

Administrator Suggestions Regarding the Recruitment of Male Elementary Teachers

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Abstract

This paper explores situations that deter men from pursuing teaching certification in elementary education and presents the opinions of elementary school administrators regarding hiring practices involving male applicants. We contacted administrators from the 29 public school districts in Erie County in New York State and asked them to complete an online survey sharing their opinions about the lack of male teachers in grades K-2 and what they considered to be solutions to this situation. As gatekeepers to teaching positions, administrators can provide critical insights into strategies for increasing the number of males in the profession.

Discussion about the need for more male teachers in the elementary grades has been steadily increasing over time. This interest has been largely fueled by the poor outcomes of male students compared to female students. Differences in achievement between male and female students are evident early on, with girls consistently scoring higher than boys on fourth grade assessments of reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Male students also have worse outcomes in high school than female students: More males in the 16-24 age range have dropped out of school and have failed to obtain a high school credential (Aud, et al., 2012). The widespread belief is that children benefit from having male elementary teachers. However, according to the most recent National Education Association (NEA) estimates, only 14% of elementary teachers nationwide are men (NEA, 2011)--a percentage that is disproportionately low compared to the percentage of female elementary teachers.

#### The Need for Male Teachers

It had been argued that the teaching profession should mirror the gender balance in the wider society (Balchin, 2002) and that the lack of male teachers goes “against the democratic and egalitarian values schools are expected to promote” (Johnson, 2008, p. 3). Many students never have a male teacher until they reach middle or high school and often the only encounters they have with male professionals at the elementary level are with school principals. The absence of male elementary teachers perpetuates the trend of women dominating the field because boys do not see men in the classroom and, therefore, do not consider careers as elementary teachers. It is believed that if boys saw more male teachers, it would lead them to see elementary teaching as a viable career choice in their own lives (Seifert, 2004). Another argument in support of the intentional hiring of men is that and that men are needed to serve as father figures for the many students without male role models in the home (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005).

Most researchers realize that the intentional recruitment of males to elementary classroom does not occur without some assumptions about appropriate versions of masculinity. From interviews with female teacher in the U.K., Jones (2003) found that teachers had very specific ideas about “the right kind of man” that should be hired to teach young children. Similarly, it was found from a survey of 250 primary school principals in New Zealand, that principals preferred male teachers who exhibited traditional male attributes, enjoyed stereotypical male activities such as rugby, and were heterosexual (Cushman, 2008).

#### Lack of Male Elementary Teachers

Most administrators hire teacher candidates on a yearly basis and their selections therefore shape the school culture, particularly when a gender imbalance is created by the disproportionate hiring of women. That being said, the role administrators play in this process is mediated by the pool of qualified male candidates from which to choose. One problem inherent in the hiring of male teachers is that few men pursue career goals in this area. A commonly cited reason for this situation is the low pay of elementary teaching. While the base salary of elementary and secondary teaching is fairly similar (annual average of \$49,400 versus \$50,900, respectively, in the 2007-2008 school year), teaching at the secondary level allows for more involvement in extracurricular activities, which can amount to an average of \$3,500 extra per year (U.S. Department of Education, 2007-2008). Men who want to coach have limited opportunities available to them prior to seventh grade, resulting in these men opting for careers in the middle grades and high school.

Concern about family disapproval for entering a traditionally female profession and fear of being labeled a pedophile can also keep some men from entering the field (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008). Men may have legitimate fears of accusations of child abuse: If a young child is upset, a male teacher who demonstrates reassurance in the form of physical affection is much

more likely to become suspect than a female teacher. This situation, along with suspicion from parents, may also prevent administrators from hiring men (McWilliam & Jones, 2005).

Additionally, it has been found that older female teachers may attempt to “mother” young male teachers, and that male teachers often feel uncomfortable working with a large number of women (Cushman, 2005). Men may also feel uncomfortable with the pressure to prove their masculinity while also showing themselves to be nurturing enough to work with young children.

Overall, there is little research on the hiring of elementary teachers, particularly regarding the opinions of school administrators. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of elementary administrators in Erie County in New York State regarding the importance of male teachers at the elementary level and their suggestions for recruiting more males to the profession.

#### Demographic Profile of School Districts

Erie County is located in Western New York about 15 miles south of Niagara Falls. There are 29 public school districts in the county with sizes that vary drastically: Buffalo is the largest city in the county with a population of about 300,000. The Buffalo Public School System has 83 elementary schools and 14 high schools. In contrast, several districts are rural with only two or three schools in a 25 to 30 square mile area.

With the exception of the city of Buffalo, there are relatively few racial and ethnic minorities in Erie County. In 28 of the 29 school districts, the majority of students in grades K-12 are white. By contrast, in the Buffalo Public School System, 78% of the students are racial or ethnic minorities (NYSEd.gov, 2012).

#### The Study

First, the personnel director of each school district ( $N = 29$ ) in Erie County was contacted to obtain the numbers of men and women teaching in grades K-2. Elementary principals and administrators were then sent (a) a letter describing the study and requesting their participation in

the online survey, and (b) a follow-up e-mail with a link to the online survey. A total of 105 emails were sent out and 43 surveys were completed for a 41% response rate.

The survey asked administrators the following questions: (a) whether they thought more males should be recruited to the primary grades, (b) all things being equal, would they would hire a female over a male for the primary grades, (c) what, if anything, should be done to recruit more males to the primary grades, and (d) what suggestions they had for how elementary schools and teacher preparation programs could attract more males to teach in the primary grades.

### Findings

In the Erie County public schools, there were reported to be 1,350 female teachers (97%) in grades K-2 compared to 38 male teachers (3%) in these grades. Of the 29 school districts, 11 had no male teachers in grades K-2 and 9 had one male teacher. Three districts had 2 male teachers, and there were three districts with 3, 4, and 5 male teachers, respectively. Buffalo--the largest school district--had 12 male teachers, which was the most in any district; however, proportionally males comprised only 3% of the total number of teachers in grades K-2.

Results from the administrator survey indicated that all (100%) administrators felt that more male teachers were needed in the primary grades. The reasons they provided included the following: (a) the need for male role models due to the lack of male presence in the home; (b) some boys respond differently to, and are better behaved with male teachers; (c) children need to see males and females in the same professional roles to reduce the likelihood that they will grow up with stereotypical beliefs about gender roles or viable career options for men and women; and (d) men and women have different interests and attributes and therefore make different contributions to teaching.

In terms of this last point, nearly all administrators believed that male teachers made different contributions than female teachers to the classroom environment. The examples they

cited were based on stereotypical notions of male behavior, such as their being less emotional and more direct than women. One principal claimed: “Male teachers rarely have classroom management issues.” Other beliefs about the skills male teachers brought to the classroom included their love of, and superior abilities in science and their “natural ability to understand boys and how they think.” Respondents also stated that male teachers brought a sense of excitement to the classroom and were more likely to use hands-on learning activities.

Administrators were also asked whether, all other factors being equal, they would hire a female candidate over a male candidate for a primary grade position. Only one administrator reported that they would hire a female teacher candidate over a male, explaining that sometimes a woman might be more suitable to work with particular students. Twenty-four (61%) respondents stated that they would not hire a female candidate over an equally qualified male candidate. Most principals explained that they would hire the “best” candidate for the position. Others explained that they would hire a male candidate over a female candidate due to the shortage of males in the primary grades. In the words of one respondent: “A male primary grade teacher is rare - he would bring diversity to traditionally female teaching teams at this level.”

Administrators were also asked what they believed should be done to attract more men to teach in the primary grades. Their responses included changing the image of the profession and exposing student teachers to the lower grades. Three administrators indicated that nothing should be done to attract male teachers to the profession--they must want to teach at this level and therefore should not be recruited to the field. A selection of administrator responses is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Administrator Suggestions for How to Attract Male Teachers to the Primary Grades*

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Example</b>
Change the image of the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch marketing campaigns promoting the rewards of teaching young children</li> <li>• Create promotional materials showing males working with young children</li> </ul>
Expose high school students to primary grade teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer opportunities for high school students to do internships in the primary grades</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for high school students to shadow teachers in elementary schools</li> <li>• Have current elementary school teachers mentor male high school students</li> </ul>
Recruit male students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with high school guidance counselors to identify potential male teacher candidates</li> <li>• Provide college scholarships for male teacher candidates</li> <li>• Target recruitment efforts through male-oriented college organizations, such as fraternities</li> </ul>
Increase financial rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase teacher salaries</li> <li>• Provide graduate school stipends</li> <li>• Implement federal loan repayment programs</li> </ul>

Administrators were also asked for suggestions on how elementary schools and teacher preparation programs could attract more males to teach in the primary grades. Their responses included the following: (a) increase school-initiated efforts, (b) increase college-initiated efforts, (c) provide better teacher preparation, (c) expose male teacher candidates to the rewards of elementary teaching, and (d) make changes to the teacher education curriculum. Examples of administrator responses are shown in Table 2.



Table 2.

*Attracting Males to the Primary Grades: Administrator Suggestions for Schools and Colleges*

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Example</b>
School-initiated efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary school teachers and administrators should attend high school career planning events to share the rewards of elementary teaching with male high school students</li> </ul>
College-initiated efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleges should work with career advisors to present the option of elementary teaching to male high school students</li> <li>• Colleges should advertise their elementary teaching programs through guidance departments in high schools</li> </ul>
Better teacher preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide stronger preparation for male teacher candidates in the area of literacy</li> <li>• Encourage male education majors to get dual certification in reading</li> <li>• Provide assistance for male teacher candidates with interview preparation</li> </ul>
Expose male teacher candidates to the rewards of elementary teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information for male teacher candidates on the difference they can make in the life of a young child</li> <li>• Hire current elementary teachers as adjunct professors or invite them to be guest speakers in college classes to encourage males to consider elementary teaching</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for male teacher candidates to visit elementary classrooms prior to student teaching</li> </ul>
Make changes to the teacher education curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on math, science, and technology as they relate to the primary classroom</li> </ul>

## Discussion

While the proportions of men and women are becoming more balanced in other professions, early childhood education is one field in which men remain noticeably absent.

Although much has been written about the need for more male elementary teachers and school

administrators in this study indicated that they wanted more male primary grade teachers in their schools, there has been little growth in this field.

The reasons that administrators provided for the need for male teachers were varied, and included beliefs about (a) the importance of male role models, (b) males' superior classroom management skills, and (c) the need for children to be exposed to a gender-balanced environment.

Many constructive suggestions of ways to increase the number of male primary grade teachers were made by school administrators. In particular, they pointed to the importance of informing male students of this career choice while they were still in high school, creating more opportunities for male students to get exposure to the primary grades during their teacher preparation programs, and preparing male college students for elementary school positions by focusing on their own literacy skills. These suggestions need to be actively explored in order to address the gender imbalance of the teaching profession. With increased collaboration between high schools, colleges, and school districts, focused efforts could result in the recruitment of more male teachers for the primary grades.

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