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### Article

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# **Do we need more male primary teachers? Tensions and contradictions in the perspectives of male and female trainees.**

Colette Ankers de Salis, Avril Rowley, Kathy Stokell & Mark Brundrett

## **Abstract**

*Primary teaching ITT courses across the UK have been under pressure from central government, Ofsted and the media to recruit more male students to their courses with the aim of increasing the proportion of males in the primary teaching workforce. This is because increasing the number of male role models in primary schools has been mooted as the solution to boys' underachievement, especially in reading and writing. There is, however, little evidence showing any correlation between boys' educational outcomes and the number of male primary teachers in schools. The purpose of the project reported in this paper was to ascertain the beliefs of the future primary school workforce about this focus on the need for male role models in schools. A mixed methods approach was employed; 120 male and female primary trainees were surveyed and a further 48 took part in group interviews, all of whom were based in an Initial Teacher Training department in a university in North West England. Results indicated that although aspiring teachers felt that males and females could make equally good role models for children their personal value systems perpetuated the myth that boys need male role models to achieve better educational outcomes.*

## **Introduction**

Historically, primary teaching in England was a male-dominated profession (Burn, 2002) and we may note that at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of infant teachers were men, including in the Early Years (Steedman, 1987 in Burn, 2001). However, it has long been the case that women make up the majority of the workforce in the primary and early years sectors (Drudy et al 2005; Drudy, 2008). Indeed, the latest figures show that, overall, women actually make up over four fifths (80.2 per cent) of the whole school workforce but that in primary schools 84.6 per cent of nursery and primary teachers are women while just 15.4 per cent are men (GOV.UK, 2017).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s there were many calls in English-speaking countries, including England, to attract more male teachers into the profession. Examples of this include policies introduced by the Training and Development Agency in England (TDA, 2008) and the Queensland Strategy, in Australia, (Education Queensland, 2002). Both of these initiatives aimed to attract more men into teaching in order to make the workforce more representative of society and to provide more male role models in order to enhance the achievement of boys, which was seen as a key challenge in both educational systems. We should note, however, that the view that a greater proportion of male educators will

enhance outcomes for male students is based on the contested proposition that male teachers are a necessary element in the workforce if pupils, and especially boys, are to learn appropriate behavioural habits and achieve well in schools. We posit here that this is an enduring myth that has influenced school recruitment policies and governmental attitudes in relation to the primary school workforce. We are not, of course, suggesting that male teachers are not to be welcomed on training programmes or in schools nor that an increased proportion of male teachers in schools would be in any way regressive but, rather, we seek to ensure that policy is based on reliable research evidence and, in doing so, to examine the attitudes of trainee teachers to the issue of gender in the teaching profession especially as it relates to primary classrooms and pupil achievement.

The research that underpins this article was sponsored by the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE) and seeks to explore the attitudes of primary teacher trainees in one ITT department in the North West of England to such prevailing orthodoxies using both an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The main aims of the study were to discover whether trainees, and thus the next generation of teachers, felt that pupils needed positive role models, what they considered to be the importance of gender in such role models, and what qualities were more generally required in teachers.

The originality of this paper lies in the fact that this is the first study of its kind that that the writers are aware of that focuses on the attitudes of aspirant teachers in relation to this important topic.

### **Background**

As noted, earlier, explicit attempts to attract more men to the teaching profession have been a feature of national policy for a number of years. The Department for Education reports annually on the number of male primary teachers in the workforce census indicating that this is a central area of interest (GOV.UK, 2017). In a recent statement to *Telegraph Men*, the DfE said: “The latest figures show record numbers of men training to teach in primary schools - with 3,400 more in primary classrooms since 2010” (Well, 2016). Former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove was outspoken in his view that increasing the number of male teachers was the answer to tackling issues faced by boys without a father at home (BBC, 2011) and, more recently, TeachFirst started a drive to recruit more men into primary teaching to tackle education inequalities in poorer areas (Teachfirst, 2016).

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2015a) have also shown considerable interest in this topic in recent years. Scrutiny of a sample of their reports on Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) published since 2013 indicates that comments regarding the recruitment, retention and attainment of male primary trainees are commonplace which strongly suggests HEIs should (and must if they are to be seen as compliant) take steps to ensure that

numbers of male trainees are increased and, that once recruited, support is put in place to ensure they complete their training. Examples include:

*“The key strengths of the primary and secondary partnership [include] ... well-above-average recruitment of male trainees onto the primary route...” (Ofsted, 2013a:4)*

*“Another reason why trainees achieve such high outcomes and are so employable is that the right candidates are chosen for the course. Procedures for recruiting and selecting trainees are strong and include... increasing numbers of males on the Early Years course.” (Ofsted, 2013b:9)*

*“The proportion of male trainees has increased steadily and is around half of all trainees on the programme.” (Ofsted, 2015a: 14)*

*“The partnership proactively seeks to employ male trainees for primary teaching and has a very high completion rate. Additional sessions are offered to support male trainees into a profession where they may find themselves in the minority. Given the high quality of the male NQTs who were observed during stage two of the inspection, it is clear that these additional sessions effectively develop their confidence.” (Ofsted, 2015b)*

Whilst it is absolutely right that all trainees should be fully supported by their training provider, the focus on the recruitment and number of male trainees indicated in Ofsted reports suggest a desire to see the number of male trainees increase. The reasons for this are not made explicit but as this interest is consonant with central concerns it is reasonable to suggest that the motivations overlap, thus suggesting a belief that male teachers will improve the educational outcomes of boys and their attitudes towards learning. Certainly a key reason the underpinning policy approaches outlined above was, and remains, concern over the ‘feminisation’ of the teaching profession and the assumption that this causes the academic under-achievement of boys. Indeed, widespread popular opinion links the scarcity of male role models and this apparent feminisation of teaching and learning to a ‘crisis’ (Ellis, 2016) linked to boys’ low attainment, particularly amongst those boys from low socio-economic groups when compared to girls from similar backgrounds (Skelton, 2002; Lingard et al, 2012; Wood and Brownhill, 2018).

We must acknowledge that figures in England from the last 10 years do indeed indicate that boys, in general, are out-performed by girls from as early as age 5, particularly in English and mathematics attainment (Smithers, 2012; Dolan et al, 2012; National Literacy Trust, 2012; DFES 2007) and that the gap in attainment continues to grow throughout a child’s school career. This is correlated by the GCSE results in 2016, which show an overall gap between girls’ and boys’ achievements in maths and English to be nearly 8.9 percentage

points - the biggest it has been since 2002 (Busby, 2016). However, we align ourselves with the argument that to make the assumption that increasing the number of male teachers is the answer to improving boys' academic performance, is flawed and over-simplifies the complexities inherent in education (Mills et al, 2004). One of these complexities lies within the attainment data itself since boys are not a homogeneous group. As Skelton (2012) states, gender 'intersects' with other factors such as class, ethnicity, age and so the data should be scrutinised further to determine what specific barriers are hindering attainment rather than suggesting the 'easy solution' (ibid) of boys needing male teachers.

Indeed, research strongly challenges this 'common-sense' solution; not only is there no evidence to show any correlation between female teachers and boys' underachievement it also undermines the female primary teachers who make up the majority of the profession (McCormack and Brownhill 2014; Majzub and Rais, 2010; Carrington et al, 2008; Mills et al, 2004; Burn, 2001). Where the argument is more rational, and calls are made for more male teachers to 'balance' the school workforce to address issues of equity and justice and better represent a diverse society (Mistry and Sood, 2016), there is acknowledgement that further studies would be needed to establish a link, if any, between male teachers and educational outcomes.

Not only does a scrutiny of the empirical research indicate no proven correlation between the gender of teachers and the progression of children, pupils themselves do not consider the gender of their teacher to be a significant factor (Lahelma, (2000) Lingard et al (2002) in Carrington et al, 2008). Carrington et al analysed data from the Performance Indicators in Primary schools project (PIPs) to ascertain if there was a relationship between the gender of teachers and both the attainment of children and their attitude towards learning. Their results showed that the gender of the teacher was 'unrelated [to] the attainment of the children' (p321). These findings are supported by an international review on gender and education which indicates that the gender of teachers has little, if any, effect on the achievement of pupils (Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007). Significantly, given popular assumptions, it was clear that children who had female teachers had more positive attitudes to learning.

This latter finding is noteworthy as it suggests that women teachers have a positive impact on their pupils which extends beyond attainment. This challenges a separate but related call for more male role models (Mistry and Sood, 2016) to address boys' *disaffection* with education and the assumption that male teachers can provide something that their women counterparts cannot (Burn, 2001; Wood and Brownhill, 2018). If this is the call, it is important to explore what this 'something' is. Cushman's research is important here (2008) as her research canvassed the opinion of the profession itself. She surveyed head teachers in New Zealand and sought their views on whether they felt more male primary role models were needed and, if so, what qualities they thought they would bring that women could not.

Her findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of head teachers (both male and female) agreed that more male role models were needed for boys. However, when asked to state why, the picture was more complex. Interestingly, there was a lack of emphasis on educational outcomes and more than half of the respondents stated that the qualities they would look for would be the same in any teacher whatever the gender. The most common cited reason was that more male teachers would fill the void in male role models at home for those children from single-parent families which links with findings elsewhere (Carrington and Skelton, 2003; Carrington et al, 2008). From analyses of the responses given to the qualities these male role models should have, emphasis was on 'manly', 'strong' 'sporty' 'masculine' attributes which Cushman (2008) argues is stereotypical and an attempt by head teachers to challenge the notion of primary teaching having become 'feminised'.

Cushman's findings are significant as they suggest the profession itself is at least in part-agreement with the views of policy makers, the media and some educationalists (see for example DfEE, 2000 in Cushman, 2000; Pollack, 1998; Biddulph, 1998), that male teachers are better equipped through masculinity to address the needs of boys,. Arguably, this line of argument is detrimental to the majority of primary teachers who are women since, within this perspective, they are viewed as unable, or at least less able, to motivate, educate or manage the behaviour of boys (Skelton, 2012). It is also concerning that it seems many head teachers may be in agreement with such perspectives and are, perhaps, not aware of research evidence which challenges this.

We have to ask ourselves then, why the focus on attracting more males to teaching in order to address issues in boys' educational outcomes continues when evidence suggests that gender alone has little impact on attainment or motivation. It also seems pertinent to ask that if the assumed links between boys' achievement and male role models have persisted for so long , are they shared by trainee teachers who will make up the workforce of the future? Do the popular views around male teachers reflect the views of those training to become primary teachers? Do they believe the profession does need more male teachers and, if so, why? Do they believe that males offer something that female teachers cannot? If so, what is it that they offer?

These are important questions to ask as the views held may affect the profession and how they see themselves as future teachers. If, for example, female trainee teachers believe that their male counterparts will 'do a better job' than them with male pupils, this may affect their self-efficacy when applying for jobs or considering promotion (Burn, 2001). Likewise, male trainees may feel less equipped to teach young girls which is significant in light of the importance of inclusion in primary classrooms. It is important that all primary trainees feel confident and fully prepared to teach all pupils irrespective of their gender and are aware that for pupils, the personal qualities and attributes of their teachers are key

elements to learning – particularly the ability to maintain discipline - not simply the gender of the teachers (Lahelma 2000 ; Skelton, 2001; Lingard et al, 2002).

While previous studies have explored the views of teachers with regards to the need for male role models and their potential impact on children ( for example, Cushman, 2008; Wood and Brownhill, 2018) and the views of parents and children (McGrath and Sinclair, 2013), there is little research exploring the views of trainee teachers. Where there are studies involving trainee teachers, these tend to focus on exploring the factors influencing males to enter primary teaching ((Stroud et al, 2000). It is important to gather evidence about the views of our trainees , both male and female, to explore the extent to which their views reflect the traditional stereotypes of the role of the primary teacher.

### **Methodological approach**

This study used a mixed-methods approach in order to overcome the limitations possible when focusing on either qualitative or quantitative research methods in isolation (Brown et al, 2016) and to overcome the limitations of either range of methods and achieving clearer conclusions (Brown et al, 2016). The use of more than one method also provided an element of triangulation that improved the validity and reliability of results (Golafshani, 2003). Quantitative data was collected in the form of an online questionnaire. However the more dominant method of collecting data was qualitative which for the purpose of this study consisted of semi-structured group interviews.

#### ***Online Survey***

An online survey was created using questionnaires to ascertain their perceptions about the need for male role models in primary education. Although there are a range of scales available to researchers, Likert scales (Likert, 1974) were chosen as they offer a more straightforward attitude scale compared to, for example, Thurstone or Guttman scales (Poppleton and Pilkington, 2009). The key characteristic is that they are bi-polar in nature and in this case respondents were asked to reply to a range of questions which had a range of potential responses for each question. Some questions allowed the respondent to choose either yes/no, others were to required statements/choices in order of preference, whilst others requested that respondents should choose between agree/partly agree/disagree etc.

The use of online questionnaires enabled the researchers to reach a wide sample of students to gain an insight into their initial ideas about role models in primary education. This was important to set a baseline of opinions on which to a more indepth line of questioning could be used for the semi-structured group interviews.

#### ***Semi-structured Group Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews offer an approach that enables the collection of rich data that can reveal perspectives in-depth on a given topic (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014). The use of semi-structured interviews as a method of collecting data enabled the participants to be open and honest in an environment they felt comfortable in (Norton, 2009) and provided a form of qualitative data to support the use of scaled questionnaires (Brown et al, 2016).

### ***Sampling***

The aim of this research was to establish an understanding of the perceptions of primary trainees studying at a university in the NorthWest of England about the need for male role models in primary schools and to compare these views with those opined in previous studies (Cushman 2008; Haase, 2008; Carrington and McPhee, 2008, Skelton, 2003, Stroud et al, 2000 ). It is to be noted that the institution is based in a city which has some of the most socially challenging districts in Europe and many of the trainees progress to take up posts in local schools.

The voices of trainee teachers, both male and female, are important as they can be indicative of the opinions of the future teaching workforce. This focus was well suited to the context of an ITT setting and the participants selected based on accessibility to the researchers and their enrolment on the primary education degree. This made the sampling a mix of convenience and homogenous sampling techniques. Although some research suggests that both convenience and homogenous sampling could, potentially, lead to bias and therefore produce conclusions which are not representative of the whole population (Ary et al, 2009), for the purpose of this research these sampling techniques proved to be the most feasible option that was fit for purpose (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2014).

A year 2 undergraduate cohort was selected to participate as this particular group had a higher than normal number of male trainees [23%]. The participants took part in an online survey and were then invited to participate in semi-structured group interviews to further explore some of their responses. The semi-structured group interviews focused on some of the dominant themes that had emerged from the survey. All groups were asked the same questions.

The questionnaire consisted of 8 statements to which, as noted earlier, respondents were invited to respond according to a range of possibilities. There was also an opportunity for them to elaborate on any response if they wished to. One of the questions asked for more detail and asked participants to give examples of particular qualities offered by male and female teachers if they felt this was relevant. This was to elicit their views on what they felt the different genders offered if it was indeed their view that male and female teachers offered different things as primary teachers.

### **Reliability and validity**



Qualitative research highlights ethical dilemmas and questions about the validity of the research (Rooney, 2005; BERA, 2011). With the rise of concern about validity in qualitative research, what constitutes validity has been brought to light (Cohen et al., 2000). Likewise, insider research may impact on the research process and validity may be compromised. If validity is compromised, then the research is not considered worthy (Rooney, 2005). While the use of reliability and validity are considered mainly for quantitative research, they are now regarded as important in qualitative research also, albeit in a redefined way (Golafshani, 2003). Quantitative research, which is supported by the scientific or positivist paradigm, focuses on the reality that information can be quantified and summarised (Charles, 1995). Meanwhile, qualitative research viewed from the naturalist perspective seeks to understand the world around us without statistical procedures allowing for events to unfold naturally (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, both quantitative and qualitative researchers need to ensure their studies are trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). There are disparities between the paradigms' use of reliability and validity. For example, within quantitative research, it is the research itself that has to be seen to be credible, whereby it is the researcher who is considered to be credible as a result of their ability in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003).

### **Ethical considerations**

Good practitioner research adheres to quality guided by ethics, in this instance approved by a University (See appendix 2). Informed consent is a cornerstone of ethical research practices (O'Neill, 2002) and in this instance was achieved through a participant consent form (See appendix 3) signed by each person participating in the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. Mockler (2013) extends this point further by arguing that informed consent in the context of the lecturer-student relationship allows the student to remain in control of their learning partnership with their lecturer. Similarly the issues of privileging student voice and understanding power dynamics also present challenges when the lecturer becomes researcher (Fielding, 2011). Although the concept of the eradication of the power dynamic present in a lecture theatre is naïve (Mockler, 2013), it is nonetheless important to understand the impact the lecturer becoming the researcher can have on students in terms of their ability to answer honestly. For the purpose of this research a mixed-methods approach was, in part, an effort to combat this limitation. For example, using questionnaires enabled the students to answer anonymously and in their own time, while interviews enabled them to share their thoughts honestly and in greater depth.

As this study was conducted with a sample of 120 students in a university setting confidentiality was a major ethical consideration (Clark and McCann, 2005). To adhere to appropriate ethical guidelines the names of all participants and the university were protected by replacing each of them with a letter (Comer, 2009). Furthermore all of the data collected was stored on a password protected hard drive and a university data base (Neuman, 2000). The was conducted with respect for the students involved while at the same time guaranteeing the quality of the research process (British Educational Research

Association, 2011) by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the students and of the data gathered (Saks and Allsop, 2007). In accordance with British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, all students were respected and their welfare and rights maintained (BERA, 2011).

## Results and discussion

Trainees were asked first of all if they felt children needed positive role models in school. All of the participants agreed and gave definitions to illustrate their understanding of the term 'role-model'. These were all similar and did not differentiate according to gender, showing that the trainees did not feel that gender played a significant part in being a role model (Figure 1). The comments focused on the way in which a role model was someone who was influential and whom children would wish to emulate when they became adults. The personal values and character traits of the individual role model were seen as of more significance than the gender of that individual.

Male Trainee	Female Trainee	Both
Look up to – someone you want to be when you are older.	Displays important values.	Person in a position of power that more vulnerable people seek to emulate.
Inspires/motivates you.	Demonstrates the good qualities as a person – kind, caring, motivate you to do your best because they are doing their best.	Levels of success at what a person does inspires another person – whether the thing they do is positive or negative.
Someone who encourages – so if you had a child who had just started gymnastics – they would encourage it. Helps you to do what you want to do.	Someone who looks to benefit the lives of others regardless of who they are – not just power – someone who makes me feel good	

Figure 1

When asked what they thought of the significance of gender, a similar proportion of participants agreed with the statements that all boys needed a male teacher role-model (80% male and 60% female) and that boys without a father at home needed a male teacher role-model. Interestingly, only 18% of respondents thought that boys achieve better academic outcomes with male teachers [30% males and 15% females]. This can be viewed as positive since it reflects research findings (McDowall and Klattenberg, 2018; Puhani, 2017; Carrington et al, 2008; DfES, 2007) and also suggests that in some ways at least, female trainees do not regard their male counterparts as being 'better' at teaching male pupils. Conversely, 30% of males represents a significant minority who do believe that boys do better academically with a male teacher.

When asked if male and female teachers offered different qualities as role models, opinion was divided. 80% of the male trainees and 56% of the female trainees agreed that the different genders offered different qualities. Presented in figs 2 and 3 are the examples they gave of the different qualities (some trainees gave more than 1 example).

Male respondents	Qualities cited with respect to female teachers	Female respondents
Times cited		Times cited
12	Maternal and nurturing	18
1	creative	
2	Approachable/Friendly/sociable	2
1	Focussed on presentation	
	Communication skills	1
	stricter	1
	Calm softer voice less strict	3

Figure 2

It was clear from the responses that the trainees were almost unanimous in their consideration that females are more 'maternal and nurturing' in their roles in primary schools. This perpetuates the myth of the feminisation role of the primary teaching profession explored in earlier literature (Skelton, 2002; Lingard et al, 2012) and is surprising when it is considered that a younger generation of prospective teachers have such gendered views. One would have to ask whether this is what they really feel or whether it is what they have been conditioned to feel as products of a feminised system of primary education?

Male respondents	Qualities cited with respect to male teachers	Female respondents
Times cited		Times cited
6	Sporty	3
2	Sense of humour	2
8	Discipline/leadership/Father figure (esp for those without fathers)	18
	Confidence	2
	Laid back delivery	2

Figure 3

It is interesting that the key points made by trainees mirror gender stereotypical qualities that have been raised in earlier research (refs needed) and that trainees - the teachers of tomorrow - appear to be concurring with popular stereotypical views of primary teachers that are found in some of the literature. They identified the male teachers' distinguishing features as being being sporty and a strong disciplinarian - a fusion of the 'super-hero' and the 'demon' (Evans and Jones, 2008), while the female teachers' discernible characteristics are very much maternal qualities that make them 'naturally' approachable, kind and empathetic. The main opinions of the trainees will now be discussed in turn.

### Females and maternalism

Although a reassuring number (41%) of the female participants in the study did not believe that males and females offered anything different as teachers, the majority identified with having 'natural' maternal and other closely related attributes, which set them apart from their male counterparts. Only 2 females mentioned the equal but opposite parental qualities with respect to male teachers. In group interviews, their views were apparent:

Female Responses	
F1:	Male trainees are more disadvantaged in KS1 and <face more barriers> than female counterparts
F3:	I don't think they're disadvantaged in the sense of (.) getting jobs or anything ... I don't think a female would be chosen over a male for a job in KS1, but I do think that they're disadvantaged in the fact that there's a <u>massive::</u> stereotype
F1:	yeah ... and I think aswell-
F3:	males should teach KS2 and females should teach KS1
F2:	I know this is a ... dead erm ... like >stereotypical thing to say again< but males are less like maternal, like you know when women, obviously children when their younger they are quite babied aren't they?
F3:	yeah
F2:	I think men are [less]
F3:	[I think] I think the only barrier is the actual stereotype itself, like I don't think it goes beyond that
(ALL):	( ) I don't
F2:	if they went for a job and they had all the characteristics they want[e]
F4:	[and] the qualification-
F2:	THEY wouldn't be disadvantaged at all, but I just think it's that if you thought about it-
F3:	the perception
F4:	I think males themselves would rather have KS2 more –
F2:	( ) but that's like the stereotype
F4:	yeah exactly
Male Responses	
M1:	So for me, I find it difficult, ... a barrier that I find in Keys stage one is, is using my voice. I struggle to ... manipulate my voice (.) in a way that gets key stage one children, particularly low key stage one children, to respond well, so ... they're ... they're, more likely to <b>respond more well a more 'sing-songy' fem style voice</b> and I found that really difficult and to be honest, I

	haven't really, the lowest year I've been in is year 2, and that was in my 1 <sup>st</sup> year, so I haven't <u>really</u> felt I've had the opportunity to overcome the barrier
M3:	I found Year 2, year 2 was one of my favourite year groups to teach – really enjoyed it. <u>But ... when I went into year 1 I found that really tricky. The whole singing and dancing and puppets, and using that kind of thing, I found that really tricky. Whereas I find it a lot easier to get a relationship with older children than with the young children.</u> I find it much easier. I don't know why but I just do. I think it's a lot harder, I find it a lot harder to teach lower down the school. Much harder
M2:	It's a bit of a touchy subject, but I think that like lower down the school they're more likely to like hug you and like touch you all the time, which I think as a male, I feels more wrong then if you were a female
M3:	That doesn't faze me at all, that doesn't bother me .... crossing a road on a school trip and a child holds your hand, it doesn't bother me <u>at all</u> , I doesn't bother me, child coming up giving you a hug or ... anything like that, it is <u>just</u> I find it difficult to ... relate to the children
M1:	I do think that ... I am .. I am less inclined to (.) give somebody ...a:: hug or if somebody hurts themselves, you see like they sit on their teachers knee, that then ... rightly or wrongly I feel that ... I am more likely to be judged as male.. or more likely to be raised as a potential issue of concern
M2:	<b>I agree with you there</b>

All of the male trainees who had previously stated that men and women teachers offer different qualities mentioned an aspect of maternalism as an identifying feature of female teachers. Moreover, in group interviews, male trainees commented on feeling 'uncomfortable' and talked about their negative feelings towards KS1 children's need for emotional attention . Some male trainees felt that females are better or the public would perceive them as better in KS1 because of their "motherly" way and commented on finding it hard to "manipulate their voice" on a level suitable for KS1

In most cases in the literature, it is noted that these myths are being generated from outside the profession. What is interesting and, arguably, worrying here is the fact that these are the views of 'teachers-in-waiting' and their attitudes appear to resonate with those of serving teachers from earlier studies who also regarded men and women teachers as being different in ways that emphasised traditional gender roles (Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Skelton, 2003). This paints a very complex picture and it seems necessary to explore some of the possible implications of this.

Points have been made elsewhere about gender attitudes creating homogeneous groups whose members act and respond the same way in the classroom (Howard and Hollander, 1997; Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007; Skelton, 2012) and the danger of perpetuating such myths as:

*...the application of narrow, restrictive constructions of gender which rely on stereotypes to describe the primary teaching force will not encourage a more diverse teaching force' (Skelton 2012:12).*

It seems surprising that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a workforce which is responsible for the education of young people is self-perpetuating gender-based myths. If our trainee teachers are self-categorising themselves according to stereotypes this could have an impact on the future workforce. If males do not feel they have the 'natural' qualities that make them sympathetic, caring, nurturing, then they may feel more disposed to work with older children and avoid the early years sector (Mistry and Sood, 2012). Moreover, if they also perceive that this is the view of their female colleagues, that the Early Years is just not a natural place for male teachers (Carrington and Skelton, 2003), this will then perpetuate the current status quo whereby the early years sector is overwhelmingly female-dominated in terms of numbers.

Moreover, it is arguable that by adopting the stereotypes of themselves and the opposite gender, trainee teachers are in danger of accepting other views that draw on gender stereotypes and that are not healthy for the profession. Notable here is the view that schools and dominant pedagogies are 'feminised' and 'fuzzy' (Bergman, 2008 in Faulstich-Wieland, 2013; Ofsted, 2008) and that male teachers are needed to counteract 'soft' female approaches and appeal more to the interests of boys. The idea that male teachers all teach in a 'male way' and all female teachers in a 'female way' is at best, shortsighted and has been rightly challenged (Francis, 2008; Wood and Brownhill, 2018). This suggests that what is needed is for such issues to be raised and discussed with the teachers of the future.

### **Males, discipline and leadership**

Male trainees identified themselves as being leaders and better at disciplining; qualities that were also identified by female trainees about their male counterparts. This was revealed in the questionnaires and in focus groups.

Female Responses	
F1:	Male trainees make better KS2 teachers
F3:	(h) <b>I've always thought that you know</b>
F1:	↑have you?
F3:	yeah!
F1:	I think it's because as boys get older they start getting a bit of attitude and all that and they need like a male role model ... you know like Dads are often more strict, like they might try and be [like]
F3:	[I don't know], I think children see males as having more authority
F1:	Get one over on the female teacher
F2:	yeah, I wouldn't say they make <u>better</u> teachers, but I know what you mean by having more authorit[y]
F3:	[I]t tends to be the case doesn't it ... I think for boys to have a role model it's

F2:	better Yeah
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Again, such views fall into the stereotypes and raise potential barriers for the workforce. If females perceive themselves as 'less good' at disciplining and less of a natural leader, it follows they would be less likely to think in terms of leadership roles. As male trainees have cited these qualities as 'male' qualities they are perhaps more likely to pursue such roles which may partly explain why male teachers occupy a disproportionate number of management roles in primary education. Again, research findings do not support these assumed differences between the genders. McDowell and Klattenberg's recent investigation (2018) into the linguistic discipline strategies of male and female teachers both in the UK and in Germany found no discernible difference between the genders in the range of strategies used. Both males and female teachers shifted between strategies traditionally viewed as masculine and feminine. The key influencing factor affecting linguistic choices appeared to be the culture of the workplace and not gender.

A different but related consequence of these aspects of self-efficacy is that male teachers may find themselves burdened with discipline issues passed on to them by female teachers or face issues of self-confidence when their own approach does not conform to the strict disciplinarian figure expected of them (Stroud et al, 2000). For those males not identifying with a 'typical' male stereotype, this could pose barriers in terms of career development.

Related to these views around male teachers being 'better' at disciplining and needed as role-models for boys, is the possible impact on relationships with some parents. Research shows that when teachers and schools work in partnership with parents, barriers to learning are reduced, attainment rises and attitudes and behaviour improve (Bastiani, 2003; Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). Arguably, for this to happen, a healthy 'alliance' is necessary which needs to be based on mutual respect (The Steer Report, 2005). Wood and Brownhill's recent research (2018) with three male teachers, revealed they saw themselves as necessary role-models, particularly in the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills in children.

As Wood and Brownhill (2018) argue, if male teachers are viewing themselves as 'replacement fathers' who can make up for absent or inadequate fathers' lack of parenting, they are, in effect, finding fault with the group who are doing the parenting - the mothers. Such a perspective must have an impact on home/school relationships. For this reason, it is again worrying to see trainee teachers expressing similar views.

## **Males and sport**

Sport is another aspect that both female and male trainees identified as being particular to male teachers, though, interestingly, fewer females mentioned this compared to the males. This view reflects those of the head teachers in Cushman’s survey (2008) who indicated that this was something desirable that male teachers could offer more than female teachers. Discussions between some of the trainees in the group interviews suggest that these attitudes may be ingrained in schools with the assumption that male teachers will be ‘better’ at PE and sports than female teachers. The extract from the conversation below suggests that a female trainee was overlooked and not asked to teach PE which again could have an impact on confidence and career progression.

Female Responses	
F2:	It’s kind of like the same as well like in anyone, with the other teachers in school, because, Paul was like, >well might not have been because he’s male, it might have been because he was funnier than I was< (h) like I felt like he was more ...like welcomed into the staff room and like they had more to ask him than they ask me, [cos I was just another] female training
F1:	[Well when] well when, I was supposed to be on placement with Tom the last year, and he didn’t end up doing the placement he deferred it they were really bummed that he wasn’t there, and I was like, hi, like <u>I’m</u> still here, and they were like “oh were really sad that we haven’t got the other trainee” and I’m like well <I’m still here>.
F2:	You know what’s actually interesting? He got pushed more to do P.E. than I did, because we had our, had our, some meetings together, what we were going to be teaching ... an, I was more like, (.) like Maths and English, and he was teaching P.E, an I was like “Can I teach P.E.”? And they were like “Oh, you’ll do that next week” and just never got round to teaching it
F4:	Yeah.
F2:	Before I left.

Overall, the data from the study suggest that current attitudes that are prevalent even amongst trainee teachers, who to represent the future workforce of schools, are dominated by comparatively ‘traditional’ and hegemonic paternalistic attitudes to education. The wider evidence suggests that such deep-seated notions do little to enhance the quality of education in primary schools and may also present barriers and challenges for both male and female teachers who are, consequently, subject to career expectations that are gendered in their nature.

## Conclusion

In accord with many other researchers in this field (Mistry and Sood, 2016; Skelton, 2012), we argue that the workforce in primary schools should be diverse and representative of society but that efforts to secure this should cease to be based on arguments that the under-representation of men disadvantages all pupils but particularly ‘disadvantaged’ boys. Such an argument is unhelpful to the profession and insulting to women who make up the



majority of the workforce and who are assumed to be unable to teach, inspire or control male pupils.

While this argument has tended to come from outside of the profession and has manifested itself in the views of parents (McGrath and Sinclair, 2013), media articles and policy documents, evidence from this study with a group of trainee teachers and from previous studies (Haase, 2008, Carrington and McPhee, 2008, Cushman 2008 , Skelton, 2003, Stroud et al, 2000), suggests that gender stereotypes continue to be perpetuated both by teachers' self-efficacy and by attitudes and practices within schools even though the flurry of papers written on this were a decade or more ago. Previous papers have argued that if we want to have a more diverse teaching population in primary schools that is representative of the true nature of gender rather than simplified stereotypes then the focus and message from recruitment drives needs to be rethought (Skelton 2012). This is because they have been based on simplistic assumptions and have also failed in their efforts to increase recruitment.

While this is a valid and important point, the findings of this project also suggest that HEIs need to reevaluate the content of their training courses. If trainee teachers have stereotypical self-images of themselves and their colleagues based on gender, it seems sensible and necessary to challenge these as part of training programmes, so that the profession itself becomes less tolerant of simplistic recruitment drives and individuals do not face barriers (self-imposed or otherwise) in their career. Work on the mental models operant in teachers dating back more than a generation suggests the the self-image of educators is central to their professional life (see, for instance, Nias, 1989) and it is, therefore, crucial that the unseparating beliefs and attitudes of aspiring teachers are not unexamined.

As teachers are responsible for recognising and overcoming barriers to learning and promoting equality (DfE 2011), it is important that teachers of the future are aware of how gender stereotypes may manifest themselves and how to overcome these in the classroom. Arguably, this needs to start with an evaluation of their own values and beliefs and a knowledge and understanding of both the history of gender and primary education and the current debate and empirical evidence associated with the topic of 'male primary teachers'. While this may not quickly change hearts and minds, it is important to challenge the stereotypical views held by our future teachers and school leaders.

Linked to this, and the findings of Wood and Brownhill's small study (2018) , it is arguable that Initial Teacher Training courses need to devote more time to the consideration of context such as housing and poverty, which can make parenting and indeed life, difficult. Their conclusion, that teaching has become an agent of neo-liberalism which leads them to 'blame' parents - notably single mothers - for challenges and to reach 'easy' solutions, such as the notion that male teachers are needed to 'fill the gaps' is an interesting one, worthy of exploration by those training future teachers. This is especially relevant to the students in

this study since, as noted earlier, the institution where they are based provides much of the workforce of teachers for one of the most socially challenging areas in Europe.

It seems clear that the practical implications of this study are that schools may need to reconsider their recruitments aims and policies in light of these findings and that Initial Teacher Training Institutions should consider ways in which they might challenge prevailing attitudes held by many students. More broadly, at the national level, a debate is needed about what kind of workforce is needed in primary schools and what qualities and attitudes are required in the teaching workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> The Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE) is a charitable organisation founded on the core purposes of advancing the cause of primary education and on supporting those most directly involved, through professional discourse, practice and study. More can be found out about ASPE membership by visiting the ASPE website at: <https://www.aspe-uk.eu/about/>.

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