

Early Child Development and Care Special Edition
Men in Early Childhood
For attention of Deborah Jones

Title: Entrances and exits: Changing perceptions of primary teaching as a career for men.

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Abstract

The number of men in teaching has always been small, particularly in early childhood, but those that do come into teaching usually do so for the same reasons as women, namely enjoyment of working with children, of wanting to teach and wanting to make a difference to children's lives.

However, in two separate studies Thornton & Bricheno (2006) have shown that on beginning teacher training in 1998, and at the point of leaving the profession in 2005, men and women tend to emphasise different concerns. This article will explore those differences and seek possible explanations for how men's views of teaching might be changing over time.

Introduction

The number of men in teaching has always been small, particularly in early childhood, and a variety of reasons have been put forward as to why this is the case. At a general level, in most societies, work is gendered, there is a continuing sexual division of labour (Cockburn, 1991), and teaching, especially in the early years, is a predominantly female occupation. More specifically, Mills (2005, p.5) suggests so few men teach because of

... poor wages in relation to the work performed; limited career path for those not seeking administrative roles; the labelling of male primary school teachers as homosexual or not 'real men'; the current media spotlight on allegations of child abuse; the fear of being labelled a paedophile.

Hegemonic masculinity serves to restrict the career options available to men (Mac an Ghail, 1994). To go against this expectation requires men contemplating teaching as a career to be particularly confident about their sexuality and their ability to counter imputations of paedophilic intentions.

In the 1990s there was considerable suspicion of men in teaching, particularly in the primary sector; concerns were expressed about whether men should be encouraged into early years work (Pringle, 1998), and questions were raised about the sexuality of men who worked in primary teaching (Thornton, 2001). This linked to public concerns about child protection issues (Whitehead, 2002); Howson (cited by Haughton, 2002) suggested that the increased focus on child protection following the Children Act 1989 may have impacted negatively on the recruitment of male primary school teachers.

However, such concerns may now have lessened, in part because of the implementation of mandatory police checks on everyone who works with children.

So, there have been some significant disincentives to men becoming teachers of young children. However, there have also been incentives. Once in teaching men have a marked tendency to move swiftly up the career ladder, disproportionately occupying higher paid and higher status positions (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006; Drudy et al 2005). This represents a clear benefit to those men who choose to make counter-stereotypical career choices, such as teaching.

Our research has found that the kinds of concerns outlined by Mills (above) were shared by many new male entrants to teaching in 1998, but that they were not prevalent amongst the reasons given by men who had left or intended to leave teaching in 2005. This could suggest that initial concerns about becoming a teacher are either mistaken, or overcome, during the course of teachers careers, or that there have been changes in wider society that make such concerns less important than they once were.

Concerns about becoming a teacher in 1998

In 1998, in collaboration with Professor Ivan Reid, then at the University of Loughborough, we undertook a large scale survey, partly funded by the TTA, into 'Students' Reasons for Choosing Primary Teaching as a Career' (Reid & Thornton, 2000). This research involved a questionnaire survey of, and follow-up interviews with, new (1998 entry) primary teaching students drawn from 14 different Higher Education institutions in England. The sample comprised 1611 questionnaire responses and 143 follow-up interviews (of which 2 were not identified by gender). First year undergraduates and PGCE primary students across 4 chartered and 7 non-chartered universities plus 3 university colleges were included in this survey. The institutional sample was broadly representative of Higher Education ITE providers and the gender sample was close to then current intake figures of approximately 15% male, 85% female. Similar studies have since been carried out by Carrington (2002), Drudy *et al* (2005), Hobson et al (2005) and Hargreaves *et al* (2007).

All of these studies concluded that both male and female student teachers chose to teach for positive reasons e.g. they enjoyed working with children, believed it would bring high job satisfaction and would be a challenging but rewarding career.

However, within that context, we found that men were more likely than women to be attracted to primary teaching by the conditions of service (such as long holidays, index-linked pension and career prospects), while women were more likely than men to be attracted to teaching because it involved work with children, fitted well with parenthood, and because they wanted to make a difference (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006).

Our student interviewees were volunteers who self-identified in the survey. Clearly these students were a self-selected group from the much larger survey sample. However, it is still a large sample and their perceptions and their concerns about becoming teachers are illuminating.

Three questions in particular elicited the concerns and reservations shown in Table 1 (below):

What do you think might put people off becoming primary teachers?

What do you think should and could be done to encourage more people to enter primary teaching?

Do you have any reservations about primary teaching as your career?

The main concerns expressed by both men and women about entering the teaching profession centred on pay, workload and the status of teachers. Concerns were expressed about teacher's pay levels and their perceived inappropriateness for graduate entrants to teaching, for attracting the more able / highly qualified into teaching and for 'breadwinners'.

Pay is basically the BIG issue and responsibility and paperwork. I wasn't aware how much they have to do. Seen as a women's profession and therefore people do not want to go into it and it is not seen as a reputable profession. (Female PGCE)

Pay being linked to pupil performance. (Male PGCE)

Lack of teacher autonomy and the somewhat heartfelt cry of 'let teachers teach' are echoed in many sections of the interview data, where respondents emphasised the burdensome nature of non-teaching duties, be they administrative, paper-based or out-of-class activities.

Paper work increasing- new strategies every year, with a new curriculum next year which will more than likely change or be revised, followed by more changes in practice with a new emphasis...you get the point. (Male PGCE)

.. the workload, it's not 9 to 3 pm, it's more like 8 to 8 pm. (Male BA-QTS)

Workload is horrendous. (Female PGCE)

Being tired all the time and working almost non-stop for the same money as I was getting as a secretary. (Female UG)

Funding of proper administration in schools - let teachers teach (Male PGCE)

These successfully recruited trainees also had concerns about the 'bad press' that teaching had attracted and the apparent low status of teachers.

Teachers... are the first in the firing line when 'standards' are not acceptable but the last to be praised. (Male PGCE)

I think that better opinion from the government and the public of teaching is required. I think that teachers should stop getting the blame for society's ills. (Female PGCE)

The teaching profession needs to have a higher status in the eyes of the public - too often it is seen as a job that people do because they can't think of anything else to do. (Female PGCE)

Still seen as a ladies' job, should be more of a profession like secondary teaching. You are a professional but people do not see you as one. (Female PGCE)

Table 1: Primary ITE students concerns about being a teacher in 1998, by gender.

	1998	1998
Issue	Male % (n=20)	Female % (n=121)
Pay	70.0	68.6
Status	65.0	47.1
Workload	50.0	63.6
Government initiatives	35.0	43.0
Gender issues	30.0	5.0
Behaviour	25.0	14.9
Stress/health	10.0	16.5
Performance pay	5.0	4.1
Management	5.0	0.0

However, although important to both men and women, teacher status was more often referred to by men and workload more often referred to by women.

Low public esteem. From a male perspective, pay, as a first income, this is not good and prospects are not good either. You reach the ceiling and are stuck. Teaching is seen as a female profession, particularly the early years. KS1 for me was difficult as the younger ones need more "mothering". Primary teaching is seen as an odd profession for a man to be in. (Male PGCE)

Teachers are not seen as professionals. They are not portrayed positively in the media - everyone remembers bad teachers. We need a more professional profile. Teachers have the stigma of being left-wing softie profession. The NUT is a militant/political body, represented as trade union. We need our own professional body. There is the impression that primary teachers do a 9-3.30 job and anyone can do this, this is ignorance on the part of the media and others. (Male PGCE)

The amount of paperwork! I honestly never realised there was so much. I have spoken to teachers about it, they themselves have commented on the fact that it has become a lot worse over the years! (Female BA-QTS)

I won't be doing it for the rest of my life [I used to think I would], because of the amount of work and lack of reward. (Female PGCE)

Like other researchers in the field (Smedley, 1999; Johnston *et al*, 1999), we found that issues relating to the gender of the teacher were of far greater concern for men in 1998, at the start of their training, than they were for women, and that men more frequently expressed concerns about pupil behaviour than did women.

People's opinion of males, questioning men's intentions, surprised me! (Male UG)

There is a stigma attached. In the 1970s in my primary school, I had male teachers. They have gone because it is a cultural thing. Primary teaching is seen as a "sissy job", as effeminate. It does not have a macho profile, the pay is not good and it is not a high achieving or competitive career. (Male PGCE)

On the other hand, more women than men referred to the number of government initiatives and had concerns about their future stress levels.

The new pay proposals will bring a change in the working environment and bring unpleasantness. In primary teaching the ethos is team working, so that the staff bond together and these proposals threaten that. (Female PGCE)

Worried about stress levels and how much life outside school will be affected. (Female BA-QTS)

Yes, the pressure, what is expected of you. All the teachers I have met seem to have so much to do. This worries me. I want to have a life as well. (Female PGCE)

It is interesting that pay was cited as one of the major disincentives to teaching in 1998. Significant increases in pay and changes to the pay structure for teachers were proposed around this time but had yet to materialise in pay packets.

In 1998 there were also some clear signs of government attempting to accentuate the positive aspects of teaching and to attract positive publicity for teachers. The Green Paper (DfEE, 1998) 'Teachers Meeting the Challenge of Change', had just been published. It set out a new deal for teachers in the form of a new pay and career structure, and more formalised professional development, with the stated purposes of

- improving quality through workplace reform
- imposing professional standards on newly qualified teachers
- enhancing career prospects through clarifying routes to promotion and higher pay scales
- introducing numeracy and literacy strategies in primary schools
- setting up a General Teaching Council (GTC)
- turning teaching into 'a first class profession'.

It was this document that introduced the idea of performance-related pay for teachers, with movement to a new, improved salary scale dependent on pupil achievements. However, the Green Paper was not well received by teachers at the time. They felt it would be divisive, introduce competitiveness into a collegial working environment and would not be properly funded (Bricheno & Thornton, 1999). It also introduced more controls over teachers, their training and the curriculum they taught. Feelings among those successfully recruited during 1998 were of teaching being a low status profession, one that was under paid and overworked, and often criticised in the media. There was clearly still much to be done.

Research undertaken in 2005 explored teachers reasons for leaving teaching and it is against this later data that we can explore whether or not the perceptions and concerns of leaving teachers in any way 'mirror' the concerns expressed by new entrants back in 1998.

Reasons for leaving teaching in 2005

In 2005 we placed advertisements in newspapers and magazines, inviting teachers who had already left, or were about to leave the profession, to complete an on-line survey about their reasons for leaving. The questionnaire enabled respondents to write as much as desired in answer to questions about reasons for leaving teaching and planned or envisaged post-teaching work destinations. 371 teachers and ex-teachers responded, across all age phases of education. We found that in general they gave many similar reasons to those reported elsewhere, for example: high workload, poor pay, and low status and morale (Spear *et al.*, 2000); workload, government initiatives, stress, pupil behaviour, pay and school management/leadership (Barmby and Coe, 2004). Workload and pay feature in both Spear *et al* and Barmby and Coe's work, but it is interesting to note the presence of new factors in the 2004 work. Although stress has been a recurring issue in teacher retention (Smithers and Robinson, 2004; Sturman 2002), school management and pupil behaviour appear to be relatively new concerns. We found, in common with other studies, that pupil behaviour was frequently mentioned as a reason for leaving in 2005 (but of relatively minor concern to our new entrants in 1998).

Our 2005 leavers from the Primary sector gave government initiatives as the most common reason (46.2%) for leaving teaching, while 25% cited pupil behaviour. Pay (12.5%) and status (10.3%) were mentioned far less often than in 1998, and issues relating to the gender of the teacher barely featured at all. Bullying by more senior staff emerged as a reason for leaving although was not mentioned as a possible worry by new entrants in 1998. Do these differences indicate that the pressures of teaching have changed in recent years?

For this group of teachers, government initiatives, workload and pupil behaviour seemed more pressing reasons for leaving than pay or the image/ status of teaching (the major concerns of our new entrants in 1998). These differences may be explained by the unusual nature of the methodology and sample of leaving teachers, consisting of a self-selecting group of teachers who felt strongly enough to respond to national advertisements and complete an on-line survey, but they may also indicate that the nature of teachers work has changed and that the concerns that teachers express about teaching in 2005 are somewhat different to those that were prevalent in 1998.

Focussing on men and women teaching in the Primary sector, we found some interesting gender differences (Table 2, below). Men seemed to be more concerned about government initiatives, and, as in 1998, about pupil behaviour, pay and performance related pay. Women, on the other hand, expressed more concern about stress/health and, in contrast to 1998, the status of teachers.

Workload, poor management and bullying were mentioned by similar proportions of both men and women, suggesting no particular gender difference.

Table 2: Primary teachers' reasons for leaving teaching in 2005, by gender

Issue	2005	
	Male % (n=34)	Female % (n=150)
Government initiatives	57.6	44.0
Behaviour	35.3	22.7
Workload	26.5	30.7
Pay	20.6	10.7
Performance pay	17.6	11.3
Poor Management	8.8	13.3
Stress/health	5.9	15.3
Status	5.9	11.3
Bullying	5.9	7.3

[I was] dealing with extremely disruptive pupils, so that I would be actually teaching for less than 50% of actual teaching hours. I was working every evening during the week and at least one day per weekend, whereas my friends in alternative jobs had much more free time out of normal working hours. At the time, the pay was not as good as it is now, but I found the working hours intolerable. (Male Primary)

Targets, unrealistic demands by people in government who have never taught (Male Primary)

Pay is uncompetitive with peers in private sector with less responsibility and much shorter hours (Male Primary)

Teachers have too few rights and are expected to do far too much. We don't have the respect of the children or of their parents and this is made worse by the way the government treats us....We are not treated as professionals - everything is too prescribed. The pay isn't bad, but what we're expected to do for it is just impossible if we're to have any kind of life. We are respected by no one. (Female Primary)

Until the status of teachers and the wider school function is restored, there will be a spiral of poor morale (staff and pupils), bad behaviour, desperate government measures and declining educational

achievement. I'm glad I had the option to leave - many don't. (Female Primary)

The insidious undermining of self esteem through lack of full confidence and trust by the government, parents, the public. The lack of appreciation of the responsibility, knowledge and skills and physical stamina required to teach. The crassly mistaken ideas of policy makers (Female Primary)

Similarities and Differences: 1998 Entrances, 2005 Exits

In Table 3 (below) we can see that the concerns of new entrants in 1998 and those of leavers in 2005 are different. This could be explained by the longer experience and greater immersion into the culture of teaching of leavers; by changes in individual life contexts (marriage, children) or changes in priorities and expectations (related to teachers themselves as individuals and groups); or it might be explained by wider changes in society and the socio-economic and cultural context in which teachers work takes place (and of course by an interaction between all these things).

Table 3: Comparison of recruits (1998) and leavers (2005) concerns

Issue	1998 % (n=141)	2005 % (n=184)	Concerns in 2005 seem to be:
Workload	61.7	29.9	Less relevant
Pay	68.8	12.5	Less relevant
Status	49.6	10.3	Less relevant
Gender issues	8.5	Not raised	Less relevant
Behaviour	16.3	25.0	More relevant
Performance pay	4.3	12.5	More relevant
Management	0.7	12.5	More relevant
Bullying	Not raised	7.1	More relevant
Government initiatives	41.8	46.2	Relatively unchanged
Stress/health	15.6	13.6	Relatively unchanged

Although we cannot talk about percentage decreases and increases for these two quite different samples, it is illuminating to focus on the changes in emphasis that are indicated in Table 3. In 2005 reservations about teaching shifted towards an increase in concern about performance pay, management, bullying and pupil behaviour and towards a decrease in concern about workload, status and pay in general. Only concerns about Government initiatives and stress/health seem to be relatively unchanged.

The leavers sample may be unusual, but our findings regarding a general decrease in the citation of pay as an area of concern are supported by the House of Commons Select Committee (2004). They reported that pay was no longer considered the main issue in terms of teacher retention, while Hargreaves *et al's* (2007) research found that teachers pay was now much less likely to be seen as an area of concern, rather pay was seen increasingly as a positive feature of a teaching career. This reflects changes to

teacher's salaries and pay structures that have taken place since the 1998 Green Paper, and which appear to have had a positive impact on perceptions of pay in the intervening period. Pay is certainly less of an issue for leavers in 2005 than it was for entrants in 1998, as can be seen in Table 4 (below). However, while in 1998 it was of major concern to both men and women entrants, in 2005 a gender difference emerged, with pay of greater concern to men than women.

Table 4: Differences in concerns between entrants (1998) and leavers (2005), by gender

	1998	2005	1998	2005
Issue	Male Entrants % (n=20)	Male Leavers % (n=34)	Female Entrants % (n=121)	Female Leavers % (n=150)
Government initiatives	35.0	57.6	43.0	44.0
Behaviour	25.0	35.3	14.9	22.7
Workload	50.0	26.5	63.6	30.7
Pay	70.0	20.6	68.6	10.7
Performance pay	5.0	17.6	4.1	11.3
Management	5.0	8.8	0	13.3
Status	65.0	5.9	47.1	11.3
Stress/health	10.0	5.9	16.5	15.3
Bullying	Not raised	5.9	Not raised	7.3
Gender issues	30.0	Not raised	5.0	Not raised

Pupils' behaviour was a concern for men entering primary teaching in 1998 and is one of the most prominent reasons for men leaving the profession in 2005. On the other hand if we look at male and female attitudes to teaching children we notice that in 1998 the main reason among both male and female students for entering the profession was the enjoyment of working with children. In 2005 very few of those leaving teaching mentioned this. Five men (14.7%) made positive comments; two talked about wanting to give children more fun, two talked about the government initiatives that got in the way of children's education but only one (2.9%) talked positively about children, saying 'Pupils are great'. In contrast 35 women (23.3%) expressed their enjoyment in teaching children, their love of children and their love of the job and their sadness at their need to leave the profession:

Yes, they are taking out the enjoyment of teaching and changing the reasons I started and trained to be a teacher (Female Primary)

I have been a teacher and Senco for over twenty years in the same school. The pressure is now so great with the continual drive to address new initiatives that I am only now really teaching for the money. All the fun and real enjoyment has largely disappeared. (Female Primary)

I LOVE teaching and it has been a difficult decision, but I will be leaving next year when my son goes to secondary (I will have been

teaching for only three years). I know an awful lot of teachers feel as I do. The children are not the problem and neither is the actual teaching - it's all the other unnecessary rubbish that goes with it. (Female Primary)

Whatever the reason or explanation, men's stated concerns about teaching appear different in 2005 from those expressed in 1998. Male leavers in 2005 were less concerned about workload, pay, status, gender issues and work-related stress than 1998 entrants, but more concerned about government initiatives and children's behaviour. Women leavers in 2005 similarly expressed less concern than did 1998 entrants about workload, status and pay, but had similar levels of concern about work-related stress and government initiatives.

There are some clear differences between the perceptions of men and women as entrants in 1998 and as leavers in 2005. In 1998 both men and women were concerned about pay levels. This was not a predominant concern amongst leavers, but it was mentioned by twice as many men as women. While pay scales have undoubtedly improved since 1998, men can still earn more money outside of teaching (Dalton & Chung, 2004). Note also that the issue of performance pay, introduced following the 1998 Green Paper, was more prominent among reasons for leaving in 2005 than it was an area of concern for new entrants in 1998; and that this was particularly so for men.

Discussion

Has anything happened in wider society that may have prompted these different responses? In 1998 our new entrants talked about the 'bad press' teachers received.

... it certainly doesn't help that the teachers have such a bad deal in the press. You know, every time you open a newspaper you hardly hear anything good being said about the teachers, it's always like, 'Oh the teachers are on strike again', and the teachers are, you know, do this and they get a very bad press report... I think their status is low... I think rather than the government always saying teachers must do this, must do that and have to prove themselves and so on, they should occasionally praise them and say yes they are doing a good job. (Reid and Thornton, 2000, p.46)

More recently, the DfES Teacher Status Project (Hargreaves *et al*, 2007) has found that news coverage of teachers and teaching changed significantly between the early 1990's and 2005, and that it has become increasingly positive and supportive of them.

While much coverage focused on confrontation between teacher unions and government or government-related institutions, there was markedly less emphasis on confrontation – and concomitantly more emphasis on support and help to teachers – in the most recent period... Earlier news coverage of the 'teacher bashing' mould has given way to a more supportive and less confrontational style of reporting, which gives teachers a prominent 'voice' and recognises, as genuine, the problems and pressures faced by teachers. (p.25-26)

This recent work on the status of teachers (Hargreaves *et al*, 2007) provides substantial evidence that the representation of teachers in the media is now significantly more positive than it was ten years ago and that this may in part be due to wider political and social changes.

Prime Minister Blair's constant refrain of 'Education, Education, Education', from his election in 1997, and the conscientious efforts of his ministers to reshape and improve the image of teachers and teaching within the minds and hearts of the British public may well have begun the move towards more positive stories being told about teachers within the media, and may have helped to enhanced public perceptions about teachers and teaching.

The previous Conservative Government had imposed significant changes on teachers, such as the National Curriculum (DES, 1989), national tests, OFSTED inspections, league tables, training days and new contracts, while at the same time battling against teacher strikes over pay and conditions, and engaging in what might be called the 'teacher bashing' cited above. The '3 Wise Men Report' (Alexander, Rose and Woodhead, 1992), produced in one month and much discussed in the public domain, argued that standards were falling, primary teaching was stuck in the Plowden philosophy of progressive child-centred education, that there should be more streaming, more whole class teaching of separate subjects by subject specialists, and that primary teachers lacked the necessary subject expertise to teach the National Curriculum. Just one year later John Patten (then Conservative Secretary of State for Education) proposed a 'Mum's Army' (TES June 18th 1993) of non-graduate and differently trained nursery and KS1 teachers. Both the 3 Wise Men report and Patten's proposal were highly controversial and may have served to undermine confidence in primary teachers in the eyes of the general public, and to lower perceptions of the status of the profession.

In comparison to their immediate Conservative predecessors, successive Labour Secretaries of State for Education have spoken more about teacher professionalism and trust rather than criticising teachers and blaming them for poor standards in education. Estelle Morris, as the newly appointed Secretary of State for Education in 2001, said

This pamphlet... is about the next steps we must take to raise standards in our schools yet higher. It focuses on those at the heart of raising standards: the talented and dedicated professionals who staff our schools and teach our children. And it signals a new era of trust in our professionals on the part of Government. (Morris, 2001 p.1)

She went on to say

Our teachers and school staff are a national asset of priceless value. But as a nation we have not always treated them as such. In the last four years we have begun to put that right. Investment is at record levels, teacher numbers are up and so is pay. (p.1)

The 1998 Green Paper was the first major educational policy document to emerge from the then newly elected Labour Government and it proposed not only major reforms

around pay and careers but also to turn teaching into ‘a first class profession’. The then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett believed that the Green Paper proposals would create

... a new vision of the profession which offers better rewards and support in return for higher standards. (DfEE, 1998)

The Green Paper received a great deal of publicity and prompted a lot of public debate about the status of teachers and teaching, not least amongst teachers and their professional organisations amongst whom it was initially not well received (Bricheno & Thornton, 1999). However, with hindsight, we can see that the Green Paper proposals did result in a step change in teacher salaries, careers and working conditions.

Teachers now have rights to non-contact time to undertake planning, preparation, and assessment (PPA) and have been released from a range of clerical and ‘non-teaching’ tasks as part of the workforce reforms (DES, 2003). There has been a mass expansion in the numbers of classroom assistants (again initially resisted by teacher unions), and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs), qualified through additional training, also work closely with teachers, undertaking teaching and learning activities with small groups and whole classes in the teachers’ absence.

The programme of reform and investment to raise the status of teachers and the teaching profession, undertaken by the Labour Government, appears to have been successful, despite including the introduction of performance related pay, changes to the curriculum and a constant flow of new educational initiatives. There appears to have been a profound turnaround in the way in which teachers are perceived by politicians and are presented to the public.

Changing perceptions of male primary teachers

Current government policy, and much of the media reporting of education, suggests that male primary/early-years teachers have something unique and positive to offer young children – their gender. They are considered desirable because they can act as ‘positive role models for boys’ (DfEE, 1998, p. 225). Such changes in Government policy are in line with public opinion, with parents now far more willing to accept men working with young children (Hinsliff, 2003), and less concern about men being potentially dangerous to them (Owen, 2003; Sargent, 2005).

The high profile scrutiny of male teachers appears to have lessened somewhat between 1998 and 2005. Headlines such as ‘Pervert label puts men off teaching’ (Budge, 1998 p.1), ‘Male teachers fear slurs’ (Carvel, 1998 p.2) and ‘An unsuitable job for a man’ (Furedi, 2000 p.5) are now much rarer. Men may also have benefited from greater public awareness of their rarity, and through arguments and increasingly prevalent assertions about their value and importance in teaching, especially as role models for boys.

Between 1998 and 2005 there were frequent calls for more male teachers to act as ‘positive role models for boys’. It was a ‘National Priority’ according to The Guardian (2002) while Lepkowska, in The Express (2000) pleaded, ‘Please Sir, our young pupils need your skills’. In 2000 Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett said ‘we

need more good male role models to challenge boys' resistance to learning and laddish behaviour' (DfEE, 2000). School standards minister, Stephen Timms (Woodward, 2002) said it was 'important that boys in primary schools had male role models', while Diane Abbott MP claimed the problem of black male underachievement in school was partly due to the preponderance of white female teachers (Merrick, 2002). In 2002 the Teacher Training agency introduced targets for recruiting more men to train for primary teaching while in 2005 Liam Fox, then Conservative Shadow Minister for Education, suggested that 'boys should be taught in single-sex schools with strong male role models to help a lost generation of fatherless young men find their way in life' (Hinsliff, G. & Temko, N. (2005).

These well publicised statements, which contributed to the myth (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006) that male teachers automatically instil better discipline and enhance boys achievements, may well have served to raise perceptions about the status of male teachers, while possibly, at the same time, lowering that of women teachers (TES, 2002). Taken together with Government policy changes since 1997, which have clearly been successful in terms of improving teachers' pay and status and have addressed workload issues, it would seem that the balance between disincentives and incentives to men teaching young children may have changed between 1998 and 2005.

Conclusions

This article has explored the differences between 1998 entrants concerns about teaching and those of leavers in 2005. That there are differences between them we have no doubt. However what might have caused these differences is subject to speculation. We have suggested that one possible explanation for the differences might lie in social and political changes that took place between 1998 and 2005, namely a change in the ways in which teachers and their status were presented in the media and how they were viewed and treated by two different governments – the Conservatives up to 1997 and the New Labour (to date).

Men are more likely than women to leave teaching for higher pay and better opportunities elsewhere, and this is especially true for men in primary teaching (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006 p.139). Male teachers, particularly male primary teachers, have a choice of better paid options open to them. But there are some strong indications that the image of teachers presented in the news media, and public and teachers own perceptions of their status, improved between 1998 and 2005. Concerns about male teachers being perceived as gay or paedophile appear to have lessened somewhat. The expressed concerns of teachers now are different from what they were in 1998, and this may mark a turning point for the numbers of men in primary teaching.

However, there remain two over-riding concerns for teachers: the intense government interference that some believe erodes their professionalism, and the issue of pupils' poor behaviour. Both appear to be more important to men than to women, and may continue to act as disincentives to men becoming primary teachers.

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