Do boys need male primary teachers as positive role models


Abstract
This paper examines the current government concern to recruit more male primary teachers in England and Wales. The discourse of the failing boy and the fear of male working-class disaffection are implicated in present publicity campaigns. The invisible female primary school teacher (and her female pupils) needs to be inserted into the debate. The paper sets out to explore how established stereotypes have contributed to maintaining a highly gendered work force. It asserts that the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) publicity materials are gender-biased and insulting to practitioners. Voices from female and male primary teachers illustrate the discussion.

"no country should pride itself on its educational system if the teaching profession has become predominantly a world of women."

Langeveld in The Year Book of Education.1963.

Introduction
"Does 'we need more male teachers' mean we don't need women teachers?" Sylvia, a mature white working-class female primary teacher, asked me this question when I told her about my present research interest concerned with male primary teachers. I feel her question deserves an answer. I also believe that Gillian Plummer's (2000:vii) identification that:

"...the greatest national concern at the present time is the underachievement of boys........The educational failure of working-class girls is hidden"

needs to be further addressed by feminist researchers who have focused on gender and education and not offered an accompanying class analysis (Skeggs 1997:6). hooks has also criticized feminist research for marginalising black and white working-class women (hooks 1984:18) and their particular experiences of exclusion (see also Thompson 2000:14). Yet, feminist researchers have carefully critiqued the simplistic notion of male 'role models' for disaffected boys, making visible the reassertion of hegemonic masculinity. Pepperell and Smedley (1998:344) point out how:

"Concepts of role model and socialization theory are widely challenged in the literature on gender, but used rather unproblematically in the 'common-sense' comment around teacher recruitment in the press."

See also Epstein et al (1998), Raphael Reed (1999:101) and Thornton (1999:50) for further discussion of the 'role-models' debate.

What I sense has not yet happened is a synthesis of teachers' voices; an exploration of the stereotypes surrounding primary teachers; and a recognition of the political, social, and economic specificity of present calls for 'more male' primary teachers.

Fusing both seemingly light-hearted images (always the most dangerous) and lived teacher voice together has the potential to create a way to address both Sylvia's question and Plummer's (2000) concerns. It may also provide material to provoke government policy makers to reject the spin-doctor approach to teacher recruitment. Their expensive campaigns are seen as insulting and totally unrealistic by most of the teachers and students I listen to. They serve to further marginalise and silence women teachers and girls: many of the TTA pamphlets are dominated by glossy images that suggest that the vast majority of teachers are men (many are also black men).

Behind this 'topical' paper is a serious purpose: it is concerned with teacher as well as pupil exclusion in our schools. We need 'good' primary school teachers in our schools and to suggest that only one 'gender' (or any other essentialising label, including age) can fulfill this role is to maintain and perpetuate damaging stereotypes.

In the main part of this paper I will offer a review of more 'traditional' teacher stereotypes, which are equally unrepresentative, but have serious consequences for present recruitment and promotion patterns in English primary schools. I intend to insert the voices of female and male primary teachers themselves, attempting to make visible complex and contradictory notions of 'ideal type' primary teachers. I explore the historical origins of these stereotypes, and review relevant research findings. Finally, I draw some conclusions for future advertisement initiatives that are more equitable and socially just. Recruitment campaigns that do not rely on unproblematic 'commonsense' appeals for 'more men' but instead listen to teachers' views and draw from pertinent research evidence.
Debates and discourses that surround the role of 'the primary teacher'

This section is written to make more visible and thus open to challenge (Duncan 1996:169) the complex and often contradictory discourses that inform the present government and media campaigns to recruit more male primary teachers (TTA 1996, 2000) in England and Wales. The Teacher Training Agency slogan:

"Every Good Boy Deserves Football." (advert 1999)

well illustrates the on-going linkage made between football, male teachers and boys. Skelton (2000:15) has researched how dominant masculinities are still constructed in primary schools though the employment of football to engage boys' interest:

"football was a crucial feature of hegemonic masculinity."

The TTA slogan was supposedly aimed at recruiting more primary teachers in England and Wales, but the focus is on boys and men. Raphael Reed (1999:102) argues that:

"..calls for increasing the employment of male primary teachers to counteract the feminising effects of primary education and provide positive role models have failed to ask questions about the type of masculinity being reproduced by male primary teachers...."

In an occupation where only 16.4% of primary teachers are male, with a marked decrease in the 21-29 age group (Statistics of Education Teachers England and Wales 2000) the need to re-introduce male authority is increasingly concerning the media and the government. This discourse is inter-linked with the media attack on single parents and serves to further stigmatise female teachers:

"Nursery boys 'devalued' by female teachers." (Leake 2001)

This sentence in The Sunday Times headlines an article that argues the:

"predominance of women in nursery education is making boys feel inferior."

It quotes statistics to show the vast majority of nursery teachers are female and expresses great concern over the lack of positive role models for boys and thus any encouragement for boys 'games and sport'. The male journalist suggests that women teachers favour girls and reports that the government is to set targets to recruit more men in order to tackle this serious issue. The article discusses how men must also face the worry of being accused of child abuse in this sector of schooling. The tone and content of the report valorises men, assumes women and girls do not play sport and once again positions the female teacher as deficit. We see the male teacher written as 'hero' needed to rescue the boys from these discriminatory women teachers and their young favoured female pupils who have "superior verbal abilities."

These public images that continue to surround the role of 'primary teacher' are deeply embedded within English cultural traditions and their long-term usage continues to influence recruitment, subsequent promotion patterns and increasingly government education policy. However as Weber and Mitchell (1995:5) write:

" These images have remained largely unexamined and their significance unnoticed."

These images at the present time define men as an asset in primary classrooms (Pepperell and Smedley 1998:342), whilst women are increasingly seen as deficit (Miller 1996). It is clear that public beliefs and promotion patterns continue to reflect the historical themes that Langeveld (1963) drew on in his text: themes that greatly devalue women teachers and girls whilst, affirming male authority and boys interests. Yet, as Skelton (2000:12) also reminds us:

"....not all men teachers position themselves within footballing discourses."

In my own interviews with female and male inner-city primary teachers (Burn 1999, 2000,2001) I have listened to anger from the men who do not want to be defined in such an essentialist way as sports/discipline men:

" I'm not their father! Even when I was still on teaching practice, the female year six teacher sent me the 'naughty boys' to discipline. I was teaching in year four.......they had found out in the staffroom I had been in the army...."

A mature white working-class male teacher.

Issues of race and class are implicated in these gender stereotypes:

" It's very isolating....at times you are just assumed to be a strong male teacher.....I was given a year 3 and 4 class. I was the only male with the team....I had a disproportionate number of boys with behaviour and emotional problems...only 9 girls...at least 70% of the boys were black. I don't know how they thought I could manage such a large group of boys (he was in his first year of teaching) as it turned out I really couldn't."

A black working-class male teacher.

These rejections of 'discipline man' are not supported by all of the male teachers I listen to; instead they employ the stereotype for career advantage:
Children were getting used to the females shouting at them. Males have a deeper voice—it's a weapon.

A white early-years male teacher.

These claims to being more able to control the children (and also gain respect from parents and governors) are supported by direct reference to physicality:

"I believe you get 'easier' discipline if you are a man...I think it is an advantage...especially the boys...parents come in and they can see my size...I'm quite tall and 15 stone and I can use it as well....if the children are fighting I can get in their space."

A white working-class male teacher.

All of the women primary teachers I have listened to have commented with anger on the status given to male teachers due to this 'discipline man' image. An image that translates into the idea that "we need a man" (a white female head teacher).

"...men are favoured and they are perceived as being the authoritarian figures within the school....."

A white working-class female teacher.

"I think kids come into school and if they've got a man in the classroom they respond differently. They think they can't get away with as much...."

A mature white working-class female teacher.

These notions of male authority are not new; twelve years ago Grant's (1989:46) research presented a female primary teacher discussing her experience of being interviewed for senior management. The excerpt below demonstrates how the discipline discourse is applied to 'strong' men who employ their physicality:

"John who got the headship, he is 6ft 2, 15 stone, has a loud voice. He plays - he is a bully - and he plays a very hard line in that school. Now within Carlton Green there is the perception that it's a tough school and it needs a big strong man."

It would be informative to hear John's version of why he was appointed to the post, would he ascribe his career success to his masculinity and his ability to be 'strong'? These images of discipline man were echoed in the conversations of other women teachers that Grant interviewed, and similar views were reported by Acker (1994).

I suggest from my own experience of teaching in primary schools for 17 years, that the discipline man discourse is central to maintaining unfair staffing and promotion patterns in this sector of education. I was told as long ago as 1979: "of course you know they want a man" just prior to interview for deputy headship in an inner-city primary school, by the male Chair of Governors (a young man was appointed).

The increasing feminisation of primary teaching itself over the last twenty years has not been marked by more equitable promotion patterns; in fact, now scarcity seems to further advantage any male teachers who apply for the job. Thornton and Bricheno (2000:203) carried out a recent review of English primary school staffing and promotion patterns. Their statistics confirm continuing male career advancement:

"...men in primary teaching work in an increasingly female and low status profession, but within it they achieve disproportionate power and status."

The feminisation of primary school staffing 'does not equal feminist' (Coffey and Delamont 2000:48). Skelton (1991:284) found male teachers were well aware of their career advantage. Conflicting views emerged from the male teachers she interviewed; David discussed a sense of having 'no control' over promotion paths:

"Men are pushed into deputy head, headships because they are men."

Whilst, Andrew drew on traditional ideas of masculinity, stating:

"Men after all, first of all, are men and therefore the sort of society we live in alas, expects them to be slightly superior and able to do this......"

In my own research I have listened to male primary teachers complaining bitterly about being expected to "go up the greasy pole" in terms of management. The role of management as a masculine preserve is further reinforced by the new market place ideologies that are now increasingly influencing primary school organisation and practices. Ball (2000) writes of the advent of a business culture ethic in education, and eleven years previously Al-Khalifa (1989:87) had identified the beginnings of this shift towards a technicist model of management within primary school management.

"That's the new image, suited folk with ring binders under their arms and clip boards. Its management."
This 'image' of the new young management man or woman does not fit easily with football man/dim mother. However, it does exemplify how 'masculinity and femininity' are themselves notional concepts rather than essential sex differences (Francis and Skelton 2001:11). In this new image 'suited' women can occupy the corporate management role as well as men, but again only certain 'types' of women fit this stereotype. One female teacher defined them as: "Mrs Thatcher's women."

The division between the early years and the junior sector is also highly significant:

"as the proportion of men increases, women's representation at headship level decreases." (Grant 1989:36).

The female dominated infant school, as Evetts (1989:192) records does provide more promotion opportunities for women. Acker's research findings further confirm this pattern of promotion (1994:108). In 1992, 99 % of infant head teachers were female: whilst, in junior schools 75% of primary head teachers were male. This staffing divide was referred to in Leake's (2001) article that so criticised female nursery teachers:

"...just 1% of Britain's 215,000 nursery teachers being men."

It is worth comparing these figures to previous historical periods where:

"...in the early years of the nineteenth century the majority of teachers of infants were men...." Steedman (1987:120).

So the:

"immutable concept of the woman teacher as a married woman, with small children..." National Union of Teachers (1980:54).

needs to be set in a specific social historical context. In 1849, 68% of pupil teachers in English elementary schools were male and only 32% were female (Tropp 1957:22). The gender and social class composition of teachers in primary schools has altered throughout the last century due to a complex range of social, political and economic circumstances, including wars and changing global labour markets (Copelman 1996).

Today over 80% of all primary teachers in England and Wales are female (Coffey and Delamont 2000:46). However underlining all these changes has been the centrality of women's continuing domestic role. This is implicated in the present dominance of women in the early years, since:

"Caring has been led by a nurturing model, nurturing itself being principally defined as like mothering. Early childhood services have to a greater or lesser extent been seen as offering mother substitutes," Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999:165).

I also suggest that new 'management man/woman' market ideologies may be attempting to replace these more traditional stereotypes. However in the early years we still find a 'deviant man' (Skelton 1991) discourse used to keep men 'out of the kitchen' so that women can become "mother-made-conscious" (Steedman 1992:179).

Again my own interviewees refer to these maternal stereotypes, sometimes refuting them and sometimes claiming them in order to gain status:

"...they feel that I am there to bring up their children and be a surrogate mother......I am not there to put their children on the toilet...."

A mature white working-class female early years teacher.

Women early years teachers are well aware of their lack of status and authority:

".....there's an under-currency that you go and take the Early Years and Reception because you can cope with the child wetting themselves and you need to tie their laces, its: 'Penny you go and deal with this child that's just fallen over!' (a sing-song voice).

A young white working-class female early years teacher.

However, if the familial stereotype places the female teacher as 'substitute' mother, then the male teacher is left with the role of 'father', especially for the single parent family. Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) also identified the discourse of the male as being needed to compensate for the absent father in single parent families. The team of researchers comment on how male early years workers are seen as 'naturally' being more interested in sport, ball games and playing with vehicles by the female staff. Thus the gendered norms are written into the multiple stereotypes that continue to surround male and female teachers in England. Stereotypes that impact on maintaining gendered staffing and promotion patterns within the profession. It again evidences:

" the patriarchal division of private and public"(Dillabough 2000:169)

with 'female' work defined as merely an extension of the domestic domain with the accompanying status of "non-worker." I have lost track of the times I have been told that primary teaching was ideal for me as it 'fits' into my domestic commitments (I had three children) an extension of my private household duties.
There seems to have become established over the years an immutable concept of the woman teacher as a married woman, with small children, who is uninterested in promotion. As far as can be ascertained, all women teachers, single, childless, old and young, are related to this concept with inevitable and disastrous consequences for their career prospects. (NUT 1980:54).

In the same way that women are viewed through their childrearing potentials, men are viewed as providers and protectors who must be given authority and status. The common gendered construction of primary teaching as "caring" and thus an extension of the 'mothers' role, is discussed by King (1998:8) in his American study:

"In the case of primary teaching, we so consistently talk about what it is (caring) to conceal what it cannot be (male)."

Male primary teachers must therefore not occupy the 'caring' role, they are positioned as having different roles to inhabit in the wendy house: roles that continue to replicate the patriarchal norm. This is a defining feature of the many stereotypes that surround the occupation. The persistence of these discourses contributes to valuing: "traits stereotypically attributed to men"(Grant 1989:47) but only if men demonstrate them.

These stereotypes that still shape recruitment, staffing and promotion patterns today, despite TTA publicity campaigns have developed from early ideas concerned with the role of women (and by association their female pupils) in England. In 1912 the London County Council Woman Teachers' Union campaigned for separate education for girls:

"The appropriate education of those who will ere long become the mothers of the Empire."


This quotation is a good example of how the maternal discourse was situated within the colonial one and translated into a continuation of Louisa Hubbard's earlier campaign in 1870s to recruit women teachers who embodied the nineteenth century "solid middle-class domestic ideology." (Widdowson 1980:31). This discussion of 'appropriate' behaviours for female teachers has been in the news again 89 years later.

The TES (1.6.2001) editorial referred to an on-going media debate concerning a young white female teacher who was taking part in a television game show. The TES concluded that "the naked teacher" as they named her, had let the school down. This popular teachers' weekly newspaper held a poll to see if other teachers believed that she should be sacked for "lewd" behaviour: teachers supported the female teacher, rather than the press. Once again in this media debate, we can trace the continuation of the Victorian discourse that positioned the female teacher as a 'moral guardian of the nation.' The same image was made visible in Walkerdine's (1989:78) description:

"She must strive to counter the effects of bad mothering to secure democratic rather than rebellious citizens."

The idea that the teacher has to set an example to society (provide a role model) is also embedded in Hoyle's (1969:25) book aimed at teachers and student teachers in England and Wales. In his book, concerned with primary and secondary teachers, social class norms as well as sexual mores are part of the teachers' role to uphold in society:

"By virtue of his occupational status the teacher is 'middle class',... Furthermore it is expected that these will be the norms which he will embody and seek to transmit to his pupils."

In this excerpt we see how gender and class and race are implicated in the stereotype of teacher as role model. The 'teacher' in this book is always assumed to be a white male and in transmission mode. The rare mention of any 'female' teacher is clearly accompanied by a nurturing role discourse and an early years label (Hoyle 1969:49). The female teacher has herself a specific function to perform as a 'socialising agent':

"The concept of the infant school teacher as a mother figure is an appropriate one since one of her main tasks is to wean the child away from its psychological dependence upon the home....."

The male junior teacher in his primary role of 'instructor' is also defined by sex-typed characteristics (Hoyle 1969:65,66). In Hoyle's book the ideal type of the male teacher is presented as a "father" who is efficient in carrying out his "tasks". The book then offers a further set of teacher types. The roles are male and they are all are set within the context of the patriarchal family. Teacher as grandfather; teacher as elder brother; teacher as uncle; teacher as cousin:

" The image here is of a rather wayward cousin. He has much to teach his pupils, but he is not greatly interested in them."

Oram's (1989:31) analysis of the primary school as an institution modelled on the familial structure is clearly evidenced throughout Hoyle's book. She comments:

" The younger the children the more apt is women's place as their teacher. The sexual division of labour in the profession has emphasized this familial structure."

Hoyle's stereotyping of the paternal male teacher who 'instructs' Junior pupils is in clear contrast to the maternal, 'weaner' of children found in the Reception classroom.

The present gendered stereotypes concerning primary teachers are not just found in English culture. Research in other countries also
discourses operate we cannot assume they are accepted (Weedon 1987:125): Just because men are the sex which is considered dominant, they cannot fulfill the dominant image of hegemonic man (Connell 1995) due to his subordinate masculinity is not envisaged. The danger of essentializing practices that seek to fix and naturalize groups. People are classified according to a mythical 'norm' and those who transgress these boundaries are censored and stigmatised. Hall (1997:258) writes: 

"...another feature of stereotyping is its practice of 'closure' and exclusion. It symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything that does not belong."

Francis (2000:15) has identified a list of attributes that demonstrate how notional ideas of femininity and masculinity in western societies still operate in English schools. Her research was concerned with secondary pupils; my reading of the many stereotypes that still surround the occupation of 'primary teacher' reveals the same gender dichotomy is applied to teachers.

King (1998:3) likewise acknowledges damaging male stereotypes in his study of seven men teaching pupils in American primary grade classrooms:

" A public perception is that men who teach primary grades are often either homosexuals, paedophiles, or principles in training."

Notice King's inclusion of the clear promotion advantage that is also built in to male teacher career paths in England.

In New Zealand, Duncan's (1996:160) research study similarly indicated pay and promotion patterns for female teachers' of young children that favour men. Duncan (1996: 165) found identical teacher stereotypes that reveal: " links between women's work and women's nurturing." Duncan (1996:167) employs Foucauldian notions of discourse and power in order to make visible how these assumptions about the nature of women's work continue to reinforce dominant regimes of truth, and creates a composite 'for the sake of the children' discourse.

Duncan demonstrates in her discussion of these damaging domestic discourses, just how complex and contradictory these multiple stereotypes are: and just how influential they can be at policymaking level. She recognises that in New Zealand these common discourses are further informed by the historical legacy of teacher as "missionary." Duncan (1996:169) concludes that by making visible these discursive processes:

" the discourses are exposed, rendering them open to change, or to be challenged."

Steedman (1992:188) referring to the teacher as 'mother' discourse, deconstructs its historical development from the male infant teachers in early 19th century England. She supports Walkerdine's (1992) analysis of the way traditional feminine virtues were established as part of the woman teachers' role of inculcating the values of a 'good bourgeois home.' A male who does not want to or cannot fulfill the dominant image of hegemonic man (Connell 1995) due to his subordinate masculinity is not envisaged. The danger of exploring these familiar stereotypes is that the reader or researcher begins to assume that all primary teachers inhabit them and thus description unwittingly re-enforces them. Researchers (and government publicity departments) must recognise that just because discourses operate we cannot assume they are accepted (Weedon 1987:125):

"Although the subject in post structuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations."
"Teaching must always be, in some way or other, a retreat from general social life and from fully adult relationships..."

In her first novel written in 1938 Ruth Adam who had also been a primary teacher, drew from some commonly held teacher stereotypes in the 1930s. Adam's (1983:275) may have written about the public perception of: "a stuffy old school-marm" yet, the storyline reveals a range of women teachers who do challenge this narrow stereotype. I did not read Ruth Adam's story the way Steedman (1992:52) interpreted it and it is important to recognise teachers' own sense of agency in responding to the images offered. Middleton (1992:20) reminds researchers that women teachers are not "passive victims" and they are not a homogeneous group (Burn 2001. Osler 1997). In the same way we need to recognise male teachers from marginalised groups in society will also attract damaging stereotypical assumptions linked to their particular ethnicity, sexuality, or social class that can serve to exclude them from status and power in the school hierarchy (King 1998:115).

It is important to recognise the "interconnecting relationship" of class and race as well as gender (Reynolds 2000:82). How does the Black, working-class male infant teacher negotiate his work identity for instance and what stereotypes are ascribed to him? (Osler 1997). One teacher I interviewed told me:

"They looked at me and saw a stereotype."

A mature black working-class male teacher.

It is important to avoid further stigmatising the teacher occupation with these images: whilst, at the same time striving to uncover their existence and impact on role constructions and policymaking. Teachers like myself may well attempt to contest and disown them, but others will still view us through their lens. We will have been judged as fulfilling or challenging the expectations that these stereotypes set. Pupils as well as other staff, governors and families will operate within the accepted definitions of the 'ideal type' of teacher, unless those 'types' are discussed critically. Johnston, McKeown and McEwen (1999:61) in their Irish research found that career officers reinforced the notion of 'dim teacher':

"primary school teaching is regarded as low level work lacking in intellectual demands."

The male researchers gave a questionnaire to 334 B.Ed trainees (15% male) that asked them to respond to attitudinal statements that were very similar to the stereotypes I have already discussed e.g. "It is inappropriate for males to teach young children." The results when combined with the focus group interview data indicated general agreement that the role is an extension of being a mother. Their research also showed that male trainees placed more value on the notion that 'you need a man' in schools. The same discourse has been increasingly employed in the present 'failing boys' debate. A notion that Johnston, McKeown and McEwen (1999:60) describe as: "akin to a moral stance". The 'we need a man to save the failing boys' discourse employed by the press and TTA campaigns continues this 'moral' stance.

This paper argues that these well-known teacher stereotypes are not insignificant; although the lack of systematic research into their construction suggests that they are of little importance. My colleagues and I have lived with them all our working lives; and when you are often told you "look just like a teacher" the first thing you reflect on is which of the many stereotyped discourses is the speaker actually drawing on.

In Canada, Weber and Mitchell (1995:31) have worked with teachers and students interrogating these teacher images and found common representations.

"Perhaps most people draw a white woman standing in front of a classroom pointing at the board because it is still the typical Western elementary school experience lived by today's children and teachers."

The authors conclude that instead of distancing ourselves from these images, teachers could profitably probe and employ them to develop both society's and their own personal perceptions of teachers' and their role. Mitchell and Weber's (1999:8) latest book is offered as a guide to teacher educators and primary teachers who want to engage in "a pedagogy of reinvention" concerned with the on-going development of professional identity. The opportunity for this type of work is missing in the present English teacher-training curriculum with its prescriptive targets and Ofsted inspection regimes focused on skills and competencies (Cole 1999).

Government attempts to redefine the role of primary teachers without reference to these well known stereotypes with their inherent gender dichotomies of nurture neurotic woman versus rational management man avoids acknowledging the many subtle ways traditional patriarchal power relations continue to be replicated and re-affirmed within the staffing hierarchy of English primary schools. A staffing pattern that has been developed over the last century and is further sub-divided between infant and primary schools. This pattern is evidenced in all of the popular teacher stereotypes that I have explored in this paper. The frustrated spinster to be pitied (Beddoe 1989:27) of the 1920's may have moved on to the dim mother of the 1990s (Miller 1996:13) but both stereotypes are still part of the gendered discourse that Miller carefully evidences in her book. A discourse that advantages male primary teachers, providing that they too accept their prescribed authority roles. At the present time the authority role is being refocused on the disaffected boys. Male teachers, especially the black ones, must provide role models to re-engage boys in the "curriculum of the dead" (Ball 1994:28). The 'failing girls' as Plummer (2000:200) reminds us do not even exist in present government policy priorities.
Conclusions

In this paper I have offered a necessarily partial and personal review of commonly held assumptions and stereotypes that operate to maintain the traditional patriarchal staffing order in English primary schools. I illustrated this review with teacher voices and research in the field. I have drawn from Weber and Mitchell's (1995) views that we can profitably interrogate these taken-for-granted stereotypes, with the intention of challenging them. 'We' includes primary teachers as well as teacher educators such as myself. Researchers must aim to produce scholarly and accessible evidence that can be used by educational policy makers in order to better inform their recruitment strategies. Teachers’ own voices must be inserted into government educational policymaking that so impacts on their work reality. I have shown the TTA slogan:

"Every good boy deserves football"

to a wide range of inner-city female and male primary teachers and students, and their responses have been unanimous - rubbish! I do not use this emotive word lightly.

I personally find the present government recruitment slogans, such as:

"Can you battle with the Roundheads and win?"
"Can you manage a football team?"

insulting and excluding in their content. Teaching is not ‘war’ any more than a male preferred sport. Whilst visual images used by the TTA, which are exemplified by a close-up featuring half of a young black boy’s face with a flame in his eye needs to be looked at (Hall 1997:225) in the light of high black male exclusion rates in our state schools (Sewell 2000). What messages are these images giving to the public?

However, in this initial attempt to ignite a discussion involving teachers as well as policy makers; rather than light a fire (another TTA slogan) I have focused on the traditional stereotypes that my research data suggests still operate to define primary teachers. Since qualifying as a teacher in 1970, I have seen too many excellent female and male primary teachers suffer discriminatory treatment because they do not ‘fit’ in or accept these stereotypes. They refute the idea of a dim mother or a deviant/ discipline/ sportsman. In the light of this latest TTA recruitment campaign I think Sylvia’s question is a reasonable one. Government policy makers need to reflect on her question and start to address it in future publicity campaigns.

Meanwhile, my memory work (Davies et al. 2001:168) is full of scenarios that evidence the way these seemingly trivial and light-hearted stereotypes have affected colleagues and been used to exclude them. I believe that the most treacherous discourses are the ones we do not notice or think are not worth challenging; their ‘innocence’ adds to their power. The mature white female teacher, told by her young ‘management man’ male head: “you’re past your sell-by date”when she applied for a well deserved promotion; the post went to another young man. The young black male student, who wanted to teach early years, being mocked by the female students: “it’s for us really, we’re better at it.”

This paper concludes that present TTA publicity and recruitment slogans, further reinforce notions of a certain ‘type’ of teacher and they need to be rigorously challenged by all of us involved in education in England and Wales.

Bibliography

BURN, E. (2000) ‘You Won’t Want to get Your Hands Dirty’: An Early Years teacher reflecting on her training experience. irEducation


This document was added to the Education-line database on 22 October 2001