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**Title: MEN INTO PRIMARY TEACHING: WHO GOES WHERE?**

**DILEMMAS OF ENTRY, SURVIVAL AND CAREER PROSPECTS**

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**Abstract**

Concern about the under achievement of boys during compulsory schooling has been linked to the scarcity of male role models within primary teaching and is influential in current initiatives to attract more men into primary teaching. Links between such gendered role models and educational achievement appear to be assumed rather than proven. Whilst not seeking to address the concept of role model directly this article explores the position of men vis-à-vis women in primary teaching and initial teacher education (ITE). It highlights contradictions in patterns of achievement through identification of exceptional male success once qualified as primary teachers and apparent relatively high failure and withdrawal rates during ITE. The implication is made that issues regarding equity of treatment between males and females in recruitment, ITE and subsequent teaching careers need clarification before ways of increasing the number of male primary teachers can be considered by policy makers.



# **Men into Primary Teaching: Who Goes Where? Dilemmas of Entry, Survival and Career Prospects**

**Mary Thornton**

## **1. Introduction:**

Twenty percent of primary teachers and approximately ten percent of primary BEd students are male. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT, 1995), the Teacher Training Agency (TTA, 1996) and its Chief Executive, Anthea Millett have expressed their concerns about gender imbalance in primary teaching, suggesting that men be encouraged to see this as a “*legitimate profession in which they can be successful*” (NAHT, 1995). The TTA is even offering increased student allocations to teacher training departments that demonstrate ‘distinctiveness’ by recruiting a minimum of twenty percent male students to their primary BEd and PGCE courses.

That men frequently are successful is self-evident. Fifty percent of primary head teachers in England and Wales are male yet males make up just under twenty percent of the primary school teaching force. Research undertaken by Edwards and Lyons (1996) suggests that in primary schools “*the further one moves from London the greater the tendency for the age of pupils and the size of school to be directly related to the gender of the head.*” Males, they found, are much more likely to be heads of junior schools (older children), and of the biggest primary schools (more pay), and that this established pattern gets stronger and stronger the further one moves away from the capital city.

Concerns expressed about a lack of male role models in primary education over a number of years have recently been lent support by new evidence of the relative under achievement of boys in relation to girls in primary education (Williams, 1995). Yet, the male role models available to children in this phase of education (and all others) illustrate clearly that men hold high status positions such as headships, predominantly assume responsibility for high status subjects such as maths and science, receiving extra pay for doing so (Alexander 1991), and almost exclusively teach in the higher status age-ranges i.e. the older children, juniors at least but preferably years 5 and 6. Thus it could be argued that primary children not only require more male role models, evenly and proportionately distributed across all primary teaching jobs and positions, but also more positive and powerful female role models.

This article identifies the structure of successful male careers in primary education and seeks to explore issues relating to attempts to increase male recruitment to primary teaching. At the same time it raises questions concerning equity of treatment with women regarding career prospects. These issues impact upon the nature of the role models available to children in our primary schools. This article does not address the concept of role models in primary teaching specifically although this is recognised as problematic and in need of further investigation. Rather, the focus here is on teacher gender as it relates to primary teachers careers and Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

## **2. Successful male careers in primary teaching**

Gender differences within education are not new. Despite some narrowing of gaps in recent years, males are more likely than females to study to advanced levels maths, technology and science-based subjects, and females are more likely to do the same in the humanities and arts-based subjects. These differences can be seen not only in the gender distribution of secondary and higher education subject-based teachers but also between male and female subject coordinators in primary schools. There are also important power / status differences between primary teachers and their colleagues in other age-phases of education.

When John Patten, former Secretary of State for Education, proposed a ‘mums army’ of non-graduate and differentially trained nursery and Key Stage 1 teachers he made explicit and overt the usually implicit low status of primary teachers. His ‘mums army’ proposal clearly illustrated, and made public, teacher stratification within the educational division of labour, although he did not invent it. This stratification of teachers has a long history, permeating the consciousness of many parents and the general public as well as politicians. It is not uncommon for primary teachers to be thought promoted when they move to an older class!

Patten’s ‘mums army’ proposal publicly confirmed primary teachers’ lower status by identifying lower (than degree level) qualifications as acceptable for teachers of young children. It also explicitly confirmed the higher status of teachers of older children, an age-phase where male primary teachers are much more likely to be found.

The primary teacher, male or female, occupies a different and more lowly power / status position than that of the secondary school teacher of GCSE and A

Level subjects or the higher education lecturer, but the primary teacher is also much more likely to be female. This results from particular socio-historical processes, some of which are identified by Alexander (1984, 1989). It is reinforced and maintained in part by the use of value-laden language, such as specialist or generalist, to denote differences between teachers (Thornton, 1995). Sociologically this is not surprising. We know of the status hierarchy amongst categories of knowledge (e.g. maths above art), and are aware of the low status accorded to areas predominated by female labour and associated with young children (both key features of primary education).

In England and Wales 81% of primary teachers are female yet 50% of primary head teachers are male and there is a strong tendency for males to gain headships in the larger schools (Edwards and Lyons, 1996). Male teachers earn, on average, £82 more per week than female teachers (Weale, 1996). Research data clearly indicates a gendered pattern relating to subject responsibility, age-range taught, pay, promotion and positions of seniority in primary schools (Thornton, 1996; Alexander, 1991).

Earlier small scale research, undertaken between 1988 and 1990 (Thornton, 1990), found that eleven of twenty-two primary heads were male and all were heads of junior schools or JMI schools (11/16). There were no male heads of infant schools; almost half of the Year 6 teachers were also deputy heads (7/16), most of them were male (5/7), and more than three quarters of them held posts of responsibility for maths and / or science (13/16). The following could be said about that particular sample:

- there was a greater tendency for Year 6 teachers to be responsible for mathematics and / or science (higher status subjects) than for teachers of the other age-ranges covered;
- there was a greater tendency for Year 6 teachers (higher status pupils) to also be the deputy head than for teachers of the other age-ranges covered;
- there was a much greater tendency for male teachers to teach Year 6 than for any of the other year groups covered by this research (of a total of ten, eight males taught year 6 and two Year 3).

Each statement is independent of the other, involving different groupings of the Year 6 teachers in the sample (total of 16), so it was not possible to combine the statements i.e. that most Year 6 teachers were also deputy heads, responsible for maths and science in their schools and male. The combined statement in fact applied to just over 25% of Year 6 teachers (5/16). However, there was clear evidence of a patterned connection between senior management positions, i.e. a maths and / or science subject identity, teaching the eldest primary pupils and maleness.

To summarise, it is clear that in teaching in general, higher status (and subsequently authority and power) goes with the teaching of older pupils, having an overt subject identity (especially if that subject identity is maths or science), and maleness. Similar patterns and issues of gender-related power / status have emerged from the follow-up research (1995-7), and have been confirmed by other studies with a different focal point e.g. Loizou and Rossiter's (1987) study of the

role of maths post-holders, and Alexander's (1991) study of the role of 'primary needs' coordinators in Leeds.

The follow-up research to Thornton, 1990, which is ongoing (1995-8), is based on a sample of two hundred and twenty schools, covering one thousand eight hundred and seventy two teachers. Initial findings suggest confirmation of these gender patterns in primary teachers career profiles and areas of responsibility. A large data base has been established but has yet to be fully analysed. It covers many of the schools within a twenty five mile radius of Watford, across several LEAs. Follow-up interviews are planned in a selection of the 146 schools that have indicated a willingness to participate further in the research. The interviews will seek to explore specific school-based contexts and teachers' perceptions, actions and decisions, which interact with, and lead to or influence, the patterns identified in the statistical data, and what areas are accessible to intervention.

Table (i) summarises the initial findings of the follow-up research in relation to gender distribution and teaching position.

\*\*\*\*\* Table (i) insert near this point \*\*\*\*\*

It should be noted that the majority of female teachers (61%) are on main professional grade (MPG), holding no additional allowances or management positions, and that the majority of male teachers (65%) are on salaries above MPG, as allowance holders or as part of the senior management team. Over a

third of the males in the sample have achieved headship of a primary school while only 7% of the female teachers have done so. There may be relatively few male teachers in this sample (13%) but once qualified and in post they appear to have excellent career prospects.

\*\*\*\*\* Figure 1 insert near here \*\*\*\*\*

Detailed analysis of age-ranges taught and areas of responsibility has yet to be completed but initial indications are that male teachers are predominantly responsible for:

- core subjects of maths, science and English (29 of 32 male allowance holders);
- high status subjects such as maths, science and / or IT (25 of 32 male allowance holders), and
- older children (30 of 32 male allowance holders teach KS2).

Female teachers in the sample are spread much more evenly across both key stages, core and foundation subjects and non-subject based areas of responsibility (such as SEN, assessment or a particular age phase, such as KS1). Well over 80% of the male teachers in these primary schools either teach KS2 (48%) or are head teachers (35%). More than two-thirds of these male KS2 teachers teach the oldest children, in years 5 and 6, while less than 17% of them work with KS1 children or float. Clearly males are a small minority in these schools but they apparently have highly successful careers, holding a

disproportionate share of the high pay, high status, and powerful positions. As role models for male pupils they could be viewed as offering very positive images of primary teaching as a suitable career.

Alexander's (1991) work examined in some detail the status and gender of post-holders for the seven most frequently coordinated curriculum areas in a representative sample of thirty Leeds schools. It was found, in that sample, that *"all male maths post-holders were of a higher status than MPG"* (Main Professional Grade) i.e. they received additional salary in the form of an incentive allowance. Female teachers on MPG held posts of responsibility for maths in half the sample of schools i.e. they received no extra salary for doing so, but *"...in only 3 of the 17 schools which had any male staff at all were women rather than men responsible for maths"* (p131, my under-lining). This is significant for it suggests that if male teachers are available in primary schools then they, rather than female teachers, will be given responsibility for maths.

In addition, Alexander found that *"A third of the sample's deputies coordinated maths"*, and that 38% of the sample's deputies were male. He states *".....schools in the sample consistently gave priority to developing curriculum areas coordinated by high status teachers (e.g. deputy heads and allowance holders), and these areas tended to have a high proportion of male teachers holding responsibility...."* (p135)

Despite data relating to age-range taught i.e. older pupils / Year 6 not being available from his study, Alexander's findings parallel those derived from

the current research being reported here. In both instances there is a connection between subject specialism, age-range taught, power / status and maleness.

At a simplistic and somewhat superficial level, it may seem that female teachers may enhance their career prospects by specialising in higher status subjects such as maths, science and IT, and the teaching of older children (KS2 but especially years 5 and 6). However, Alexander's work suggests that if women are in competition with men for these posts they are less likely to be appointed (ibid. 1991), and if they are appointed then they are less likely to receive a salary increase as a result. Gender stands out as a key differentiating feature in primary teachers careers and its significance will not be missed by children.

Quantitative data, such as that outlined above, enables us to identify key patterns and structures. It also enables us to challenge effectively any simplistic suggestions that increased recruitment of males into primary teaching would resolve the gender imbalance in role models experienced by children. The situation is clearly more complex than that.

### **3. The male experience of teacher education**

Given the career profiles indicated above one might be tempted to think that male entrants into primary teacher training are few but of particularly high quality. Experiential and formal knowledge of a range of undergraduate and post graduate ITE courses, together with a tentative analysis of longitudinal cohort data from one provider, suggests otherwise. Many males appear to fail or withdraw from their teacher education course and males are disproportionately

represented in the lower classes of the degree classification system, both in undergraduate teacher education and undergraduate degrees in general where they are twice as likely to be awarded a third class degree as women (Nye, 1996). Male recruitment may be low and in need of expansion but a greater success rate from current recruitment levels would go some way towards addressing primary teacher gender imbalance and the meeting of TTA targets.

That male ITE students fail, in disproportionate numbers, to complete their training courses satisfactorily, is clearly indicated in the following cohort analyses (Table (ii) ) from a home county new university, which is unlikely to be untypical.

\*\*\*\*\* Table (ii) insert near here \*\*\*\*\*

Non completion for male students through withdrawal, course change or failure ranges from 27% to 50% and for females from 6% to 18%; clearly a significant difference. If final year failure, the award of an unclassified degree and third class degrees are taken into account then male students on the BEd are lost or doing poorly at a rate between 55% and 66%. Table (iii) provides an illustration of this cumulative pattern.

\*\*\*\*\* Table (iii) insert near here \*\*\*\*\*

The withdrawal / failure rates on the PGCE are lower, perhaps because mature students tend to achieve better results in higher education than students straight

from school (Nye, 1996), but there remain substantial differences between male and female ITE students.

Possible explanations must be researched but might include:-

- male students feeling intimidated by a predominantly female peer group;
- lack of a male support network due to small numbers;
- lack of commitment to their chosen career in primary teaching;
- lower levels of maturity amongst 18 year old males;
- lack of support from friends and family in pursuing a career that is perceived as stereotypically female;
- lower entry qualifications being accepted from male applicants;

Systematic research is needed into reasons for male entry, and explanations for withdrawal and / or failure sought. The progress of male students during their training period needs to be carefully monitored and explanations sought from both the students themselves and their tutors. Without further and detailed understanding of how and why this occurs enhanced recruitment will only result in enhanced failure rates. Ultimately we must recruit higher calibre male students for the right reasons, such as a dedication to primary education and the potential to teach well. We could but should not recruit more male students on the basis of skewed career advantage seemingly derived from the mere fact of being male. To be really successful in raising male primary ITE recruitment the whole profession needs raised status and improved financial reward.

#### **4. Summary**

How can more males be encouraged into primary teaching while ensuring equity of treatment with female colleagues in terms of career progression? The TTA ‘distinctiveness’ criterion will encourage education departments to extend male recruitment where possible but it will not, of itself, increase the number or calibre of male applicants to primary ITE, nor will it enhance their completion rate during training. The reasons given for current initiatives aimed at increasing recruitment of males to primary ITE must be critically explored. It cannot be assumed to be necessarily a good thing. However, if it is accepted as a desirable goal then we must determine what actions can be taken to achieve it..

The TTA recognises that 18 -19 year old males will not suddenly, of their own accord, begin to see primary teaching as a good career choice. It has to be worked at, at a variety of levels. If male applications for primary ITE are effectively increased through initiatives such as those adopted by the TTA then ITE admissions tutors could be more selective in terms of ability and suitability, thereby reducing current wastage rates.

On a more general level, the status and pay of all primary teachers must be raised if primary teaching is to attract high calibre applicants of both sexes. Politicians and OFSTED must identify and highlight the positive features of this work rather than constantly focusing on negative ones. Primary teaching must lose, somehow, its image as low status predominantly female labour. These things will not be easy to achieve, nor will they happen quickly but they are problems that can be addressed in a variety of ways.

Working towards more equitable treatment of male and female primary teachers, in terms of career progression, is more difficult. Male / female inequality is a persistent feature of our society and we would do well to remember Bernstein's (1977) dictum that schools cannot compensate for society. Equal opportunities policies and legislation appear to have had little impact on general patterns of gender stratification. Ways must be sought to overcome current patterns of inequality in male and female primary teachers careers, and to work in the future towards equity of treatment between male and female colleagues when it comes to career progression, power and status. As Campbell (1996, p19) states, *“Changing the distribution of power in primary schools seems an especially important objective in institutions in which, disproportionately, the head is male and most of the other staff are female.”*

While, in Campbell and Neill's (1994) terms, schools are *“underpowered to achieve socially influenced aims”*, they are sites of action, and choices can be and are made. School-based change is possible in terms of primary teachers career prospects. The pattern of gender differences in headships across the country (Edwards and Lyons, 1996) demonstrates that progress can be made when a problem is recognised and there is the will to address it.

**3200 words approximately**

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**Tables and Figures for insertion in text**

	Male (250)	Female (1622)
Head Teachers	35%	7%
Deputies	17%	9%
Allowance Holders	13%	23%
Non-Allowance Holders	32%	53%
Floating	3%	8%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Table (i)

Distribution of Males Across Teaching Positions - Distribution of Females Across Teaching Positions

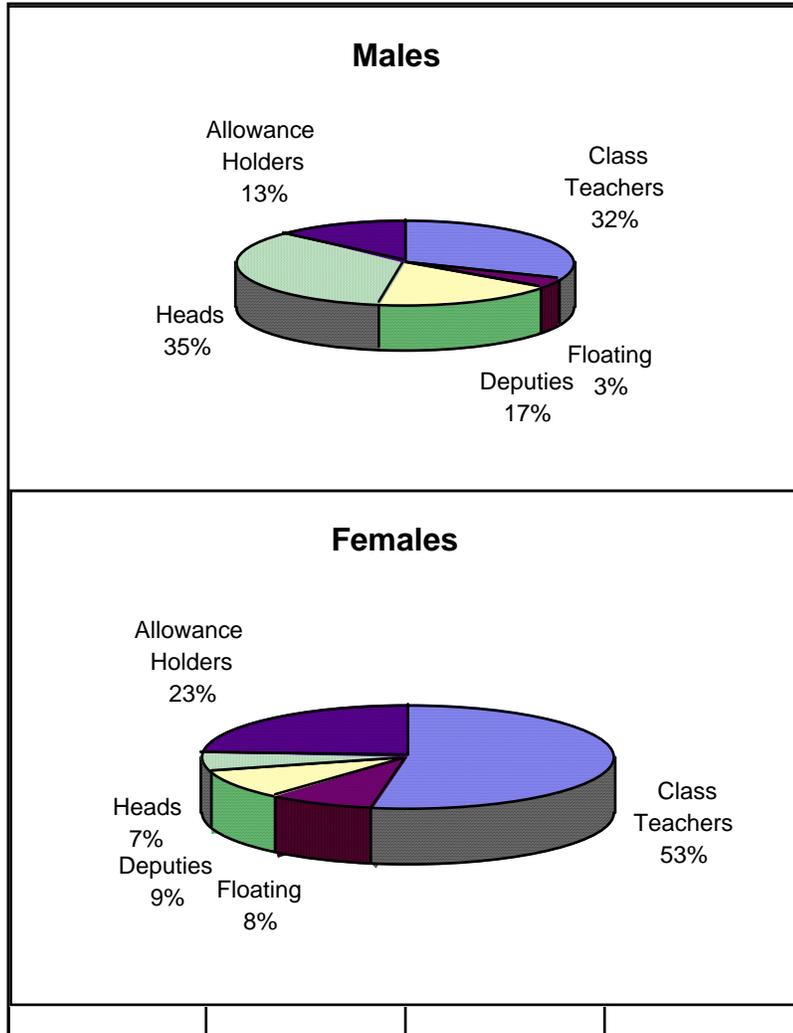


Figure 1

<u>M/F ITE Students</u>	<u>males</u>	<u>females</u>	<u>fem%loss</u>	<u>male %loss</u>
<u>1992-96 BEd Cohort</u>				
Year 1 total 131	9	122		
Year 4 total 119	6	113	<u>7.4% (9)</u>	<u>33% (3)</u>
<u>1991-95 BEd Cohort</u>				
Year 1 total 150	18	132		
Year 4 total 119	9	110	<u>17%(22)</u>	<u>50%(9)</u>
<u>1990-94 BEd Cohort</u>				
Year 1 total 118	8	110		
Year 4 total 99	5	94	<u>14.5%(16)</u>	<u>37%(3)</u>
<u>1994-5 PGCE t:69</u>	13	56		
	4f/wd	10f/wd	<u>18%(10)</u>	<u>31%(4)</u>
<u>1993-4 PGCE t:92</u>	11	81		
	3f/wd	5f/wd	<u>6%(5)</u>	<u>27%(3)</u>

Table (ii)

KEY: f = failed      wd = withdrawn  
t = total number of PGCE students

1990-94 BEd Cohort	males	male % loss
Year 1 Total	8	
Year 4 Total	5	37.5% (3)
Of the five males completing their final degree, one failed		
= loss / failure rate of 50% (4)		
Of the remaining four , one got an unclassified degree		
= poor degree / loss / failure rate of 62.5% (5)		
Therefore only three male students were successful in gaining a good honours degree ( 37.5% of the original cohort of eight male students).		

Table (iii)