

Part 3

School Education: Policies, Innovations, Practices & Entrepreneurship

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Teaching a Female Profession: Is That a Problem?

Abstract

This paper explores the move towards an all-female teaching force, particularly in the developed world, where men are turning their backs on the profession. It attempts to gather the evidence as to what is affecting men's choice to reject teaching as a career. It explores the possible causes of this change, which has been increasing over the last few years and examines its causes and the effects on schools and on their pupils. In particular, it looks at the effects on boys and young men of a school world, with a lack of male role models and explores what can be done by governments, schools and the teaching profession to halt this worrying trend. Pupils need both male and female teachers as girls speed ahead in education, leaving boys behind in schools dominated by women, with few male teachers, to gain boys' interest and so become involved in their own education. Suggestions are made as to what can be done to overcome this problem, which is now moving into developing countries too. Governments need to act and society value more, the contribution teachers make towards the success and growth of a country, whilst being in many cases ignored or disregarded by politicians, some parents and in some cases their pupils.

Keywords: feminisation of education, boys, male teachers, role models, teaching profession

Introduction

Men it appears, do not in many cases, consider teaching a sensible career path. Schools at all levels in most developed countries, are dominated by women and possibly as a result, the whole profession is overworked, under paid and 'enjoys' low status. The success of males is often measured by other men, by the remuneration they receive and unless they rise to, for example, the height of administration of a large Academy Chain, in a job remote from the classroom, they are very unlikely to obtain the financial rewards that other males look up to. Of course, the often criticised long holidays and short hours commented on by parents and media, may provide some

compensation, as the myth still remains in many societies that teachers only work from nine till three o'clock, when teachers call it a 24/7 job, that takes over one's life. What then are the effects of the so-called feminisation of teaching on students and on those who might consider teaching as a career? In some parts of the world, men are still proud to become teachers as they did formally in the UK. Indeed here, there was a ban on married women teaching in UK which was not removed until World War II, when men were conscripted to fight. Gradually women have taken over the teaching role and now dominate. What has caused the change in men's interest in training to become a teacher and staying in schools in front of a class until retirement? This paper explores some of the reasons for this feminine domination of the teaching profession in developed countries and the effects of the lack of males working in classrooms.

Feminisation of the profession

UK, Australia and Canada, are often pointed out as having a problem with the feminisation of the teaching profession. However, some developing countries have far fewer women in the teaching workforce than men and fewer opportunities for females to enter the profession. Much of the research on the feminisation of the profession has been targeted on countries in the northern hemisphere. The concerns over this domination by females and the possible effect on school cultures and particularly, worries about recruiting policies, education policy at government level, how in particular boys in school are affected by mostly female staffing and the effect of the over representation of females on the status of and the rewards given to the teaching profession, have raised questions about the organisation of the profession (Kelleher, 2011).

Teaching is a female-dominated occupation across the OECD. While men have, historically, been overrepresented in senior positions, the school workforce in England is no different. The latest data shows that the school workforce is becoming even more female-dominated in England. The proportion of male secondary school teachers is at a record low (35 per cent) and has stagnated in primary schools since 2016 (14 per cent).
(Fullard, 2022, Blog)

Where are the men?

All this concern is not new, in that for several decades developed countries have been in many cases, attempting to equalise the gender balance in the teaching profession. Buie (2005) reported that men in primary schools were a diminishing breed as in 2003, only ten per cent of entrants then to primary teaching programmes were male and that action was required to alter this trend. This author also claims that at the time it appeared that 'soft skills' were seen as more appropriate to early years and primary teaching and they were more likely to be natural in women. However, this author also claims that traditional stereotyping and moreover, the status of the profession are what influences men against choosing to become teachers, particularly in primary schools, but also at secondary level too. She laments the lowering of the status of the profession in comparison to other more graduate male dominated ones, which generally offer much higher salaries. Also, it appears from several sources that men can feel isolated in primary schools; often being the 'only man' is not an easy task.

A report on male teachers in Scottish schools (Denholm, 2013) demonstrated that men saw teaching, unless they gained quick promotion and rose to be a head teacher, as

one where pay levels and status were too low. This, coupled with the high workload, affected their choice of career, giving them a negative perception of the profession. In addition, in some primary schools some parents had concerns over male teachers working where children needed help with toileting and changing for PE. None seem to address these issues with women's involvement. Gender stereotyping was and is still strong in many communities and there is concerns felt by men over possible safeguarding issues, where accusations of incorrect behaviour can be devastating to anyone in the profession. This paper's author notes that a male tutor who is a maths graduate and coaches local secondary and university students, when volunteering at a local primary school (the only male apart from a caretaker on the staff), was taken to task over his behaviour. This error was it appears, pulling his fleece over his head in front of the class; this move also pulled up his shirt displaying his stomach. The headteacher quickly criticised his actions, saying he had not taken enough care and thought and should not display his body to the class like that. He apologised, but wondered if his misdemeanour had really been so bad, as to result in a 'ticking off' from the headteacher.

The number of male teachers in secondary schools is also falling in England, down to its lowest ever level with thirty five percent of teachers in secondary schools being male (Savage, 2022). Research by ISER from the University of Essex, claims that the nine percent drop in the real value of pay in a decade, played a large part in present teacher under-recruitment (Fullard, 2022). The research found that three in ten classroom teachers would be better off in other graduate jobs. Even more alarming is that the teachers leaving the profession are the more experienced teachers, who schools cannot afford to lose.

One other issue raised by various voices is the negative image given to teaching by the media, constantly reporting violence and bad behaviour in schools, for example school stabbings, shootings and also child exploitation or sexual interference by teachers. In addition, there is concern over boys in private schools in the UK sexually harassing teenage girls and later news, that this was also occurring in state schools. This resulting, in many girls making complaints to authorities. More male teachers setting examples of positive treatment of the female sex, is an advantage and could influence the behaviour of boys and young men. A further problem can be seen in many countries with large varied ethnic groups, where a strong case can be made for encouraging men from those minorities, to teach children in diverse communities. It is important for children from ethnic groups to see teachers who come from similar backgrounds who are now working and contributing their expertise and knowledge back to the communities they represent. It appears to be particularly noted that black teachers in the USA, are successful in encouraging black boys to perform well in schools (Reeves, 2022).

Williams (2019) raises a further issue, complaining about the lack of female voices in the education media which she claims is dominated by men, who are commenting on women in the workforce rather than both sexes. The dominance of males in the media discussing education, as opposed to women, who make up the majority of the workforce has to be questioned.

In addition, Williams (2020) writing about the effects of Covid in her school, discusses the reactions of male and female teachers to the challenges faced in performing day to day activities and the difficulties teachers faced. She comments on an Education Policy Institute Report which pointed to the over ten percent drop in men

remaining in the classroom from 2010 onwards. However, she brings to our attention, the numbers of women that have left teaching and queries the apparent inherent belief held by politicians and parents alike, that there will always be an endless supply of eager young women, anxious to take on the massive burden and difficult job of being a teacher, as well as running a home and raising children. Particularly, she notes that men are the ones who get promotion to higher roles, certainly because they are more likely to apply than women, but also because the women are so weighed down with, in addition to the teaching workload, supporting family life, so they have no time to take on more responsibilities.

Brown (1960) in Heubeck (2021) raises the questions as to why any man would volunteer to train as a teacher in elementary school in the USA, as the challenge to social stereotyping would make any such person an almost social pariah. Heubeck (2021) questions if these thoughts are now outdated, but also points to the three to one ratio of women to men employed in elementary schools in the US. The reasons she says are given by men, to being attracted by or for moving into teaching were varied. Boredom in first jobs, as a result of days spent in front of a computer and special programmes to attract more black men into teaching, with financial support, were commented on. In addition, some men found that as a male in the classroom they seemed to have a positive influence on boys, in that they demonstrated that learning and working in education was rewarding and fulfilling. All the men who responded to Heubeck's questions said they had all been asked when they expected to move into an administrative role. Some wished to, but several said they would prefer to stay in the classroom, as it was so rewarding. Possibly this positive point is rarely explored by national media, apart from odd advertisements on UK TV, attempting to recruit to teaching programmes, showing the difference a teacher can make to a child's life. Several men in Heubeck's research appeared to prefer to foster and support the educational experience of pupils and hope that by their example, some of the boys will consider teaching as a profession.

Although this lack of male teachers is now a serious problem in developed countries, developing countries are starting to record the same problem. Wanzala (2018) discusses The Kenya National Examinations Council (2018) report that men were starting to turn their backs on teaching as a possible profession. The number of female candidates taking the examinations to qualify as teachers for the primary sector, was fast out-pacing males. In the five years up to the publication of the report, more women than men had taken qualifications to teach. In addition, standards appeared to be lowering, with a high number of candidates having to re-sit the exams and far fewer distinctions being awarded. This is causing concern over the quality of candidates applying to be teachers, which appears to be lower than previously and the Ministry of Education has had to reduce the entry grades required from those wishing to train, a worrying step when quality is at stake.

Why we need men to teach boys?

Boys are struggling in school attaining lower grades, showing less commitment to learning, fewer getting degrees etc. Is this partly due to the feminisation of the profession and why is this happening? In the USA (Reeves, 2022) points to the sex of teachers there, three out of four are women and this percentage is rising. He and many other researchers, believe that this ratio can have a negative effect on males, who perceive learning and education are for women. Pay, conditions of working, long hours

and traditional perceptions that women work with children, appear to affect the choices of the genders. In particular it can influence women who want to raise children, as school holidays are difficult to cope with, when working outside the sector. Women make up eighty percent of all staff in schools in the UK, which sends clear messages to boys about who is interested in learning, males or females (Ponsford, 2018). We need more men to act as role models for boys, to demonstrate that learning is important, manly and of use in the future; not merely for the ‘soft sex’. An OECD (2015) report in the US demonstrated that more boys are likely to be suspended from schools, drop out and fail to complete education than girls. Similar figures are to be found in the UK and South Korea. The ratio of females to males is particularly bad in early stages of education, nursery, primary and middle schools. However, there is in secondary schools, and Academy chains, despite the higher numbers of female classroom teachers a higher proportion of men in leadership roles than women and the same phenomenon is to be found in universities (Hilton, 2019). In addition, research shows that eighty three percent of parents would like to see more men in primary schools teaching roles, currently only 15.7% are male (Phillips, 2021).

The Children’s Workforce Development Council (Clark, 2009) conducted a survey of parents in early school settings and the overwhelming result was that they, (particularly those in single parent families with fathers missing), wanted more male teaching staff in all settings, to act as good examples for their children. There is an urgent need to alter perceptions, as roles in society are changing fast. Work roles are now seen as being open to both sexes, gender neutral and we need to see more men in caring, nurturing occupations. The time for men to use strength in factory related employment is disappearing, more jobs are available in social work, education and health areas and men need to be in those sectors, or possibly may finish up as employed (Reeves, 2022; Teaching Expertise, no date).

Recommendations to improve male recruitment and retention in teaching

- Involve more fathers in school life – social media chat places not just for mothers (author’s daughter’s recommendation she was furious that men were not welcomed into the social media chat for her children’s classes).
- Changing patterns of work can allow men to work with after school clubs or sports fixtures and school trips, involve them.
- Offer advice to fathers or secondary male students to visit primary schools if they are interested in a possible career in teaching.
- Involve schools with teacher training programmes to help encourage male recruitment.
- Be inclusive in any staff planned social events and staff room chatter to prevent men feeling excluded.
- Encourage visits from both males and females from secondary education to explore the idea of training for teaching this should be encouraged by primary heads. Work experience for boys really counts.
- Raise the pay for the profession to put it onto par with other professionals or trained and experienced teachers will leave.
- Consider reducing or removing the fees for undertaking a year training for teaching post a first degree.

Conclusion

So, what is the answer to the question ‘is feminisation of the teaching profession a problem?’. Undoubtedly it is yes. Boys in schools need the influence of men and particularly in subjects such as English and literacy, as it appears boys perform better in those areas with male teachers (Reeves, 2022). How do we overcome the social stigma felt by men in working with the youngest children?

Single parents families so common in many developed countries have boys without a father figure, male teachers can to a small extent give them examples of maleness and acceptable male behaviour, possibly lacking in their lives. For adolescent boys affected by hormones and with a tendency to be highly impulsive, without considering the consequences, can benefit from a teachers who have has gone through that stage of life (Reeves, 2022). However, to attract more men into the profession it has to be made financially more attractive, with incentives to stay in the classroom rather than going into administrative roles, in order to progress. Possibly, the structure and reward system in schools needs to change to keep men in the classroom. More attempts should be made by media and governments to explain the importance of male teachers to young boys and young men. Their influence can change lives. Action is needed or many boys will keep losing out.

At present we are confronted with a scenario of vanishing male teachers and education seemingly being of interest to only the female of our species. This is not helping boys’, girls’, or countries’ progression; we need more men in classrooms, demonstrating that learning is for both sexes and important for the future. On a sobering note Fuller (2022) reported that a quarter of schools in England do not have a single male teacher. Something needs to be done and at present little action appears to be happening! We are moving to a teaching profession devoid of half of humanity and the future is not looking good for schools, boys, or many countries’ progression and growth.

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