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'Moving away from the caring': exploring the views of in-service and pre-service male teachers about the concept of the male teacher as a role model at an early childhood and post-primary level

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International calls have frequently been made by policy makers and professional/public discourse for more male teachers to enter the education profession under the assumption that they will act as role models for boys. The role of these male teachers as role models is an attempt to not only raise boys' academic achievements but to help improve standards of behaviour and attitudes towards learning. Their presence also is designed to offer those boys who are living in single-parent families with a father figure. However, a level of ambiguity surrounds the male role model argument and this paper is written to critically explore this. The paper examines the views of English and Irish male teachers at early childhood (0-8) and post-primary (12-18) in relation to the concept of the male teacher as a role model, considering if and how male role models differ depending on the age of the child, and whether female teachers serve as role models for boys. Based on the findings gathered through the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, the authors raise a number of questions and concerns regarding the continued practice of 'blanket calls' for male role models in early years and primary school settings.

Key words: male role model, male teachers, early childhood male teachers, pre-service male teachers, in-service male teachers.

List of non-standard Abbreviations

CTF – Canadian Teachers' Federation
DfE – Department for Education
INTO – Irish National Teachers' Organisation
M&AT – Materials and Architectural Technology
M&ET – Materials and Engineering Technology
MORI – Market & Opinion Research International
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TTA – Teacher Training Agency
UK – United Kingdom
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

INTRODUCTION

The lack of male teachers entering the teaching profession has been a concern at an international level (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States) for a number of years (see Martino and Beyenn, 2001). The feminisation of early childhood (defined for the purposes of this paper as 0-8 years) and post-primary (aged 12-18 approximately) has often been held responsible for the educational difficulties and academic disengagement experienced by some boys (Johannesson, 2004). The call for more male teachers is frequently based on the assumption that they will act as role models for these learners (Carrington et al. 2005). Such thinking has been strongly advocated by and evident in the work of international policy makers, recruitment agencies and employers who argue that positive male role models would greatly enhance the educational experiences of boys, particularly those disaffected with schooling (Tinklin et al. 2001). Contrary voices have emerged in response to such thinking (Skelton, 2002).

The current paper explores the views of male teachers towards the concept of the male teacher as a role model. It examines their understanding of role models, if and how role models differ depending on the age of the child, and their perceptions of female teachers as role models for male pupils. The current study involves both pre-service and in-service teachers. These are based at an early childhood (in-service) and post-primary (pre-service) level within England and Ireland respectively. While the two cohorts vary in a number of ways (geographical location, level, in/pre-service) the findings present an interesting 'snap-shot' on the views of a group of male teachers in relation to this controversial issue. An exploration of existing literature associated with this controversial issue is presented below.

The need for more males in teaching?

At an international level, concerns have been expressed in relation to the gender imbalance of teachers entering and remaining in the profession. For example, in America the number of male teachers in 2002 was at 'a 40 year low' (Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 2004, p.5). In Queensland Australia attempts have been made to attract, recruit and retain male teachers in State schools with the hope of increasing the male workforce to 35% (ibid). Similar concerns have been expressed in both English and Irish contexts, especially in early childhood education, where only 5% of such educators in England are male (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012). In comparison, all pre-primary educators in the Republic of Ireland are female (OECD, 2012). The figure increases to 19% at primary level in the UK (Department for Education

(DfE), 2012) and 15% in Ireland (OECD, 2012); this highlights a real decline in men entering the primary sector in Ireland from 32% in 1970 to 27% in 1980 to 22% in 1990 to the current all-time low of 15% (OECD, 2012). These declining figures have resulted in male teachers been referred to as a 'species in danger' (Howson, 1995 cited in Pepperell and Smedley, 1998) and 'prized commodities' (Jones, 2007, p.180). The figures at post-primary level, however, are more balanced, with nearly 35% and 40% of teachers at this level in Ireland and England being male (OECD, 2012).

The consistently low enrolment of male teachers, particularly in the early years and primary sectors, has been attributed to the 'low pay/low status' that is associated with working with young children, coupled with assertions of teaching in these sectors as being 'women's work' (Rolfe, 2006). Numerous government campaigns at a national level have been realised in an attempt to close the 'gender gap' (Carrington et al. 2007, p.397) and to entice more men into teaching. 'Man enough to teach – in primary and early years' and 'Could you be a male model?' are just two examples of strategies used in England to attract more men into teaching (see Teacher Training Agency (TTA), 1996). The call for more male teachers is also evident in international government policy making, for example in Canada (Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), 2002) and New Zealand (Education Queensland, 2002).

The impact of the feminisation of teaching

The feminisation of the teaching profession has been viewed as having a negative impact on boys' educational experiences (Skelton, 2002) resulting in boys becoming 'trouble[d], at risk…victims of feminism' (Lingard et al. 2012, p.408). Griffiths (2006) describes how female teachers are perceived as acting in stereotypical feminine ways resulting in their practices, pedagogies, strategies and expectations favouring girls. It has been suggested that boys are disadvantaged by the 'quiet, co-operative, verbal, fine-motor, indoor, artistic and passive kinds of activities' (Biddulph, 1995, p.145) supposedly preferred by female teachers. This has resulted in boys becoming 'disaffected' in their schooling resulting in poor engagement, behavioural difficulties, academic underachievement and eventually early school dropout (Burn, 2002).

Increasing the number of male teachers has been proposed as a way to counteract the 'soft pedagogical practices' of women (Odih, 2002, p.91). Having more male teachers in classrooms could make educational settings 'boy-friendly again' (McPhee, 2007, p.35). McPhee also claims that more men in classrooms will

result in lessons and teaching materials being focused more on 'male' interest and preferences. Furthermore, assertions that 'men teachers keep order and discipline better than women teachers do' (Johannesson 2004, p.38) are prominent in the minds of teachers and parents. Counter to such thinking, Ashley (2001) argues that what motivates and interests boys is similar to what motivates and interests all children; therefore particular strategies are not needed for boys or girls. Such thinking, it has been argued, is 'rooted in hegemonic views of masculinity' (ibid, p.39).

While it has been suggested that male teachers would impact positively on boys' schooling, numerous questions have been raised in this regard (Mills et al. 2004; Martino and Keher, 2006). Frankel (2008) suggests that there is no definite research indicating that male teachers would have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. Other studies go even further with, for example, Carrington et al. (2005) finding that students taught by female teachers were more likely to portray positive attitudes towards school in comparison to those taught by male teachers. An Icelandic based study by Johannesson (2004, p.37). found that female teachers questioned the impact of the teacher's gender, arguing instead that 'the teacher's personality matters most' with children being more 'interested in the person of the teacher'

It has also been argued that educational achievement, resulting from a complex interplay between social class, poverty and ethnicity, amongst other factors, is an extremely multifaceted issue and one that cannot be addressed by simply introducing more male teachers into classrooms (see Lingard et al. 2012).

The male role model

Although gender formation has long been considered a social construct (Connell, 1995; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996), the notion of role models still receives considerable attention. The concept of role model is deeply rooted in role theory and socialisation (Merton, 1957; Bandura, 1986). Such theories believe that children are socialised into behaving in certain 'gender' appropriate ways. Hargreaves (1986), for example, explored how people tend to behave in ways that are socially prescribed. This socialisation occurs through the 'top-down transmission [of social norms] from the adult world' (Connell, 2008, p.12). Within this process, the child is viewed as a passive actor, one who merely acts out prescribed roles that he has no control over.

Sex role theory consists of two separate categories: men's sex roles and women' sex roles. It is believed that the more shared characteristics the 'role model' has with, in this case, the pupil, the more likely they are to emulate the role model. Therefore, if the teacher shares

characteristics such as 'gender' with the pupil, there is a greater chance they will be a role model (Bricheno and Thornton, 2007). This is perceived as a valid justification as to why male teachers are more likely to be role models for boys. While numerous criticisms of sex role theory exist, detailed discussion on this is beyond the realms of the current paper (see Stacey and Thorne, 1985; Thorne, 1993, Mac an Ghaill, 1994 for a more detailed critique of sex role theory).

While calls have been made for more male role models in schools and educational settings there is often a lack of clarity in relation to the 'personal attributes' (Cushman, 2008, p.123) such role models should possess. Differing and sometimes conflicting perceptions, expectations, aspirations and ideologies exist, with male teachers expected to model particular yet unspecified characteristics and behaviours. Sargent (2000, p.421) argues that the concept of the male role model is 'so uncritically embedded in discourse that [we] do not feel it needs an explanation'. Hutchings et al. (2007, p.136) highlight how policy makers and the media are seemingly 'at a loss in terms of being able to discuss what characteristics male teachers can and should offer, and how these may actually benefit boys'.

Numerous studies have attempted to explore and articulate the particular characteristics male role models should possess. The male role models portrayed in international governmental, media and public discourse have been categorised as 'hyper-' or 'hypo-masculine' (Skelton, 2007). There is a belief that the 'right kind of role model' should exhibit strong characteristics of conventional masculinity (Connell, 2002) and be 'properly masculine' (Robinson, 2002). This tends to be supported by boys, who select hegemonic traits when asked to identify specific characteristics a role model should have (Johannesson, 2004; Yates et al. 2006). Engagement in sport, football in particular, was emphasised as a key attribute boys would look for in a role model (Sumison, 2000). Being active, adventurous, emotionally neutral and 'not soft' were additional characteristics of the male role model as identified by Smith (2004). Concerns have been raised around male teachers who exhibit attributes such as frailty, emotion, co-operation and dependence (Skelton, 2007) with few parents requesting male teachers to adopt a nurturing and emotional role with their children (Sargent, 2000). Skelton (2007) explores the contradiction that male teachers are expected to provide examples of non-laddish behaviour, but at the same time portray a non-effeminate form of maleness.

METHODOLOGY

The research undertaken consisted of two main parts. The first part was conducted in England with in-service male practitioners and teachers working within the early

childhood sector (0-8). The second part was conducted in the Republic of Ireland with pre-service post-primary male teachers (12-18). All participants who took part in the research were male.

The English based study encompassed three phases. Phase one involved the completion of a postal/electronic questionnaire to male early childhood practitioners and teachers who were actively engaged in a classroom setting with children aged 0-8. 75 questionnaires were completed and returned from the 178 sent out, giving a response rate of 42%. The questionnaire explored participants' interpretations of the concept of the male role model. Phase Two involved a focus group with a small number of men (n=3) who worked or had worked at an operational level in schools (those in management roles). The focus group explored the same issues as phase one as these men had not taken part in the first phase. This was conducted in an effort to ensure that men who worked 'indirectly' with young children (0-8) (phase two) had a 'voice' in the research along with those who had daily 'direct' contact with young children in their professional role (phase one). The third phase consisted of six semi-structured interviews with willing phase one respondents. This phase explored items of interest from the findings of earlier phases including the physical characteristics of a male role model, the advantages and disadvantages of having male role models, and the similarities and differences between male role models in early childhood and other educational settings.

The participants in phase one of the English study worked in a number of different educational-based settings; these are presented in Table 1.

Participants identified themselves as being class teachers, nursery nurses or teaching assistants, head teachers or support workers/after school providers; the percentage breakdown of each role is offered in Table 2.

The majority of the participants (70%, n=52) had between 0-10 years of experience in the 0-8 sector. The men who took part in the focus group (phase two) comprised of two head teachers and an academic who was a former member of senior management in a junior school. Those who took part in phase 3 were willing participants from phase 1.

The Irish based study encompassed two main phases similar in nature to phases one and three of the English based study. A phase similar to the English phase two was not included as pre-service teachers have not had an opportunity to experience or take on managerial roles at this stage of their career. Phase one involved the completion of an electronic questionnaire by male pre-service teachers. The questionnaire was similar in nature to that used in phase one of the English study. An email invitation was sent to all male pre-service teachers enrolled in an undergraduate programme at an Irish university. 88 responses were returned, giving a response rate of approximately 20%. Despite numerous reminder emails the response rate remained low. This may be due to the fact that 'repeated follow-ups have diminishing returns and may be considered as spam, thereby irritating or annoying potential respondents without noticeably increasing response rates' (Solomon, 2001 cited in Deutskens et al. 2004, p.23). Additional reasons for the low response rate could relate to the on-line nature of the questionnaire as well as its length[1] (Dillman, 2000). The authors acknowledge this and are concerned with the number of non-responses. As a result, the authors do not attempt to generalise the findings to a larger population but are merely presenting the findings as a 'snap-shot' of a particular group of male teachers.

On completion of the questionnaire respondents were invited to indicate their availability and willingness to participate in phase two. Due to time constraints, the authors decided to conduct focus groups rather than one-to-one interviews. Two focus groups were conducted, with participants being selected on a random basis. The focus group mirrored the semi-structured interviews used in phase three of the English aspect of the study. The initial intention was to have four participants in each focus group. However, due to last minute drop outs, the two focus groups consisted of a total of five participants (three and two).

Those involved in the Irish study were enrolled in a four year undergraduate initial teacher education programme. On graduation all participations would be qualified post-primary teachers in one of a number of subject areas. The subject areas, along with the percentage of respondents from each course, are outlined in Table 3.

The majority of male respondents (38%, n=33) were in their third year of study, with 32% (n=28) being in their final year of the programme. The remainder were in either their first (15%, n=13) or second year (16%, n=14). Respondents ranged in age from 19-45, with the majority being aged 20-24. All but one focus group participant was enrolled in either M&AT or M&ET programmes. The remaining participant was enrolled in the Biological Science with Chemistry or Physics programme.

Data gathered during phase one was analysed using 'frequencies of occurrence' (Cohen et al. 2005, p.283). Test for significance was conducted using chi-squares. Drawing on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994), the qualitative data from phases 2 and 3 was analysed for themes and sub-themes until the authors were satisfied that thematic and data saturation had occurred (Krueger, 1994). All research instruments were piloted in advance of use, hence improving the validity of the research.

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[1] The questionnaire was identical to the version used in the English element of the study and therefore the length could not be altered.

Table 1. Table to show the setting types participants from phase one of the English study worked in along with the percentage representation of the respondents.

Setting type	Percentage of respondents (n=75)
Primary school	87% (n=64)
Nursery setting	7% (n=6)
Pre-school setting	6% (n=5)

Table 2. Table to show the different roles of participants taking part in phase one of the English study along with the percentage representation of the respondents.

Participant's role	Percentage of respondents (n=75)
Class teachers	72% (n=54)
Nursery nurses or teaching assistants	18% (n=13)
Head teachers	3% (n=2)
Support workers/after school providers	7% (n=6)

Table 3. Table to show the subject areas participants from the Irish study would be qualified to teach following graduation.

Course	Percentage of respondents (n=88)
Biological Science with Chemistry or Physics	13% (n=11)
Materials and Architectural Technology (M&AT)	32% (n=28)
Materials and Engineering Technology (M&ET)	25% (n=22)
Modern Languages	1% (n=1)
Physics and Chemistry	10% (n=9)
Physical Education	19% (n=17)

The limitations of the current study include the limited number of participants involved in the research. The views expressed by these participants may not be reflective of the views of other male teachers within the sector and consequently cannot be generalised to the population at large. While the data was collected using similar methods with the same questions and focus the authors acknowledge the fact that the two cohorts differ in a small number of ways. Any comparative discussion on the findings is conducted with an acknowledgement of the number of differences between the two cohorts.

FINDINGS

Respondents' understanding of the term 'role model' is initially outlined. This is followed by their attitudes towards differing aspects of male role models, the female role model and how role models change depending on the age of the child[2]. The quantitative and qualitative data sets are used, where possible, in a supportive manner.[3]

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[2] Participants' quotes, where used, are supported by information on the particular participant i.e. phase of the study i.e. questionnaire, interview or focus group and the level they teach at i.e. early childhood, primary or post-primary. All post-primary respondents were involved in the Irish aspect of the study while all those who teach in early childhood/primary were involved in the English study.

[3] Some themes only emerged in the qualitative aspect of the study. Therefore, some sections of the results draw mainly on qualitative data as the issue emerged from the focus groups, interviews or open ended questions in the questionnaire.

Significance between the two sets of quantitative data, where relevant, is also presented.

Exploring the concept of role model

Two main themes emerged in relation to how male teachers, at both an early childhood (0-8) and post-primary (12-18) level, defined a role model.

Firstly, respondents believed that a role model was a person you 'looked up to' (questionnaire, early childhood). There was a belief that role models were people one aspired to emulate or imitate. For example, 'a role model is someone who you believe has positive traits that you would like to have yourself and so incorporate these traits into your own life' (questionnaire, post-primary). Related to this, respondents believed that a role model was a person who inspired and motivated others: 'a role model is someone who inspires you to strive to be better' (questionnaire, post-primary).

Secondly, respondents believed that role models were people who 'set a good example' (questionnaire, early childhood), who set positive standards, displayed 'positive characteristics' (questionnaire, early childhood) and ultimately had a positive influence on others. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

> I think a role model is someone with positive values and uses these to inform his words and actions with others. (questionnaire, early childhood)

> A role model is a person who encourages through their actions and characteristics what should be strived for in terms of morals, respect and achievement. They are an example to young people and are conscious that their example should be a positive one (questionnaire, post-primary)

It was noted that a role model does not always have a positive influence on pupils as one can 'learn negative things from a role model' (interview, early childhood) as 'the majority of young people only have negative experiences of males/role models. They expect them to shout, hit, drink and be unreliable.' (questionnaire, post-primary)

100% (n=75) of male early childhood educators and 97% (n=64) of post-primary pre-service male teachers agreed that role models were important in the lives of all children and young people. The majority of respondents were either unsure or disagreed that boys needed role models in their lives more than girls (70% (n=53) of early childhood respondents; 74% (n=48) of post-primary

respondents).

99% (n=70) of male early childhood educators and 87% (n=58) of male post-primary teachers considered themselves to be role models for their pupils. In relation to this question, a chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicates a significant difference between the two cohorts c^2 (1, n=138) = 5.734, p = 0.01. Of those who viewed themselves as role models, 93% (n=65) of early childhood educators viewed themselves as being role models for both boys and girls; this compares to just 45% (n=24) of post-primary pre-service teachers. 55% (n=29) of post-primary respondents viewed themselves as being role models for boys only in comparison to 7% (n=5) of early childhood respondents. In relation to this question, a chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicates a significant difference between the two cohorts c^2 (1, n=123) = 31.794, p = < 0.005. No respondent from either cohort believed themselves to be a role model for girls only.

On being asked which group viewed them as role models, 15% (n=10) of early childhood educators believed that boys viewed them as role models, while 86% (n=59) suggested that both boys and girls saw them as role models. For example, one focus group respondent (early childhood) believed that girls can also view male teachers as role models as male teachers are 'showing young girls what males are, what males do and say and think and know. Being a role model is about being a good role model for girls too'. This contrasts with the post-primary data where 55% (n=29) of respondents believed that only boys viewed them as role models while the remaining 45% (n=24) believed that both boys and girls viewed them as role models. In relation to this question, a chi-square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicates a significant association between the two cohorts c^2 (1, n=122) = 20.489, p = < 0.005. Again, no respondent from either cohort believed that girls only viewed them as role models.

Male teachers as automatic role models

Participants offered varying views as to whether men are automatically role models in educational settings. Firstly, it was suggested that being a role model formed part of the teaching role therefore 'every adult who works with children in some way or another' is a role model (interview, early-childhood) and 'if you get a job in a school you are expected to be a role model by society. Being a role model is part of the teaching profession.' (focus group, post-primary) This applied equally to both male and female teachers as 'being a teacher is being a role model, whether you are male or female you are still a role model' (focus group, early-childhood).

While some participants believed there was an

These themes had not been previously explored through quantitative means.

expectation on male (and female) teachers to be role models, it was suggested that this ultimately depended on the type of person you are and, therefore, becoming a role model was not an automatic process. For example, participants felt that being a role model was 'a status to be earned' (focus group, early childhood), sentiments shared by the phase three data from the English study:

> You can't just expect to be a role model for kids – being a bloke is not enough. I think that you've to earn the status - with staff [in the school] they probably think I'm automatically a role model but with the children themselves I think it still needs to be earned from them (interview, early childhood)

Personality and personal characteristics were stressed as important factors in being viewed as a role model. Focus group participants believed if you were 'nice and sound out', if you 'had common interests', and 'if you were approachable' (focus group, post-primary) you would have a greater chance of being viewed as a role model. Therefore, these participants believed that being a male teacher does not automatically qualify you to be a role model as 'it is got to do with your personality' (focus group, post-primary). Again such a view was shared by phase three findings (early childhood).

   There was a feeling that being a role model was an innate and natural thing, and was not something that could be forced or learned. Role models needed to 'be themselves and go with their qualities and what they believe in' (focus group, early childhood). It was suggested that one's ability to be a role model was 'within them' (focus group, post-primary) and 'is something you either are or are not' (focus group, post-primary). Trying too hard to be a role model would not be effective, as reflected in the following quotes:

> I don't think you can go in to work on a Monday morning and decide to set yourself up as a role model. I think it is either there or it isn't. I think it is part and parcel of your own make up. (focus group, post-primary)

> It's unacceptable to assume you are a role model – children will see through you if they think you are working too hard at being one or are putting it on. (Interview, early childhood)

Post-primary participants suggested that male teachers who taught certain subjects engaged in sport or who had a greater chance of being viewed as a role model. For example:

> If you teach what I would consider a male subject, or a predominantly male subject, there is

probably a greater change of you becoming a role model for boys. (focus group, post-primary)

This is supported by findings from an interview at phase three (early childhood): 'I still, in my head, think of male teachers being PE teachers'.

Male role models: Male or maleness?

It emerged from both cohorts that being male is not enough in order for one to be considered a male role model. Focus group participants (pre-service and post-primary) believed that males who display 'maleness are more likely to be viewed as role models than males who do not portray typical male characteristics – 'this is someone who is masculine – someone who outwardly expresses maleness' (focus group, post-primary). It was suggested that 'guys go for someone who has very high masculine traits, big, strong, has the right kind of clothes, hair, and looks cool. I think it is got to do with the way people want to be. You have to support maleness by doing male things' (focus group, post-primary). Post-primary pre-service focus group participants believed that the ideal male role model would be someone who was

> well built, physical, had height, sheer physicality, well turned out, all the time well presented. I don't know why but for whatever reason when I think of a role model that it what I think of. I never see a four foot, five stone man' (focus group, post-primary).

   Such a view was partly supported by select phase three interview findings but were, by and large, challenged by early childhood in-service educators who suggested that the qualities portrayed by male role models could and should be 'non-typical' (focus group, early childhood) and should aim to contest stereotypical notions of 'blokey behaviours' (focus group, early childhood):

> I think role models have to be more in tune and open with their emotions with the little ones. There's nothing to be ashamed about doing it even if you're a man. (interview, early childhood)

It was suggested that different types of role models were needed in schools in order to ensure there was a variety of options available to young men. Having a range of role model options in schools would ensure all boys could identify with some teachers. For example,

> Some children respond better to 'mumsie' men who are a bit more motherly towards them 'cause they [children] might not be getting that at

home; other kids might like men who are funny and silly and have a laugh with them – it's different types of men for different kids (interviews, early childhood)

This was further developed by the post-primary pre-service focus group participants who suggested that while they personally would relate more easily to a man involved in sport, 'some kids just aren't into sports so they may be interested in science or computers so it might be a business person they would see as a role model' (focus group, post-primary). It was suggested that 'it is all about keeping variety in the school to provide something for all kids' (focus group, post-primary). Indeed, from an early childhood perspective, it was acknowledged that some respondents were a 'fairly niche market' (interview, early childhood) whose 'emotional intelligence' was regarded as offering a 'different view of being a "typical" man' (interview, early childhood).

The female role model

While the majority of respondents indicated that females can be role models for boys (99% (n=70) early childhood, 84% (n=52) post-primary), the majority also believed that role models for boys are usually male (76%, n=54) early childhood, 77% (n=51) post-primary). On being asked to explore this further, post-primary pre-service participants[4] indicated that while 'females certainly can be role models' it would be unlikely that boys would view a female teacher as a role model. They may 'fancy' their 'really hot' female teachers but would be less inclined to view them as role models (focus group, post-primary). For example:

> 90% of the time I would be inclined to look up to males just because I have more in common with them. We are brought up to think that males are a certain way – so when kids are growing up parents portray that 'males are the ones you look up to' (focus group, post-primary)

Some post-primary pre-service focus group participants believed that it may be more acceptable for young women to view a male teacher as a role model than for a young man to view a female teacher in this manner. It was suggested that if a young man viewed a women in this way it might 'take away from their maleness' (focus group, post-primary) and might result in them 'being viewed as a homosexual. It is not the norm to look up to a woman.' (focus group, post-primary)

It was also suggested by post-primary pre-service focus group participants that boys would be more likely to

look up to female teachers in primary school, before they have gained an understanding of the differences between men and women and before they had realised what characteristics a man should portray. For example, 'I think early on I would have looked up to female teachers' (focus group, post-primary) but that 'while you have female and male teachers at post-primary the male student will more than likely look up to the male teacher but in primary schools you will look up to your teacher whether they are male or female – just any teacher that there is' (focus group, post-primary), a sentiment shared by focus group findings (early childhood). This issue is discussed in greater detail below.

Moving away from the feminine: role models from early childhood to post-primary

The majority of post-primary pre-service respondents (71%, n=43) believed that being a role model for students aged 12-18 years was different to being a role model for younger children. This compares with just 32% (n=24) of early childhood respondents[5]. In relation to this question, a chi-square test for independence indicates a significant difference between the two cohorts c^2 (2, n=132) = 20.734, p = < 0.005.

Those who viewed the role as different believed that the characteristics displayed by role models at the various stages of a child's development differed. It was suggested boys form different 'types of relationships as they get older' (focus group, early childhood). These participants believed that boys needed different things at different stages of their development and 'would pick up on different characteristics at different ages' (focus group, post-primary). It was suggested that 'children of different ages have different emotional and physical needs' (questionnaire, early childhood) as 'qualities such as intelligence, charisma and a sense of humour are more relevant to older children' (questionnaire, early childhood). For younger children it was argued that 'kindness is absolutely paramount' as a role-modelled quality (interview, early childhood).

There was a belief expressed, largely from male post-primary pre-service participants (and supported by findings from all three phases of the early childhood research), that role models in the 0-8 sector were 'more caring' with pupils, having a 'more natural caring relationship' with their teachers in early childhood and primary (focus group, post-primary). As a result, it was suggested that a male teacher at an early stage of

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[4] This issue was not explored further during the early childhood focus groups or interviews

[5] Of the remaining early childhood participants 58% (n=43) believed being a role model was similar irrespective of the age of the child while 11% (n=8) were unsure. This compares with 23% and 7% of post-primary participants respectively.

education 'has to be more in touch with his feminine side because there are more caring aspects. You have to be softer. You can't be tough.' (focus group, post-primary) However, these was a common held belief amongst Irish focus group participants that as young men develop they 'realise that they have to change and they have to look up to things like sport' (focus group, post-primary) and begin to 'identify with people who are more masculine and pick out the masculine characteristics' (focus group, post-primary). It was suggested that role models become 'less feminine, tougher and more outspoken' (focus group, post-primary) as they progress through the education system. It was felt that as they moved to post-primary level young men engage in a process of 'moving away from the caring' (focus group, post-primary).

On attempting to tease this issue out, these focus group participants indicated that during the early years the young boy is not aware or concerned with presenting themselves in a particularly 'masculine way – in first and second class of primary school you would be a lot less aware of masculine things' (focus group, post-primary). However, this changes as boys develop as they become more aware of how they should behave with boys who are more feminine than the rest getting picked on' (focus group, post-primary).

Through engagement with male family members, school and male teachers, young men learn how to 'define themselves and learn what it means to be a boy, what is okay and not okay' (questionnaire, early childhood). This is further reflected below:

> I certainly know, for instance, that my son…would be playing with girls and there'll be a game suggested involving babies and he will be roped in and he'll play and he'll say "Well yeah, can it be Wayne Rooney's baby?" and the answer is "Yes!" and so it's fine…which makes it more acceptable in his eyes or his friend's eyes (focus group, early childhood)

The male early childhood practitioners experienced particular challenges to their 'maleness' and were frequently viewed as 'effeminate' or 'emotional' as a result of working with young children. For example, an interview participant in phase three (early childhood) spoke about 'numerous personal and professional factors which hinder potential males from entering the early years sector. There are difficulties for those who actually work in the early years, namely coping with the negative perceptions of men who work with young children', citing paedophilia and being lazy as challenging perceptions based on personal experience.

Those who believed that being a role model was similar irrespective of the age of the child (58%, n=41) early childhood, 23% (n=14) post-primary) suggested that role models at all levels emulate the same qualities and

characteristics i.e. 'older children still value many of the same characteristics' (questionnaire, early childhood) as the teacher is 'still the same person with the same values' (interview, early childhood). There was a belief that the needs of the child remained the same – irrespective of their stage of development.

DISCUSSION

A number of issues emerged from the current study. For example, both groups believed that they are viewed as role models by their (usually male) students and they also believed that children do need role models in their lives. Furthermore, differing views emerged as to whether being a role model was an automatic or an earned title. For the purposes of the current paper three main themes have been identified for further discussion. These include *Reinforcing or challenging the hegemonic ideal?, Moving away from the feminine* and *A range of role models*. The paper concludes by reflecting on what teacher development at both a pre-service and in-service level can do to address some of the issues emerging from the study.

Reinforcing or challenging the hegemonic ideal?

While many of the male early childhood educators spoke about the need for male teachers to display non-typical forms of masculinity and to challenge 'blokey behaviour', the male pre-service post-primary teachers appear to emulate and reinforce particular hegemonic forms of maleness thereby 're-inscribing dominant versions of masculinity' (Martino and Berrill, 2003, p.99). Teaching staff who are male, teach 'male dominated subjects' are strong, physical and play sport were more likely to be identified by male post-primary teachers as role models for boys. This mirrors much of the international literature referred to earlier (see Skelton, 2007). Such attributes, as identified by the male pre-service post-primary teachers, are in line with the common masculine traits identified within Western society (Francis and Skelton, 2001) and are supported by the work of Skelton (1991), who found that many male teachers are primarily informed by 'entrenched stereotypical attitudes' (p.238). Such entrenched views are more likely to be present in existing male teachers, with Courtenay (2000, p.1387) finding that men, through 'their behaviours and their beliefs about gender, are more stereotypical than those of women and girls'. This is particularly true of male teachers who teach older children as supported by the work of Francis and Skelton (2001) who found that male student teachers in upper primary children were more likely to support traditional versions of masculinity than men who taught earlier grades. This may point to the fact that the hegemonic views presented by the Irish pre-service post-

primary teachers in the current study is down to the level they teach at, rather than to any geographical factor or to the fact that they have yet to enter the profession. However, additional research is required to explore this further.

The reluctance of the male pre-service post-primary teachers involved in the current study to move beyond the hegemonic ideal is not surprising when one considers McDowell's (2000) assertion that 'clinging to dominant versions of masculinity is a common reaction among many men – young and older' (p.207). While we do not mean to suggest that all male teachers adopt and reinforce such views (as seen in the findings from those men from the early childhood), it appears that some male pre-service post-primary teachers, rather than challenging dominant ways of being male as some early childhood participants attempted or at least advocated to do, continue to 'reinforce gender stereotypical behaviours in boys' (Martino and Berrill, 2003, p.101). Despite the fact that similar findings have emerged from studies published over a decade ago, some male teachers in the current study continue to express, perpetuate and reinforce gender stereotypical attitudes held by students (see also Sumision, 2000; Robinson, 2002). It has been argued that 'a greater male presence in the profession [at an early childhood level] might assist in heightening sensitivity to gender issues and ultimately assist in gender reform' (Sumsion, 2000, p.138). There is evidence which suggests that men who work with young children recognise that early childhood (0-8) is synonymous with 'the feminine' e.g. 'patience, empathy, flexibility, tolerance, kindness, compassion, gentleness and affection' (Balchin, 2002, p.31), and thus perceive these characteristics as part of the role model 'ideal'. This was supported by the views expressed by early childhood practising educators in the current study. By promoting qualities such as sensitivity, caring and understanding, Hutchings et al. (2007) suggest that men who work with young children have an important role in offering children less stereotyped images. While many of the early childhood educators in the current study attempted to do just that, the views expressed by the male post-primary student teachers would indicate that by the time boys enter post-primary level such views may be contradicted by some of the teachers they may meet.

These findings continue to raise questions around the merits of the role model argument, particularly in relation to improving boys' engagement and achievement in school. Numerous studies have found that academic achievement is often perceived as a feminine domain and as being a challenge to the hegemonic ideal, with boys who are good at school being considered less masculine (Epstein et al. 1998). Continuing to introduce male teachers who support hegemonic forms of maleness could actually do little to alter boys' attitudes to schooling. Rather than continuing to have 'blanket calls' for more

men in teaching, it could be beneficial to actually begin a detailed discussion on the 'personal attributes' (Cushman, 2008, p.123) male teachers should have (such a discussion, of course, should also take place for female teachers). As previously stated, such discussion has been lacking to date (ibid).

Moving away from the feminine

While the male early childhood educators spoke about the need for male role models to be caring, nurturing, kind and to provide reassuring physical comfort when needed, the male pre-service post-primary teachers believed that normal development for a young boy involves a process of moving away from all things deemed *feminine, caring* and *soft*, instead moving more towards those who are tougher and less feminine. It has been suggested that there is a 'continuum' of qualities and characteristics that role models emulate. These qualities subscribe to the idea of 'classic' masculine and feminine traits that are pertinent for children of a particular age. This is supported by the work of Rolfe (2006) who found sympathetic qualities, such as being compassionate, caring and sensitive, were deemed more pertinent for those working with young children (0-8). Some participants suggested that as children develop they seek different qualities and characteristics from their role models, which is supported by the work of O'Brien et al. (2009).

Such thinking (of boys moving away from the feminine) is not new and is strongly supported by the literature with Keen (1991) and Biddulph (1995) contributing to such an argument. Diamond (2004) identifies the belief that 'masculinity requires that femininity be relinquished' (p.362) with young men undergoing a process of distancing themselves from femininity and unmanliness (Roulston and Mills, 2000, p.234). While boys in their infancy may develop in a feminine direction, it is assumed that in order to 'achieve a masculine gender identity, boys must subsequently dis-identify with their mothers and counter identify with their fathers' (Diamond, 2004, p.359). If such detachment does not occur, it is believed that the boy will not achieve a secure sense of his masculinity and will ultimately be feminised. Therefore, rejecting femininity and all things associated with it is viewed as an essential component in the formation of appropriate forms of masculinity. There is an assumption that without moving away from the feminine boys cannot properly develop into men (see Countenay, 2000). It appears that while some of the early childhood educators contradict this, the male post-primary pre-service participants are reinforcing and supporting such thinking.

There was a belief that if men portrayed any feminine characteristics they and their sexuality may be called into question as 'boys who are more feminine than the rest

get picked on' (focus group, post-primary). This mirrored the societal pressures the early childhood educators spoke about in terms of the resistance they experienced due to their choice of career path – 'I remember my dad asking, "What's wrong with you?"' (Interview, early childhood). Such a view is supported by Nayak and Kehily (1996) who explains how adopting a feminised identity can all too easily be translated into being viewed as gay while Countenay (2000) argues that 'men and boys who attempt to engage in social action that demonstrates feminine norms of gender risk being relegated to the subordinated masculinity of 'wimp' and 'sissy' (p.1389). Such views, while not new, are interesting when one considers that the male pre-service post-primary teachers in the current study believed that male teachers at early childhood had to be 'more in touch with his feminine side', 'more caring', 'softer' and 'less tough'. While many of the early childhood educators identified similar characteristics, this raises questions around how these male pre-service post-primary teachers' position men in non-traditional roles (in relation to the hegemonic ideal) and may support the feelings expressed by the early childhood practitioners in relation to their maleness being called into question as a result of their choice of career. It also raises questions around the messages these male teachers may be portraying to their students in relation to acceptable career choices for men (and women).

An interesting difference to emerge from the two cohorts related to the fact that female teachers were largely absent from the minds of male post-primary teachers as perceived role models. There is an assumption, supported by the findings of Biskup and Pfister (1999), Vescio et al. (2004) and Bricheno and Thornton (2007), that boys' role models are instinctively male. Drexler (2012) challenges this by suggesting that role models can also include women and claims that 'boys can learn how to treat women by watching men. But they can just as easily learn it from watching how women demand to be treated.' However, the views of the male pre-service post-primary teachers in the current study challenge this as the movement away from the feminine the participants referred to may continue to limit a boy's ability to view female teachers in this way.

While femininity is viewed as having a negative impact on maleness and therefore was distanced and 'othered', female teachers were further demoted to the position of looks by male pre-service post-primary teachers in the current study. While female teachers were rarely, if ever, viewed as role models, the 'hot' female teachers were the only ones given any acknowledgement or recognition by the male post-primary teachers. It has been argued that heterosexual practices are founded on the objectification of women (Holland et al. 1998) with female teachers often being positioned as 'a sexualised object of male desire' (Francis and Skelton, 2001, p.16). While men's

actions and behaviours are viewed as important, what really only matter for women is how they look (Wright and Clarke, 1999). This appears to be reflected to some extent in the current study. While not arguing that all male teachers would hold such beliefs as outlined above, questions need to be raised about the impact having teachers (be they male or female) who continue to reinforce such views would have on boys and girls.

A range of role models

Participants in the current study stressed the importance of providing a variety of role models, or a 'range of masculinities' (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996), so that all boys would be able to identify with at least one male teacher in the school. Such a view is supported by Sumison (2000) who argues that perhaps a critical mix of masculinities would be more effective than a critical mass. While on the surface this appears to be a valid suggestion, one could question how alternative forms of masculinity would be supported within a school structure and teacher belief system that continues to identify largely with the hegemonic ideal. Will boys continue to gravitate towards the more dominant forms of masculinity even when alternative versions are on offer? This would be particularly true within a context where 'hegemonic forms of masculinity culturally dominate and 'others' other masculinities that are available to boys, particularly those that challenge the heterosexual norm' (Robinson, 2005, p.22). Would the male role models who provide alternative ways of being male be quickly labelled as 'wimp', 'sissy', 'homosexual' or 'other'? Evidence suggests that schools, while producing contradictory forms of masculinities, continue to be difficult places for boys who adopt alternative forms of maleness (Renold, 2004). Therefore, providing a critical mix, within the current education system, is not enough on its own. If a variety of role models are to be respected and valued in schools we would need to ensure that schools (and it could be argued society as a whole) provide an environment where

> Different forms of femininity and masculinity are valued, more equitable and respectful relationships between girls and boys are possible and where those forms of masculinity and femininity which have negative consequences for girls and boys are challenged. One of the premises underpinning this way of thinking is that individuals can only change when they are offered alternative ways of thinking about and enacting male or female identities, and when these different identities are invested with value (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998, p.150)

This goes much deeper than merely providing more male teachers as role models for boys but instead suggests a critical look at the belief systems, practices and structures that underpin the working of schools. It ultimately demands a 'pervasive', 'whole school' approach, such as that advocated by Gilbert and Gilbert (1998, p.240). In practice, it requires close scrutiny of all aspects of school life, including school sports fields, playgrounds, changing rooms, classrooms, staffrooms, principals'/head teachers' offices, and approaches to discipline. Of course, male teachers play an instrumental role in this regard.

What can teacher development do?

While perhaps extreme, it could be argued that many of the male teachers in the current study, mainly at pre-service post-primary level, lacked a critical awareness and understanding of gender issues. While they were acutely aware of their own gendered experiences they did not question many of the hegemonic assumptions they held or the consequences of such thinking on themselves or others. The hegemonic views presented by the post-primary student teachers in the current study may be as a result of still being within a pre- rather than in-service level. Could a lack of experience within the classroom be impacting and influencing their views? Perhaps, following exposure to school and classroom life these male teachers may develop a greater awareness, appreciation and sensitivity towards gender issues. Ideally, a comparative study needs to be conducted with pre- and in-service early childhood and post-primary teachers in Ireland and England in order to determine this for certain. While additional research is required to provide clarification in this regard, the authors, however, remain sceptical. These pre-service teachers are entering schools that continue to be structured around and reinforce hegemonic practices. If these teachers are entering such environments without such sensitivity is there any possibility that they will develop it in situ? Previous published work would suggest not. For example, Haase (2008) found the 'limited understanding some male teachers have of personal power or the type of hierarchical, unequal, oppressive social arrangements to which they are contributing' (p.606). Haase (2008) goes on to suggest that male teachers need to develop a greater awareness of 'how their everyday gender practices impact on the students they teach and also how they may be contributing to the larger discourses of gender, power and an inequitable system of social organisation' (p.606).

Such a shift in thinking is unlikely to occur without particular emphasis being placed on such issues at both pre-service and in-service level. Teacher development needs to encourage teachers (particularly those who are male) to examine their practice, behaviour and assumptions (Francis and Skelton, 2001) and to enable them to interrogate 'the social practices of masculinity in…. their own [lives]' (Martino and Berrill, 2003, p.100). Teacher development programmes must therefore ensure they provide opportunities for all teachers to explore and deconstruct their own views of, in this case, gender; this might be achieved through group discussions, staff training exercises and opportunities for personal reflection. Martino and Berrill (2003, p.102) highlight the need 'to explore in teacher training institutions and professional development forums how issues of masculinity and sexuality impact on male teachers' self-perception and how this in turn influences their…relations with students'.

Emphasis should be placed on challenging narrow constructions of gender (Wright and Clarke, 1999), drawing attention to the 'pecking order of masculinities' (Martino and Berrill, 2003, p.105) as well as deconstructing dominant forms of masculinity. The goal would be to 'make available alternative ways of knowing' for male teachers (Martino, 1995, p.210). Ultimately the issue centres on teaching as a professional endeavour. If one is truly to be considered a professional then issues around gender and gender construction are central to what it means to be a teacher. The focus then becomes on helping teachers build their professional identity in a changing world (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992). Therefore, gender and gender construction does not become an add-on in teacher development programmes but is at the core of what it means to be a teacher in the first place (Mannix McNamara et al., 2011).

While it is easy to make such suggestions, the current approaches to teacher development, which emphasises subject specialism and content mastery (Villegas-Reimers, 2003), do not provide suitable conditions for such learning to take place. Teacher development programmes need to place emphasis on personal development rather than being merely functional and instructional in nature (Sugrue, 2002). This also needs to be sustained as part of continuing professional development. If gender related issues are to be addressed, there is a need to include opportunities to develop personal qualities and self-understanding (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992) through teacher development and critical reflection. When personal growth models of teacher development are adopted teachers tend to have a greater sense of self-understanding, become more reflective, are more sensitive and ultimately become better teachers (Vogt, 1995). Such approaches can only bode well for deconstructing and challenging gendered stereotypical views.

While male teachers are obviously key in this regard, the authors would argue that masculine identities are not constructed amongst and in relation to men alone. Women play a pivotal role in the formation of masculine

identities through their reactions and interactions with men, through the behaviours they support, reward and punish. Therefore women can be regarded as 'bearers of masculinity too' (Connell, 1995) and therefore female teachers should also be included in this process.

CONCLUSION

In line with the findings of Haase (2008), the current research goes some way to providing evidence that merely employing more male teachers 'is unlikely to aid the goal of improving gender inequalities in schools' (p.598). We do not argue that all male teachers hold similar views to those expressed herein, nor are we opposed to more male teachers being employed in schools. The findings may point to the continued reliance on hegemonic ideals by a number of males entering the profession, especially at post-primary level. Lingard and Douglas (1999) argue that 'an influx of conservative and uncritical men could simply reinforce and embed more traditional patterns of gender relations that are strongly heterosexual and stereotypical macho' (p.57) – as could a similar influx of conservative and uncritical women. Such an approach may actually limit the ability of students, irrespective of how many different types of role models are on offer – to adopt different or alternative versions of masculinity (Warin, 2006).

While no one could (or should) question the need for having both a male and female presence in schools, there is a need to explore the 'personal attributes' (Cushman, 2008, p.123) we want our teachers to possess. We believe that a greater awareness of perceptions of the male role model in education is needed in order to critically examine the concept in greater depth and to explore the personal qualities and attributes of such role models. Without this the authors feel that the perceived benefits of male role models in educational settings will continue to be limited in both value and impact. This (as well as emphasising personal development in teacher education programmes) may result in male teachers who are reflective, sensitive and ultimately better teachers (Vogt, 1995). Again though, these sensitive and critical male teachers may experience difficulty surviving within an education system deeply entrenched within hegemonic ideals. Without close scrutiny of all aspects of school life (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998) such teachers are unlikely to have any long lasting effect.

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