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PREVIEW

EDUCATION IN THE PARISH / PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD

The Educational Tradition in the Life and Works of Willa Cather

by

Mellanee Kvasnicka

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Susan Rosowski

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1997

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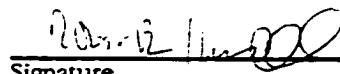
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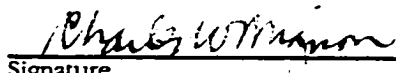
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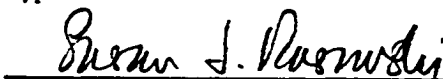
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EDUCATION IN THE PARISH / PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD
THE EDUCATIONAL TRADITION IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLA
CATHER

Mellanee Kvasnicka, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1997

Advisor: Susan Rosowski

Willia Cather's life and work were indelibly affected by her educational experiences. The combination of the education she received in Red Cloud and that which occurred at the University in Lincoln provided her with a vision of a specific place and people made universal by her classical education. How and what Cather learned had enormous influence on her art. Cather's view of education was a driving force in her work: she used learning to stave off the increasing materialism of the twentieth century; she wrote vehemently and often of the rights of young people; and she viewed teaching as a means of preserving one's youth. The relationship between teacher and student is critical, to understanding her idea of education. In that connection, there is often a kind of intimacy unequalled in other kinds of human contact. As a student and a teacher, Cather understood the necessity of that intimacy. In her own writing she would use her work as a way of establishing that same degree of understanding with her readers. Ultimately Cather's work champions the idea that an education must do more than enable us to make a living; it must also teach us how to live. What she writes of education makes a prophetic statement even today as liberal education and the humanities seem to be, as she wrote, "having their dark hour."

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PREVIEW

Preface

As a high school English teacher, I am often asked what I want "to do" with a Ph.D. I suppose my answer may surprise those who ask. What I want "to do" with my doctoral work is to become a better teacher. I've taken some comfort as I worked with Willa Cather that she might understand what I mean. As a champion of the rights of young people to be young, she realized, I think, how much a teacher can do for her students. I say that not to be self-serving; I say that because my own excellent teachers have left their imprint on me as surely as Cather's teachers did for her.

The more I learned about Cather and her teachers, the more I wanted to know about her ideas of education. I soon discovered that in Cather's fiction, there are teachers everywhere. Sometimes they occupy positions of central importance in the novels; at other times, the teacher-characters serve on the perimeter of the action, providing an important view from a more objective perspective. Teachers often voice Cather's most deeply held ideas about art, integrity, and the value of learning, often showing us the difference between the inquisitive life and acquisitive living. As a teacher myself, I wanted my own students to understand that for Cather (and I would hope for them as well), education never ended, but was instead a process, a means of enriching all aspects of our participation in life itself.

My work has done all of that and more. I have learned as much about myself as I have learned about Cather. I have come to understand that people teach and learn in many ways. The process of learning for me has strengthened my contacts with those around me, whose generous support and assistance have indeed made my project possible.

One of the hot topics in education circles today is peer support. My gratitude begins with those with whom I work who have encouraged me during this very long process. Foreign language teachers and students helped me polish my Spanish. Two principals, Joyce Christensen and Jerry Bartee encouraged my work. I am grateful to Lynn Porn and the staff in Archives at Love Library at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for their assistance. My research in Pittsburgh was facilitated by Cather enthusiast Jeannne Shaffer. Sue Rosowski gave unstintingly of her comments and energy in reading my manuscript. My family has wondered if my project would ever reach its conclusion, even as they urged me to continue. Finally, Cather often signed her letters, "Faithfully," and perhaps I've learned again what that means, as I offer my thanks to my husband Bill, whose loyalty and love make all my journeys possible.

Chapter 1

The Educational Background

In one of Willa Cather's finest stories, "Old Mrs. Harris," Vickie Templeton's neighbor and mentor, Mr. Rosen, gives her a slip of paper inscribed with a quotation from Michelet: "The end is nothing; the road is all." In that simple act, Cather encodes what was one of the guiding principles of her life. For Willa Cather, life was a striving, a journey, a quest for self-realization and understanding. As a writer, Cather would demonstrate again and again the value of education, of learning, as a kind of journey whose purpose was not reaching a destination, but navigating the obstacles along an uncertain course. For Willa Cather, the journey began with the teachers in her own life, continued in her own teaching career, and ultimately manifested itself in her fiction. This quest became a focal point of Cather's life and career. When Mr. Shimerda tells Jim Burden, "Te-e-ach, t-e-e-ach my *Ántonia*"(27), Cather has done more than create a poignant scene between father and daughter. She has crystallized her belief in the importance of education. For Cather, a life of learning brought her closer to her art.

To a far greater extent than most of her contemporary writers, Willa Cather's own education played a critical role in her development as a writer. James Woodress suggests that "no other writers of Willa Cather's generation . . . were as well-educated as she" ("American Experience . . ." 56-57). A look at the writers of Cather's time confirms this statement. Hemingway's (1899-1961) formal education ended with his high school graduation. William Faulkner (1897-1962) did not graduate from high school. Steinbeck's (1902-1968) education was limited to reluctant attendance at Stanford, which he left in 1925 without a degree. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) took classes at

Princeton but never earned a degree. Even writers whose prominence drops below that of Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Cather do not have her solid educational experience. Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941) attended school only intermittently, and Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) attended public school and Indiana University (1889-1890).

Although Cather's women contemporaries were better educated than the men, they did not achieve the same enduring literary status as did Cather. Pearl Buck (1892-1973) was graduated from Randolph-Macon Women's College, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) from Radcliffe, and Zora Neale Hurston (1903-1960) from Barnard in 1928. As singularly important as education was in Cather's life and work, it seems crucial to understand that she received an education both typical of and exceptional to that of the nineteenth century. Cather's education in a Nebraska hamlet and later at an emerging land-grant university demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of a system whose roots were deeply embedded in the principles of American thought.

Historically, developments in women's education occurred concurrently, though often in different settings and contexts. Three aspects of American educational history provided direct influence on Cather's life and work: the development of the rural, frontier school and teacher, the institution of the land-grant university, and the movement toward greater freedom for women in education. Section one will explore the establishment of the frontier school, which most immediately affected Willa Cather. Section two opens and extends the effects of frontier schools into the larger context of the land-grant university. A third division focuses on developments in the women's movement concerning education and specifically to Willa Cather's training. At times developments in all three areas intersected, moving toward providing better education for America's citizens. Ultimately such improvement would include the education of women.

Education on the Frontier

On the American frontier, education was a commodity expensive and difficult to obtain, although often establishing a school was among a community's highest priorities. Not only did children need to be taught how to read and write, but community planners also understood that establishing a school gave a town respectability. Having a school was a drawing card for settlement, just as it is today, when chambers of commerce tout a city's educational system. Settlers were determined to "prove up" the land and provide for their families. But they were also determined that their children should be educated: "While many adult prairie settlers grew up with this lack of public education, in the educational and community void of the open country, they sought public education for their own children" (Cordier 12). S.D. Beals, the state superintendent of education in Nebraska in 1869, suggested that these new settlers were

. . . free from the prejudices which grow up amid old associations, that are peculiar to long settled and unchanging communities. They are inspired under the influences of a rapid development in physical resources and material wealth, to look for corresponding progress in social, political, and religious sentiments and institutions. They have left the old, they expect the new. (qtd. in Cordier 13)

And in leaving the old behind, there was a very real sense they were responsible for making education work. Generally settlers believed in public education and supported its establishment in tax dollars for buildings and teachers' salaries, although in communities where the tax base was not sufficient to provide these necessities, schools were established in individual homes. There were, of course, opponents--parents who kept their children home to tend to chores, those who felt education should be had at its cheapest, those who

felt education should be had only by the brightest. However, as historian Mary Cordier points out:

In the participatory democracy of the rural school districts, the adult men and women voters overruled the "school killers" who did not want public schools and the "aristocrats" who wanted schools only for the brightest students, the wealthy, or only for boys. While the fortunes of any given school district deteriorated or flourished depending on the agricultural economy, the schools were built and maintained, teachers were hired, and the growing population of children learned. (15-16)

That support for public coeducation was widespread is evidenced by the fact that by 1900 laws for compulsory attendance were being implemented in all but two states outside the South (Blum 454-455).

In the early days, teachers were often only slightly older and better prepared to teach than the children they instructed. Mari Sandoz graduated from the eighth grade and began teaching a country school. She had had only four and a half years of schooling and was sixteen years old. In Old Jules she writes of her own experience. During the first week of August in 1912 she

sneaked to Rushville . . . and in a pink cross-barred gingham dress took the teacher's examination in such subjects as arithmetic and civil government, and the theory of teaching. It seemed quite impossible that she could pass. All the other candidates were well-dressed young ladies and she was a child, but she must get away--peacefully if she could, because of her mother, but get away. (366)

In her youth and uncertainty, we are reminded of Lesley Fergusson in Cather's story "The Best Years." Many rural schools were staffed by such young women who saw teaching as

one of the few wage-earning opportunities open to them. Early requirements for teaching were quite simple: candidates must be literate and available. But as more and more teachers were needed, standards were increased and state departments created norms for certification, usually tests given by county superintendents. Teachers' examinations were advertised to be held on certain days at different locations in the county. Examinations might have been conducted in a school, a store, the superintendent's home, or even a church (Dick 325). Even these early tests were simple, but gradually, competency examinations were more thorough, demanding knowledge in both content and methodology. The 1890 Superintendent's Report lists reprints the examination questions used for hiring, including the following:

Define prosody. In what measure is the quotation written? Mark the scansion of the last 2 lines.

Point out and define the figures of speech found in the selection.

Give your method of teaching history.

How would you stimulate and cultivate the moral nature of pupils?

Find the contents in gallons of a cask that will hold seven bushels.

How does the excessive use of alcohol affect the speech?

Give ten principal exports, rivers, and cities of the United States.

What was the most important battle of the French and Indian War?

Why? Give terms of the treaty of 1763. (Lane 67-81)

While some examinations had moved to include issues of methodology, most remained content oriented, asking questions which required very specific, factual answers. Students clearly were expected to know what and when rather than why or how. But as support for education increased, so did teacher standards and competency. This shift from subject-centered instruction to children centered methodology deterred some men from seeking teaching positions (Cordier17).

Most teachers were women. Men began to leave the teaching ranks when teaching became a full-time job that lasted for longer than a few months of the year. As the school year lengthened, men found it difficult to pursue other careers in addition to teaching, such as farming, law, or the ministry. Other factors in the feminization of teaching included the fact that women were paid less,¹ that opportunities for employment outside the home were limited, and that teaching was considered an "acceptable" career for women because it coincided with the settlers' notions of "womanhood," which included nurturing the young. In the years following the Civil War, teaching "began to be considered genteel. In fact it was regarded as one of the few occupations that a lady might engage in without compromising her social standing" (Donovan 7). Thus "teaching, even with its low salaries, was viewed as an honorable, prestigious occupation for women . . ." (Cordier 26). School reformer Catharine Beecher characterized the ideal schoolteacher of the mid-nineteenth century as a missionary of sorts (a comparison Cather will use herself), qualified academically, and the possessor of a kind of benevolence who was ready to go "to the most ignorant portions of our land to raise up schools, to instruct in morals and piety, and to teach the domestic arts and virtues" (Hoffman 51). In the 1840s, 600 prospective teachers were recruited by the National Board of Popular Education to teach in the West. Beecher worked with two of these early groups of neophyte teachers. Their charge was to teach children "for the common good as well as to earn a salary." As Mary Cordier points out, these were also the goals of the "indigenous prairie schoolwomen," though

There was nonetheless, a difference between operating on others as missionaries to the 'most ignorant portions of our land' and operating with others as accepted members of the community. (29)

The indigenous prairie schoolwomen had a much greater stake in successful teaching careers when their own roots were deep in the communities where they taught. From a

twentieth-century vantage point, Beecher's charge for teacher was an onerous one, and the idea that teaching "could be accepted as a chosen alternative to marriage" (Hoffman 11) strikes modern women as condescending. In some ways, the expectations articulated by Beecher's characterization of women was paralyzing, placing an enormous responsibility on women:

She believed in womanhood as a primary identity that cut across all class, regional, and religious lines—a natural sisterhood. Convinced of women's moral superiority, she believed that the salvation of the nation in a time of social disruption rested with educated women's influence as mothers and teachers. In effect she argued against egalitarian efforts to provide women with access to political and economic rights and offered instead a politicized domesticity. (Evans 71)

Nevertheless, in a few decades Beecher's dream of an army of women teachers had been realized, despite opposition centered on women's alleged inability to teach "higher subjects or to control rowdy older male pupils;" thus, the "entering wedge for female teachers, therefore, was the education of young children in common schools" (Kaestle 123). In 1853 the first state superintendent of schools in Indiana proclaimed, "Blessed be he who invented female teachers" (Kaestle 124), and in offering kudos to women once again for their domesticity, a state superintendent in Pennsylvania declared that women have "patience and perseverance, quick sensibilities and sympathy with youthful minds. Except in the family, she nowhere so truly occupies her appropriate sphere, as in the classroom" (Kaestle 124). The attitudes that had once prevented women from entering teaching now tended to confine them to the classroom, ironically limiting their opportunities.

Most of these prairie women were white, the wives, mothers, and daughters of the lower-middle-class families, who, perhaps

more than any other professional group in American life, have been identified with the great mass of middling farmers, shopkeepers, artisans, and low-level managers who have occupied the rough edge between manual and intellectual labor. (Rury 10)

The humble beginnings of teachers, coupled with the fact that teaching became a "feminized" profession, "woman's work," insured that teaching would not be seen with the same kind of esteem and respect as other professions dominated by men, such as law and medicine. Most women began teaching "careers" when they were young--because teaching was often considered a temporary measure before one got on with the real business, the serious aspects of life--whether it was a career in a more learned profession or business for men, or marriage and a family for women. Thus, as historian John Rury suggests,

. . . teachers have been relegated to the very edge of professional responsibility. And yet Americans have almost always acknowledged the critical role played by teachers in transmitting essential values, skills, and knowledge to the nation's children. (11)

A 1915 report dealing with "Nebraska Rural Teachers" established the following profile of the typical rural teacher: she was 21 years old, and had lived in both town and country. Her education had been received in Nebraska and consisted of eight years of common school and four years of high school. (Here we see the effects of the increased number of high schools.) The typical rural teacher felt most proficient in arithmetic. Her expectancy in the teaching profession was 1.85 years. Her yearly income was \$445. 28. She paid \$114.80 in board, did her own janitor work without extra pay, and spent her vacation at home or attending summer school (Manley, Images 34-35).

Once teachers were found, frontier schools faced other problems. Books were scarce and equipment scanty. Just getting to school was often an ordeal, and the placement of the school sometimes became a issue of lively controversy. When towns began to develop, those who lived in outlying areas were often forced to make long treks to and from school. The length of the school year grew from two months to six months to eight months, and school attendance was often hampered by the needs of the land. Local authorities established and maintained control of curriculum, and methodology was often recitative. As school historian Wayne Fuller points out, there might have been as many as thirty recitations per day. During these recitations, students were required to repeat verbatim what they had memorized from reading the textbook, including such material as the multiplication tables, geographical facts, historical events and dates, and poetry. It might also have meant reading aloud to the teacher (106). But while recitation was an often used technique, it was not, by far, the only method used by rural teachers. Other methodology included board work, older students listening to younger students' recitations, what we would today call "peer tutoring," and competition. In many ways, students were forced to assume responsibility for their own learning, and the independent student was apt to be more successful than his/her less autonomous classmates. But as Mary Cordier suggests, "This reliance on independent learning could be disastrous for the children with little educational background or support from their homes and who were slower at learning" (118). Willa Cather came to school having first been educated at home, and by the time the family moved to Nebraska, and eventually Red Cloud, Cather was already a highly literate young woman, exactly the kind of student who would have benefited from this kind of independent learning.²

What kind of curriculum was taught in these early schoolrooms? Frontier historian Everett Dick points out that "The lack of uniformity in textbooks was the bane of the frontier pedagogue. The parents brought the old texts from their former homes in the East

and often in a class there would be three or four different kinds of geographies or readers. This caused an utter lack of uniformity and impeded progress"(320). Thus subject matter was often determined by whatever books were available, though by 1900 most teachers in rural areas were teaching a standardized curriculum, usually established by the state superintendent of education. The course of study usually included reading, writing, and arithmetic, grammar, history, civics, geography, and hygiene (Fuller 104). Because many frontier teachers had reached only the eighth grade (or less), the curriculum content reflected that reality. Because "only a minority of the nineteenth-century teachers [had] completed a course of study at a normal school," teachers often received additional training by attending teacher institutes taught by "outstanding local teachers and administrators and by teacher educators from the normal schools" (Cordier 53).

These teacher institutes offered work in spelling, penmanship, language, grammar, reading, drawing, music, geography, history, civics, arithmetic, physiology and hygiene, agriculture, carpentry, sewing, and cooking (Cordier 53-54). One such institute held in Lone Tree, Nebraska, in 1873 suggests the kind of activities prevalent during such seminars. The day began with a prayer and a song. The speaker (perhaps a minister or experienced teacher) presented such lectures as "The Teacher's Work" and "Preparation for the Teacher's Work." Often the emphasis was on the religious, stressing the moral and spiritual in teaching. After presentations in botany, grammar, reading and school economy, sessions were given over to readings and music. Essays on various topics were read. At the Lone Tree institute, 69 teachers attended (Dick 327-328). In 1888, 75 Nebraska counties held teacher institutes. Of the 6,980 teachers working in Nebraska, 6,488 attended those institutes at an average cost of \$1.70. Two years later 85 counties organized teacher institutes, and the Superintendent's Report relates that "During the summer institutes of 1890 the number of teachers attending the institutes equalled the entire number of teachers in the counties" (Lane 27). What teachers may have missed in

methodology and subject matter in their "formal" training, they attempted consistently to gain through attendance at teacher institutes.

Students who completed the course of study in their rural communities often concluded their education with the eighth grade. The growth of the public high school as we know it and as it developed in Cather's day began with a law passed in Massachusetts in 1827 which mandated that larger towns must supply instruction free of charge and tax supported in high school subjects, such as surveying, logic, Latin, and Greek. The development of other types of secondary instruction followed, including such developments as coeducational high schools and manual training schools, the first of which was founded in Baltimore in 1884 (Wynn 156-157). As early as 1857 the American Journal of Education had supported the development of the "Common High School," listing several reasons for its importance, most significant of which is that its creation would enable teachers to better use their time in more specialized kinds of instruction for students at more sophisticated levels of study (Gross 139).

Educational historians point to three main origins of the development of the secondary school in the United States: "by establishment according to a definite plan, by the transformation of an academy [a private school for older students] into a public high school, and by the gradual development of advanced work in an elementary school until a separate organization was formed" (Good 237). Cather's high school in Red Cloud followed the third pattern of development. By 1887, the Webster County seat was fifteen years old and had gone through several school buildings: a dug-out school, a sod schoolhouse, and an early frame building. These were replaced by a two-story brick building serving primary through 12th grades. The high school used a large second-floor room. In 1917 a three-level building gave the high school its own quarters. That building is still the core of the Red Cloud High School (Griffing 782).

Thus the establishment of high schools lagged behind the development of colleges and universities, so that, as was the case with the University of Nebraska, institutions were forced to establish "prep schools" in order to bring students whose education was in some way lacking, up to a level of excellence appropriate to university requirements. The prep school at the University of Nebraska, called the Latin School, was for many years "the largest department in the University--in 1881-1882, for example, 183 of the 284 students enrolled in the institution were preps. But the Latin School was a poor substitute for an effective secondary school system" (Manley, Centennial 89). The gap in secondary education in Nebraska needed to be filled. As David Bergquist points out, "The middle secondary educational link so necessary to the fulfillment of this concept [of a state educational system] had been non-existent or in disarray in Nebraska, although by the 1880's high schools were more commonplace" (97).

Chancellor Irving J. Manatt (1884-1888) was well aware of this gap in student preparation, and he began a campaign to promote the establishment of the public high school, though many took his interest only as a means of finding more students for the university. The establishment of high schools was an expensive proposition, but Manatt argued that in the long run, the state would benefit from such investment. "I see the common school stuck in the mud," he said, "and the university suspended in the air. If we are to have a system of education, the word is 'Close up'" (Manley, Centennial 90). In 1884, to emphasize the University of Nebraska's determination to promote the development of effective high schools in Nebraska, Manatt announced that the Latin School would raise its standards of admission. Manatt's move began to pay off. The University Catalogue for 1885-1886 listed schools in Beatrice, Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, and Tekamah had received major accreditation, while high schools in Fairmont, Friend, Gibbon, Harvard, Hebron, McCook, Red Cloud, Sutton, and Wilber had fulfilled the requirements for minor accreditation (Manley,

Centennial 90-91).³ Manatt was a controversial chancellor, however, and as historian Robert Knoll points out, "Manatt worked with the state's high schools for a closer articulation of the curriculum, but without fully comprehending that a grounding in the traditional classical studies was not enough for the new world, and his arrogance and sarcasm alienated many with whom he had to work" (20). Historian James C. Olson writes that "There were those who felt that the state was wasting its money in trying to establish and operate a university when so few opportunities existed for secondary education, and the preponderance of students in the preparatory department caused the University to be dubbed derisively as 'the Lincoln high school'"(346). The University of Nebraska would be little more than a glorified high school until secondary education in Nebraska could prepare students for the realities of college work.

There was some argument over what kind of curricula should be established. The argument was an old one--should high schools prepare students for college or university work or focus on the practical, more technical arts because so few of the students went on to college. In 1892 the National Education Association entered the debate, attempting to define the relationship between the high school and the university. The Association appointed the Committee of Ten with Harvard President Charles William Eliot as chair. That group concluded that it is

not the chief business of secondary schools to prepare students for college, but to prepare them for life whether they go or do not go to college. . . . The main report received great acclaim . . . but it seems to have had little practical effect. The schools continued to expand their programs, increase their electives, and make very decided differences in their treatment of college and non-college youth. (Good 256-257).

The location of the high school (usually in a centralized town setting) made it difficult for families in rural areas to send their young people such great distances. This conflict between rural and urban interests was heightened by the fact that University of Nebraska professors were often called upon to visit small-town high schools to certify them as having met the standards in terms of curriculum for entrance to the University of Nebraska:

The greatest criticism of the University concerned its high school accreditation system. For some years members of the faculty visited high schools in the state for the purpose of reviewing their curricula and instructional programs. Those with appropriate programs were accredited by the University and their graduates permitted to enroll in the University without examination. Graduates of unaccredited high schools had to take a battery of tough examinations. While the arrangement undoubtedly did much to improve high school education, people from rural districts complained that the University had too much influence in determining what high schools should teach.

(Manley, Images 33-34)

In 1870 there were only 160 public high schools in the United States, but by the end of the century, there were over 6,000. As towns and cities grew, they enjoyed enormous benefit from this growth, with their concentrated population and better transportation(Blum 455). Following the trend established by colleges and universities (largely as the result of the land-grant institutions), high school curriculum evolved into a more "practical" course of study, away from the "classics" in favor of greater emphasis on science and other "useful" subjects.

Not everyone took advantage of the growing importance of high schools. Many high schools were selective; students had to pass an examination to be admitted. In some

families, the educational tradition was not a strong motivating force for attendance. In some areas there were no high schools, and some families could not spare children from employment to attend. High school did not appeal to many adolescents, especially in curricula which was largely rhetorical. Transportation to school was sometimes difficult. In some places high schools were so weak attendance was worthless (French 153). Today's society views a high school diploma as commonplace, but in 1900, "only six percent of the population finished twelve years of schooling. Significantly, 60 percent were female, since boys tended to leave earlier for the work force" (Rosenberg 22). Nevertheless, high school attendance rose steadily, roughly doubling each decade from 1880 until 1960 (French 153). Figures in Nebraska support this trend. In 1888, Red Cloud High School had an enrollment of 56 students. There were four graduates that year. In 1890, 100 students were enrolled and there were three graduates, one of whom was Willa Cather. She was one of 613 graduates in the state that year (Lane 141,145).

Financing public schools was left largely to individual communities, so there was often wide discrepancy between the quality of education received from one area of the country to another. Blum suggests that the South and the West often lagged behind the East in the quality of its education, with the South having tremendous problems supporting not only twice the number of children per adults as the North, but also because southern states (at the insistence of white folks) supported two separate systems of education (455).

An important by-product of frontier education was the development of a teacher corps of women empowered, in an ironic way, by neglect. While local school boards maintained autonomy, the individual teacher often came to wield great power and authority in the school room. Left on her own to manage the school building, develop curriculum, handle discipline, deal with parents and school board members, take care of her own family, or if unmarried, see to her own personal life and needs, and support her