

# MATES: FORMING PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Teresa Moore  
Central Queensland University

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents preliminary results from a state-wide online survey designed to explore the experiences of male beginning teachers in Queensland, Australia. The data analysis explores issues that impact on male teachers differently to their female colleagues, and the kinds of support currently available to male beginning teachers in Queensland as they make the transition from university to the workplace.

## INTRODUCTION

Over recent years there had been much speculation and concern raised about boys and education. The House of Representatives report, "Boys: Getting it right" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2002)) resulted from concern at the federal government level about boys and their education. There has been concern about the lack of appropriate male role models fuelling a "crisis in masculinity". There has been a perception that boys are becoming a lost generation, with many growing up without the presence of a father as an intimate part of the family network. Newspapers – both in Australia and overseas – have reported on girls outperforming boys at school, with the implicit message that this is something society should be deeply concerned about (Bricheno and Thornton, 2002).

In response to this concern, various studies have been done investigating the role of male teachers in boys' performance (BBC News, 2005a, 2005b; Matters, Pitman, and Gray, 1997). Findings suggested it was not the lack of male teachers that caused boys to fail in the school system; rather, the failures were related to the quality of the teachers and their teaching, regardless of their sex. Similarly, research in Australia has shown that not all boys are underachieving (Mills, 2004). When looking at boys' underachievement, issues of class, race, and culture need careful scrutiny (Mills, Martino, and Lingard, 2004). Well-qualified and committed teachers are the strongest predictors of student achievement (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003; Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997). In other words, the performance of boys was related to the use of appropriate strategies that encouraged students to learn, rather than to the need for more male teachers. However, in 2002, there was still sufficient concern at the

state government level regarding boys' education and the recruitment of male teachers in Queensland, to develop a male teacher strategy. This strategy promoted the dual purpose of providing students with diverse learning experiences as well as demonstrating a commitment to create an inclusive work environment (Education Queensland, 2002). Through this strategy, the reasons for attracting more males into teaching shifted from being a key determinant of boys' performance, to that of providing a balanced workforce.

The context in which teachers now work has become complex and risky, and demands emotional work. This situation is often exacerbated by community expectations that the teacher will take on roles that were previously the domain of the family and the church (Hargreaves, 1997). As Barry and King (2002) declare,

At its most basic level ... the role of the teacher is to teach and this involves facilitation of learning and learning skills. This means that an important part of the teacher's work is to nurture students and to manage information in such a way that each student achieves maximum intellectual, social, physical, emotional and spiritual growth (p. 6).

In Queensland, there has been an emphasis on preparing students for life after school through the development of life skills that are readily transferable to the workplace. There has been a focus on getting students onto pathways that will either take them into apprenticeships or employment, or into university and further education options. For some parents (and teachers), schooling is about learning basic knowledge and skills through practice and testing. For others, it is about promoting lifelong learning, thinking, and problem solving in a range of situations; with this linked to the beliefs and value systems of the community (Barry and King, 2002).

Therefore, it can be argued that being an educator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means being able to communicate and make partnerships; it means being a quality teacher: someone who has initiative and a keenness to become a lifelong learner, and someone who also understands the complexity and diversity within kids' lives. Teachers, these days, need to be able to form partnerships beyond the school gate with all kinds of people, and to develop the ability to work both autonomously and within groups. They are required to build bridges between the intimate worlds of their students and the harsh reality of contemporary society (Moore and Knight, 2005).

### ATTRACTING AND RECRUITING MALE TEACHERS

There has been widespread discussion about the issues that face many male teachers in our schools, coupled with a steady decline in the

overall number of male teachers (Smith, 2004). Smith (2004) has suggested that while there has been an steady decrease in the number of male primary teachers, there has also been a significant shift of male teachers between the government and non-government sectors. The number of male teachers in government schools has dropped from 22,791 to 17,541 but, correspondingly, the number of male teachers in the non-government sector during the same period (1984 – 2002) rose from 4,158 to 6,345. Despite this decline and shift of employed male teachers, there does not appear to be a recruitment issue associated with male students and pre-service, teacher-preparation courses in Queensland. Data supplied by the Strategic Human Resources Division of Education Queensland demonstrates a steady increase in applications across 2000 – 2005.

	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>mid 2001</b>	<b>2001-2002</b>	<b>mid 2002</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>mid 2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>mid 2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>
<b>Female</b>	4,625	91	4,600	49	4,617	32	4,510	36	5,155
<b>As % of Total First Prefs</b>	<b>76.5%</b>	<b>79.8%</b>	<b>74.5%</b>	<b>76.6%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>	<b>71.1%</b>	<b>72.9%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>73.7%</b>
<b>Male</b>	1,420	23	1,573	15	1,663	13	1,675	20	1,843
<b>As % of Total First Prefs</b>	<b>23.5%</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>27.1%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,045</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>6,173</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>6,280</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>6,185</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>6,998</b>

*Table 1. QTAC applicants listing an education course at a Queensland university as their first preference 2000 – 2001 to 2004 – 2005.*

Table 1 shows the number of male and female applicants listing an education course as a first preference at any Queensland university from 2000 – 2001 through to 2004 – 2005. Table 2 shows the number of male and female applicants who were offered and subsequently enrolled into an education course at a Queensland university.

	2000-2001	mid 2001	2001-2002	mid 2002	2002-2003	mid 2003	2003-2004	mid 2004	2004-2005
<b>Female</b>	2,579	42	2,432	26	2,156	9	2,219	18	3,010
<b>As % of Total First Prefs</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>82.4%</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>81.3%</b>	<b>74.8%</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>73.1%</b>	<b>69.2%</b>	<b>74.2%</b>
<b>Male</b>	747	9	760	6	727	3	817	8	1,047
<b>As % of Total First Prefs</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>26.9%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,326</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>3,192</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2,883</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3,036</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4,057</b>

*Table 2: QTAC Applicants who were offered and who enrolled in an Education Course at a Queensland University 2000-2001 to 2004-2005*

Note. This table was supplied to the author by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd. (QTAC). Copyright 2000 – 2005 by QTAC. Reprinted with permission.

These data show that the number of males listing education as a first preference is steadily increasing, along with a steady increase in the number of males taking up those offers. These increasing numbers would suggest that there is not a significant attraction or recruitment issue. Rather, it is more of an issue about the allocation of university places. Unfortunately, Smith (2004) also found that the number of male graduates from teaching courses has decreased – highlighting attrition within university courses. Likewise, the number of male students within the Bachelor of Learning Management (BLM) course at Central Queensland University (CQU) has increased, but some of these students may not necessarily graduate as teachers. The Mates program was developed to support male BLM students and to link students with a network of supportive male teacher mentors.

### THE MATES MENTORING WORKSHOP

All 38 primary school principals from across the Mackay and Rockhampton State Education Districts and the Rockhampton Diocese were asked to nominate male primary teachers to participate as mentors. Twenty-six male teachers attended a mentoring training workshop where they explored three scenarios. The first addressed the "good" mentor; the second assisted the teachers in setting their own boundaries around the mentoring process and, finally, the third

addressed issues that impact on male teachers differently to their female colleagues. These issues included sexual harassment, misconceptions, and negative stereotypes associated with the male teacher. At the same time, second-year male BLM students were approached at the CQU Mackay and Rockhampton campuses to link up with these mentor teachers.

Whilst there was initial interest expressed by students approached, only one Rockhampton student and two Mackay students eventually linked with individual mentors. Time management, a full academic program, and part-time work commitments were some of the reasons provided for the lack of participation by BLM students. This has implications for any future running of the Mates program. Those students who did participate found that the face-to-face meetings were the most successful way of maintaining their networks and mentoring partnerships.

### EXPERIENCES OF MALE BEGINNING TEACHERS: THEMES EMERGING FROM THE ONLINE SURVEY DATA.

An online survey was sent to 431 male beginning teachers across 319 schools in Queensland. Of these 431 teachers, 105 responded to the survey. Three areas were covered in the survey: the first

section was general demographic data, the second related to reasons for becoming a teacher, and the last section looked at their experiences so far as beginning teachers.

### **Who are our male beginning teachers (MBTs)?**

The majority of respondents were Generation Xers (i.e., people born from the 1960s to the early 1980s) (77%), while 19% were from Generation Y (i.e., people born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century after Generation Xers). Baby boomers (i.e., people born from 1946 to the early 1960s) made up the remaining four percent of respondents. This generational stratification was done in order to identify the generational groupings of beginning teachers. This illustrates that there are males coming straight from school into teacher training as well as males who have either changed careers or who have returned to university to gain different qualifications. The majority of respondents indicated that they were full-time students at university prior to taking up their current employment – with many of the respondents aged between 24 and 44. Manuel (2003, p. 140) points to the increased interest in teaching – both in Australia and overseas – as a career choice for graduates, and as a second career. There are now multiple entry points to teaching. This in turn signals the multiplicity of student teacher bodies such as mature-age students, graduate-entry students, and those students coming straight from secondary school. The mature-age student and graduate-entry student may have considerable life experience, including being a parent. There was a good mix of urban and rural schools in the sample, with nearly all respondents beginning work as teachers within the past six months to two years.

### **Attracting males to teaching**

Many of the MBTs saw the definite career pathway, job security, and lifestyle associated with teaching as attractive. It became apparent that the salary paid to teachers was also significant, positive for some but negative for others. Some respondents thought the salary was sufficient for what they were asked to do in the classroom, while others felt that the pay should be increased. It was suggested in the comments of some of the MBTs that increasing the salary could serve to attract more males into teaching.

However, many of the respondents were prepared to trade off a lower salary or wage for other qualities of life.

Data from the survey indicated that family (34%) and teachers (37%) were the main sources of information about teaching as a career. Sixty-one percent of the respondents thought that they could be a role model to students and 62 % "wanted to help kids". Holidays and working with good colleagues were also among the highest ranked positives for the respondents. These were strong motivators that attracted the respondents to teaching. The negatives associated with teaching – once these respondents had begun work – included the paperwork, work intensification (long hours and work taken home), the amount of preparation required, and behaviour management.

### **Supporting male teachers**

Ewing and Smith (2003, p. 17) identified four significant issues that impact on the retention of beginning teachers:

1. Adjusting to the demands of teaching fulltime.
2. Negotiating colleague relationships.
3. Understanding classroom, school, and community cultures.
4. The idealism of the pre-service preparation.

These issues were drawn out in the data gathered via the online survey and signal areas that continue to concern MBTs. These are also areas within the workplace that trained mentors could address in their provision of support for the beginning teachers. Half of the respondents considered that the first six months of working had been easy, while the remaining half felt it had not been easy.

During that initial six months, 48 % of the respondents had been assigned a mentor. This indicates that some schools have mentor programs, with other schools having short induction sessions; but there was no indication by the respondents as to whether they had found these experiences to be positive or negative. The MBTs remarked on their supportive colleagues (78%) and on-going mentorship (23%) as the support available to them at their particular school. Mentoring by experienced teachers, a reduced workload, and access to resources and

previous work programs were among the most common suggestions of what many of the MBTs would have liked in their first months of teaching. Adjusting to the realities of full-time teaching, and understanding school cultures and parental expectations concerned most of the respondents. Luckily, most of them were able to call on supportive colleagues. This suggests that there is a certain amount of idealism rather than realism associated with pre-service training. Limited access to practical experiences could lead to an unrealistic image of workplace expectations. Having a mentor to talk about expectations of the school, of parents, and of the educational system is one way to develop a realistic understanding of the workplace.

### **Negotiating stereotypes: developing a teacher identity**

When discussing what was important in supporting male teachers to remain in teaching, issues of negative stereotypes and allegations of impropriety emerged. It can be argued that many male primary-school teachers negotiate a fine line between being valued as a male teacher and being seen as "suspect" because of their chosen career. This became evident in comments from the online survey, such as:

Male teachers often leave due to parents' attitudes and unrealistic expectations as well as many preconceived ideas as portrayed in the media (Respondent 20).

Despite the male primary-school teacher being employed first and foremost as a professional educator, he also occupies a male body, constructed by some in the media as an object of danger. The nurturing female is seen as a "good" body, but the nurturing male is often perceived as a "suspicious" body. Sargent (2004) postulates that to counteract this suspicion some male teachers may adopt particular teaching styles. Respondent 59, cited below, highlights the construction of difference within a teaching workplace and how he personally negotiated this difference:

... recognising that we have a different teaching style to women. This is especially important when it comes to mature age males who have come across from other professions as I have. Teaching has become a female dominated profession and policies have been written with women in mind. Not that there is anything

wrong in the way that they teach – it is just that men have a different approach (Respondent 59).

I would argue here that Respondent 59 is not being judgemental about his female colleagues but rather is attempting to reassert a masculine identity established on the basis of his identity being different to a feminine identity (Probert and Wilson, 1993, p. 11). With this kind of identity negotiation it could be argued that the personal expectations of Respondent 59 has led to the acting out of a particular kind of masculinity – namely, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2002), which comes from the intense scrutiny of being in a "feminised" occupation. Manifest in this is the need to teach differently because of possible sanctions if the male primary-school teacher is seen as nurturing. Therefore, it could be further argued that teaching style is more about avoiding situations that could be misconstrued, and recreating the "real-man" image demanded by many parents. Sargent (2004) suggests that male primary-school teachers can be caught between a rock and a hard place; where the "normal markers of masculinity in foreign environments are seen as dangers." However, if these men were to display any "feminine markers" such as nurturing, then they could be labelled as gay or suspect.

From comments made by some of the MBTs it can be seen that they felt strongly that attitudes towards male teachers needed to change:

A change in attitude that men can actually teach young children and that we can provide strong and positive role models to children (Respondent 7).

Breaking down the barriers between males and females in the workplace. There has been a large barrier in communication and expectations of staff members in the school (Respondent 32).

Comments such as those cited above signal the need on the part of both university educators and educational managers to reflect on and monitor their own assumptions and practices as part of challenging and transforming institutionalised practices that could re-inscribe narrow stereotypical images of the male primary-school teacher. There are ambiguous and contradictory discourses associated with male bodies, nurturing, and teaching. For example, while fathers are given permission to care for and nurture their children in contemporary Australian society, this permission is not readily extended to

non-relatives. However, also operating here is a perception and possibly an expectation in some schools that male primary-school teachers become surrogate fathers, especially for those "troubled boys" from single-parent families headed by women.

## IMPLICATIONS

Much of data presented in the survey echoed comments that had been made by the mentor teachers who had attended the mentor training. They too had talked about a lifestyle choice when asked about their decision to become teachers. Two major areas of further research are indicated here, and concern lifestyle choice and generational shift. There are Generation Xers becoming teachers after previous occupations, and they are training to teach a new generation of students. Similar to the survey respondents, many of the mentor teachers indicated that they had been in other occupations prior to their teacher training. These occupations ranged from working in the finance field to the trades.

While most of the workshop participants wanted to make a difference with children's lives and to work with children, there were also remarks about a quality of life associated with this career pathway. Similarly, most of the workshop participants saw "working with kids", and "being able to make a difference in the lives of the kids" whom they taught, as attractions and rewards associated with teaching. Overall, both the MBTs and the teacher mentors expressed delight and enjoyment with their work. These were committed teachers who were there because they felt that they could give something to the education of all students in their classes and schools.

As highlighted earlier, the workplace context of the teacher generally, and the male teacher specifically, has become a risky and complex arena (Hargreaves, 1997). Sargent (2004) believes that teachers negotiating these arenas find that whichever way they turn there are hidden obstacles and even traps for the teacher who does not employ some degree of self-surveillance. Many male teachers now work in an environment that is under constant surveillance either by self or by others, within and beyond the school gate. Despite this surveillance, this environment can also construct a sense of isolation for some male teachers.

Some male primary-school teachers find themselves as the only male teacher within a school, while others do have the luxury of male colleagues. This does not, however, automatically mean that these colleagues are friends or have interests in common beyond the professional realm.

From the survey data, it was seen that most MBTs had supportive colleagues; I would suggest that having access to experienced teachers through a mentoring program such as Mates – which could begin as early as the second year of teacher training – could offer the BLM students at CQU a realistic view of teaching. Accessing other male teachers would enable pre-service students to discuss issues around parental and school expectations – and perceptions associated with appropriate behaviour – and would provide a supportive network for male student teachers, MBTs, and experienced male teachers.

## CONCLUSION

From the survey data, and from comments made by workshop participants, it can be argued that teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is perceived and can be promoted as a lifestyle choice for many male teachers – especially if they have families. Teaching also offers a good career pathway, with one of the strongest rewards seen as being able to make a difference in the lives of children. Retention of MBTs can be promoted through:

- Having a network of supportive others;
- Effective pre-service training;
- Realistic knowledge of the challenges likely at school;
- Knowing the school before working there;
- Affirmation of, or value shown, of what male teachers are doing (Manuel, 2003).

One of the greatest indicators of retention is seeing the presence of other male teachers. The presence of male teachers across a wide range of curriculum areas would also assist in breaking down negative stereotypes and images of the suspect body. Negotiating the divide between personal and public and/or professional life is daunting for the beginning teacher. This is where the Mates mentors could play a valuable role in being the bridge between the idealism of the

university program and the reality of the professional workplace.

## REFERENCES

Barry, K., & King, L. (2002). *Beginning teaching and beyond* (3rd ed.). Sydney: NSW: Social Science Press.

BBC News. (2005a). *Male teachers 'do not help boys'*. Retrieved September 20, 2005, from <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4230120.stm>

BBC News. (2005b). *Welsh classrooms 'need more men'*. Retrieved September 20, 2005, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/wales/4515825.stm>

Bricheno, P., & Thornton, M. (2002). Staff gender balance in primary schools. *Research in education*, 68, 57-64.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Education Queensland. (2002). *Male Teacher's Strategy: Strategic plan for the attraction, recruitment and retention of male teachers in Queensland State Schools 2002-2005*. Retrieved April 16, 2004 from <http://education.qld.gov.au/workforce/diversity/equity/pdfs/mt-strategy.pdf>

Ewing, R., & Smith, D. (2003). Retaining quality beginning teachers in the profession. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2(1), 15-32.

Hargreaves, A. (Ed.). (1997). *Rethinking educational change with heart and mind*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. (2002, October). *Boys: Getting it right* [Electronic version]. Retrieved April 4, 2005, from [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/report/fullrpt.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/report/fullrpt.pdf)

Manuel, J. (2003). 'Such are the ambitions of youth': Exploring issues of retention and attrition of early career teachers in New South Wales. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 31(2), 139-151.

Matters, G., Pitman, J., & Gray, K. (1997). *Are Australian Boys Underachieving? An analysis using a Validity-Reliability framework based on the work of Lee Cronbach and Pamela Moss*. Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Conference of the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA), Durban, South Africa.

Mills, M. (2004). *Issues in the male teacher debate: HREOC v CEO*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Victoria.

Mills, M., Martino, W., & Lingard, B. (2004). Attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers: Policy issues in the male teacher debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(3), 355-369.

Moore, T., & Knight, B. (2005). Finding Mates: Developing a male teacher support program. In B. Knight, A. Harrison, & B. Walker-Gibbs (Eds.), *Researching educational capital in a technological age*. Flaxton: Post Press.

Probert, B., & Wilson, B. W. (1993). Gendered work. In B. Probert & B. W. Wilson (Eds.), *Pink collar blues: Work, gender and technology* (pp. 1-19). Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.

Sargent, P. (2004). Between a rock and a hard place: men caught in the gender bind of early childhood education. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 12(3), 173-193.

Smith, J. (2004, December). *Male primary teachers: Disadvantaged or advantaged?* Paper presented at the Australian Association of Educational Researchers, Melbourne.

Waters, T., Marzano, R., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: McREL.

Wright, S. P., Horn, S. P., & Sanders, W. L. (1997). Teacher and classroom context effects on student achievement: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11, 57-67.