

The Perils of Being a Male Primary/Junior Teacher: Vulnerability and accusations of inappropriate contact with students

Les risques d'être enseignant mâle aux niveaux primaires et juniors : les vulnérabilités et accusations possibles de contact inapproprié avec les élèves

Michael Parr et Douglas Gosse

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Résumé de l'article

Il est perçu au Canada, qu'il existe une pénurie enseignants masculins, particulièrement aux niveaux primaires et juniors. Parmi les facteurs qui les empêchent de considérer la profession, est le fait qu'ils se sentent vulnérables. Cette présentation vise à souligner une recherche faite auprès de 223 enseignants masculins en Ontario de niveau primaire et junior. Cette enquête électronique démontre que 28 parmi eux ont déjà été soupçonnés d'un contact inapproprié et discutent des circonstances et les répercussions de ces commentaires. Les résultats de cette recherche sont présentés dans le contexte des implications d'être enseignant masculin travaillant avec de jeunes enfants dans un milieu de travail non traditionnel.

THE PERILS OF BEING A MALE PRIMARY/JUNIOR TEACHER: VULNERABILITY AND ACCUSATIONS OF INAPPROPRIATE CONTACT WITH STUDENTS

MICHAEL PARR & DOUGLAS GOSSE
Schulich School Of Education, Nipissing University

ABSTRACT. There is a perceived shortage of male teachers in education, particularly at the primary/junior (P/J) level where male teachers in Canada account for a dwindling minority. Included among the many factors inhibiting males from becoming P/J teachers are perceptions that males might be unduly vulnerable to false accusations of inappropriate conduct with pupils, frequently of a sexual nature. This paper highlights findings of research exploring the experiences of male P/J teachers in Ontario. Results of an online survey completed by 223 male P/J teachers are discussed; 28 of these teachers reported they had been suspected of having had inappropriate contact with pupils and wrote online comments outlining their experience. The findings are discussed in the context of what it means to be a male assuming a non-traditional role of working with young children in today's milieu.

**LES RISQUES D'ÊTRE ENSEIGNANT MÂLE AUX NIVEAUX PRIMAIRES ET JUNIORS: LES
VULNÉRABILITÉS ET ACCUSATIONS POSSIBLES DE CONTACT INAPPROPRIÉ AVEC LES
ÉLÈVES**

RÉSUMÉ. Il est perçu au Canada, qu'il existe une pénurie enseignants masculins, particulièrement aux niveaux primaires et juniors. Parmi les facteurs qui les empêchent de considérer la profession, est le fait qu'ils se sentent vulnérables. Cette présentation vise à souligner une recherche faite auprès de 223 enseignants masculins en Ontario de niveau primaire et junior. Cette enquête électronique démontre que 28 parmi eux ont déjà été soupçonnés d'un contact inapproprié et discutent des circonstances et les répercussions de ces commentaires. Les résultats de cette recherche sont présentés dans le contexte des implications d'être enseignant masculin travaillant avec de jeunes enfants dans un milieu de travail non traditionnel.

Diversity presents itself in ways that vary across cultures, traditions, beliefs, gender, and identity, and should be celebrated for the opportunities created for personal and professional growth. Exposed to only one view, or too little diversity, we may become restricted in our imagination of possibilities for individuals and broader society. It is important in Canadian and international contexts to ensure that equity between genders is promoted, so that we do not limit developing views or opportunities in life for men, women, and those of alternative genders and identities. For instance, historically, men's work was associated with careers such as doctor, lawyer, and executive, and women's work with nurse, legal assistant, and secretary. In Canada, affirmative action programs to address gender inequity on behalf of women have been so successful that today more women than men are applying to and attending both medical and law schools (Abraham & Hammer, 2010; Alphonso, 2010; Wentz, 2003). As a result traditional expectations and stereotypes are changing, perhaps resulting in a new imbalance. In education, schools and faculties of education are increasingly dominated by women (Benedict, 2000; Parr, Gosse, & Allison, 2008) in all programs but most significantly in primary/junior¹ (P/J) programs.

The shortage of male P/J teachers in faculties of education and teaching positions concerns many educators, researchers, and the public. When a boy (or girl) comes from a single mother home, which is increasingly common (Statistics Canada, 2009), and enters a female dominated school, he or she may not have a positive male role model until junior high school (Bernard, Hill, Falter, & Wilson, 2004; Farrell, 2005). Some suggest that this may be particularly problematic for boys given that education and the myriad of processes involved in schooling play a significant role in both producing and reproducing gender identities and shape the development of young boys' masculinities (Swain, 2005). Many researchers have participated in the debate regarding the feminization of teaching and the effects or non-effects of teacher role-modelling on students and the significance of these on the development of identities (Martino, 2008, 2009; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Pollack, 1998; Sargent, 2000, 2001; Sax, 2007). What many of these researchers do agree on is that students require *effective* male teachers who serve as positive role models and competently fulfill the responsibilities that a teaching position demands.

Gender imbalances are problematic in education, a field in which modelling of competencies and possible career opportunities have been viewed as critically important for children and adolescents. Not so long ago, in the nineteen seventies and eighties, and even more recently in 2001, it has been argued that students would benefit from seeing women in teaching positions such as science (eg. Smith & Erb, 1986; Stake & Granger, 1978), in leadership positions in schools (eg. Estler, 1975), and in medicine (eg. Yedidia, & Bickel 2001), suggesting that this modelling would encourage greater numbers of girls to aspire to attain such positions (Taylor, 1980). Today, we see that it is boys

who are struggling academically in school as compared to girls and that more than ever before, more females than males graduate from high school (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2006; Intini, 2010) and continue on to university (Statistics Canada, 2010; Tiger, 1999). Recent Canada-wide statistics inform us that females comprise 58% of all undergraduate university enrollments, 56% of enrollments at the Master's level, and their numbers have increased to make up an unprecedented 47% of all doctoral students (Statistics Canada, 2010).

Discussions about learning differences between boys and girls, and the effects of modelling related to gender, race and ethnicity, continue to inform the debates over the need to hire teachers from a wide variety of visible minority groups. Hawley and Nieto (2010), for example, have recently presented such a position, which they identify as “an inconvenient truth”, stating that,

when it comes to maximizing learning opportunities and learning outcomes for students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, race and ethnicity matter. Race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning in two important ways: They affect how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and they influence teachers' assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning. Being more conscious of race and ethnicity is not discriminatory; it's realistic. (p. 66)

We suggest that similar arguments apply to gender and to students' need to have diverse representations of gender presented to them; with males as well as female role models occupying positions such as that of a P/J classroom teacher. In order to address such under-representation in the teaching profession, the Ontario Ministry of Education, in its recent publication *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009), has gone so far as to pledge to

work with faculties of education and the Ontario College of Teachers to incorporate content pertaining to equity and inclusive education in pre-service and in-service education programs and to increase access (to teachers colleges and hence teaching jobs) for members of underrepresented groups. (p. 20, emphasis added)

Along with individuals of other visible minorities identified by race, ethnicity, ability, and sexual orientation, male elementary teachers might now be viewed as one of these under-represented groups.

Although educators, researchers, and policy makers may acknowledge that diverse role models are important for all pupils to envision possibilities reflected in broader society and for their personal sense of agency (Bernard, Hill, Falter, & Wilson, 2004), school boards find it increasingly difficult to provide male role models for students when the numbers of male teacher candidates and teachers are steadily dwindling (Bradley, 2000). It is evident that the number of male teachers is indeed decreasing across Canada as older male teachers retire

and fewer young males choose to enter the profession. Across teaching positions in Ontario, men presently represent only one in ten of all P/J teachers and less than one in three secondary teachers (Bernard et al., 2004). Statistics from across Canada show similar trends, with a female:male ratio of five female teachers for every one male elementary teacher, and an overall K-12 ratio of three female teachers for every male teacher in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Perceived barriers to males becoming P/J teachers include the impression, both from within the profession and in the public eye, that men are less nurturing than women; that it is inappropriate for men to be working with young children; and that male primary teachers are often characterized as “feminine,” “homosexual,” or “pedophile[s]” (Gosse, Parr, & Allison, 2008; King, 2000; Martino & Berrill, 2007; Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001; Parr et al., 2008; Sargent, 2000). In order to begin to address imbalances and inequities of gender representation in education, questions must be asked to explore the reasons why males are not choosing, entering, or even remaining in these teaching positions. Such questions challenge us to explore structural, social, political, or other real or perceived barriers that influence men to choose the role of primary teacher. In responding to this challenge, this research sought to explore these questions and to add to our developing understanding of the professional journeys of male P/J teachers.

METHODOLOGY

In a pilot study, *The Professional Journey of Male Primary Teacher Candidates in Northern Ontario*, we interviewed six participants who were enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program in 2006-2007, and five who had withdrawn from the education program since 2000. All attended B.Ed. programs in universities in Northern Ontario. We conducted a series of three interviews with each of the enrolled candidates as well as a focus group, and interviewed the withdrawn candidates for approximately ninety minutes each. In this earlier study (Gosse, Parr, & Allison, 2007, 2008; Parr et al., 2008), we found that:

- Familial, social, and collegial support networks were critical to preventing a sense of isolation/alienation while in female dominated education faculties;
- Gay/single male teacher candidates reported being more vulnerable to feelings of isolation/alienation;
- Early experiences working with children in their own youth prompted an interest in entering the teaching profession for middle-class teacher candidates;
- Male teacher candidates with young families found the dual role of breadwinner-student especially stressful;
- Males with spouses and/or children reported being more confident and accepted by peers;

- All male candidates expressed concern over false accusations of sexual abuse.

Our recent provincial study, *The Professional Journey of Male Primary Teachers in Ontario-2007-2009*² (partial findings of which are presented here in this paper), seeks to explore the experiences of male primary teachers in order to add to our understanding and awareness of some of the social, political, institutional, and structural variables that influence males' decisions to enter, remain, or leave primary and elementary teaching. Supported in part by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the initial phase of inquiry involved the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from an online survey sent to several hundred ETFO members, all of whom were certified as male P/J teachers. In total, 223 teachers completed the survey. Of particular interest were the male teachers' responses to the question, "Have you ever been suspected of inappropriate contact with pupils?" Of the 223 respondents, 28 responded "Yes." Three respondents declined to answer the question and the remaining 192 responded, "No." Participants were prompted to add comments in response to the following invitation, "If yes, please describe the impact on your career and personal life." Some comments were brief, others quite lengthy.

Our data analysis was thematic (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In other words, our ongoing analysis evolved as patterns emerged and themes formed based on our literature review, in-depth participant interviews and in-class observations with nine practicing teachers recruited from the survey, and analysis of the online survey itself; the latter providing the primary data for this paper. As primarily qualitative researchers, we also attempted to capture glimpses into our respondents' realities and to represent respectfully their voices by presenting their own unedited words. Our interpretations of their words and the conditional statements that follow are not generalizable but do form a set of hypotheses and concepts that we, and other researchers, may apply to similar, future research (Charmaz, 2000). We recognize the subjectivity in our own approach and indeed in all research. Our intent is to present an analysis that tells a story about male primary teachers, their social processes, and situations. We synthesize our research findings with three dominant themes for further reflection and inquiry: *male teachers' vulnerability, support networks, and sense of injustice.*

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Male teachers' vulnerability: Fear of false accusations

Many teachers commented on their sense of vulnerability and acknowledged that they took measures to try to protect themselves from false accusations of inappropriate conduct. Despite this, male teachers may find themselves, by virtue of their gender, being placed in or expected to assume roles that may make them more vulnerable to accusations of inappropriate contact

with pupils (Sargent, 2001). In our study, several respondents reported that they were expected or directly asked to assume a disproportionate amount of responsibility for dealing with discipline and physical altercations as well as coaching sports teams. One respondent stated,

quite often larger males are expected to become involved if there is a physical confrontation. I did so several times and was dragged through the mud. The union protected me but it was still unpleasant and I felt betrayed by admin. I think there is much better education for young teachers on this issue however I do feel that a lot of the classroom teacher's power and authority has been seriously eroded due to bullshit politics. I think twice now if an admin asks me to get involved; I make sure there are others present and that everybody does their part. Stress is the main aspect of teaching and this definitely causes huge stress when someone questions your motives, character, integrity, etc.

Male teachers also reported that they were often assigned challenging students to work with more frequently than their female counterparts. This may place male teachers at risk if they are being assigned a greater proportion of students with special emotional and behavioural needs. One teacher reported, "On more than one occasion, a student with behavioural needs has been assigned to me because I'm a male teacher; as if it meant I could 'fix' the child." Another teacher shared his experiences,

Often males are seen as a silver bullet to solve behavioural problems in students ("He just needs a strong male role model."). As a result, males usually have an overload of behaviour problems in their classes, without support. Year after year, it wears you down.

Students with behavioural needs often present challenges warranting interventions that may place a teacher at greater risk. If male teachers are being assigned these students due to colleagues' and administrators' problematic perceptions of males' greater toughness and/or abilities to deal with these students, then we hold this practice to be sexist. Not only is this unrepresentative of men, but it perpetuates harmful stereotypes of women being weaker, less capable of dealing with adversity, and in need of men's protection.

In other instances, male teachers may be more vulnerable when engaging in certain behaviours which are traditionally perceived as nurturing, such as consoling and hand holding, seen as a regular normal part of the daily routines for their female colleagues (Gosse et al., 2008; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Parr et al., 2008). One respondent said, "*J'ai tenu la main d'une fille et on m'a dit tout de suite de faire attention tandis que cela se fait chez les femmes tous les jours*" (translation: I held the hand of a girl and they immediately told me to be careful even though that happens every day with the women teachers). Another male primary teacher who held students' hands while on yard duty faced the following comment, "Primary kids like to hold hands with me when I was on yard duty. Principal said I was fostering future relationships. The community was poor and the children were needy and lacked a 'father

figure' in their lives." This raises the question of whether a teacher's gender influences observers' perceptions of specific behaviours (such as holding a student's hand in the yard) as fostering a positive, supportive relationship, or as grooming for future inappropriate relationships. Additional responses clearly illustrate a double standard: "Yes, I believe the general population do not feel that men can be nurturing to small children. When a pupil hugs a male teacher flags go up all over the place. When a pupil hugs a female teacher, people say she's caring;" "The fear/threat of misconduct allegations is always present in your mind. The rules that govern my female colleagues with regard to student contact is much less rigid;" "People act as though there is something 'seedy' about being a guy who likes kids. Even though I have four of my own, there is a certain palpable suspicion that I have ulterior motives or something;" and finally, "I live life on the edge every day I step into the classroom. All it takes is one parent/fellow teacher to perceive that the line between nurturing and pedophile is blurry and I am a dead duck." These reports are supported by earlier research suggesting that the male teachers felt that they were under greater scrutiny than their female counterparts for accusations and that their very motivations for teaching young students were suspect (Parr et al., 2008).

Support networks

Teachers accused of inappropriate contact with pupils varied in their descriptions of the impact of the accusations on career and personal life. These ranged from reportedly minor effects to significant stress. Only three of the comments provided by the respondents reflect what may be considered minor consequences: "No lasting impact but some inconvenience at the time;" "Stressful to say the least. The situation was cleared up within 24 hours and no long term consequences to career or personal life;" "Parents overreacted. Principal at the time was very supportive. It was minor, but it did upset me." The remaining comments can be interpreted as much graver. Several participants reported that they relied heavily on a network of support from their spouses, family, friends, administrators and teachers' federation to help them endure the process of investigation and the aftermath. One respondent commented that he found the ordeal

devastating. Even though the child came up (I didn't see her) and hugged me. Rumours spread to the extent that I was suffering tremendously and wanted to quit. My wife was an amazing support. The school board was... let's just say less than supportive.

Another relied on external support networks to help him deal with the ordeal: "How to begin? False allegations have been made of me in the past. They crush the spirit and without friends, community support and counselling, I would never have survived." Yet another respondent found his administrator to be his most valuable support, indicating,

A parent wanted her child moved to a room with her friends. When this didn't happen she suggested to the principal that I was a danger to the females in the room. When an investigation proved otherwise, I was accused by the same parents of being gay, and thus a threat to the boys. An investigation again proved otherwise. But the child was moved and the parents got what they wanted. I was in the position of starting a new position in a new town. The allegations were devastating. I wasn't sure where to turn or how to deal with the problem. Fortunately, I had a strong, supportive, caring, and professional principal. When you are accused of something like that, you're terrified. All of your work, your time, your commitment, your hopes, and your dreams are on a dangerous precipice. It is terrifying, and takes a long time to get over.

Ultimately, not all respondents were fortunate to have an effective support system in place. In a tight employment market such as in Ontario, some men had to move away from their family and friends into an unfamiliar town or city to secure employment. This often isolated these teachers from much needed support. One respondent reflected on the time it took to overcome his ordeal and how he had done so in relative isolation: "Devastating/paralyzing... took years to overcome... mostly on my own." Whether he or others would have been able to overcome this devastation more quickly if appropriate supports were made available remains a question for further research. Not all teachers have effective support networks and systems in place to adequately assist them and their families following accusations being made against them. This leaves many teachers in fear and in isolation while dealing with the emotions and unfamiliar set of practices that follow from being accused of committing an inappropriate act the teacher knows they did not commit.

Sense of injustice

Comments from respondents reflected a perceived *sense of injustice*: a feeling of being unjustly under suspicion or scrutiny. Furthermore, when falsely accused of inappropriate contact with pupils, participants reported that they believed they had to *prove their innocence*, rather than being considered *innocent until proven guilty*. Being treated as though guilty until proven innocent may be a result of the pendulum swinging to an opposite extreme from an earlier time when reports of abuse were ignored or dismissed and victims of abuse were not believed and even accused of lying (Robins, 2000a). The Robins Report was commissioned to make recommendations regarding policies and procedures to identify and prevent sexual assault, harassment or violence by teachers against students. Robins was instructed by the Ontario government to review the case of Kenneth DeLuca; a former teacher whom had pleaded guilty to 14 sexual offences, involving 13 victims, 12 of whom were students of his. As early as 1973, and continuing numerous times thereafter through to 1993, complaints were made to principals, other teachers, and school board officials regarding DeLuca's sexually abusive conduct toward students. Although the complaints were considered well-founded, they were not acted upon in any

significant way other than to have DeLuca move from school to school over a twenty-year period (Robins, 2000b).

In Ontario, school protocols, policies, and procedures for dealing with reports of teacher abuse changed significantly following dissemination of the final Robins Report, *Protecting Our Students: A Review to Identify and Prevent Sexual Misconduct in Ontario Schools* (2000a). Currently, when a report of inappropriate contact (sexual or physical) is made against a teacher, new protocols generally require that the teacher be removed from the classroom, or the school itself, until the matter has been adequately addressed and/or dismissed. Typically, the teacher is advised to immediately contact their teachers' federation and seek legal advice. Attempts on the part of the teacher to discuss or resolve the matter with the student or parents are prohibited. All discussion happens at arm's length. The accusations are considered valid until proven otherwise. The Children's Aid Society (CAS) is contacted and, if warranted, the police are called in to investigate. Criminal charges may be laid. When a student or parent makes an accusation, the teacher need not be informed until CAS and the police have had an opportunity to initiate their investigation. The school board is furthermore required to inform the Ontario College of Teachers³ (OCT), which in turn will launch and pursue their own investigation, regardless of whether the CAS or the police file and proceed with charges. The Ontario College of Teachers may in fact still find a teacher guilty of professional misconduct, even when the teacher has been found not guilty of the alleged offence in a provincial court of law.

Any allegation or accusation of inappropriate physical contact or any type of sexual abuse may trigger this entire chain of events. Therefore, it is understandable that some teachers may be surprised if their principal were to call them to the office or phone them at home in the evening, and inform them that they are not to return to the classroom the next day because CAS and the police are investigating an accusation of abuse or misconduct against them. One teacher described his surprise over such an accusation against him: "I was totally floored! And in disbelief!" In many cases, the incident turns out to be a misinterpretation of an event or of a comment to which the teacher had not attached any significance or ill intent. Administrators are often compelled to initiate these protocols and react to a report of an incident, suspecting the worst in order to ensure full protection of the child. When this occurs, the costs to the teacher may be sidelined.

Many teachers reported being treated as though they were guilty of having committed a particular offense prior to any hearing or trial. This presumption of guilt is clearly evident in one respondent's comments explaining how he was "exonerated in an open process, though it almost felt like [I was] guilty until proven innocent. It makes you wary of being in situations that should otherwise be perfectly fine." Another respondent summarized his experience

as “extremely unsettling, strong sense of injustice.” Yet another respondent indicated that he had to “disprove” the allegations rather than have the allegations proven true. He indicated that in his career, “Twice students claimed I assaulted them. No significant impact (just short-term discomfort) - in each case, I was able to disprove, dismiss the allegations.” It is often hard to “prove your innocence” if indeed there are no other witnesses to the apparent act one is being accused of perpetrating. If there are witnesses, matters can often be cleared up quickly, but unfortunately in schools there are many instances where teachers find themselves alone with one or two students or with no witness at all. One teacher reflected on how fortunate he was to have had witnesses to verify his side of the story: “The issue was resolved early on as there were many witnesses to what had happened and it was apparent that the child allegation was untrue.” Not all teachers are so fortunate.

When a teacher is falsely accused, and the accuser thereafter admits they were lying, an apology from the accuser may not even be extended to the teacher. One respondent commented, “The immediate assumption by parents/admin seemed to be guilt, but there were no apologies when the child was revealed to be lying.” Another respondent suggested, “Repeated slander by parents is discomfiting and unfounded. There should be legal support for slander cases.” Many false accusations are reported in the media and can do irreparable harm to an individual’s personal and professional reputation, but despite this, it is expected that the male teacher will quickly dismiss the incident and carry on where he left off with his life and his teaching career as if the ordeal had no lasting impact on him emotionally or otherwise.

Some male teachers have endured extreme stress through investigations leaving long-term effects on their personal and professional lives. One said, “[I] thought I was going to lose my job, family, and life. Accusations being made in the media and community frightened me.” Another reported,

After a complaint by a parent, I was charged with three counts of physical assault on my students by police. I was removed from the classroom for one year while the case was before the court. Great devastation to my life, both personally and professionally. Charges were finally dropped, as they were without foundation.

Furthermore, several respondents seem to exhibit shocked reactions, guarded behaviours, and career questioning long after the accusations had been proven false. One respondent stated,

After the suspicion, I seriously reconsidered my career choice and began to re-evaluate whether or not I made the correct choice. I also began to think about whether or not it was worth it or not to stay in the profession or enter a more male dominated profession.

Another commented that, “[It was] very, very stressful. It really makes you think, ‘Why bother!’ It makes you think you should just do the job as described

and forget about being HUMAN!" A final respondent offered a simple yet powerful testimony to describe the impact of being falsely accused has left on his career and personal life - "Humiliation."

DISCUSSION

A full 12.7% of the primary/junior teachers responding to this survey indicated that they had been suspected of inappropriate contact with pupils. Many teachers described the effects of these accusations as extremely stressful and damaging to their careers and personal lives. For male teachers, false accusations were a reality many had come to accept as a hazard of the profession, often accompanied by a sense of constant worry that infringed on their ability and willingness to respond as they naturally might to situations that present themselves everyday in their classrooms. This weariness restricted the male teacher's ability to act in ways that they otherwise more naturally might; ways in which their female colleagues were free to act without suspicion. If the male P/J teacher is not overly cautious and reserved, he may be increasing his vulnerability to having his actions misinterpreted and of being falsely accused of misconduct.

Male teachers must continue to interact closely with students in fulfilling their teaching responsibilities each day, despite the inherent risks and the collateral damage to themselves and their career that often accompany a false accusation. While the protection, safety, and wellbeing of students remain of paramount importance, practitioners in education must also ensure that teachers' rights are respected and that teachers themselves remain safe and secure within their teaching positions and in situations where they have done nothing inappropriate. For this level of safety and security to prevail, protocols for dealing with accusations of inappropriate conduct must protect both the child as well as the teacher from the harmful effects of potentially false accusations. Most school boards and teacher federations in Ontario offer in-service training on determining and maintaining professional boundaries for contact and interactions with students. In Ontario, The Ontario College of Teachers also published a *Professional Advisory on Professional Misconduct Related to Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct* (2002), which contains guidelines for teachers in maintaining professional boundaries between teacher and student. Despite these measures, educators acknowledge that teaching is a people profession, a caring profession, and as such, the act of teaching places its members in close contact with vulnerable others (students).

These policies and procedures, guidelines, and advisories are useful in that they both protect students and prevent occurrences of false accusations by delineating boundaries between professional and unprofessional conduct. Despite these measures, there will continue to be false accusations against teachers and therefore, there exists the need for increased measures to protect teachers against

the negative effects of false accusations. Discriminatory beliefs and practices on the part of administrators, teachers, parents, or students that allow for the profiling and targeting of male teachers as suspected pedophiles and abusers should not be tolerated. Educators must continue to be vigilant in protecting students from all kinds of harm, but in so doing must be cautious not to allow the victimization of male teachers through prejudice and false accusations of abuse. If a teacher is more vulnerable solely because of their male gender, in other words, if gender profiling or targeting is occurring, this should be identified as discriminatory and as such, deemed unacceptable. Future research should be conducted to more thoroughly explore this concern.

The present research findings suggest that support networks are very important to the accused teacher in dealing with the process and aftermath of an investigation. For participants in this study, these supports had reportedly come from family, friends, administrators, teacher federations, and outside counseling agencies, although not necessarily from all these groups in each case. It would be critical and prudent to ensure that if an allegation has been made against a teacher, that suitable professional counseling be made available. Teacher federations and school boards may consider working together to develop improved protocols that will ensure that appropriate supports are in place to safeguard the wellbeing of teachers as they proceed through the difficult and stressful period of investigation and determination of findings.

It is clear that this research identifies the need for the development of improved protocols that safeguard the wellbeing of all involved when accusations of abuse/misconduct arise in schools. With safeguards in place, and as discriminatory practices against male P/J teachers diminish, more men may choose to enter and remain in P/J teaching positions. As the number of male P/J teachers increase, students and parents alike will see that being a male P/J teacher is not such an anomaly, and negative judgments and presumptions about the motivations or capabilities of males working with children may be challenged. In addition, with more male teachers serving in this capacity as positive role models, young children and adolescents will be provided with diverse opportunities to witness the professional caring and nurturing side of men. This modeling may in turn lead both male and female students to consider an expanded range of roles, and in particular, lead males to consider a greater range of possibilities for personal and career choices for their future as they themselves mature into adulthood and become citizens of the 21st century.

NOTES

1. In Ontario, Primary/Junior refers to programs for students that are typically between the ages of 4-12 and attending Junior Kindergarten up to Grade 6; intermediate level programs are typically for students between the ages of 12 and 14 and in Grades 7-8; and secondary programs are for students in Grades 9-12 and typically between the ages of 14-18.

2. The provincial study, *The Professional Journey of Male Primary-Junior Teachers in Ontario, 2007-2009*, was financed by The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) and supported by the Northern Canadian Centre for Research in Education and the Arts (NORCCREA) with Douglas Gosse (principal investigator), Michael Parr (co-investigator). We would like to acknowledge and thank research assistants Johanna Kristolaitis, Ashley Parr, Taralyn Parr, and Brendan Dillon, for their assistance.
3. Ontario College of Teachers is the accrediting body for teacher certification in Ontario and responsible for determining as well as policing the standards of practice and conduct of the teaching profession. (see <http://www.oct.ca/>)

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MICHAEL PARR is an Associate Professor in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University. His wide variety of teaching and administrative experiences have been instrumental in serving as a springboard to his research investigating educational leadership and change, with emphasis placed on practices that foster inclusive schools and issues of equity and social justice. Correspondence and comments concerning this article should be sent to Michael Parr, Schulich School of Education; Nipissing University. He can be contacted at: mikep@nipissingu.ca

DOUGLAS GOSSE is an Associate Professor in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University and director of the Northern Canadian Centre for Research in Education & the Arts (NORCCREA). He researches effective teaching and learning strategies for boys, the realities of male teachers, and inclusive education.

MICHAEL PARR est professeur adjoint à l'École d'éducation Schulich de l'Université Nipissing. Il possède un éventail d'expériences professionnelles variées en enseignement et en administration. Cette variété d'expériences lui a servi de tremplin dans ses recherches en leadership et changement éducationnels, recherches ciblant particulièrement les pratiques favorisant l'inclusion au sein des écoles, l'équité et la justice sociale. Toutes communications ou commentaires relatifs à cet article doivent être envoyés à Michael Parr, École d'éducation Schulich; Université Nipissing. Il est possible de communiquer avec lui à mikep@nipissingu.ca

DOUGLAS GOSSE est professeur adjoint à l'École d'éducation Schulich de l'Université Nipissing et directeur du Northern Canadian Centre for Research in Education & the Arts (NORCCREA). Ses recherches portent sur les stratégies d'enseignement et d'apprentissage efficaces auprès des garçons, la réalité des enseignants masculins et l'éducation inclusive.