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Male Teachers, Myths and Pedagogies.

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In the Australian State of Queensland a recent policy document has been launched that has as its purpose the recruitment of more male teachers into the government education system. This policy document reflects many of the concerns raised by sections of the media in much of the western world and in a range of texts with international audiences. Many of these concerns suggest that boys are best taught by male teachers and that the current disproportionate numbers of males and females in the teaching profession is harming boys (see for example Biddulph, 1997; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1999). The paper critiques this notion of the necessity of male role models for boys to achieve at school. It argues that such claims are often grounded in a simplistic and anti-feminist logic that denigrates single mothers and female teachers (see Mills, 2000; Roulston and Mills, 2000). The paper also argues that it is the quality of pedagogies experienced by students that is important in terms of improving the social and academic outcomes of both boys and girls, not the sex of the teacher.

The paper draws heavily upon data collected during a large national project investigating gender issues in Australian schools. This research was commissioned by the former Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, now Department of Education, Science and Training - DEST) to investigate the educational needs of boys. The aim of the study was to investigate how systemic factors affected the educational performance and outcomes of boys and how these could be addressed in the school context. This project involved both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The qualitative component consisted of 19 case studies of schools across Australia, both primary and secondary, involved in particular programs concerning boys. The sample was a purposive one, providing a range of school types and a range of programs. Within each of the case study schools there were various data collection methods. These included analysis of school documents and policies, and classroom and school ground observations. Additionally, in depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, deputies, counsellors, guidance officer, heads of department, teachers, parents and students – boys and girls – in each of the schools. Student and teacher questionnaires were also administered to all the students at the year levels being studied in both primary and secondary schools and to all of the teachers at each school. This paper will focus on transcript data relating to students' and teachers' comments on the topic of 'What makes a good teacher?'

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