

*Rebecca Priegert Coulter*

*University of Western Ontario*

and

*Christopher John Greig*

*University of Windsor*

## The Man Question in Teaching: An Historical Overview

*For more than a century in Canada, debate has been ongoing about the place of men in the classrooms of the nation and their role in ameliorating the problem of boys' underachievement. Using annual reports from provincial departments of education, other government and commission reports, publications by and for teachers, articles and stories from the popular media, and other print sources, we set out the broad and general contours of this continuing debate to demonstrate a marked consistency and several recurring themes in discussions about the man question in teaching.*

*Depuis plus d'un siècle au Canada, l'on discute de la place des hommes dans les salles de classe et le rôle qu'ils jouent dans l'atténuation du problème des garçons sous-performants. Puisant dans des rapports annuels des ministères provinciaux de l'éducation, d'autres rapports de la part de gouvernements et de commissions, des publications pour et par les enseignants, des articles, des textes de médias de masse et d'autres sources imprimées, nous établissons les grandes lignes de ce débat encore actuel. Les résultats démontrent une cohérence marquée et plusieurs thèmes récurrents portant sur cette question des hommes dans l'enseignement.*

Contemporary discussions in Canada about the absence of men in teaching are marked by a strange case of amnesia (Coulter & McNay, 1993; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004). Forgotten is the fact that for more than a century there has been an ongoing debate about men's place in the classrooms of the nation and men's role in ameliorating the "boy problem," a worry that has an even longer history in public discourse. Often overlooked too is the process by which teaching became a female-dominated occupation and women came to be blamed for boys' underachievement. In this exploratory and introductory study, we begin to unpack this history, which is complex and often contradictory. It is a history that reveals struggles about teacher identity, the professionalization project, gender relations in schools and society, and the nature and meaning of gender itself. Drawing on annual reports from provin-

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Rebecca Priegert Coulter is a professor in the Faculty of Education where she works in the areas of educational politics and policy, the history of Canadian education, and gender and education. Her current research projects investigate teacher militancy in the 21st century and police surveillance of teachers' political activism in the 20th century.

Christopher John Greig is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education. His research focuses primarily on masculinities and schooling, gender and literacy, and the history of education in Ontario. He is currently involved in writing the history of boyhood in postwar Ontario, 1945-1960.

cial departments of education, other government and commission reports, publications by and for teachers, articles and stories from the popular media, and other print sources, we set out the broad and general contours of the ongoing debates about men in teaching. Our purpose is to demonstrate that for more than 100 years there have been a marked consistency and recurring themes in discussions about the man question in teaching. This suggests the need to move beyond everyday and commonsense explanations to devise a more sophisticated understanding of gender, pedagogy, and academic achievement.

*Teaching as Women's Work*

As the 20th century dawned, the feminization of teaching was already a reality in Canada; that is, there were far more women than men teaching in the nation's classrooms, driven largely, but not solely, by the expansion of school systems and growing enrollments in elementary schools. This gender pattern has remained unchanged to this day. From 1870 to the present, there have been some regional variations, and changing economic and employment circumstances have resulted in men moving into and out of teaching. More men taught in the depression, for example, when other jobs were scarce, but this meant, of course, that it was considered acceptable to push women out of paid employment. This is an observation worth remembering: more men in teaching almost certainly means fewer women in teaching. The main trend, however, despite some fluctuations, is that for more than 130 years most classroom teachers in Canada have been female (Barman, 1990; Kinnear, 1995; Perry, 2003; Prentice, 1977; Reynolds & Smaller, 1994). And for just as long there have been deep and abiding concerns about the absent male and what this means for the boys.

As public school systems developed in the mid-19th century, senior administrators such as Egerton Ryerson in Ontario and Alexander Forrester in Nova Scotia were uneasy about the movement of women into school teaching. As Gidney and Millar (1994) argue, for the men credited with creating the school system,

A woman teacher was not part of the natural order of things, or at least, as things should be. Their reaction to the steady march of feminization was sometimes hostile, sometimes begrudging, but mostly a determined reluctance even to acknowledge it was happening. (p. 238)

But as Prentice (1977) points out, local school boards liked female teachers because they "they could be had at a savings of 50%" and administrators, however reluctantly, had to admit that despite their reservations, women turned out to be as good as or even better than men as teachers (p. 52). For example, one Alberta inspector concluded, "we get better average service from women than men." Male teachers, he said, generally lack "one or all of the three G's: Go, Grit and Gumption" (Alberta Department of Education, 1908, p. 48). In 1896 George Ross, the Minister of Education in Ontario, in commenting on the "transfer of the educational work of the country from the male sex to the female sex," observed

That so far there is no perceptible deterioration in the quality of work done in the schoolroom, while in the matter of discipline and in all other circumstances

which go to make school life pleasant to the pupil, there has been a very marked improvement. (Ross, 1896, pp. 190-191)

Undoubtedly women's entry into teaching was driven by economic considerations. They were cheaper labor, and most local trustees, notorious for penny-pinching, took advantage of women's eagerness for paid employment to lower expenditures (Althouse, 1967; Perry, 2003; Prentice, 1977). Quickly these pecuniary interests came to be justified discursively by talk about the "naturalness" of teaching for women. Women themselves took up this discourse, and hence the essentialist argument doubled back on itself with respect to pay and status. If it was natural for women to teach, if women were best suited to work with the young, then because of this they should be seen as rendering a service out of love and should not expect high levels of remuneration or autonomy. Teaching became women's work, work that was rewarded by low pay, poor benefits, and challenging working conditions.

In a society deeply divided by gender, and as teaching became women's work, what might this say about men who taught? Did men's own rigid policing of masculinity, of what it meant to be a man, contribute to their flight from teaching? There is ample evidence to suggest that historically men justified their choice of teaching as a career on the grounds that it provided a stepping stone to higher-status positions or occupations. Becoming a school administrator was one clear option for male teachers, and many took advantage of this route to advancement. A 1971 study of the members of the Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation (OPSMTF) confirmed that "the opportunity for promotion to administrative and higher paying posts is probably the strongest reason that men remain elementary teachers" (Jackson, 1971, n. p.). This pattern of promotion for men is well documented (Clifford, 1989; Kinnear, 1995; Lortie, 1975; Wallace, 2005). Similarly well documented is the use by men (and some women) of teaching as a way to earn money to facilitate additional postsecondary learning and an exit from teaching to another profession. For example, Gidney and Millar (1994) have demonstrated how transient male teachers were in the 19th century, a pattern that persisted into the next century. In 1946 the Canadian Youth Commission noted the continuing exodus of young men from teaching across Canada because "they are drawn into more remunerative and more attractive vocations" (p. 94). This pattern is not unusual even today (Bradley, 2000; Ontario College of Teachers, 2004).

Because of their sex, male teachers were situated differently from women within their occupational group, having easier entry to administrative positions, an unfettered ability to marry, and until the mid-20th century higher salaries simply because they were men. Male teachers also distanced themselves from their female colleagues in a number of ways, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that many men resented women's role in teaching and often held women in disdain. Part of this gender antagonism arose from the struggle to make teaching a profession. In the 19th century to be a professional was by definition to be a man (Gidney & Millar, 1994). As women flooded into teaching, some men argued that any hope for teaching to become a recognized profession was lost, and this view persisted into the latter half of the 20th century. In fact in Alberta in the 1930s, some men even opposed the introduc-

tion of automatic or compulsory membership in teachers' federations/ associations on the grounds that the "preponderance of women" in teaching meant that men "would be out-voted and that feminine control would result," thus making professional status unattainable (LaZerte, 1940, p. 399). While considering a motion that proposed a single salary scale for all teachers regardless of sex, a number of male teachers at the 1957 provincial assembly of the OPSMTF offered a range of comments that indicated little respect for their female colleagues and sought to justify pay discrimination. One opined, "We should make up our minds whether or not we are professional men teachers. School boards are forcing us to discuss salaries in conjunction with women. This should not be so. We should act independently" (Hopkins, 1969, p. 209). Another, speaking at some length, demonstrated the form male self-interest took:

The women want the men to fight their battles, and to have a "me too" attitude re salaries. When the teacher supply levels off, school boards will be willing to pay men more than women, and this proposal [for one salary] would prevent such an advantage from being accepted. In many instances in towns and villages throughout the province, women have sabotaged the efforts of men to improve their salaries. Men teachers should be in a position to "go it alone," and this would not be permissible under one policy. I am willing to cooperate with the women but not by one salary policy. (p. 209)

Into the 1970s, comments such as "we will never become a true profession as long as men are outnumbered by women" and "we will never get anywhere in salary negotiations as long as we are swamped by women" were made (Ellis, 1971, p. 36). Statements of this nature reflect a persistent though unsubstantiated claim that female teachers are less committed to the profession than men (Barman, 1990; Coulter, 2005).

For men working in a female-dominated occupation, social status was a big issue, and much of their anxiety was driven by close identification with the hegemonic masculinity of the professional-managerial class. When men were questioned in the period immediately following World War I as to why they would not take up teaching as a life profession, they said,

that "a teacher has no future" and point out the fact that in other professions men are encouraged to become experts, and special talent and special training are adequately remunerated, while in teaching, an ambitious man with good capacity "soon reaches the top" both professionally and financially. (Alberta Department of Education, 1921, p. 58)

A 1943 editorial in the *Educational Courier*, the professional journal published jointly by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO) and the OPSMTF, reinforced this point using a heterosexist and class-based comparison to emphasize why real men would eschew teaching.

Let a doctor join a social gathering and immediately a stir goes through the assemblage. One hears the whispered word going from lip to lip, "It's Dr. Conkle." If he is young and single, the girls are immediately agog, eyeing him speculatively. Let a dentist, an architect, a lawyer, a stock-broker, an engineer come in, and the ensuing twitter and ado is substantially the same. But let a school teacher make his entry and what happens? The commotion that follows is about equal to that created by the maid's announcing to the hostess that the

vegetable man is at the door and wants to know whether she'd like some nice fresh spinach. If any whispered comment at all is made, it usually takes the form, "Oh, it's only a teacher." (Editorial Slant, 1943, p. 3)

This situation could only be rectified, the editorial went on, "by a generous raising of teachers' salaries which will also raise the prestige of the profession" (p. 3).

It is also worth noting the occasional evidence that illustrates that male teachers policed each other to ensure the public performance of a traditional masculinity. For example, one male teacher observed,

Years ago, the men who became teachers were really men. But the last few years have brought us nothing but effeminate types. The pupils are better off with a sensible woman than with a man like that. The ones this Board hired last year should have joined the FWTAO. (Ellis, 1971, p. 37)

In this homophobic comment we see an explicit rejection of men who did not fit the hegemonic masculine norm, who were seen as "not really men" and as too much like female teachers. It gives us pause to consider what kind of men are imagined as suitable by those who seek more men in teaching.

#### *Male Teachers, Boys, and Fear of the Feminine*

In addition to the assumption that increased numbers of men would help make teaching a real profession, the desire for more male teachers was shaped by concerns about the boys. Male teachers, it was argued, were needed to build manly character in boys and to administer discipline and control "bad boys." The presence of male teachers would also address increasing fears about the effect of feminized schools on boys. Here the suggestion was in part that boys were being disadvantaged through excessive exposure to female teachers in schools. It was believed that male teachers would balance and enhance the school environment for boys and counter any ill effects imposed by female teachers.

Questions about the negative influence of female teachers on the education of boys have been raised consistently across the decades (Moss, 2001; Sommers, 2000). It was argued that women lacked the necessary worldly experience to teach boys what they needed to know to enter successfully into the broader world. For example, at the 1901 convention of the Ontario Educational Association one speaker asked,

Can women prepare our boys for the social, political or moral duties which develop upon them in the world? How can they, when they themselves form no part of it, know practically nothing of it, and in the nature of things never will know much about it? Boys must be taught by men who have wide experience in public matters. (Silcox, quoted in Moss, p. 99)

The speaker went on to denigrate the female teacher, while promoting the need for more strong men, men of character, in teaching: "This is a realm entirely beyond the female teacher ... a strong moral man will have twice the influence on the average boy" (Moss, p. 99). Female teachers were thought to lack the inborn qualities that could be counted on to ensure the kind of discipline and academic rigor necessary in schooling boys for academic and personal success. Despite efforts by some male educational leaders to counter this claim, female

teachers were often characterized as less efficient and less serious about the education of boys than their male counterparts.

The persistent patriarchal murmur that claimed that boys were in need of masculine teachers was reflected across time. In 1908 one commentator stated bluntly, "The lack of male teachers in Quebec is felt there, as in other provinces, to be a serious obstacle in the education of boys over twelve years of age" (Educational Reports, 1908, p. 291). An Ontario school trustee in 1912 commented, "If men cannot be got to teach our boys and hence leave their training to girls I fear it will tend towards effeminacy and eventually breed a generation more fit to be apparelled in petticoats than pants" (Abbott, 1991, p. 52). And in 1939 the editor of the *Educational Courier* extolled the courage of a Chicago woman who vehemently criticized female dominance in the schools for "turning our boys into 'sissies, bullies or weak-kneed husbands'!" and for "transforming baby sister into a 'man-hating, over-aggressive woman.'" Her argument that boys needed to come in close contact "with typical he-men" or otherwise "they tend to feel insecure in their role of men-to-be" was fully supported by the editor (Too Much "Sissy Government," 1939, p. 39). Clearly fears about challenges to the traditional form of masculinity (and coincidentally, femininity) and to male dominance were driving calls from some men and women for more men in teaching. These fears persist both as a subtext and explicitly in current debates (Beausay, 1994; Gurian, 1998; Pollack, 1998; Sommers, 2000).

Although many schoolmen had recognized that women could manage classrooms in a more than satisfactory manner, arguments about the need for "real men" in the classroom were closely linked to concerns about school discipline. In 1904, for example, R.A Pyne, Ontario's Minister of Education, claimed that female teachers were less competent than men in these matters: "It is unreasonable to think that for large boys a woman is as competent as a man.... If proper discipline is to be exercised, that force of character which a well trained male teacher should possess is essential" (Gelman, 1990, p. 126). Like the simplistic arguments being offered today, this used the *male as disciplinarian* discourse not only to denigrate female teachers, but to deny their management and pedagogical skills in the classroom (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004). Although in some cases the call for more male teachers was tied to a desire for "proper" discipline, it was also seen as a way to control the "bad boy." A "bad boy" was

the one who has made a reputation for himself in the school and the community who causes his teacher the most anxiety and makes the most demands upon his patience and time the leader in all mischief and the one that the good boys are warned against by their fond mothers. (Tomlinson, 1917, p. 144)

To manage this underachieving bad boy a male teacher was needed, one who could be relied on "to keep the boy on the right path to manly character" (p. 144). One task of the male teacher, then, was to replace a rougher form of masculinity with a safer, bourgeois manliness.

Male teachers also were thought essential for boys in order to fill in for absentee fathers. As Rogers (1953) explained,

Men teachers are needed especially since male influence on children is inadequate at home as well as at school. Some fathers are divorced or absent for long periods in the service; others work long hours and have little time for their children ... boys need in their immediate environment an adequate prototype of the well-adjusted male adult with whom to identify and to afford suitable guidance. (p. 28)

Here the male teacher was thought vital if boys neglected by fathers, coming from single mother-led families, or endangered by what Lupton and Barclay (1997) recently termed the "hot-house of the mother dominated family" (p. 40) were to acquire an appropriate masculinity. Yet it would be a mistake to suggest that the concern about the lack of male teachers in our schools was only centered on the boys. Girls, it was argued, also needed to have male teachers "to assist them in their adjustment to a heterosexual world" (Rogers, 1953, p. 28). Drawing as it does from a hetero-normative discourse, this passage highlights how the call for more male teachers was often less about boys' learning and more about the maintenance of existing gender norms.

The patriarchal murmur for more male teachers was persistent. In the 1960s the influential family sociologist Elkin (1960) promoted the view that male teachers were essential in the lives of boys to serve as manly "father-figures" when boys' own fathers were rendered ineffective by an overly feminized society. In a similar vein, sociologist Sexton (1969) claimed that "the quantities of females and the scarcity of 'male' men make the school inhospitable to masculinity" (p. 191). According to Sexton, the feminized school environment that denied boys' natural way of being was turning boys into sissies. As she put it, "Schools make sissies out of many boys and feminize many more by insisting that they act like girls" (p. 55). In order to counter the nefarious effects that women were assumed to have on boys, she called for more male teachers: the right kind of male teacher. "Should we have more men teachers in the schools? The best answer is probably yes, if the men we hire are the right kind of men. If they are not they may be worse than women" (p. 189). The right kind of male teacher for Sexton was the virile, rugged, manly man, one who could remasculinize boys by providing a hegemonic model of masculinity. In this she was explicit: "The most likely recruit for elementary school teaching may be the real man's man" such as rugged ex-football players, tough men (p. 195). Perhaps this is the kind of male teacher that Katz (1948) had in mind when he promoted the view that schools should be staffed with many more teachers who "had the qualifications of Boy Scout leaders" (p. 7).

#### *Gender, Teachers, and Disadvantaged Boys*

Throughout the 20th century, both the academic literature and various reports on education noted that boys underachieved in the classroom compared with girls, thus demonstrating that this issue too has a longer history than is usually acknowledged. Articles in prominent academic and professional journals such as *Elementary English*, *Elementary School Journal*, *Educational Review*, *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *Journal of Education*, and *Educational Courier* expressed concern over boys' underachievement in schools, particularly in reading achievement relative to girls. Keyser's (1952) review of research in reading in elementary school reported that it was generally accepted that "girls are superior to boys in reading achievement in elementary school" (p. 70). Carroll

(1948) established that there were significant differences in favor of girls in terms of reading achievement. Anderson (1948) revealed that “at every age level a larger percentage of girls than of boys liked to read” (p. 259). Similarly, Ilg and Ames (1950) investigated developmental trends in reading behavior among elementary schoolchildren and concluded, “girls as a group appear to be advanced over boys as a group at every stage of the reading gradient, not only in regard to speed of reading but also as to total reading score on reading tests” (pp. 309-310). In commenting on the results of the Dominion Group Reading Readiness Test, Savage (1959) noted that the scores “are higher for girls than they are for boys” and that these results accorded “with the findings of other research that girls tend to have greater facility than do boys in learning the language in the first years of school” (p. 69). A 1962 study looked at age-grade distributions for Ontario students in grades 1, 6, 8, 12, and 13 from 1936 to 1961 and concluded that one characteristic that did not seem to have changed over the years was the “apparent academic superiority of girls” (Lyle & Ellis, 1962, p. 46). The Hall-Dennis Report *Living and Learning* noted, “Girls in the early years are far more successful in our present graded system than boys—in fact, one or two years ahead of boys at the same age” (Ontario Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education, 1968, p. 55). Explanations for this underachievement of boys in schools were linked to the notion that schools were overly feminized and hence more men in teaching would solve the problem.

Furthermore, following World War II, increased urbanization, prolonged schooling, and women’s continued movement into public life enhanced fears about the social feminization of men and boys. This produced a moral panic about boys and schooling not unlike the current one (Epstein, Elwood, Hey, & Maw, 1998). Boys were positioned as victims of an increasingly feminized society and were believed to be in need of protection from an aggressive and dominating female horde. Consider the following excerpt from a *Maclean’s* (Bannerman, 1948) article in which one cultural critic claimed that female domination of males began at birth and continued through elementary school. “The henpecking process starts in the school where, especially in the lower grades, male teachers are out numbered at least four to one” (p. 8). He then went on to offer a lament for the typical Canadian boy: “Thus little Jack Canuck takes orders from women both inside and outside the home and it naturally makes a terrific impression on his infant mind” (p. 8).

Academics expressed similar sentiments and accused female teachers of failing to cater to boys’ “natural ways of being,” that is, by refusing to tolerate masculine aggressiveness and disruptive behavior, women created a feminized school culture, a condition that led, it was argued, to boys’ being unfairly disadvantaged in classrooms and unjustly receiving more punishment than girls. Two educational psychologists, Meyer and Thompson (1956), concluded that boys’ natural aggressive masculine behavior resulted in “male pupils receiving a larger number of dominative or punitive, contacts than girls from their teacher” (p. 387) who, they pointed out, was typically a woman. Here the logic rested on a biological essentialist view of an aggressive, active masculinity that was constructed as naturally opposed to the softer, gentler, more passive female nature. As Meyer and Thompson explained, “the social

mores of the typical female teacher, at least with respect to aggressive, assertive behavior, are in sharp contrast to the behavioral tendencies of the typical male youngsters" (p. 392). Yet in order to explain fully why female teachers punished boys far more often than girls, Meyer and Thompson abandoned their earlier description of women as soft, gentle, and passive to attribute to female teachers a high degree of excessive "counter-aggression" toward boys (p. 386). In short, the researchers concluded that the more boys acted out in "naturally" aggressive ways in the classroom, the more aggressive, hostile, and predatory the female teachers would be toward them.

Women teachers who asked students to work quietly also were scolded for trying to force boys to go against their masculine nature. It was assumed that a fundamental boyishness involved robust, aggressive, active, and sometimes obnoxious behavior. It was this boyish behavior, many thought, that was in conflict with the ethos of a feminized institution and caused boys a great deal of emotional, mental, and physical harm. It is not a great leap in logic to see, then, that schools in general and female teachers in particular were constructed as ill equipped to handle boyhood's natural, active, masculine qualities. Consider the following extract:

Trying to make them [boys] quiet, still, polite, orderly, as adults ... is the wrong line to take and is what causes the difficulty with the boys. Boys having the masculine nature will master their environment, [and] rebel against pressure to become inactive and quiescent. (Patri, 1945, p. 9)

Certainly a major implication of this discourse was that it made room for the claim that schools were at fault for failing to accommodate boys' natural ways of being.

Echoing a similar cast of mind were various studies that claimed that due to their overly feminized staff and curricula, schools were having deleterious effects on boys. For example, a report published by the Canadian Research Committee on Practical Education (1950) reasoned that overly feminized schools and staffs were a contributing factor to high rates of male dropout. The report suggested that boys were being victimized by an education system that met the needs of girls at the expense of boys and noted that "possibly the curricula and staff are more suited to girls than boys" (*Why Boys Leave School*, 1950, p. 6). Eerily, this sentiment anticipates the culture of misogynist blame that is shaping much of the current male teacher debate here in Canada and elsewhere (Mills et al., 2004). Moreover, the allegation that school staffs by virtue of being predominantly female favored girls rested on the assumption of innate gender differences. By sharing a biology, female teachers were thought to be better able to teach girls than boys, whereas male teachers by the same logic were better suited to train, teach, and raise boys. This understanding was captured by one prominent professor of education Scarfe (1954), who argued that not only did girls and boys "have very different interests, gifts and needs," but that "boys often react best to a man's way of teaching and girls to a woman's way of teaching. They approach their studies in different ways" (pp. 7-8). Worried perhaps that his comments might seem more like empty rhetoric or were based loosely on anecdotal evidence rather than a substantial truth, he

added, "these statements are not guesswork but simply the records of scientific facts" (p. 8).

A feminized curriculum and pedagogy, an overabundance of female teachers, and female-dominated school environments were all blamed for boys' apparent lack of academic success in schools. This led one young woman just beginning her career to lament,

The experts tell me that boys are handicapped by our school system because they cannot identify with women teachers and feel that school is for girls. I plan to obtain more academic education (in spite of financial problems). I try to be a well-prepared and interesting teacher (at the expense of my out-of-school life which other experts say is vital to good teaching). I try to be patient and understanding with pupils who have no visible desire to learn. I am polite and friendly with older staff members who are often shirkers with lots of free unsolicited advice. I listen to the inspector when he shows up once a year, but I can't help being a woman. I was born that way. ("A First-Year Teacher," 1966, p. 57)

This beginning teacher was pointing out that although she was doing everything expected of good teachers, she would be forever regarded as flawed because of her sex. Men, on the other hand, were desired precisely because of their sex, and professional considerations faded in comparison.

#### Conclusion

The presence of women in the teaching profession, made possible because gender discrimination forced them to work for less in return for a measure of personal independence, was justified with biological and essentialist arguments. Teaching was natural work for women whose biological destiny was seen as childrearing. Many of the arguments about the need for men in teaching fall into the same trap. It is assumed that the mere presence of biological men in classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards will solve the boy problem. It is just "natural" that men would be good role models for boys and have the power to fill in for absent fathers. Rarely does anyone wonder what more men in teaching might mean for girls, and rarely does anyone unpack the anti-woman subtext in all the criticisms about feminized schools. What in fact are the objections to efforts to make boys kinder, gentler, more equitable and thoughtful people? A more humane and human education is in effect what is being criticized when the term *feminized schools* is used as a descriptor or an epithet. And finally, in what sense can it even be said that schools are feminized when women teachers

stand hip-deep in cultures saturated with phallogocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers, and in a discipline which, despite its historical terrain as "women's work" ... remains [in] the theoretical and administrative custody of men. (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 2)

This emphasis on the location of authority and power in education is a further reminder that the call for more men in teaching has a history and politics full of meaning with respect to the structures of gender relations in teaching. Wells (1891), a former secondary school principal and for many years Editor of the *Educational Journal*, demonstrated considerable awareness of this reality when

he commented on the furor that was aroused because a school trustee in Toronto made a motion to allow women to serve as school principals. Decrying the resumption of attacks on female teachers, “the reappearance in fresh garb, of many familiar arguments and assertions about the inability of women to control unruly boys, etc.,” and efforts to blame women teachers “for the deterioration of the boy of the day [and] his lack of ‘moral manliness,’” Wells argued that the “the whole question” of teaching was “one of character and ability, not of sex.” The solution to the debate about the man and woman question in teaching was this: “Let the most competent teachers be appointed to all positions, whether men or women” (p. 508).

In the 19th century Wells (1891) recognized that a good education was the result of meaningful content, carefully selected and supported by the thoughtful pedagogy of a socially responsible and ethical teacher who might be male or could be female. Unfortunately, in the 21st century some people still claim that female teachers are detrimental to boys’ learning and resort to unsubstantiated arguments about the superiority of males in the classroom. In these positions history repeats itself—again.

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