

How far do you agree with the view that Frances Mary Buss 'transformed the whole educational scene for women in the second half of the nineteenth century'?

The education of girls from more privileged sections of society before the 19th century was fulfilled by governesses, however by the 1850s alternatives were established largely through individual initiatives such as the North London Collegiate for Ladies and Cheltenham Ladies' College. In contrast the education for working class girls remained intermittent and absolutely analogous to their domestic role.

Source 13 supports the gender divisions in education: children were considered to be of 'one sex only'. The degree to which she herself challenged this traditional and patriarchal reflection of society is under question. While it is clear that this is clearly a dissent from socially orientated education of earlier girls' schools which promoted domestic and social skills over the 'intellectual attainments' Buss speaks of, Source 14 offers a conflicting view of her curriculum. Her curriculum, while still contrived, was significant as first to offer middle-class girls the same educational and academic opportunities as boys albeit while preserving strict standards of femininity.

The education (involving needlework for example) shouldn't be taken as representative of Buss' view. She clearly expresses that 'it would be better to educate the girls' in Source 13. Therefore her curriculum was intended not to alienate the aristocratic and well-to-do of society but rather offer a legitimate and respectable alternative to the governess or social education at the time. Thus, source 14 judges Buss without consideration of the entrenched patriarchy over all aspects of Victorian society. 'Ladylike behaviour' was upheld but the collegiate was founded in 1850 as her own 'independent and ambitious venture' and was far beyond her time in terms of her curriculum, especially when compared to institutions such as Cheltenham Ladies' College. A 1854 Governors' Report from Cheltenham supports the idea that Buss was a pioneer. Cheltenham's initial focus of education was preserving the 'modesty and gentleness of the female character' for their role was 'the natural helpmate of men'. Clearly, Buss was contrived by the attitude of society rather than her own personal patriarchy, in contrast to the limited picture given by Source 14.

Although not noted by the sources, her biggest achievement was her attempt at diversifying education. She was committed to the expansion of secondary education to the middle-classes. This is supported by Molly Hughes, a student at the North London Collegiate who noted a 'different atmosphere'; she was not judgemental or elitist, perhaps as a result of her modest origins in comparison to her contemporaries such as Dorothea Beal, who focussed on creating a highly select and prestigious institution from its inception. Its Council intermittently rejected the 'daughters of trade' whereas an 1850 report from the North London Collegiate stated that a 'liberal education can be gained at a modest expense. Clearly, both were important as a dissent from traditional education but Buss less elitist and more inclined to support those of lower class. Thus Buss represents a greater transformation to 'the whole educational scene'

rather than confined to one particular class like Beale. Source 15 statement of Buss a 'pioneer' of women's education is corresponding with other evidence.

In conclusion, while access to prestigious post-elementary education was strictly reserved for middle and upper-class girls, Buss' main achievement is the departure her school represented from governess dominated education of aristocratic girls. This role is also fulfilled by Beale, however Buss represented a proliferation of education to girls of lower classes. Thus her transformation of education was profound (as a model for future schools and promotion of girls' worth in education) but limited largely to the upper classes. She challenged the Victorian view of education singly dominated by 'one sex only' and while still a strictly middle and upper-class affair, represented (as a result of her modest origins) a proliferation of education to wider masses, something Beale was unprepared to appreciate.

Thus, while still contrived by Victorian society, she was the individual who represented the largest challenge to the 'angel in the house' idea and attitudes to female education. Any grievances of her school were largely as a result of the intransigent conservatism of society, rather than her own personal limitations. She was before her time and ahead of other individuals.