificant’.15 That the largely female teaching force at the Laboratory School was, indeed, significant to the school’s testing of ideas led to a spirit of gender equality unlike that found at most schools of the era, with the typical administrative structure that kept female teachers subservient to male administrators.16

This spirit was illustrated in several ways at the school. First, Alice Dewey collaborated with her husband from the very beginnings of the Laboratory School, and she and Ella Flagg Young held key positions of leadership at the school. Jane Addams, while less directly involved with the school, provided Dewey with a living example of a working democracy at Hull House. Thus Dewey led the school along with accomplished women who are credited (by Dewey and by others) with influencing his thinking.17 Second, as I will outline here, female teachers at the school found an environment in which they were enabled, indeed expected, to be involved in the development of ideas and practice at the school. The Laboratory School teachers, centrally involved in the research that distinguished the school as a laboratory of ideas, wrote reports on the daily work of the Laboratory School, along with published articles that disseminated their findings to a wider public.18 And finally, the girls and the boys of the school worked together on all ‘occupations’, which included, as remembered by a former student, Josephine Crane Bradley, ‘carpentry, cooking, weaving, sewing, art’. As she recalled of what might be considered the signature experience of the school, ‘The building of the club-house – the real and practical work – helped us to see what architecture really is. We got far more out of

14Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy, x.
15Katharine Andrews Healy to Katherine Camp Mayhew, undated, but approximately 1930, box 44, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
16In The Dewey School appendices, the authors include a list of teachers and assistants, and of those listed, 81 are women and 33 are men. See Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, Appendix III, 479–80. On hierarchical decision-making in schools, see Kate Rousmaniere, Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 212.
18See also Durst, ‘The Union of Intellectual Freedom and Cooperation’.
that than out of books.'19 Indeed, the Laboratory School community experimented with more than pedagogy; they worked together – men and women, adults and children, famous and anonymous – to figure out the meaning of ‘education as intelligent living’.20

Arriving at the Laboratory School

A core group of these teachers who ‘supplied the answers to the questions’ posed by the Laboratory School established close ties to the Dewey and Mead families, and the school’s ‘circle of friends’.21 Who were these young women, and why did they make the decision, in the last years of the nineteenth century, to teach at a new and innovative school at a university that was itself in its infancy? One of the first teachers at the school was Katherine Camp, teacher and director of the science department from 1896 to 1904. Her younger sister, Anna Camp, was a history teacher at the school from 1897 to 1898, and a substitute teacher and private tutor in subsequent years. The sisters were joined by Althea Harmer, teacher and director of domestic arts and sciences from 1897–1904, and Mary Hill, a resident of Jane Addams’s settlement house, Hull House, who was a teacher in science, history, and textiles at the school from 1898 to 1901.22 An investigation of the work and thoughts of these Laboratory School teachers enables us to consider how these women shaped, and were shaped by, the educational and social experiment that was the Laboratory School.23

Fortunately for historians, the Camp family saved their voluminous correspondence, and their letters and papers vividly describe their Laboratory School years. Likewise, Mary Hill’s family saved a collection of her letters from this period, and these letters are similarly detailed, and wittily engaging. The only letters remaining from Althea Harmer are from a period after she left Chicago, and they document her continued ties to the Laboratory School community. Using additional sources such as

19Josephine Crane Bradley, as quoted in Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, 405. The club-house is discussed in Hall, ‘The Unsung Partner’, 90.
20Another ‘suggested title’ for the manuscript of The Dewey School. In box 15, Katherine Camp Mayhew Collection (6561), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
21George Herbert Mead to Jane Addams, 1 December 1910, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College (on microfilm). Mead referred in this letter to ‘the circle of your friends’.
22See The Elementary School Record, February 1900, 1–2, for a list of the teachers and their degrees and institutions of higher education. On a related figure at the University of Chicago, Julia Bulkley, see Kathleen Cruikshank, ‘In Dewey’s Shadow: Julia Bulkley and the University of Chicago Department of Pedagogy, 1895–1900’, History of Education Quarterly 38, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 373–406.
the women’s college records and biographies of male relatives, it is possible to piece together biographical sketches of these four teachers.24

Katherine and Anna Camp grew up in a middle-class family in and around Sandusky, Ohio, in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1876, their parents, Jacob and Elizabeth Camp, made the decision to move their family, which included Elizabeth (b. 1868), Katherine (b. 1870), Frank (b. 1872), and Anna (b. 1876), from Sandusky to a 15-acre farm a few miles outside the town, for what their youngest daughter described as ‘a radical experiment in family living’. As Anna Camp Edwards explained to her own children many years later, Sandusky children of this era and social milieu ‘were dressed up every afternoon and taken out for a walk by a maid or an older member of the family and always cautioned "not to get dirty!" Little freedom was allowed them and there was an almost total lack of spontaneous play. Against that whole conventional order of society, both father and mother rebelled.’ Her parents ‘dared to act on their convictions, turned their backs on the conventional social life of Sandusky, and, to the consternation of relatives and friends’, moved to a farm so that ‘their children should have first hand contact with nature and plenty of space for creative play’.25

After this upbringing, seen by the family as unconventional for their class, all three Camp daughters went on to study at institutions of higher education. Katherine Camp received her BS in 1894 from the University of Michigan, which she attended with her older sister Elizabeth (and where the sisters met the Dewey and Mead families, as John Dewey and George Herbert Mead were then on the faculty in Ann Arbor). Anna Camp graduated in 1897 with a BA from the College for Women at Western Reserve University.26 They pursued higher education and professional careers with strong support from their parents, whose letters were full of attentive encouragement. For instance, as Mrs Elizabeth Camp wrote to Anna in 1902: ‘I hope

24Cornell University’s Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections includes three collections that contain letters and materials from the Camp family: The Katherine Camp Mayhew Collection (6561), the Camp Family Collection (891), and the Edwards Family collection (1484). Althea Harmer married Charles Bardeen, Dean of the University of Wisconsin’s Medical School, whose papers are held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Steenbock Library. This collection includes a small number of letters from Althea Harmer written after her marriage and move to Madison. One of her sons, John Bardeen, became a Nobel-prize-winning physicist, and thus I have also relied on Lillie Hoddeson and Vicki Daitch, True Genius: The Life and Science of John Bardeen (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2002). In addition, I have been in correspondence with William Bardeen, John Bardeen’s son and Althea Harmer Bardeen’s grandson. The archives at both Pratt Institute and Drexel University, which Harmer attended, contain some limited information on her studies. Mary Hill married a fellow Hull House resident, Gerard Swope, who would go on to head General Electric. A recently donated collection of her letters from the Laboratory School years is held at the University of Illinois-Chicago, and a smaller packet of her letters from this era is included in the Gerard Swope Collection held at the MIT Library. For information on Mary Hill’s life, I have also relied on David Loth’s Swope of G.E. (New York: Arno Press, 1976, reprinted from 1958), as well as the archives at Bryn Mawr College. I am in contact with her grandson, David Swope, and granddaughter and namesake, Mary Hill Swope.

25According to Edwards, ‘Professor John Dewey … once said he had been greatly influenced by what they did’. See Anna Camp Edwards, ‘Out of Old Virginia and New England’, 1953, pp. 1, 16–17, box 11, Camp Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

26Author Biographies, box 44, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
you’re making headway both in teaching and learning and at the same time keeping
your health.'27 The Camp family’s letters – from parents and daughters – reveal the
value this family placed on intellectual pursuits for women, as the sisters sought the
fulfilment of a rich professional life.28

After graduating from the University of Michigan, Katherine Camp took a teach-
ing position in the Department of Domestic Science at Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute,
established in 1887 as an institute for the skilled trades. It was at Pratt that she began
what would be a long career as a teacher. After she taught her first class, in September
1894, she wrote to her brother Frank that she felt ‘like a cat in a strange garret, trying
to conceal my qualms from my pupils, which is trying work’.29 In spite of this initial
trepidation she persisted at teaching, and a few years later John Dewey offered her a
position at his new school in Chicago. In May of 1896, John Dewey wrote to his assis-
tant, Frank Manny: ‘I expect we will have one additional teacher next year, besides
the help we can get from the students. This will probably be Miss KAth. Camp whom
you may or may not have known at Mich. She has done a great deal of work in science
and domesticx[ sic] science, and has good executive ability.’30 After Katherine Camp
accepted Dewey’s offer, she wrote a letter to her father that attempted to address what
must have been his worries about her decision to leave her position at Pratt Institute.
She wrote from Brooklyn: ‘I must confess I was a good deal disturbed by your letter
giving the permanency value of Pratt and the substantial recognition of a “raise” so
much importance. As to the permanency here there is not doubt of that but also the
permanency in Chicago is almost as great, of the school I mean, and of course my
success will ensure my permanency.’ She went on to argue that ‘the possibilities are
you must acknowledge great – also the training mental and social possible much
greater in C. [Chicago] than here’.31

Katherine Camp moved to Chicago and began teaching science at the new school
in 1896. A year later, after completing her studies in Cleveland, her younger sister
Anna came to Chicago to teach at the school.32 Anna Camp taught history there for a
half-year, and then became the private tutor of Josephine Crane, a hearing-impaired
student and daughter of school supporters Charles and Cornelia Crane, a role that kept
her in close contact with the Laboratory School.33 Anna Camp moved in and out of
the flats that her sister shared with various other teachers from the Laboratory School,

27Elizabeth Francis Camp (mother) to Anna Camp, February 10, 1902, box 53, Edwards
Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University
Library.
28See, for instance, Jacob Andrus Camp to Katherine Camp, March 28, 1894, box 8, Camp
Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University
Library.
29Katherine Camp to Frank Camp, September 25, 1894, box 8, Camp Family Collection (891),
Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
30John Dewey to Frank Manny, May 10, 1896, The Correspondence of John Dewey,
31Katherine Camp to Jacob Andrus Camp, May 12, 1896, box 9, Camp Family Collection
(891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
32In 1897, John Dewey wrote of Anna Camp: ‘I suppose she wants to come next year’. John
Dewey to Alice Dewey, July 18, 1897, The Correspondence of John Dewey, (electronic
33By January 1898, after just a few months of teaching history, Anna Camp had begun to
tutor Josephine Crane. See Anna Camp to Jacob Camp, January 23, 1898 and February 2,
1898, box 45, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript
Collections, Cornell University Library.
as she tried to fashion her work with Josephine Crane and the school into a profession that brought her satisfaction.

One of the ‘flat girls’ who lived with the sisters was Althea Harmer, who taught domestic arts and sciences at the school from 1897 until Dewey left for New York in 1904. Althea Harmer’s story is different from that of the Camp sisters, for as her son’s biographers indicate, she did not have the support of her family as she left her Pennsylvania home to pursue higher education and a profession. Born in 1873, Harmer studied at both Drexel Institute and Pratt Institute, graduating in 1896 from Pratt’s Normal Domestic Science Course, where the curriculum included courses such as Sewing, Design and Drawing, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. As Katherine Camp taught in Pratt’s Department of Domestic Science as Instructor in Chemistry and Physics during Harmer’s year at the Institute, it is likely that she was Harmer’s instructor in the chemistry courses, and thus her connection to the Laboratory School. Harmer, whose specialty was textiles, taught domestic arts and sciences at the school for almost as long as Katherine Camp, and became particularly close to the Mead family.

In 1899, Anna Camp remarked to her father that: ‘A Miss Hill from Hull House now occupies one of the front rooms of the flat. She is a very pleasant girl, teaching at the school, and restful which is a great thing.’ Mary Hill was born in 1871 in New Jersey and graduated in 1896 with a BA from Bryn Mawr College, where she studied chemistry and biology. Friend and Hull House roommate of medical reformer Alice Hamilton, Hill taught at the Laboratory School from 1898 to 1901, and was briefly a flatmate of the Camp sisters and Althea Harmer. According to the Bryn Mawr Program for the years following her graduation, she moved to Chicago right after her graduation, first teaching at the Sieboth-Kennedy School in Chicago, from 1896 to 1898, before moving on to the Laboratory School, where she taught history, science and textiles. At Hull House, Hill worked with Dewey and Addams to establish the Labor Museum, which showcased immigrants’ traditions and trades and, as I shall argue below, illustrates the ties between these two experimental institutions.

As the Camp sisters wrote in The Dewey School, the teachers ‘came, for the most part, naturally into the school with a feeling of joy in its adventure’. Given the experimental focus of the school and its founder, these teachers had elected to do much more than teach. They had embarked on a short-lived adventure with long-lasting consequences for themselves, and for all those interested in educational innovation. During their years in the reform-minded city of Chicago, the Laboratory School teachers joined the Deweys, the Meads and the rest of the Laboratory School community to build what would become one of the most closely observed educational experiments in the United States.

---

34 Hoddeson and Daitch, True Genius, 13.
35 Personal email correspondence from Paul Schlotthauer, Librarian and Archivist at Pratt Institute Libraries, and Althea Harmer’s student record from Pratt Institute for 1895–1896.
36 Anna Camp to Jacob Camp, February 13, 1899, box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
37 Bryn Mawr College Program, 1902, 154, held at the Bryn Mawr College Archives. In an 1898 letter, Alice Hamilton wrote that Mary Hill was ‘working very hard at the University – with Mr. Dewey, besides her teaching at the Dewey School’. Alice Hamilton to Agnes Hamilton, October 11, 1898, Hamilton Family Papers, on microfilm, held at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.
38 Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, 373.
Pragmatic experimentation

The Laboratory School, with its founding aim as a laboratory for the testing of philosophical ideas, embodied the pragmatism that John Dewey and others were working out at this time. As Dewey wrote in 1908 in ‘The Bearings of Pragmatism upon Education’: ‘An education based upon the pragmatic conception would inevitably turn out persons who were alive to the necessity of continually testing their ideas and beliefs by putting them into practical application, and of revising their beliefs on the basis of the results of such application.’39 Five years earlier, in ‘Democracy in Education’, Dewey wrote similarly about democracy: ‘The ethical principle upon which [democracy] rests’ is ‘the responsibility and freedom of mind in discovery and proof’.40 In a pragmatic educational experiment, teachers needed to be both responsible and free, in order that they could test, apply and revise their ideas. In Democratic Hope, his recent study of pragmatism, Robert Westbrook argues that the pragmatists relied on a ‘community of competent inquirers’ to ‘fix a belief’,41 and maintained that: ‘pragmatism — by virtue of its methodological commitment to experimental inquiry … has a powerful elective affinity with democracy’.42 Democracy and pragmatism make the same demands of their adherents: to actively pursue the best possible answers to essential questions. A democratic organisation enabled a school community engaged in experimentation to benefit most fully from the expertise of all its members.

As Dewey asserted, also in his 1903 article on ‘Democracy in Education’: ‘through the free and mutual harmonizing of different individuals, the work of the world is better done than when planned, arranged, and directed by a few’.43 As the Camp sisters put it in their Dewey School chapter on ‘Developing Scientific Concepts’, ‘Social experiments must be planned. All concerned must enter into the planning to insure the success of any social undertaking, and all must accept their plan as tentative, to be tested by events’.44 What this meant for teachers in the Laboratory School, a predominantly female group, was that their ideas counted. As Katherine Camp Mayhew recalled two decades after she left the school, she and Dewey ‘got on fairly well, not always agreeing in ideas about things’, but ‘Dr. Dewey would say “You have just as much right to your opinion as anyone else”’.45 Similarly, Katharine Andrews Healy wrote of her experience teaching at the school with Dewey: ‘We were all on a piece of research together and never the least dictation, only a rare open minded attitude of inquiry on his part. Oh I am a much better person for that contact!’46

42Westbrook, Democratic Hope, 8.
43Dewey, ‘Democracy in Education’, 197. For Jane Addams’s views on this, see Louise Knight, Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 401. See also Seigfried, Pragmatism and Feminism.
44Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, 309.
45Notes taken at Mothers’ Luncheon, October 15, 1928. In box 12, Katherine Camp Mayhew Collection (6561), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
46Katharine Andrews Healy to Katherine Camp Mayhew, undated, but approximately 1930, box 44, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
Thus the experiences of the teachers are crucial to understanding the history of this school and of the ideas behind it, as, according to its founding philosophy, the value of ideas could only be determined by testing them out in action. Ideas, then, were not separate from action – thinking was not divorced from doing. Therefore, in a pragmatic experiment in education such as the Laboratory School, the teachers were not simply implementing the ideas of others; they were thinkers in action at the heart of the philosophical experiment. For Dewey and the teachers, the daily testing of ideas was central to this philosophy laboratory, as according to pragmatism ideas become valid as they are translated into action and then evaluated.47

The Laboratory School’s organisational structure was designed to capture and document the thoughts of the teachers at the centre of the educational inquiry. A 1902 letter Dewey wrote to the University of Chicago’s President Harper, in defence of the inclusion of teachers’ articles in a scholarly volume, illustrates his understanding of the role of the teachers in the school’s work. Dewey wrote:

At my suggestion some members of the teaching force in the Laboratory School attempted to prepare articles which should interpret upon psychological grounds the result of experience gained in certain lines of instruction in the Laboratory School. I supposed it was perfectly clear, not only from the name, but from the history and idea of the school that it bore the same relation to the Department of Education that the laboratory of Physics or Chemistry does to those departments, and consequently, that persons who, upon appointment from the University to do work in the Laboratory, would be competent to furnish material.

As he concluded, ‘If the School does not stand in a position of a research laboratory, I see no reason for its existence’.48

Thus the Laboratory School teachers occupied the central position of researchers in this educational laboratory. Several of the teachers, including Katherine Camp and Althea Harmer, wrote articles published in educational journals, including the Elementary School Teacher, Elementary School Record and the Manual Training Magazine. As I shall argue, these articles went beyond descriptions of classroom practices, and engaged with the central ideas with which the members of this school community were grappling. In addition to writing scholarly articles, the Laboratory School teachers wrote weekly teachers’ reports on the experiences in their classrooms, met regularly to discuss teaching methods and the children they taught in common, and made collective decisions regarding instructional matters. And, of course, the Camp sisters mined their involvement with the school to write The

---

47While it was not unexpected for the women under study here to be teachers, as this was considered to be a respectable profession for middle-class women of the era, they were unlikely researchers. Given the centrality of the actual testing of ideas to pragmatist experimentation, the women were actively shaping original roles for themselves as newly conceived ‘teacher researchers’. For studies of historical representations of female educators, see Diana Moyer, ‘Agency in Feminist Historical Research: Representations of Elsie Ripley Clapp’, Journal of Curriculum Theorizing 20, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 33–43; and Kathleen Weiler, ‘The Historiography of Gender and Progressive Education in the United States’, Paedagogica Historica 42, nos 1&2 (February 2006): 161–76.

Dewey School three decades later. So the teachers’ daily experiences at the Laboratory School prepared them to think about and articulate their findings, as they carried out the work Dewey described as ‘testing ideas’ by ‘putting them into practical application’, and then ‘revising their beliefs on the basis of the results of such application’. 

This process of revising beliefs resulted in some cases in modifications and additions to what was primarily a problem-solving curriculum. For instance, Mary Hill wrote in 1900 that the ‘number work’ was being reviewed, with an attempt at ‘systematizing as far as necessary to avoid gaps and lapses’. And in 1901, Mrs Elizabeth Camp, then widowed and living in Chicago with her daughters and their flatmates, wrote to her daughter Elizabeth that ‘Mrs. Dewey was here last week and was talking about Fred’ [the oldest Dewey child], as he was ‘not grounded in the foundations as he ought’. As Mrs Camp went on, ‘I guess they – the Dewey School – will have to modify the idea they commenced with that children could be educated without working at things they could see no use in like the old fashioned three r’s. Don’t say I wrote this or speak of it but I imagine it is one of the things that troubles Kate [Katherine Camp]. I don’t think it is a bed of Roses.’ The work of the teachers at the Laboratory School was challenging and sometimes unsettling. As Katherine Camp wrote to her mother about a misunderstanding with John Dewey about her administrative duties for the following year, ‘I am in a box, as far as going anywhere else is concerned. I should hate to go like poison on some accounts, on others life would be easier and more desirable’. Acknowledging the particular rigors of teaching at a school such as the Laboratory School, the sisters wrote:

The broad and easy ways of conventional teaching lured the teachers to seemingly pleasant travel. Continually must they be on guard against the temptation to select the old,

---

49 Katherine Camp and Althea Harmer published articles in *The Elementary School Teacher* and *The Elementary School Record*, journals that were published by the University of Chicago. *The Elementary School Record (A Series of Nine Monographs)* was published in connection with the Laboratory School during the year 1900. Also appearing in this series were articles by the following teachers: Lillian Cushman, May Root Kern, Katharine Andrews, Georgia Scates, Frank Ball and Georgia Bacon. *The Elementary School Teacher* began as *The Course of Study* in 1900, and was ‘Devoted to the work of The Chicago Institute’. When Colonel Parker came to the University of Chicago, the journal came with him. It was renamed the *Elementary School Journal* in 1910. Teachers who joined Camp and Harmer as authors for this journal included Laura Runyon, Lillian Cushman and May Root Kern. Katherine Camp published an article in the *Manual Training Magazine* in 1901. By my count, then, Katherine Camp published a total of seven articles in addition to the book with her sister Anna; Harmer published five articles; and Hill did not publish, but, along with Katherine Camp, Harmer, and others, wrote teachers’ reports, which are collected as the Laboratory School Work Reports at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library (Special Collections). See Durst, ‘The Union of Intellectual Freedom and Cooperation’ on teachers’ meetings and teachers’ reports at the Laboratory School.


51 Mary Hill to Gerard Swope, April 2, 1900, box 4, Gerard Swope Papers, MIT Library.

52 Elizabeth Camp (mother) to Elizabeth Camp (daughter), January 15, 1901, box 45, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

53 Katherine Camp to Elizabeth Camp, March 23 [possibly 1900 – year not given], box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
easy, and habitual forms of activity for which ready-made materials were at hand, rather than one that required search for new materials and careful thought.\textsuperscript{54}

While teaching at the Laboratory School made great demands on the teachers’ time and energies, it also offered them an opportunity to enquire deeply into questions at the heart of their chosen profession. Particularly for the school’s female teachers, this provided them with a chance to assume responsibilities, with the accompanying satisfactions, rarely found in American schools of this era. In their published writings, school reports and correspondence, the teachers outline for us the central role they played in the daily work of this educational experiment. What emerges is a description of a school in which teachers and students alike were engaged intellectually and socially with one another and with what they called ‘subject matter’ in a way that was unlike other schools of its time. For this reason, they often taught and learned in front of a crowd. As Mary Hill wrote in 1900, ‘I had a pleasant time in school this morning in spite of hords [sic] of visitors’.\textsuperscript{55} The school was largely a convivial, if challenging place to teach. As the Camp sisters wrote:

Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the constant and intelligent attempts to put into classroom use, and thereby test, the theory of the school. The success or failure of these attempts occupied to a great extent the weekly teachers’ meetings and was the subject of the informal daily discussion that always went on between the teachers in hallways and on the way to and from the classrooms.... Although the immediate decision with regard to treatment of subject-matter and method was left to the individual teacher, each teacher’s method was so checked and rechecked by cooperative discussion of results and effect on the children, that changes in viewpoint continually took place.\textsuperscript{56}

The teachers interacted regularly, both formally and informally, and as their letters and writings indicate, remained open to ‘changes in viewpoint’ in a time of great educational flux.

Teaching at the Laboratory School

Central to the work of the Laboratory School teachers was the responsibility of developing the children’s capacity for solving problems. In her 1904 article, ‘Textile Work Connected with American Colonial History’, Althea Harmer explained how the study of domestic arts and sciences enabled children to, as she put it in an earlier article, ‘call the constructive imagination into play’.\textsuperscript{57} As she wrote: ‘The child’s understanding of the daily life of a people is vivified by reproducing their typical occupations. This realization of their daily struggles is insured by his use of the actual material and methods of their time.’\textsuperscript{58} Harmer then described the work done in her classroom in both cooking and weaving, such as their work with flax: ‘Flax was cultivated in the garden and also made into thread, using the simplest method of retting, heckling, and scutching.’\textsuperscript{59} Together, the children solved problems associated with the production of flax.

\textsuperscript{54}Mayhew and Edwards, \textit{The Dewey School}, 379.
\textsuperscript{55}Mary Hill to Gerard Swope, April 16, 1900, box 4, Gerard Swope Papers, MIT Library.
\textsuperscript{56}Mayhew and Edwards, 381–2.
\textsuperscript{57}Althea Harmer, ‘Textile Industries’, \textit{The Elementary School Record} I, no. 3 (1900): 79.
\textsuperscript{58}Althea Harmer, ‘Textile Work Connected with American Colonial History’, \textit{The Elementary School Teacher} IV, no. 9 (May, 1904): 661.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 663.
As she argued, ‘In the solution of these problems the child gets the same training that is given by abstract subjects, such as geometry, for example, with this difference, that the problems presented here are concrete, in touch with practical life, and have a historical and social background which gives them a living interest’. When children are thus involved in actual problem-solving, according to Harmer, ‘their attitude is one of inquiry and investigation, and [their] creative impulse shows, not only in the discovery of processes and methods of work, but also in their artistic impulses and power in creative work. Pedagogically considered, this is the most important result of the work – this making the children scientific and self-reliant in their attitude of mind.’

For example, in a report of 21 October 1899, Harmer explained that the children began their study of textiles by examining their own clothing ‘to see the different kinds of cloth’ and ‘pick[ing] to pieces different kinds of material to get an idea of the different kinds of fibres’, before discussing ‘where the raw material is obtained’. The children then ‘examined stalks with the cotton in bolls, flax with the seed pods and with the fibres in the stalk, the silk of the cocoon, and the wool as it is sheared from the sheep’. The problem to be solved for these students was to determine the fibres that ‘could most easily be made into thread’. This was followed by a focused investigation of wool, as the children decided that it was the easiest to work with, due to ‘the length and coarseness of its fibre’. Thus Harmer led her students through an investigation of a ‘concrete problem’ that was designed to teach scientific and historical content at the same time that it enabled them to become ‘scientific and self-reliant in their attitude of mind’.

In her descriptions of her work at the Laboratory School, Althea Harmer demonstrated her knowledge of social history (to be discussed further below), the science of cooking and textile production, and the methodology required to lead the children through these processes. As she wrote, ‘The connection made by the teacher between the purpose of the experiment and their problem to be solved, though only a phase of the work, forms a new problem for the children’. Harmer led the children through steps that she called ‘particular acts of judgment’ involving ‘thought power’. Children are trained in observation, ‘in the inspection of different fabrics and fibers; and this not ending in itself, but for the sake of forming a conclusion regarding their adaptability to certain purposes’. This is followed by ‘“re-inventing” work’, where ‘the tool, or instrument, and method of going to work are always dependent upon the material, on one side, and the result to be attained, on the other’. As the teacher guides the students through this process of inquiry, she is ‘calling the constructive imagination into play’. For the child, she went on, ‘there is but one thing going on: he is occupied with making things, with weaving, etc.; he is busy in doing something which appeals alike to feeling, perception, imagination, judgment, and manual skill, utilizing them in an activity which interests him’. Thus the investigation of textiles in Harmer’s
classes served to engage the whole child in experiences that would develop a distinct approach to solving problems of all kinds.

The teachers’ abilities to focus on problem-solving at the school depended upon their understanding of the scientific method. In the 1930s, when the Camp sisters were working on their book on the Laboratory School, they asked former teachers to describe their experiences at the school. Years after her time at the school, history and science teacher Katharine Andrews Healy recalled the importance of the students’ ‘scientific attitude of mind’. Likewise, in her 1900 article on ‘Science in Elementary Education’, Katherine Camp argued that: ‘If the use of experimental and observational science can accomplish this training of the constructive and inquiring mind, it will have justified its place in a plan of elementary education.’

An example from a science class that Katherine Camp taught in June 1900 illustrates the process undertaken at the Laboratory School for such training of the mind. In this series of lessons, the students’ examinations of tadpoles led them to wonder what caused the creatures to change their position. Camp suggested that they find out whether light would make tadpoles move or whether darkening part of the dish would make the tadpoles collect in the dark or the light portion and whether jarring or otherwise disturbing them caused them to move. As Camp reported, ‘They made a series of about eight observations and found, as has been found elsewhere, that light did not seem to be a determining factor’. Here Camp illustrated her knowledge of contemporary scientific studies, which she used to verify students’ discoveries – not to supplant their own inquiry. That students gained knowledge of the tadpoles and the reasons for their actions was important to Camp, but so also was the quality of this knowledge when it resulted from inquiry – rather than directly and originally from the teacher.

Teaching according to this experimental method made great demands on teachers’ knowledge of both pedagogical methods and content. As Katherine Camp argued in a 1903 article, the teacher must possess mastery of the following: ‘First, scientific method in itself; second, a sympathetic understanding of the springs of action of the child, united with knowledge of the content of the different sciences.’ As she explained further, ‘One essential thing to be insisted upon is the teacher’s ability to recognize the purpose of hypothesis or theory, as merely outlining present knowledge and to be held always flexible, ready for readjustment, or even abandonment, whichever should be demanded by scientific growth and development’. In his discussion of scientific inquiry in the pragmatist tradition, Robert Westbrook calls this the embrace of doubt, not the suppression of it.

The teachers’ knowledge of scientific content, essential to the success of the school, also equipped them to travel in the larger world of Progressive-era experimentation. For instance, Katherine Camp and Althea Harmer were instructors of pedagogy at the Chautauqua Institution during the summer of 1900, the same year that both Jane

---

66Katharine Andrews Healy to Katherine Camp Mayhew, undated, but approximately 1930, box 44, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
67Katherine Camp, ‘Science in Elementary Education’, *Elementary School Record* I, no. 6 (1900): 166.
68Laboratory School Work Reports, June 20, 1900, held at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library, Special Collections.
Addams and John Dewey lectured at the upstate New York educational centre. Camp offered a course on ‘Elementary Experimental Science’, and Harmer taught ‘Typical Industrial Material as Utilized in Elementary School Work’. In addition, Katherine Camp and Althea Harmer spent some summers at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratories, described by Philip Pauly as ‘a scientific Chautauqua’, where they worked and lived among the scientists gathered there. While participating in these Progressive-era centres of innovation, they extended their Laboratory School work into these other arenas, and further developed the content knowledge that enabled the inquiry they did at the school.

The teachers’ closest ties to another Progressive-era institution were with Hull House. The Camp family’s letters include regular references to the settlement house, often mentioning, for instance, lectures they attended there, such as Jane Addams’s series on ‘Democracy and Social Ethics’. Their letters, along with those of Hull House resident Mary Hill, reveal how, in their daily lives, these teachers were intellectually and socially engaged with the settlement house and its activities, and how this involvement connected with their teaching of history at the school. Perhaps as a result of their engagement with these two experimental institutions, the teachers under study here were keenly aware of what they called ‘social history’. As Althea Harmer wrote in her article on textile work and colonial history, ‘In giving emphasis to this side of social history, we bring the child into closer touch with the inner life of the people with whom he is concerned in history’. As a result of this type of historical study, ‘the question unconsciously arises: What did these people inherit, and what additions did they make to their inheritance?’

This focus on cultural inheritance and change bears very close resemblance to the work done by Mary Hill with Hull House’s Labor Museum, which showcased and preserved the traditions of immigrants from the settlement house’s diverse neighbourhood. The Labor Museum, indeed, was a collaborative effort of members of the Laboratory School and Hull House communities. As Jane Addams wrote of the

71 Katherine Camp to Jacob Andrus Camp, February 18, 1900, box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. On the course titles, see ‘Chautauqua: A System of Popular Education, Program of the 27th Annual Assembly’, The Chautauquan 31, no. 4 (July, 1900): 398–417.
72 See Katherine Camp to her family, July 16, 1899, box 45, Edwards Family Collection (1484); Katherine Camp to Elizabeth Francis Camp (mother), July 5, 1902, box 9, Camp Family Collection (891); Anna Camp to Elizabeth Francis Camp (mother), June 21, 1903, box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), all located in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Katherine Camp was in Woods Hole for all the above summers; the letters verify that Althea Harmer was there in 1899, though she may have accompanied Camp during the other summers as well. On Woods Hole, see Frank R. Lillie, The Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); David Hapgood, Charles R. Crane: The Man Who Bet on People (USA: Institute of World Affairs, 2000), 26; and Philip J. Pauly, Controlling Life: Jacques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 75.
73 On Addams, see Knight, Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy.
74 Anna Camp to Elizabeth Francis Camp (mother), January 26 [1900 added in pencil], box 45, Edwards Family Collection (1484), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
75 See Katherine Camp to Jacob Andrus Camp, February 18, 1900, Box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
founding of the museum, ‘My exciting walk on Polk Street was followed by many talks with Dr. Dewey and with one of the teachers in his school who was a resident at Hull-House [Mary Hill]. Within a month a room was fitted up to which we might invite those of our neighbors who were possessed of old crafts and who were eager to use them.’ Describing her work in a letter to her future husband (and fellow Hull House resident) Gerard Swope, Mary Hill wrote from upstate New York, while searching for artefacts for the Labor Museum: ‘I hoped I might find something around here for the museum this being an historic neighborhood – but the DAR’s spend their time in erecting monuments on battlegrounds and let their spinning wheels rot in the garrets and won’t even take the trouble to give one away.’

Like the Laboratory School, with its focus on ‘occupations’ such as weaving and cooking, the Labor Museum sought to teach through inquiry into the most essential of human social interactions. In this way, the effort illustrates the process of discovery that was also at the heart of the Laboratory School community. For example, in a report on a lesson on pottery in May 1899, Mary Hill discussed a combined class in history and science that went on an ‘excursion to the Field Museum’. The students made clay pots, and then followed this up with an investigation of Indian pottery. As she explained, ‘They saw the different ways in which it had been made, – by simply turning the clay between the thumb and finger, as they had been doing; by lining baskets in which case the marks of the basket were left on the clay, and how probably their first notions of design arose from this fact’. The Laboratory School teachers used their knowledge of content to provide students with experiences that enabled them to make connections between the larger world – in this case, of the past – and their own lives.

Thus in their daily work at the Laboratory School, in fields as various as domestic arts and sciences, science and history, teachers were engaged with students in what Dewey, in a 1900 Elementary School Record article, described as thinking that ‘does not occur for its own sake, nor end in itself. It arises from the need of meeting some difficulty, in reflecting upon the best way of overcoming it, and thus leads to planning, to projecting mentally the result to be reached, and deciding upon the steps necessary and their serial order.’ As they planned educational experiences that developed such thinking in their students, teachers needed to keep both the outlook of the children and the contours of the subject matter in mind. As the Camp sisters advised: ‘Like Alice, she must step with her children behind the looking glass and in this imaginative land she must see all things with their eyes and limited by their experience; but, in time of need, she must be able to recover her trained vision and from the realistic point of view of an adult supply the guide posts of knowledge and the skills of method.’ This shifting of perspectives, from the mind of the child to the heart of the content, and the mental agility it required, put

---


78 Mary Hill to Gerard Swope, July 23 [likely 1900 – year not given], box 4, Gerard Swope Papers, MIT Library.

79 Laboratory School Work Reports, May 26, 1899, held at the University of Chicago’s Regenstein Library, Special Collections.


81 Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, 312.
the teachers at the centre of the pragmatic experiment that was the Laboratory School.  

**Conclusion: ‘Discovery is transformative’**

In lecture notes George Dykhuizen wrote while taking George Herbert Mead’s 1926 course on Dewey, he captured the mood of the Laboratory School (though the text under discussion was Dewey’s 1926 text *Experience and Nature*): ‘Discovery is transformative, not surely additive. It changes the world in which the public lives.’ These words aptly describe the experiences of the teachers at the Laboratory School, as well as their connections to the larger world of Progressive-era experimental institutions. In both cases, the discovery that was the companion to collective inquiry was not merely an activity that added to the lives of the community members. According to this understanding, discovery transforms; it engages the inquirers with the world in such a way as to create new expectations about what it means to live and interact together.

Like other experimental institutions of its era, the Laboratory School changed our ideas about what it means to be part of ‘the world in which the public lives’. Instead of passive recipients of information who were judged on their ability to memorise and recite, students were active participants in learning experiences designed to engage them in problem-based inquiry. Instead of compliant followers of instructions from administrators, teachers were content experts who created educational experiences that would carry students from their interests to mastery of content deemed essential. Transformation came about through the social engagement of teachers and students. As Dewey wrote in an appendix to *The Dewey School*:

> The integration of the individual and society is impossible except when the individual lives in close association with others in the constant and free give and take of experiences and finds his happiness and growth in processes of sharing with them. The idea involved a radical departure from the notion that the school is just a place in which to learn lessons and acquire certain forms of skill.  

For the Laboratory School community under discussion here, the school was much more than a ‘place in which to learn lessons’. The Laboratory School became the centre for those engaged in what the Camp sisters called ‘experimental living guided by intelligent thinking’. As Mary Hill Swope wrote of her work with Dewey, ‘The best education I ever received was in his school where I worked, presumably as a teacher – but from which I received much more than I ever gave’. The teachers at the school, in their willingness to engage in an experiment in education, learned as they taught. And this engagement did not stop when the school day ended, as their private and public lives were intertwined; they attended Hull House lectures together,

---

82As Mayhew and Edwards wrote of this shifting of perspectives, ‘There is constant need for her to be agile in her change from one to the other’. *The Dewey School*, 312.

83George Dykhuizen’s notes from George Herbert Mead’s 1926 seminar on John Dewey, p. 19, box 7, George Herbert Mead Collection, Special Collections, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. The text under discussion was John Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1926), 157.

84Mayhew and Edwards, *The Dewey School*, 466.

talked about school matters after hours, and were flatmates in Hyde Park homes. During a brief time in 1899, a school family even shared living quarters with the teachers. The Meads’ sister-in-law Mabel Wing Castle lived with her young daughter Elinor (a Laboratory School student) in the Hyde Park flat shared by Katherine Camp and Althea Harmer – a flat Castle described as a ‘charming scientifically conducted home’.86

The Camp family’s letters are full of stories of dinners and lectures and bike rides enjoyed by what Anna Camp called the ‘Camp-Dewey-Mead crowd’.87 For example, in a letter Anna Camp wrote to her sister Elizabeth in 1899, she described several of the group’s activities and entertainments. ‘The flat girls were all here to dinner today, and have just gone home, after electric samovar tea.’ She mentioned ‘two very interesting series of articles in the Atlantic Monthly’, including William James’s ‘Psychological Talks to Teachers’ and P. Kropotkin’s ‘Autobiography of a Revolutionary’.88 ‘On Saturday mornings now’, she wrote, ‘we meet at Mr. Mead’s to read Dr. Dewey’s Philosophy of Education’. Also, ‘Katherine and Althea have wild schemes and aspirations now-a-days to go to Professor Geddes’ summer school in Edinburg. I have some articles on Prof. Geddes in the Ethical Science paper which I am going to read and digest, as the air is full of him and one has to absorb some of it.’89 She recounted that ‘Mr. and Mrs. Mead were here to dinner last night’, and ended her letter with the news that the ‘Castle Square Opera Company is playing here, and this week they play “The Mikado” – which we all want to see’.90

A final story from the teachers’ letters illustrates in a light-hearted way some of the spirit of experimentation that these early female professionals must have possessed. It involves three of the teachers under study here: Katherine Camp, Althea Harmer and Mary Hill. Writing to Gerard Swope in 1900, Hill recounted an evening visit the three paid to Dr Jacques Loeb. (Loeb was a University of Chicago biologist Katherine Camp was known to disagree with. In a letter to her mother, she wrote: ‘Now Dr. Loeb is down on coeducation – thinks the poor boys are distracted! Need protection! I can’t stand him any longer.’91) According to Hill’s account, Loeb offered the friends an after-dinner cigarette and left the room, underestimating, it seems, their willingness to go against conventions. For, Hill wrote, ‘When he returned and found Miss Harmer actually smoking he nearly fell over and pulled down the shades. I afterward shared it with her – since she asked me to and thinking that smoking alone might

86Mabel Wing Castle to unknown recipient, June 13, 1899, box 18, Elinor Castle Nef Collection, Special Collections, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.
87Anna Camp to Jacob Andrus Camp, January 16, 1899, box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
89Professor Patrick Geddes of Edinburgh, Scotland, was a philosopher and urban planner. See Helen Meller, Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner (New York: Routledge, 1990).
90Anna Camp to Elizabeth Francis Camp (sister), April 30, 1899, box 10, Camp Family Collection (891), Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.
91Katherine Camp to Elizabeth Francis Camp (mother) [possibly 1901 – year not given], box 9, Camp Family Collection (891), Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. On Loeb, see Mayhew and Edwards, The Dewey School, 10. See also Pauly, Controlling Life: Jacques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology.
cause her embarrassment. He said that the smoke made him dizzy. Then we played whist and at about half past ten came home. It was very amusing.\(^\text{92}\)

In conclusion, the teachers’ letters and writings offer us a glimpse into their worlds, which included the Laboratory School and Hull House, and various other centres of Progressive-era experimentation. For them, ‘the world in which the public lives’ included those who were shocked by a woman smoking a cigarette, and others who would doubt their ability, as female teachers, to make important pedagogical decisions. Yet, alongside friends such as John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Jane Addams, these teachers worked to transform, through their discoveries, the way we understand teaching and learning. The experiences of the ‘Camp-Dewey-Mead crowd’ can help us to understand not just an experiment, or an era, but also what might come from schools in which all are engaged as ‘communities of inquiry’.\(^\text{93}\) In schools, democratic inquiry requires teachers who are equipped and entrusted to make pedagogical decisions. The result at the Laboratory School was a community vitally connected to experimentation as a way to live in a democracy.

**Notes on contributor**

Anne Durst is an Associate Professor of Educational Foundations at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, USA. She is working on a forthcoming book, *Women Educators in the Progressive Era: The Women behind Dewey’s Laboratory School*, to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. She has also conducted a grant-supported project on action research with English as a Second Language and bilingual teachers.

---

\(^{92}\)Mary Hill to Gerard Swope, April 20, 1900, box 4, Gerard Swope Collection, MIT Library.

\(^{93}\)Westbrook, *Democratic Hope*, 34. This is a term that Westbrook associates with pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, as does R. Jackson Wilson, *In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860–1920* (New York: Wiley, 1968), Chapter 3.