

Gender imbalances in primary education



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The topic I have chosen to research is gender imbalances in primary education. This consists of the lack of male primary school teachers and why primary education is predominately female teachers. The reason why I have chosen this topic is because I feel that there is a significant difference in gender teachers in education mainly primary education. I am hoping to discover the main reasons for this situation in the literature. The themes that I will be covering will hopefully link up to the solution to this argument on the main motives and rationale for gender imbalances. My intentions are to implement the gap I hope to fix and repair in the literature for this project and the next project. I hope to explore more theories (methodologies) readings and interviews (methods) on the themes I have chosen for the next project.

One theme will focus on the statistics on the past and current situation of gender imbalances in primary education amongst teachers. This will be a justification and an illustration to the readers that a gender imbalance is present and actually exists. A second theme will cover the students attitude and behaviour in education in a primary and secondary setting and why masculinities plays an important role in deciding what career they hope to pursue. The third theme will focus on the ethnicity in schools and why this is largely momentous to the gender imbalance argument. Finally, the forth and final theme will be on the role models both males and females live up to in education and why primary schools are feminised.

The argument that exists here is that many more girls than boys will be seeking a place in teaching training. This is a problem for males as already the teaching profession is highly feminised. There are many questions

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attached to this topic and I feel that it is imperative to discover and determine the reasons behind this pattern. The reason why I chose primary education rather than secondary or any other educational field is because the gender imbalance is not as highly significant as the primary sector. I sense that women are opting for traditional and new careers whereas men are opting away from primary school teaching. This is the core reason why I am dividing this review into themes as these are used as guides and stepping stones to find this gap in the literature.

Statistics on gender imbalances in primary education.

The concern of gender imbalance and distinctively the low proportion of male applicants is an international phenomenon in teaching and in particular primary school teaching. Despite this being a huge case in Ireland, it is tolerated in countries such as the United States of America, Australia and France. The demise of the male primary school teacher is evident from the publication of the Irish National (Primary) Teachers Organisation. The statistics show that from 1970 the percentage of primary school teachers who are male were 32%. Every ten years it is evaluated and it demonstrates a sudden decrease in percentage of male teachers. In the year 2000 it dropped to 19% and this year it is an estimated decline to 14%. The prediction from INTO is that there will be a decline of a minimum 5% male teachers every ten years until 2040 where there will be a mere 1% of teachers in primary school considered male. This is an interesting trend as the pattern is consistently declining and shows no remorse or improvement to this problem according to this publication. This trend can only be understood in the context of wider social changes and phenomena, including

those affecting the socialisation of boys and the division of caring responsibilities.

Although male teachers are in a small minority, they are clearly not a disadvantaged minority. Their over representation in promoted posts, while gradually reducing over recent years, together with the much smaller proportion of male teachers on the lower points of the salary scale, gives rise to a gender gap in the salary. That creates the question that is this gender imbalance in primary schools down to salary. Males pursuing a different career could be the cause of the low wage income. Salary is undoubtedly a consideration for all workers in choosing a career. Yet the starting salary of a primary teacher with an honours degree is €33, 901, compared with €27, 483 for an engineer, €30, 124 for a medical intern and €32, 029 for an architect. Most business graduates start on a lot less than this when they leave college. The only difference is those jobs mentioned would rise in salary with more experience whereas the primary school teacher would offer no greater significant rise in the amount of salary. So is this a case of the lack of job opportunity?

The number of teachers in Irish schools has increased by over 4, 500 in recent years. Job opportunities range from small one or two teacher schools to large 24 teacher schools, teaching in mainstream classes, as resource teachers for children with special needs or as home school liaison teachers. Ireland's education system also offers a choice of language, ethos and location – with 3, 200 primary schools. This clearly demonstrates that there is a vast opportunity for males and females with a number of different roles that the student/trainer can get involved in. The opportunities are present

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however; the insignificant pay rise or lack of great promotion may alter a male student's decision in pursuing this career.

It is interesting to note that the numbers for primary school teaching from 2003 was justification that a gender imbalance occurs. The highest proportion of male applicants on the Central Applications Office (CAO) was in 2002 with 16. 6%. Males as a percentage of the total applicants to the primary colleges of education exceeded 19% in 1993, but has never reached that level subsequently since that year. This proves that there a significant decline in male applicants for primary teaching and illustrates this gender imbalance.

Masculinity and effects gender imbalances have on school children

A very important aspect of the gender imbalance in primary education is that of masculinity. This is a cognitive theory that must be examined and understood in order to achieve and discover the gap in the literature.

Masculinity is something traditionally to be considered a characteristic of a male. This could be a quality characterized by physical and behavioral features such as physical strength which is commonly known by males.

Masculinity is a cultural idea that many men support, but do not necessarily embody. (Williams 1995). This cognitive theory would be present for students in deciding their future roughly around the age of 15-18 years.

Every student has their own aims. They can include a desire to have an extra qualification or a skill for career purposes, gain knowledge or improve themselves in any field. One of the efficient ways to achieve them can be

separated classes. Some scientists support this theory as girls and boys vary greatly both physiologically and psychologically whereas other scholars claim that the advantages of single-sex classes are not so obvious. The main factor which supports the benefits of single-sex classes is the differences between males and females. The most significant among them are physiological. The brains of girls and boys differ in an important way. These differences are genetically programmed and are present at birth.

Moreover, girls and boys have different learning styles. The National Association for Single-Sex Public Schools has found that boys prosper a competitive environment whereas girls prefer a collaborative approach to learning. Also researchers mention that single-sex environment has a positive influence on enrolment in non-traditional subject areas for male and female students. For instance, girls are more likely to learn higher level science and maths while boys are more likely to study higher level language and arts. As a result, separated schools offer unique educational opportunities for girls and for boys.

This philosophy on the difference between males and females in a physiological sense exists especially during their secondary education. This draws to the debate that is the teaching profession suitable for males and their characteristics? There are possible reasons why this proves to be the case. Is it career guidance? There is evidence to show that career guidance teachers are more likely to recommend teaching as a career to their top female students rather than their top male students. Some boys may also feel that their peers or parents would not be supportive of them choosing a career as a primary teacher.

Another reason that the boys are not pursuing this career is because of the education barrier they face. Certainly girls are getting higher points in the leaving certificate but the figures show that boys are not applying for teaching, so points are not the issue. The honours Irish requirement does appear to be a barrier as fewer boys take Irish at honours Leaving Cert level than girls. Here lies a dilemma as there is also a need to maintain and indeed improve the standard of Irish in our schools. Lowering the requirement for a C3 in higher level might help solve one problem but compound another. However, the feminization of teaching is a worldwide trend so we can hardly claim that the honours Irish requirement is influencing the gender balance in countries such as America, Australia or France.

Gender Imbalances in the primary classroom – Ethnographic Account

As explained earlier that in order to find the links behind the gender imbalance, it is imperative to look at its historical context. This next part will focus on the ethnicity of students in the classroom and why this could be a potential reason for the lack of male teachers in primary education today. It is well established especially in mixed schools, male pupils receive more teacher attention than do females. According to Brophy and Good, Boys have more interactions with the teacher than girls. As a result of this they generally appear to be more key, dominant, important and salient in the teachers' perceptual field. Stanworth (1981) states that teachers have a general and overall preference for male pupils. Why is this situation the case and does it have an impact on the career the students they hope to follow?

After an analysis on the participation turns in a classroom, the responsibility for gender imbalances rests largely on the teacher. By 'turns' I mean the number of times a student participates in the classroom or the students' input for the duration of the classroom. The teacher holds an important responsibility to give every student a fair share of turns and become preferable to gender or biased towards one sex. The teacher may be seen to result from him/ her being socially and psychologically predisposed to solicit contributions to the lessons from the male students at the expense of involving the female students. Again Stanworth suggests that boys are more likely than girls to volunteer information to make heavier demands on the teachers' time. This indicates to me that male students are more comprehensive to work with and could take up more of the teachers' valuable time donated to the female students.

The redress of imbalances in teacher attention does not necessarily follow from the remediation of male based attitudes in teachers. This is of course unless they do become sensitive to the interactional methods used by pupils in securing attention and conversational engagement. Male students put themselves out there more than girls and show more difficulty towards the teacher but does not necessarily mean that this is a negative attitude towards the teacher. This type of behavior could determine the masculinity men demonstrate in a classroom environment. As discussed earlier, this type of cognitive theory could determine what career men hope to lead or follow. This is why I feel that male's behavior in a classroom determines what attitude they utilize in their decision making skills in the future.

In this theme, the literature chosen for this topic claim that there is a gender imbalance in turns at talk and thus in the distribution of teacher attention. I would agree with this statement as the teachers contribution is vital in terms of how much attention is gained from the students and how much information was gathered and added to the knowledge of the students. In conclusion, this study is a useful contribution to this field of study, in particular for its attention to patterns of differential participation among boys and for the novel ideas in explaining gender imbalance that it presents. However, it may have some defects and these indicate areas where further reflection and research is required. I hope to explore more in-depth research and ideas on this topic for project two and this will hopefully help me link those gaps in the literature.

Role Models in Teaching

There are many reasons why there is an extremely short percentage of males involved in primary school teaching. A huge responsibility for a primary school teacher is the fact that there involves a lot of caring for the student. The male might feel that in their head that women are more responsible for this role, therefore they would look elsewhere for a job in the workforce. The major reason given for men why they are so rare in the workforce is poor pay. In addition men find it difficult to get employment because of fears of abuse and a widely held perception that women are better at caring for young children. These perceptions are also common in the U. K.

Skelton surveyed student teachers to ascertain their perceptions of the different qualities brought by men and women to primary school teaching.

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Men teachers held a view that women teachers have better communication skills and are generally more caring. This is from a stereotypical point of view as there is not much evidence to support this statement. Women students believe that men have significant roles to play in fostering good attitudes to study among boys and are needed for role models. The statistics show that the numbers for male teachers in primary schools are declining and a result of this could be the lack of provision of role models for men.

From the 1970's the numbers of male teachers dropped from 32% to 14% this year. Skelton and Carrington (2002) conducted a large scale study of male and female students' image of primary school teaching as a career. All of the students felt that primary teaching was suitable for both teachers and that it was as intellectually demanding as secondary teaching. Seventy two percent of men and 76% of women disagreed with the statement that women teachers are more caring than men. Carrington's respondents are positively working against the stereotype that primary teaching is a female job and that what is required if we are to increase the number of men in the profession is to work against the stereotype. The research suggests that what primary teaching is about is not providing role models but exciting teaching.

It is a possibility that the excitement of primary teaching will not thrill the males and therefore they would seek to another adventurous job or career. Now that it is established that there is a significant gap in gender when it comes to primary school teaching, a main concern could be the initial behavior of males in the classroom. A critical point in this argument is the way in which for boys the behavior protects from failing. In rejecting

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academic work, they are insulated from the effect of failure or rejection. At the same time the behaviours are consistent in maintaining traditional masculine hegemony. The simple imposition of male role models would not and could not penetrate those behaviours since the schooling policy takes no cognisance of the meanings and functions of those behaviours for their perpetrators.

The core reason why there is a lack of provision of role models for males is due to the historical assumptions that primary school is often feminised. Historically the profession of primary school teaching has been a female dominated one. We can argue that the current policy initiative focusing simply on increasing numbers of male recruits ignores both historical and contemporary reality. In the case of male achievement despite the lack of male role models in primary education, the media have seemed to have made much of the shortage of male teachers. Is this down to their attitudes in the classroom or infact their own problem with the feminisation of primary schooling?

My evaluation to this question is that primary schooling is seen as caring rather than academic from a male's point of view and although men are encouraged at first to take this role, they are then regarded as suspect by current policy makers because of the caring role. My feelings are that men and women are equally capable of matching in terms of caring and responsibility, however their masculinity and attitudes towards lack of role models and education at the age of decision making separates them. This is why I feel that primary teaching is predominated by females.

Overall, my conclusion to this topic is that there is a largely significant difference in gender to primary school teaching and generates an imbalance that is historical and will continue to do so in the future. Regardless if this is problematic or not the statistics continue to show that primary school teaching is feminised and predominated by females. There are many families in the country where children may not have a strong male presence in their lives. The different perspectives, range of interests and outlooks that male teachers bring to a school can provide real role models for all children. Greater numbers of men in teaching means children benefit. Teaching is a career which offers the opportunity to mould and influence the next generation and to help every child to reach their potential. It is a career which allows for the use of all skills and talents – in communication, leadership and management – in the course of the working day.

I summarise that the research and ideas of others have provided me with the framework for my own work in project two. The fact that this review has been divided into themes has helped me gain more knowledge and better understanding on this topic and hopefully does the same with the reader. This review is regarded as a fundamental process and worthwhile research. I think the themes that I have displayed throughout the paper on the statistics, male masculinities, ethnicity and the lack of provision of role models for males have showed critical awareness on this topic. These are what I feel are the most accurate reasons for the reason that primary school teaching is predominated by females.