Teaching and the gender imbalance: do we need more MATES?

Stephen Smith  USQ

Australian Centre for Educational Leadership

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*Developing tomorrow’s leaders*

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University of Wollongong
Developing tomorrow’s leaders
Focal Issues

- The current situation
- Do you believe schools would benefit from a balance of male/female teachers?
- Do male teachers bring special skills to schools/classrooms?

How can we attract/retain more men into teaching? : MATES outline
The current situation

- “In 2002, the proportion of male primary teachers (within Australia) was only 20.9%. This is a decrease of five percentage points over only a decade” Nelson 2003

- NEA (2003) research indicates only nine percent of American elementary school teachers are men.
The current situation

- Within Education Queensland schools 27.3% of teachers are male. In EQ primary schools males represent only 22.7% of teaching staff. Commonwealth of Australia 2002

- EQ has set a target of 35% male teacher representation by January 2006.

- CEO (2002) claims only 18% of the teaching workforce in NSW and VIC were male in 2001
Future trends?

“Across the nation, there are only 4247 males who are training to be primary teachers, which is 18.8 per cent of the total number of teachers in primary training – less than one in five”

Nelson 2003

Approximately half of Australia’s male teachers are over 45 years of age

OECD 2003
Do you believe schools would benefit from a balance of male/female teachers? (M: 35%  FM: 65%)

- Participants (small groups: approx 4) discuss statement and summarize views for Buzz feedback.
Bundaberg District research 2004

Do you believe schools would benefit from a balance of male/female teachers? (M 35% FM 65%)

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Do you believe schools would benefit from a balance of male/female teachers? (M35% FM 65%)

Benefits:
- Improved diversity
- Enhanced relationships
- Reduced behaviour management issues
Improved diversity

‘Males don’t necessarily make better teachers but they do have a different way of connecting with children. This can be advantageous when negotiating with problem students. Shared interests, and in some cases, similar experiences create a degree of empathy between male teachers and students – especially males, which can only enhance the teaching-learning environment and process’ Jack: teacher
Improved diversity

- ‘Having a balance of male and female teachers is as important as a range of teachers with various skills. Matching children’s learning needs with appropriate teaching learning styles is an imperative and having a balance of males and females offers more diversity to school to match teachers and students needs’

Bob: principal
Enhanced relationships

‘Women (generally) tend to get very personal and more emotional which can impact on school moral if not balanced with a male’s more easy going nature’  Wendy: teacher

‘This (gender balance) will result in improved interactions with both parents. Some fathers are more comfortable interacting with male teachers’  Jenny: principal
Enhanced relationships

‘I grew up in a family of girls with a father who worked away from home. I didn’t have a male teacher until year 7 and was totally intimidated by his manner and teaching style. I grew to appreciate his humour and learnt to interact with him, but would have benefited from this experience much earlier. More males in early childhood classes please’  

Helen: Principal
Fewer behaviour management issues

‘With female dominated classrooms boys issues can be suppressed. Without the opportunity to see male perspectives or anticipate male problems, female teachers will suffer greater confrontation and aggression from adolescent boys in particular’

Peter: principal
Do students/schools benefit from a balance of male/female teachers?

Declining achievement of boys

“The evidence indicating that boys, on average, achieve at significantly lower levels than girls on all areas of assessed cognitive curriculum throughout their primary and secondary schooling is not in dispute...Indeed, there is a widening gap between the academic performance of girls and boys in Australia”

Rowe and Rowe 2002
Inquiry into the education of boys
Declining achievement of boys

- Boys represent 80% of students in school disciplinary programs  
  DEST 2003

- Nationally the Year 12 retention rate for boys is between 11 and 12 percentage points lower than it is for girls  
  *Boys: Getting it right* 2002

- Our juvenile correction institutions have nine times as many males as females and males are four times more likely to commit suicide  
  Aust. Institute of Criminology 2002
“...the presence or absence of males teachers has major implications for the culture of schools and the education of children...for a range of reasons including the potential impact of a more balanced teacher population on behavioural and learning difficulties for boys and on gender stereotype issues, strategies need to be put in place to attempt to attract more males into the teaching profession at the primary level.”

CEO submission to HREOC 2002
“It is also evident that there is concern about the lack of male role models in the teaching profession for young boys. Among other factors, the lack of male role models or authority figures in schools may influence the attitude of boys towards schooling in general.”

Male teacher strategy 2002
However

‘…the quality of teaching and learning provision with major emphasis on literacy and related verbal reasoning and written communication skills are by far the most salient influences on students’ cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling – regardless of either student or teacher gender’

Rowe and Rowe

Inquiry into the education of boys
Activity: Do male teachers bring special skills/attributes to schools/classrooms?

- Participants (in same small groups) discuss statement and summarize views for Buzz feedback.
Do you believe male teachers bring special skills/attributes to the classroom/school?

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Not all agreed!

‘Not special, just different ways of seeing, knowing, and doing, working with children and learners’

Roslyn: principal

‘The skills male teachers bring are no more special than the skills/attributes that female teachers bring. The point is that these attributes are missing due to the lack of male teachers’

Steve: deputy-principal
Do you believe male teachers bring special skills/attributes to the classroom/school?

- Special interest and relationship building
- Engaging male learners
- Sense of humour and demeanor
- Positive male role model
Generally speaking, male teachers bring different types of life experiences to their teaching styles. Having appropriate role models for male students, especially those boys who lack this person in their own lives would seem to bring benefits to these students. Male students would tend to relate better to the experiences and interests of male teachers. This can be the foundation for the establishment of an important relationship between teacher and student’

Greg: counsellor
Engaging male learners

‘Males better understand the ways boys think and work. There is a natural gender alignment. Females/girls tend to be more verbose and complicated, males more structured and succinct needing clear simplistic guidelines with strict boundaries’

Jane: principal
Positive male role model

‘Men have the ability to meld a physical presence with a caring/nurturing demeanour’

Jacob: teacher

‘Male teachers model the valuing and acceptance of male academic success’

Neil: teacher

‘Boys need male role models and people to whom they can turn to when encountering difficulty’

John: principal

‘Fewer male teachers could lead to the possibility of an increase in male youth suicide due to the reduction in numbers of potential ‘significant adult males’ involved in the lives of young males’

Robyn: teacher
Positive male role model

‘As a father of daughters I believe it is essential that they be exposed to a variety of masculine role models, in order for them to develop a balanced perspective of male/female dichotomy. Successful, confident, inspirational male teachers are an important component in developing young adults’

Keith: teacher parent
MATES: Male teacher support project

Why?
As the number of male teachers decline, beginning male teachers are more likely to operate in gender isolated work environments and experience a lack of guidance in dealing with particular concerns relating to male teaching.
Concerns expressed

- ‘How does a male teacher meld and project strength with a caring, supportive demeanour?’
- ‘How does a male teacher develop a positive rapport with female students?’
- ‘What are some of the roles a male teacher is expected to adopt at school?’
- ‘How do male teachers morale in an isolated work environment?’
MATES: Male teacher support project

Why?

CQU Bundaberg campus (2004)
Bachelor of Learning Management (BLM)

- 73.1% of practicum supervising teachers are female
- 28.5% of students will not encounter a male supervising teachers within any practicum
MATES

Addressing the significant decline in male teacher numbers by:

- Supporting male pre-service teachers in training through a mentoring and literacy support program
- Marketing and promoting the profession to males (especially male senior high school teachers)
- Supporting in-service male teachers through expanding networks, acknowledging their contribution and facilitating engaging PD
MATES outcomes

CQU Bundaberg (BLM)

- 56% increase in male enrolment in BLM (2003 to 2004)
- 100% retention of pre-service teachers in trial
- 100% support from local teachers to act as mentors
- 61.5% of MATES mentors supervised BLM practicums (2003 & 2004)
Supporting male pre-service teachers in training through a mentoring and literacy support program (2003)

- 25 first and second year male pre-service teachers volunteer
- 28 local (Bundaberg) primary and secondary male teachers accept invitation to be mentor
‘Male role models do matter and boys benefit by men modelling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and boys. This is much more effectively demonstrated to boys by men than it can be taught to boys by women in the absence of men’
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Summary/conclusion

- Open buzz/discussion to highlight key issues/points discussed and views expressed.
- Questions/comments