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Title

Men, pre-service training, and the implications for continuing professional development.

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Abstract

Through a case study of male students undertaking primary (elementary) initial teacher education (ITE), this article explores the views, and concerns, of men, about operating (successfully or not) within a female dominated professional field. It is a context in which the discourse of male dominance is inverted, temporarily, in order to better understand, and thus address through professional development, socio-economic and cultural constraints that, for these men, contribute to gender disparity and inhibit inclusion in their educational workplace.
(78 words)

Men training for primary school teaching and their continuing professional development.

The current dearth of male teachers at all levels of schooling is the subject of concern in many western countries (Acker, 1992; Kauppinen-Toropinen & Lammi, 1993; Sayer & Vanderhoeven, 2000). The feminisation of teaching is most pronounced at the primary school level where, for example, in England and Wales, approximately 80 per cent of primary school teachers are female (Howson, 1998). However, almost half of primary head teachers in England and Wales are male (Ross, cited Budge, 1999) and men are clearly more successful in achieving promotion to senior positions (Thornton, 2000a). But this discourse of male dominance may be inverted. By way of contrast, only 13 per cent of new primary education students in England

and Wales are male (Mansell, 2000) and they are more likely to fail, withdraw or transfer out of their pre-service training course than their female counterparts (Thornton, 1999).

The contention underpinning this paper is that we need to better understand the gendered socio-economic and cultural constraints, the push and pull factors, affecting teaching as a career (Ayyash-Abdo, 2000), in order to make sense of the clear yet complex gender disparities that occur and persist within primary teaching if we are to have any prospect of addressing them through in-service professional development. The case study outlined below, set within the context of primary teaching in England and Wales, is one step in that direction.

The Study

This study included a longitudinal, institution-based, case study of male pre-service students, through the use of field notes, interviews and questionnaires. The first phase of the case study focused on student perceptions of their chosen career in primary teaching and their experiences during training. It is this phase on which this paper is based. While patterns of male student perceptions were identified it is recognised that they form only part of the story, focused mainly on their public and professional lives. The personal and private stories of these students clearly inform these perceptions and emerged in interview, but were not directly sought.

Robson (1993) states that "If your main concern is in understanding what is happening in a specific context, and if you can get access to, and co-operation from, the people involved - then do a case study" (p. 168). All Robson's criteria applied in this particular case. However, Ely's (1991) fully open-ended approach to case study, of simply "seeing what is there" (p4), was not used. There was a clear focus to this

study. It was based on male student public and professional perceptions of primary teaching and training, and the study was driven, initially, by publicly expressed concern (NAHT, 1995; Tabberer, cited Mansell, 2000) about low, and decreasing, levels of male recruitment to primary ITE, together with an institutional concern about high wastage rates among this group of students.

The open-ended questions used, both at interview and in the questionnaire, reflected that focus. It was recognised that generalisations could not be made in relation to findings; the sample was small and based in one institution; the respondents may not have been representative of their peers located in other institutions or undertaking other primary school pre-service courses. However, the data could be used to address issues that were of general concern in the sampled institution and course, and the findings could be used to inform future professional development practice.

The Sample and Methodology

An open-ended anonymous, undeclared pilot questionnaire was sent, by post, to all male students in the first and final years of their course in June 1997. Nine of the twenty questionnaires were completed and returned with five students agreeing to a follow-up interview. The response rate was disappointing but the depth and range of the responses received was judged to be good. Small adjustments were made to the pilot questionnaire for use with all male students across all four years of the course in January 1998. The construction of the questionnaire enabled identification of the year group to which respondents belonged while those volunteering for follow-up interviews were asked to identify themselves by name.

**** place table i around here***

The perceptions and views of successful male students, and those experiencing some difficulties, were captured within the sample. The comments of continuing students were treated with caution as they may be less likely to be critical of their course and experiences. However, their views were generally in accord with the students from Year 4 (1997 and 1998 cohorts), who were leaving and who had little to fear from free expression.

All the students were volunteers, unknown to the researcher or the research assistant. The researcher was familiar with the course and knew most of the staff who taught it. Neutrality in terms of respondents, and familiarity in terms of context (Robson, 1993, p.160), has been argued to be a sound basis on which to build the reliability of data and it is thought that this was achieved in this study. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Some common patterns and themes emerged although it was clear, and is recognised, that there was also evidence of contrast and diversity in relation to the student's personal and private contexts, or life stories, that did impinge on their public and professional perceptions.

Public and Professional Perceptions of Male Students

The main findings reported here relate to emergent themes and shared views. Some comparisons were made between the responses of mature males (21 yrs and older at the start of their course) and young males (those under 21 yrs at the start of their course). Age was used as an initial way of structuring the analysis of responses

because many of the students used the term 'maturity' to explain their experiences and perceptions of primary teaching.

However, age at entry was not necessarily found to be a indicative of mature attitudes, choices, behaviour or access to support. Other criteria for maturity emerged, such as a lived-with partner, a child or children, or broader than average pre-course experience. One young student, Liam, had past work experience, a live-in partner and a young child. In contrast, Alan was mature in years but appeared to lack the type and range of support networks that seemed to typify other mature male students. These were aspects of students personal and private stories that added depth to an understanding of the patterns that emerged within the professional and public spheres of these students' lives. Overall the findings suggest that maturity might be a factor in career motivation on entry; determination to complete the course and the existence of developed supportive networks and that the gender context of primary teaching is an important issue in recruitment and retention. Illustrations of these findings follow.

Maturity

As in many pre-service teacher education courses in England there was a large number of mature students, male and female (between 25% and 35% in any one year). The distribution of male students by age category is given in Table ii.

******* place Table ii around here ****

Almost half the potential sample (22 of 47) responded. Slightly less than half the respondents (10 of 22) were mature male students although they constituted just over one-third of the potential sample.

Mature males tended to find family pressures and responsibilities to be most problematic, for example, late timetabling affected their child-care arrangements. They talked about the need to spend time with their families while at the same time working hard toward their degrees. However, they tended to feel that their maturity enabled them to get on well with the female majority on their course; that they were more outgoing and confident than younger males might be; that they were clear about and committed to primary teaching as an overt career choice.

Mature males also claimed to be well organised e.g. getting assignments completed in good time, and to work hard, although exceptionally one mature student said he found it difficult to organise himself. It was the younger students who most frequently cited course workload as heavy and difficult to manage. Mature students recognised that some of their problems were experienced equally by mature female students. One example given was that of seeking a first appointment.

"I felt I was discriminated against in actually getting a job..... I definitely   felt that what a lot of heads wanted was a 22 yr old that they could mould.   I came out of here with very definite opinions and come across, as the careers lady said, you come across as very committed and that is intimidating, frightening to heads, and I can understand that. So actually as a mature student... it's actually been quite difficult to start and I definitely felt that heads were looking for, well, malleable makes the person they are employing seem soft but... I would hesitate to say that it was a male thing, but I would say it was a mature thing." (Dick, year 4, 1997, mature)

Careers

All these men chose primary teaching for idealistic as well as pragmatic reasons. They variously said that they had always wanted to teach; it was enjoyable, challenging, and rewarding; they were influenced by good experiences of primary teachers during their own schooling; that a vocation was more important than money; that primary education was the building block of education, socially vital, and that they wanted and were committed to contributing to it.

"I asked myself what I liked doing... with teaching you get progression, everyday's different but you are building on and can measure how far you have got along....I look back on it (primary schooling) with nostalgia. We still talk about it in the pub, me and my friends. It was a fantastic time." (Vic, year 4, 1998, young)

Some felt that primary teaching would benefit from a greater male presence. They said this is due to the rise of single parent families and the lack, for many young children, of a male role model in their lives. All these students emphasised commitment to, and the worthwhileness of, primary teaching as a career but most of the younger students drifted into it.

"I didn't know what else I wanted to do." (Imran, year 4, 1998).

All saw it as a valuable and worthwhile job, but one which also led, according to most stated expectations, to fairly rapid promotion and at least adequate monetary reward (eventually).

"Sexist though it may be, there are excellent career prospects for male
  primary school teachers." (Carl, year 4, 1997, mature)

These students intended to make progress in their primary teaching careers and to get promotion. Many planned to move quickly through the pay scales and into management although they also recognised that, 'you do not go into teaching to get rich'. The intention to progress in their careers quickly was matched by an awareness of their rarity value.

"Its one of those things. Because there's a shortage of males...schools are more likely to push you ahead... in order to keep those males. But if you boost the amount of men in the profession then career prospects drop." (Tom, year 4, 1997, mature)

It would seem that this recognition, that career advantage based on short supply could disappear if male recruitment is increased, could have implications for future recruitment, retention and career development strategies.

Primary Teaching and Training

Most of these students did see some problems for themselves and other males (but mainly for other males) in primary teaching and training. The problems they identified related to the work context, and their perceptions of stereotypical male characteristics, rather than the specific content of their pre-service course, with which most seemed to express varying degrees of satisfaction.

"I have enjoyed the course so far. I must say that I found that the course is very intensive and I have been 'kept on my toes'." (David, year 1, 1998, young).

No significant or commonly expressed dissatisfaction with their pre-service course was recorded. No student recommended changes to course content as a means of reducing male wastage.

These students predominantly believed that factors influencing male wastage rates were context rather than course content-based. This is important because their work in schools, and their continued professional development, may well mirror the gendered context of their pre-service training. The exception will be their likely contact with, and potential sponsorship by, the disproportionate number of male head teachers currently in post (Thornton, 2000b). Apart from this their concerns, about establishing friendship / support networks, and avoiding 'standing out', are not likely to go away.

Friendship and support networks

While identifying friendship and support networks as crucial to success, they suggested that such support was potentially difficult for males to achieve due to their small numbers and what these students described as a male propensity to not share their problems or difficulties with others. In effect they were saying that they personally did not have any support problems, but other males might, a 'them not me' syndrome. A stereotypical view of males as being less communicative than their female peers, less able to share their feelings, to acknowledge they have problems and to seek help, was offered by many of these students as an explanation for high male wastage rates.

"Blokes don't talk about their emotions... but we need to." (Mo, year 4,   1998, young).

"Men traditionally are reputed to be less able to share their feelings. Maybe this contributes to the male wastage rate." (Charles, year 1, 1997, mature)

The strongly female environment was also thought to play a part.

"... it is difficult to feel part of the group when all the rest are female." (David, year 1, 1998, young).

Some believed that sharing experiences with other males, rather than female peers and tutors, might help.

"I found it good to have a friend of mine, another male, in the same school (TE)... it is fairly strange being in a female dominated profession... (It was) valuable to compare experiences, exchange ideas and enjoy TE." (Alex, year 1, 1997, mature)

Kez, a lone male in his group, noted the difficulty, for him, of collaborating with female peers.

"I have to wait until I'm adopted into someone's group." (Kez, year 1, 1998, mature)

Mature males, and younger ones with partners and children, such as Liam, found it easier to network with female peers. The key question here would be how to enable other students to make this transition and access the support, both male and female, that is available to them from fellow students and future colleagues.

Standing out

While the course content was believed to be gender neutral, enjoyable (by most) and often challenging, there was one aspect of pre-service training that they felt could be addressed. That was 'standing out'. They were aware that as a small minority of students on the course they easily stood out, but in general they did not want or like that to be exacerbated by the way in which they were treated by tutors, peers and future colleagues.

"The most important thing that you can do is not point out that there are men in the class. I think that is really bad. The first example was in (X)where we go up and we had to write our name on the board to say who we were. So you wrote your name on the board and everybody said, "Oh we know who you are. We're not going to get your name wrong because   you're a man", you know, the only man in the group. So immediately I'm thinking, Oh God, I'm the only man in the group.... I found it difficult in my first year, in (X) groups, being the only male.." (Tom, year 4, 1997, mature)

These students believed that highlighting the presence of lone / small numbers of male students simply reinforced the strangeness of being a minority of men amongst females. It made them stand out when they wished to be treated 'the same' as female students.

Addressing the Issues

The findings of this study suggest that maturity might be a factor in successful male recruitment, in entry into the profession of primary school teaching, and in establishing successful support networks.

These students had little to offer course tutors, or indeed national organisers of teacher education, in terms of how to change pre-service course content in order to

enhance male recruitment and success rates because they did not perceive the course itself to be the cause (or potential solution) to the problem. They did however offer some evidence and advice about work contexts which should be the concern of pre-service and in-service providers and government departments.

In relation to context, providers might well consider addressing these students' concerns about access to familiar support and friendship networks with which men can feel comfortable. For male entrants to primary teaching, it may be a positive feature of their in-service contexts that almost 50 per cent of head teachers in England are male. However, the profession is predominantly female and the decline in male recruitment overall will reduce the number of male head teachers and this may undermine their possible role as a networking resource. These students' concerns, about friendship / support networks and 'standing out', are thus not likely to go away.

The provision of male mentors, where available, should also be considered. However, they are in increasingly short supply which suggests that alternative strategies will need to be considered. These might include the training of pre and in-service tutors to make men stand out less, and the development of a core team of experienced female mentors who both understand some of the problems involved and are committed to providing the support necessary to overcome them.

(word count 2941)

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Table i - to be inserted in text

STUDENT COHORTS	TOTAL NOS.	MALE STDS	ATTENDANCE AT CLUB	QUESTIO-NNAIRE	INTERVIEW
Year 1 (97/98)	123	4	3	3	2
Year 2 (97/98)	109	10	2	2	2
Year 3 (97/98)	94	5	2	2	2
Year 4 (97/98)	115	8	6	6	5
SUB-TOTAL	441	27	13	13	11
Year 1 (96/97)	116	13	N/A	5	1
Year 4 (96/97)	133	7	N/A	4	4
GRAND TOTAL	690	47	N/A	22	16

Table i

Table ii to be inserted in text

	All Mature Males	All Young Males		Mature Respondents	Young Respondents
Year1 (97/98)	1	3		1	2
Year2 (97/98)	2	8		1	1
Year3 (97/98)	2	3		1	1
Year4 (97/98)	1	7		1	5
Year1 (96/97)	3	10		3	2
Year4 (96/97)	6	1		3	1
Group Totals	15	32		10	12

Table ii