

Re-masculinization of the teaching profession: Towards a policy of attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago school system

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Abstract

In response to repeated calls for the re-masculinization of the teaching profession, some governments have implemented policy decisions aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the school system. In this qualitative study, a purposive sampling method was used to obtain information from twenty-four participants about the type of men needed in the Trinidad and Tobago school system. Findings of the study revealed that preference was given to men who are father figures and positive role models for young boys. Such individuals should also be good disciplinarians, and physically strong men who exhibit a hegemonic masculinity. While the male role model argument resonated well with many of the respondents in the study, policy brokers were advised not to use gender as the sole basis for recruiting men into the teaching profession. Rather, those persons should demonstrate sound pedagogical skills and competence in teaching all children.

Keywords: re-masculinization, teaching profession, policy, attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers, school system

INTRODUCTION

Several governments, media practitioners, and scholars worldwide have expressed concern over what appears to be the increasing feminization of the teaching profession (Drudy, 2008; Fischman, 2007; Albisetti, 1993; Trouvé-Finding, 2005). This is not surprising since it is well-known that women make up more than ninety percent (90%) of primary teachers in many countries including Brazil, Russian Federation, Italy, Slovakia, the United States, United Kingdom, and Ireland (Drudy, 2008). A similar trend exists in Trinidad and Tobago where women account for seventy-eight percent (78%) of primary teachers and sixty-nine (69%) of secondary teachers in the school system (Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Education (MOE, 2014). Given the small size of the male teaching population, some governments have been persuaded to formulate policies aimed at recruiting and retaining male teachers in the school system. While some feminist/pro-feminist groups have criticized such policies, very little has been done to offer any alternative solution to address the shortage of male teachers in the school system (Skelton, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that men who choose to stay in the teaching profession do so because of what they describe as a passion for teaching as well as a desire to be positive role models for young boys (Joseph, 2015). Kindler and Thompson (1999) provide support for this position in their argument that: "Boys benefit from the presence of male teachers and authority figures as role models of academic scholarship, professional commitment, moral as well as athletic leadership and emotional literacy. The presence of men can have a tremendously calming

effect on boys” (p.50). Cushman (2008) provides further insights into what school principals regard as the specific attributes of the male role model. The study found that school principals generally preferred strong, stoic, athletic, heterosexual men who exhibit a hegemonic masculinity.

Repeated calls have been made for the re-masculinization of the teaching profession through government policy decisions aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the school system. One striking example can be found in an Australian education policy document in the state of Queensland (Education Queensland, 2002). This policy document entitled, the Male Teachers’ Strategy (2002-2005), provides a rationale for Queensland’s attempt to increase the number of male teachers in government schools. Mills, Martino, and Lingard (2004), argue against the very premise on which such a policy was developed, that is, male teachers provide boys with much needed role models. Faulstich-Weiland (2013) believes that men should not be employed principally as role models for boys; rather, they should be good teachers for all children.

Those who argue for a greater male presence in schools suggest that boys are generally disadvantaged or harmed by schools and society (Biddulph, 1998; Pollack, 1998; & Sommers, 2013). Condemned as mythopoetic literature, such works like *Manhood: an action plan for changing men’s lives* (Biddulph, 1995) and *Raising boys* (Biddulph, 1997) have been criticized for their anti-feminist politics (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Mills, 2000). Notwithstanding the pro-feminist challenge against male teacher recruitment drives, Skelton (2009) believes, that such policy initiatives fail largely because they focus more on gender rather than on broader constructions and understandings of what it means to be a teacher. Haase (2008) also cautions policy-makers that the employment of male teachers may not be in the best interests of gender justice unless such strategies designed to attract more male teachers are informed by sophisticated understandings of gender and social power.

There is a clear gap in the literature on policy initiatives for attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers in the Caribbean school system. While the debate on male attrition rages in the international arena, very little attempt has been made to address the issue of re-masculinization of the Trinidad and Tobago teaching profession. This study attempts to fill the gap by bringing the discourse into the Caribbean arena.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the notion of a re-masculinization of the teaching profession through government policy decisions aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago school system. Three research questions served to focus this investigation:

1. What kind of men does the Trinidad and Tobago school system need?
2. What are the obstacles to successful retention of male teachers into the Trinidad and Tobago school system?
3. What should be the primary focus of any policy aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers into the Trinidad and Tobago school system?

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to obtain information from twenty-four (24) participants including teachers, deans, heads of departments, and principals in the Trinidad

and Tobago school system. Based on their teaching experience, these participants were categorized as novice teachers with 0-5 years' experience; developing professionals with 6-20 years' experience; and veteran teachers with over 20 years' experience. Table 1 provides additional demographic information of all participants of the study.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

| <i>Gender</i> | <i>Novice Teachers</i> | <i>Developing Professionals</i> | <i>Veteran Teachers</i> |
|---------------|---|--|--|
| 13 Males | 3 male teachers with 0-5 years' teaching experience | 5 male teachers with 11-20 years' experience. 1 teacher holds the position of dean | 5 male teachers with over 30 years' experience holding the following positions: ✓ senior teacher (2) ✓ dean (1) ✓ principal (2) |
| 11 Females | 2 female teachers with 0-5 years' teaching experience | 2 female teachers with 16-20 years' experience. 1 teacher holds the position of acting principal | 7 female teachers with over 30 years' experience holding the following positions: ✓ university lecturer (1) ✓ head of department (1) ✓ principal (4) ✓ teacher (1) |

DESIGN

Qualitative interviews were conducted utilizing eight standardized, open-ended questions for all twenty-four participants of the study. These questions were designed to explore the issue of re-masculinization of the teaching profession as well as the idea of developing a policy for attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago school system. Some of these questions centred on the role of the male teacher in the school system; the versions of masculinity male teachers need to promote; and the focus of government policy on the recruitment of male teachers in the teaching profession.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Standardized, open-ended interviews were used as the data collection method for this study. Although in this design participants were asked to provide open-ended responses, some of these responses were written to allow respondents the freedom to fully express their viewpoints and experiences in any way they feel most comfortable (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). While this approach presents additional difficulty with coding the data, it reduces researcher biases within the study (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). All interviews took approximately one hour and were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis for this study consisted of examining, categorizing, and tabulating the evidence to address the three research questions of the study (Yin, 2003). The following four themes emerged from information provided by participants of the study:

1. Versions of masculinity male teachers need to promote
2. Role of the male teacher in improving boys' educational and social outcomes
3. Obstacles to successful retention of male teachers
4. Focus of policy aimed at attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers

RESULTS

Versions of Masculinity Male Teachers Need to Promote

When asked to describe the type of men needed in the Trinidad and Tobago school system, novice male teachers suggested "dedicated, strong-willed men with self-worth, self-confidence

and proper morals.” They also wanted those men to be “mentors for boys who would promote healthy versions of manhood – how to be a good husband and father.” Novice male teachers identified not only patient and dedicated men for the profession, but also “physically strong men who will not use their strength for abuse.” Novice female teachers expressed similar sentiments while stressing the need for “men capable and willing to lead by example...men of good character, role models, leaders and father figures who are firm but also caring and never harsh.”

Developing male professionals were able to identify versions of masculinity male teachers should promote. These include the “hard-working, responsible, caring and committed” type of males as well as those who can “balance firm discipline with patience and acceptance of boyish behaviours.” One respondent in this group characterized the type of masculinity needed in schools in this way:

“The teaching profession needs dedicated professionals who can demonstrate values of positive masculinity, strength and discipline ... men who are leaders, strong physically, mentally and emotionally...men who are well-rounded.”

Developing female professionals also favour what they describe as “stern, serious, respectable, honest, decent and hardworking men.” These men should possess fatherly and Godly characteristics. Participants agreed that the teaching profession needs not only men with “high moral and ethical values” but also men who are “qualified and dedicated to the profession.”

Like the other participating groups before, veteran male teachers also envision a type of masculinity that “promotes high moral values that boys can emulate.” This group described the preferred version of masculinity in this way:

“Assertive, confident and manly persons who have the well-being of children at heart...men who love to motivate children to excellence, and show respect for self and women.”

Commenting on the type of men they want to see in the teaching profession, one veteran female teacher had this to say:

“We need men who will definitely be father figures for the children in the school system. Too many children lack the presence and the influence of a father in their lives and the male teacher could play an important role in filling that gap. In addition, the male teacher should demonstrate a sense of responsibility and be committed to teaching and should possess qualities such as caring, compassion and respect for students.”

Another veteran female teacher cautioned:

“Our society, to a certain extent, still associates certain roles/tasks with males and others with females. Thus the school needs to equip male students with skills and values pertinent to being males in our society. However, the school should not only promote one version of masculinity. In preparing male students for an all-round education, they should be made aware that they are being prepared to achieve independence and to become self-sufficient.”

The general consensus among veteran female teachers seems to be that the school system needs men who are “exemplars, assertive and strong; firm but fair; courageous not effeminate; well-groomed and respectable...men who will make a difference in the lives of young boys.”

Role Of The Male Teacher In Improving Boys’ Educational And Social Outcomes

The majority of respondents agreed that male teachers have an important role to play in improving boys’ educational and social outcomes in the school system. One novice male teacher explained:

“There are certain episodes and occurrences that boys will feel comfortable talking to a male teacher about. Boys would always feel they have hope when they have male teachers. They will have hope of becoming someone important and also they will achieve [success] when they have exemplary teachers as role models.”

Another view from a novice male teacher is that “men should come into the teaching system to champion the education of boys with extra-curricular and co-curricular activities...a male teacher should be the man he wants his male students to become.”

Novice female teachers believe that the school system needs “a balance where male to female teacher ratio is concerned. Male teachers need to act as role models and be able to teach life skills to boys who lack a male figure in the family.” But according to one novice respondent, “it depends on whether the male teacher is capable and willing to promote a better society through our students.”

Teachers in the developing male professional group also concur that male teachers have a role to play in improving boys’ educational and social outcomes. This is what one participant had to say:

“The underlying causes of boys’ achievements are linked somewhat to social issues of male identity. Increasing the number of male teachers in the school system might prevent boys’ [negative] behaviours and improve achievement.”

Another male respondent from this group puts it this way:

“Male teachers tend to command a greater sense of discipline and respect...male teachers can teach boys to be responsible persons. Boys tend to look to adult males for guidance.”

Drawing from his own experience, one developing male professional had this to say:

“I have watched some female teachers and some mothers attempt to regulate boys’ behaviour and I am convinced that if given their own way, some women will raise all boys as girls. They will limit the range of activities boys usually engage in and try to restrict their behaviour and thinking to those more appropriate to girls... It is not that all women have no perspective on maleness; but for some reason, perhaps their upbringing, some have less than others. It is tragic if boys are caught in a system where there are no male models or with teachers that do not understand the needs or psyche of the male.”

Teachers in the developing female professional group seem divided on the issue of the role of men in improving boys' educational and social outcomes. One of them agrees with the position on the condition that "these men possess the qualities to be a positive role model." This respondent believes that once this happens, "younger male students would eventually improve in terms of education and social outcomes."

However, another teacher in this group strongly disagrees with the assertion. She says:

"There is no direct relationship. It has not been proven. I haven't seen any research on that... Most of the problems do not stem from male absence in the school, but the male presence may be an asset."

Like the other two groups before, veteran male teachers also differ in their views regarding the role of male teachers in improving boys' educational and social outcomes. While some agree with the idea of a male role model claiming that "men teachers communicate better with boys," others provided a more cautious response. One such response was:

"Not necessarily. It is the type of men that is important and just increasing the amount of males in schools won't make the difference. We have to attract a certain type of males, not just anyone. The Ministry of Education has to establish some type of system to select. Male teachers should lead by example. They have to be positive role models."

This veteran female teacher was just as cautious as her male counterpart. When asked whether she feels that increasing the number of male teachers in schools will lead to improving boys' educational and social outcomes, this is what she had to say:

"Not really. Increasing the number of male teachers who do not have their heart in teaching or who do not know how to be a caring and compassionate person will have no significant impact on the educational and social outcomes for boys. However, I believe that male students do need to interact with more male teachers than what obtains at present. I must stress that the interactions must be positive."

Another veteran female teacher seemed to have a more optimistic outlook when she stated:

Yes, in cases of single parent households, male teachers may assist in giving our boys a better perspective on life by providing that father figure image and demonstrating the important role played by males in society."

Agreeing with this position, another female respondent concluded:

"I think so, but they [males] must uphold strict moral values and let the boys emulate what they do."

Obstacles to Successful Retention of Male Teachers

Participants from all three groups (novice teachers, developing professionals and veteran teachers) provided insights into what they believe to be the major obstacles to the successful retention of teachers in the Trinidad and Tobago school system. Here is a summary of the perspectives of female participants:

“Labelling of teaching as a female profession; unattractive salaries and the view that males are second best to females in the teaching system; too many female administrators; lack of upward mobility; teaching is seen as a baby-sitting club for women; men are often made to feel subservient to a female principal; men are viewed as not having the patience for the job; there is too much stress in teaching.”

Perspectives from the male respondents can be summarized as follows:

“Teachers are no longer held in high esteem; high stress levels cannot compensate for the remuneration; less males are attending schools and universities, so there are less male teachers to produce; curriculum is not boy-friendly enough; the view that teaching is a feminine profession; the tendency to place male teachers in high-risk school districts; emasculation of males by female leaders of the school.”

Focus Of Policy Aimed At Attracting, Recruiting And Retaining Male Teachers

Novice male and female teachers were asked what they believe should be the primary focus of any policy aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers in the teaching profession. These were their suggestions:

“There must be scope for promotion; provide allowances; have a system where increments would not be based solely on years of experience; salary and benefits must match other private sector jobs; create a forum for male teachers to express themselves.”

When presented with the same question, this is what developing male and female professionals had to say:

“Provide different levels of training; improve teaching conditions; offer salary incentives especially for those who work in high risk schools; engage in curriculum reform which promotes more skills-based subjects that would attract more male teachers; offer subjects that promote life skills opportunities; introduce more subjects that would interest males.”

One teacher in this group concluded that the primary focus of any policy should be “to recruit men with good morals and values. However, there must be stakeholder input from a wide cross section of the country’s teaching service.”

Veteran male and female teachers expressed strong sentiments on the issue of policy decisions needed to correct some of the ills of the school system. One male participant said:

“There is an imbalance in opportunities for men as opposed to women. For example, a woman may be appointed as principal of a boys’ school but never vice-versa. The policy should stipulate a set quota of male teachers for all co-ed and male schools. There should be no female principal and vice-principal in one school except in the case of a girls’ school.”

Another veteran male respondent felt that any policy decision should include improvements in salary for teachers. He says:

"There should be an increase in salary. The salary as a teacher is not sufficient to support a man and his family. How can a man support his wife and children on that salary? The cost of living is very high!"

One veteran female participant agrees that it is important to develop a policy to retain male teachers in the school system. She puts it this way:

"There is need to retain male teachers. It is not good for any society to have the males educated by females only. Already there is a problem of the absent father in the home. Many males are being raised by mothers alone, thus it is the duty of the school to make up for this apparent lack of adult male interaction in the home."

She continues:

"The primary focus of the policy should be to offer incentives for upward mobility in the teaching service. Male teachers need to display a sense of confidence about themselves and their job."

Other veteran female respondents concluded that:

"Any policy to attract and retain men should also be fair to women; it should seek to change the prevailing mindset about the teaching profession; it should focus on developing a balance in emotional, mental, physical and spiritual stability; it should aim to deal with discipline in schools; it should provide some sort of support system for male teachers because men cannot work well under pressure."

DISCUSSION

Three research questions set the parameters for this study. The first question focussed on the type of men needed in the Trinidad and Tobago school system. Results of the study mirror findings of earlier studies where respondents showed a clear preference for men who are father figures and positive role models for young boys. These individuals should also be good disciplinarians, and physically strong men who exhibit a hegemonic masculinity. (Kindler & Thompson, 1999; Cushman, 2008).

The suggestion that men should be positive role models implies that not all male teachers are considered acceptable models for young boys; and that gender alone is not a good enough reason for the recruitment of men into the education system. Participants of the study also want male teachers to exhibit high moral and ethical values as well as strong pedagogical skills. One respondent believes that while the male presence may be as asset, there is no correlation between improvement in boys' academic achievement and the presence of male teachers in the school. This sentiment finds support in Skelton's (2009) writings which point to the failure of policy initiatives regarding the recruitment of male teachers. Skelton (2009) believes that such policy initiatives fail largely because they focus more on gender rather than on broader constructions and understandings of what it means to be a teacher.

The second research question looked at obstacles that prevent the successful recruitment of male teachers into the teaching service. Apart from unattractive salaries and lack of upward mobility, participants of the study identified other push factors that steer men away from the school system. These include the perception that teaching is women's work; the emasculation of males by some female school principals and leaders; the tendency to place men in high risk

schools; and the lack of a boy-friendly curriculum in schools. In their critique of the school system, Biddulph (1998), Pollack (1998) and Sommers (2000) argue that boys are disadvantaged by schools and society and that schools are feminized. The perception that teaching is a highly feminized occupation does little to attract men to the profession.

The final research question asked: What should be the primary focus of any policy aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining male teachers into the Trinidad and Tobago school system? Participants provided a range of responses which included the issue of programme reform to facilitate a more boy-friendly curriculum; improved compensation packages and other incentives for male teachers; a quota system which takes into consideration the percentage of female to male teachers employed particularly in boys' schools; and a policy which addresses the problem of school violence and the role of the male teacher in administering discipline.

While most participants of the study focussed on gender as the basis for government policy to attract and recruit men into the school system, others have identified the need for men of integrity with sound pedagogical skills to get the job done. One respondent suggested that any policy to attract and recruit men should not only seek to change public perception about the teaching profession but such a policy must also be fair to women.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Like many studies before, this study has identified the need for the re-masculinization of the teaching profession in order to provide young boys with positive male role models. While the role model argument seems to resonate well with many, it should not be used as the sole basis for government policy to recruit men into the teaching profession. Findings of the study suggest that such a policy must take into consideration the competence and general suitability of the particular individual seeking entry into the teaching profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for further investigation into what constitutes a positive role model for young boys and whether there is a relationship between positive role modeling and improvement in academic achievements among boys in the Caribbean classroom.
2. Further study should be conducted on a larger sample to determine what versions of masculinity male teachers need to promote in the Trinidad and Tobago school system.
3. Government policy brokers should be careful not to use gender as the sole basis for recruiting men into the teaching profession.

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