Please cite the Published Version

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Overcoming the odds: exploring barriers and motivations for male trainee primary teachers.

Abstract

The study investigated male primary school trainee teachers' barriers and motivations for their profession. Six male trainee primary school teachers were interviewed and data were analysed thematically. Three themes arose relating to potential barriers; physical contact; experiencing negative outsider perceptions; and working within a female orientated environment. Three themes demonstrated that barriers could be overcome if participants perceived the profession as a constructive career; had positive experiences of working in a supportive environment; and were seen as effective role models. Primary teacher training courses should not only aim to reduce barriers but also highlight the positive aspects that enhance motivation.

Introduction

Background

Primary school teachers within the UK work with children aged four to eleven in either state run or independent schools. The main role involves teaching children core skills in literacy and numeracy as well as other subjects, and promoting social and emotional development (Department for Education, 2013). According to government statistics within the UK, the percentage of male primary school teachers in the academic school year of 2008/2009 was only 15% (Department for Education, 2012), whilst this figure has risen to 21% in the academic year 2014/2015, there remains a high gender imbalance within the profession (Department for Education, 2014). Alarming statistics have also revealed that 27.2% of primary schools in England do not have a qualified male teacher within their body of staff (BBC Education, 2011). This gender imbalance is not unique to the UK, but is reflected in other countries across the globe (Riddell et al. 2005). For example in 2013, a number of countries, such as Bulgaria, Italy and the Ukraine, reported that 90-99% of their body of staff were females (The World Bank, 2013).

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of having male teachers within primary schools (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013; Riddell et al. 2005). McGrath & Sinclair (2013) interviewed parents and teachers about their perceptions of having male primary school teachers within primary school. Participants anticipated that male teachers within primary schools would enable the children to see that men could adopt a nurturing occupation and therefore be effective role models and father figures to students. Furthermore, participants felt male teachers might also be particularly important for boys in helping to improve their social skills and enable them to feel

more comfortable to talk about sensitive subjects. There is also evidence to suggest that male teachers within the primary school classroom may be particularly beneficial in helping improve boys under achievement within schools and aid in the teaching of vocational skills that may be of particular interest to them (Riddell et al. 2005). However, Carrington and Skelton (2003) raise concerns about matching pupils and teachers based on same gender, arguing that it has little impact on achievement, although might have a more positive influence on other aspects of the school experience.

The presence of male teachers within the primary classroom appears to have at least some positive effects on the school population; nonetheless there remain relatively few working in these positions. Further investigation is therefore warranted to establish what the barriers are that prevent males from entering this profession, and what the motivators are that successful males in the profession adopt to overcome the challenges they face.

Motivations and barriers faced by male trainee primary school teachers

A number of barriers and motivators experienced by male trainee primary school teachers have already been identified in the previous literature (e.g. Cushman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Stroud, Smith, Ealy, & Hurst, 2000). Research has shown that men who are making the decision to train as teachers within the primary sector are likely to gain support from their parents and close family; nonetheless they often need to weigh this up in the light of lack of understanding from peers who may criticise them for choosing an *easy* career option (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). This lack of support experienced in the lives of male trainee teachers might link with the concept of 'identity bruising' highlighted by Foster and Newman

(2005). These researchers argue that male trainee teachers have often received knockbacks from peers and colleagues, (as well as occasionally parents and partners) about their decisions to partake in this career. Concerns are raised to them about primary teaching being a low status profession. For example Cushman (2005) demonstrated that male trainee teachers had more demanding and time consuming jobs than their peers, however, they were left with the least amount of money. Furthermore, in terms of social status some males expressed that when teaching younger children, people perceive them as having lower intelligence than a teacher teaching older children. Carrington (2002) also suggests that primary teaching is often seen as an unattractive career choice for males due to the low pay and low status they receive and the assumption that to be successful they need to adopt a more nurturing role.

A further concern male trainee primary school teachers face is that they are very aware of being in the minority and working within a more feminine environment (Cushman, 2005). Male trainee teachers have commented that even before they start a job they have to negotiate a training course that is often more suited for their female colleagues and their learning styles (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003). The majority of the work on training courses focuses upon communication, planning and organisation skills, and learning that is often not classroom or practical based. Moreover, being in the minority could have some disadvantages as Cushman, (2005) demonstrated in a study with male trainee teachers that some participants had reported that their female colleagues often joked about them getting a job based only on their gender and not their ability as a teacher. Although this could have been a potential barrier to a successful career Warwick, Warwick and Hopper, (2012) demonstrated that despite being in the minority on teacher training courses, males were often positive about

their experiences and had not felt any disadvantage because of their gender. Furthermore, Lahelma, (2000) showed that female teachers are supportive of their male colleagues emphasising how they can improve the atmosphere in staff rooms. Working within a minority environment might actually be of benefit to some males and they could be more likely to assume a leadership role, be given differential treatment and be seen as having a stronger preference for their career than their female colleagues (Simpson, 2004).

Male teachers often feel under more scrutiny than their female colleagues in terms of physical interactions with children and have had their motives for pursuing the career questioned (Cushman, 2005). Carrington and Skelton (2003) found in interviews with male and female trainee teachers that many felt male teachers in particular were subject to more hostility and suspicion in their role. Hansen and Mulholland (2005) have reported that male teachers did not believe that they could have the same amount of physical interaction with the children as their female counterparts, for example hugging or holding hands, as more questions would be asked about their behaviour. An interesting point to emerge was that participants did feel that 'limitations on the expression and ways of demonstrating care toward their students would compromise their teaching' (pp. 126), yet some appeared more willing to sacrifice their quality of teaching in order to withhold their reputation and keep their job secure. Male teachers worked hard to come up with ways around the contact barriers, such as learning to listen to students' problems, becoming their safe haven, and to communicating effectively so that physical interaction was no longer required (Hansen & Mulholland 2005).

These concerns may help to construct barriers for future potential male trainee teachers and ultimately prevent them from pursuing this career option. Nonetheless,

male trainee teachers who are able to overcome these barriers are demonstrating remarkable resilience. They are able to maintain motivation for the profession despite experiencing risk. There are a number of motivators that can support successful career progression. Stroud et al. (2000) has demonstrated that intrinsic reasons were important in maintaining motivation for male trainee teachers, as men who partake in a career in primary education have a strong sense of purpose and commitment to what teaching requires from them. Many males entering teaching tend to have already had a career prior to the course and decided that route was not well suited to them; they substitute financial gain for the personal satisfaction they wish to achieve whilst being a primary school teacher.

Career progression could be another influencing factor in a man's choice to become a primary school teacher. Although statistics reveal that males are in the minority in the primary sector, they are however, more likely to become head teachers than their females colleagues. In 2014 there were 30,500 male and 178,000 female teachers; from the male cohort 15% were head teachers compared with only 7% for females. This shows the imbalance in terms of positions of power. Males, although more unlikely to join the profession, once they do are more likely to advance to a head teacher role (The Future Leaders Trust, 2016). This has been further acknowledged by Carrington and Skelton (2003) who wrote that one in four male teachers entering the profession will become a head teacher compared with only one in thirteen female teachers.

Resilience as a theoretical framework

The current study uses resilience theory as its theoretical frame. Although there is no universally accepted definition of resilience, for the purpose of the present

study resilience will be defined as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, p. 543). Resilience research is therefore built upon two fundamental judgements (Masten & Powell, 2003). Firstly, that the individual is demonstrating some kind of competence. For example in relation to male trainee teachers this could be conceptualised as engagement and progression on their course. Secondly, the individual has experienced, or is currently experiencing, significant risk. For example exposure to negative perceptions from outsiders, which has been highlighted in the previous literature (Cushman, 2005)

A resilience framework offers a compelling approach to understanding human behaviour, demonstrating how despite being within a risk situation humans are able to overcome the challenges and ultimately experience positive outcomes. Resilience research asks the question why humans who are experiencing an adverse situation in their backgrounds are able to achieve positive outcomes (Masten, 2001). They have not avoided the risk but have responded to it in a positive way and overcome the odds (Rutter, 1999). Resilience research is particularly appealing as it adopts a positive focus, identifying the strengths of individuals or relationships or communities that promote positive development (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, Evans & Pinnock, 2007).

This theory is a useful organising idea by which to frame the numerous potential barriers and motivations that are faced by male primary school teacher trainees. Acknowledging the process of how the barriers or risks they face (which may promote drop out from the training course) are overcome with the protective factors or motivators (which can moderate the barriers and promote progression on

the course) is key to resilience research. The theory is a prominent model within the education and psychological literature and has been used to explain many types of behaviours including behaviour difficulties in children (Author, 2016) and academic outcomes (Cutuli et al., 2013). Hence, there is a clear precedent set for its use here. The broad aim of the present study is to understand qualitatively how this process occurs – identifying the motivators that can overcome the barriers faced by the participants. In adopting a qualitative approach actual patterns of resilience functioning can be examined looking at each individuals unique barriers and motivators in detail.

Justification for the present study

The focus for the current research was to explore further the motivations that male trainee primary school teachers have to pursue a career as a primary school teacher and how they overcome the barriers they face in the process. A considerable amount of the previous literature has focused solely on the negative experiences males have to endure (e.g. Cushman, 2005), whereas the present study adds to the literature base by adopting a more positive approach, exploring key motivations and particularly how male trainee teachers overcome the negative barriers they face. This research is therefore being framed within resilience theory and to our knowledge is the first study of its kind to utilise this psychological theory to account for the behaviour of this group of people.

A great deal of the relevant research in this field has focused on qualified teachers rather than those beginning the initial teacher training. A focus on this group of people is warranted, as males are more likely to drop out of teacher training courses compared with their female counterparts (Moyles & Cavendish, 2001,

Skelton, 2009). Furthermore, the majority of this research has been conducted outside of the UK, e.g. in Australia (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003) and the USA (Stroud et al. 2000). As some of this research has shown cross-cultural differences (Cushman, 2010), further study specific to the UK context is therefore required to gain a further idea of the experiences faced by male trainee primary students.

The finding from the present study will not only help gain a greater appreciation of why men might steer away from considering primary teaching as a viable profession, and why there are drop-outs in training courses (Szwed, 2010), but also further our understanding of the motivations students currently possess for studying the course. This will help to see how potential barriers can be overcome, therefore facilitating the process of recruiting more males on to training courses and ultimately encouraging more males to maintain within the profession. This is important so that ultimately the teaching profession will be a better reflection of society and more inclusive – allowing all teachers to thrive in a career that wants the best for the children they teach (Skelton, 2009)

The research question driving this study therefore is *how do male primary school teacher trainees overcome barriers they face in progressing within the profession?*

Methodology

Design

The aim of the present study was to discover the experiences of male trainee primary school teachers. Exploring what motivates them for the profession, the barriers they face and how they have overcome these issues. The present study

adopted a qualitative design with semi-structure interviews for data collection. The main goal of using this approach was to 'capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words' (Marshall & Rossman, 2011 pp.93). The study was carried out in England and as such highlights the unique perspective of this region on the position of male trainee teachers.

Participants

Six male students studying on a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course for primary education at a University in Northern England were recruited through purposive sampling. Participants were recruited from PGCE courses, as this is the principle means by which qualified teacher status is gained within the UK. Participants were aged 24-27, came from various educational backgrounds, and had diverse work experience prior to undertaking the course. The researchers, from the Psychology department, asked the course leader to send an invitation email to all males studying on the Primary PGCE through their university email address. Participants then volunteered for the study by contacting the researchers and agreeing to be interviewed for the purposes of the research.

Data Collection

Data were collected using six semi-structured interviews (one per participant), these allow participants to have freedom when expressing their thoughts and feelings surrounding the areas of interest (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004). The semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researchers and included questions that enabled students to discuss their experience as a male primary PGCE

student. Questions focused upon the potential barriers and challenges that male PGCE students potentially face in partaking in a primary teaching career, how they had overcome these barriers and what their current motivations to study the course were. Example questions included '*What challenges do you believe you have to face when choosing a career in primary education?*' and '*How do you overcome these challenges?*' Topics and questions were derived from an extensive literature review within the area and discussions within the research team. All the interviews were conducted in Spring 2015 and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

Interviews were initially digitally recorded then transcribed verbatim by the researchers. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This method allowed the researchers to identify, analyse and report themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six-step process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) was implemented within this study to ensure accuracy and reliability. This method begins with familiarisation with the data, before initial codes are generated. The researcher then searches for themes, which are then reviewed before, they are defined and named. Finally, the report is produced. The researchers followed this approach – with discussions about key themes identified and justification for their inclusion within the report undertaken. This ensured the trustworthiness of the data and accuracy and consistency in the results produced.

Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the University ethics committee and written informed consent was gained from participants before the study commenced. Participants responded to an invitation email sent to all male students on the PGCE primary course. Students contacted the researcher and agreed to an in-depth interview about barriers and motivations for pursuing their chosen career. Interviews took place on the University campus in a familiar environment for the students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and key themes that emerged were recoded. Pseudonyms were used to protect identify of participants involved in the study.

Analysis and Discussion

A thematic analysis was conducted on the data, which revealed six main themes. Three related to potential barriers participants faced, these were issues with physical contact, experiencing negative outsider perceptions, and the challenges of working within a female orientated environment. Three themes also emerged as motivators for the participants that enabled them to overcome the barriers they faced and experience resilience, these were perceiving the profession as a positive career choice, experiencing a supportive working environment, and being seen as positive role model.

Barriers for males partaking a career in primary education

Physical Contact

The most significant barrier male trainee teachers had to overcome in order to maintain within the profession concerned issues with physical contact with children. All the participants acknowledged that gender of the teacher played a role in whether

physical contact with the children was deemed socially acceptable. Brad stated '*I think there might be a sort of general acceptance that that kind of physical contact between a female and a child is a little bit more acceptable than it is with a male*' (169-171). Dan also acknowledged that; '*you know men are more scrutinised in that sort of thing [physical contact], but it's, you know really bad! It's like, erm yeah being sort of made to feel like you're bad even though you're just sort of getting on with your job*'. (195-198). The issue of increased levels of scrutiny for males when interacting physically with children has been clearly highlighted in previous literature that has demonstrated male trainee teachers thought they were under more scrutiny than their females colleagues when interacting with young children (Hansen & Mulholland, 2003) and had their motives for pursuing the career questioned (Cushman, 2005; Carrington & Skelton, 2003). This is a particularly salient barrier, which males have to overcome if they are to maintain within the teaching profession and demonstrate resilience.

Some participants maintained that physical contact could be acceptable in certain circumstances and that patting a child on the back or giving them a hug was not an important issue, for example, '*if they* [the children] *want to come up and hug you, you don't push them away, you just let them do it*' (James, 229-230). Although the age of the child made a difference to the acceptance male teachers received by others. One participant stated that *'once you get up into the older ages, that when (p) then the reaction, I think just becomes very different with sort of physical interaction. I mean I found that I didn't tend to interact physically very much. I didn't think it was necessary' (Tom 155-158)*. Other participants, felt particularly uncomfortable with the idea of physical contact for example '*I'm not sure. I wouldn't be comfortable with that* [physical contact].' (Brad, 165). Participants expressed these ideas as they

acknowledged the importance of being above reproach and regarded safety precaution for themselves as a strong motivator and protective factor that was able to maintain their resilience for working within this profession. For example '*when you talk about safeguarding you're not only talking about keeping the children safeguarded, you've got to safeguard yourself.*' (Brad, 184-186). Participants here recognised that their behaviour impacts not only on their quality of teaching but also has an influence on their reputation and ultimately job security (Hansen & Mulholland, 2003).

Negative Outsider Perceptions

A second important barrier to becoming a successful primary school teacher that male trainees have to overcome is the negative perceptions from various 'outsiders' in particular the media and from other qualified teachers. The majority of the participants expressed being very aware of the negative perceptions, highlighted by the media, of male primary schools teachers. One participant expressed feeling very worried about the stereotypes placed on male teachers: '*yeah I guess it's like the media sort of, and the way they portray these sorts of things. It makes you worry, A lot, so erm yeah you have to be really careful.*' (Dan, 198-201). Two participants mentioned watching films based around male primary school teachers being wrongfully accused of inappropriate behaviour with young female students. They expressed feeling worried about the prospect of having to deal with a false allegation as a male trainee teacher. '*So if there was ever an incident erm (p) where, where you know something like that happened… that would ruin your confidence and er what you want to do in becoming a teacher straight away.*' (Dan, 229-235). Furthermore, Matt stated*: 'it is a risk that you're aware of because at the end of the day if there are*

any allegations like that that ever come up, if they're not true (p) it doesn't matter cos mud sticks, you know what I mean?' (244-247).

This core barrier has already been mentioned in previous literature as male teachers are often become concerned that outsiders question their motives for wanting to work within the teaching profession and see them as potential child abusers, (Thornton, 1999). This theme was evident in all the participants' interviews and they acknowledged it was a significant barrier to overcome if they wanted a professional career in teaching. This is a significant issue that despite all participants acknowledging this risk, they still maintained motivation for the profession and in doing so displaying resilience in a challenging environment.

Male trainee teachers also acknowledge experiencing negative views from qualified teachers, particularly females. One viewpoint made by qualified teachers was that male teachers are assumed to progress through the managerial chain at a faster rate than females, and male teachers are more likely to get primary teaching jobs solely because of their gender, as schools need more male teachers. This idea was mentioned by Brad who stated: *'I've actually noticed it (p) while I've been training that I think a lot of females, well not just females but a lot of people assume that you're going to progress really quickly through the chain (p) just because we're male.' (69-72).* This idea has been backed up within the literature as Cushman (2005) found that female colleagues would often joke that some males only got the job because of their gender, not because of their skill or ability to teach. Nonetheless, the evidence does suggest that this is not just a stereotypical view and that male teachers are more likely to become head teachers than their female colleagues (Carrington and Skelton, 2003).

A further negative perception that male trainee teachers have to overcome is experiencing sexism in form of negative stereotypes James mentioned that, '*as a bloke you do get the tag of being a little bit lazier than the rest of them, erm, it's a bit, it's a bit sexist.*' (110-111). This idea has been backed up in previous literature where Mulholland and Hansen (2003) found that female teachers branded male teachers as lazy solely because of their gender.

Female Orientated Environment

A third challenge faced by male trainee primary teacher is working within a female orientated environment. Many of the participants stated that working within primary schools could at times be challenging and isolating as it was harder to work with so many females. Jake mentioned: '*I guess in some ways it is kind of hard to work in a job where there are so many women.*' (41-42). Brad recognised a potential barrier when placed in a sector, which was predominantly female (Harris and Barnes, 2009): '*it could make you feel quite isolated I think (p) yeah. It, you know, if the girls all kind of group together and you were, you know, on your own (p) you could feel a little left out*' (116-119*).* This idea was further expressed in terms of integrating in the staffroom; '*I think it's maybe harder to integrate a little bit into the staff room and stuff cos you don't really want to talk about the things (pause) the things that they're talking about, as bad as that sounds' (Jake, 48-51).* The topics of conversations some participants found in the staffroom were not to their liking either, this made it even harder for them to interact with other teachers in that environment, furthermore how other teachers talked felt more isolating to male trainees as Matt mentioned that '*a bit of bitching going on or something like that...That can divide a staffroom'* (95-97). These issues can be supported in the previous literature as Cushman (2005) found that

the highly female environment had an adverse effect on males' decision to become primary school teachers.

Participants however, demonstrated that having an outgoing personality and being comfortable around women could help to overcome this barrier. Although not explicitly mentioned by the participant's issues mentioned by Simpson (2004) who suggested that being a minority could lead to differential treatment and more leadership roles, could be issues here. These potential protective factors are therefore important in helping to overcome risks experienced and demonstrate resilience in this context. For example one participant mentioned that '*I can work well with women and I always have been able to, so I had no problems with that. Erm (p) I just kind of, you know there was a big table in the middle of the staffroom and I just sort of came in and plonked my food next to them all and started chatting!*' (Brad, 323-327)

Motivations for males partaking a career in primary education

Positive Career Choice

Throughout the interviews the motivating theme of positive career choice became apparent. All participants expressed how they thought primary school teaching was a good career, which they both enjoyed and gained a sense of achievement from, ' *it is the most rewarding thing that I have ever done. Like, I feel so good about myself after I've taught a successful lesson.*' (James, 38-40). A similar idea has been reflected in the previous literature as Stroud et al. (2000) found that the prospects of making a difference to a child's life, and primary school teaching being considered as a good career choice, were highly motivating factors for males choosing primary education as a career. Although not explicitly mentioned by the participants within the interviews, career development and could be seen as a particularly

important motivator and that the prospect of becoming a head teacher is more likely for male teachers than their female colleagues (Carrington and Skelton 2003). Despite the risks of maintaining in the profession as already mentioned by the participants, a positive career choice was a strong motivator or protective factor that can moderate any barrier faced and facilitate resilience.

Job security was a further positive factor that participants mentioned around primary school teaching. Matt in particular expressed how he believed it was a very important factor when deciding to choose the career path: '*well teaching is something that I'd always sort of considered and then I suppose job security would be important.*' (40-42). However, he did express that he thought that as a male teacher he would be more likely to get the job because he was aware that schools are in need of male teachers, '*..maybe as a male in a primary school environment you're more likely to get a job, so that was a factor'* (48-49). Nonetheless, the prospect of getting a job simply because of their gender as a motivator was not found to be a generalised view, '*…I would hate it if erm, if I found out that I got the job over someone else, purely because of my gender.*' (Dan, 108-110).

Supportive Environment

A second motivating theme that was found to be important in overcoming the barriers male teachers often faced was being situated within a supportive environment. James mentioned that friends and family were overall very happy with his career choice and were supportive of him. *'they're nothing but supportive… all my friends think it's great, especially being a bloke, I mean a lot of my friends are teachers anyway, but mainly females, but they think it's great'* (James, 64-67). Nonetheless, Jake did express a slightly different response when talking about his

male friends' reaction to him becoming a primary teacher. He found that his career choice was not as accepted by his male rugby friends as they thought it was an easy job. This evidence supports the view given by Mulholland and Hansen (2003) who found that some male teachers were criticised for choosing primary education as a career by their friends as they thought it was an easy occupation. However, Jake explained that once his friends understood the complexity and demand of the role they became more appreciative, but initially this was not the case. '*Yeah, they're fine I guess. I guess some of the lads joke a bit cos I play rugby, so the lads joke a bit like it's just colouring in and stuff, but I think they appreciate how much work actually goes into it and stuff once you show them how hard you work.*' (29-32)

Not only did the acceptance of family and friends make a difference to the males, the acceptance from other professionals did too. Some expressed the feeling of being welcomed and accepted by other teachers and this was a great motivator to them to continue in the profession, '*…when I've been in primary schools they all say you know 'it's brilliant' 'it's good news' 'you'll go on and should do well' so yeah, positives I'd say*!' (Tom, 107-110). Clearly a supportive environment is a strong protective factor that can mitigate against the risk often experienced by male trainee teachers.

Role Model

A further motivating theme that arose from the interviews was that male primary teachers held the traditional view that male teachers are important within schools as they provided an alternative albeit positive form of masculinity (Skelton, 2002). These trainee teachers believed they were being perceived as a role model or father figure to the young children. One of the participants stated that '*If they're*

coming from a deprived area or an area where there are broken families then there are a lot of boys who only have female role models in their life… then they've gone through such a long development phase without any, without any male role models for them.' (Brad, 284-290). This quote was further supported by another participant who mentioned that '*you've got a lot of kids that are coming from maybe one-parent families and might not have father… I dunno male role model sort of thing like, which is what you're trying to do, at the same time you are trying to be a role model*' (Matt, 197-206). Many young children in schools are without a father figure the Office for National Statistics, (2013) found that 1.9 million of families in the UK consist of lone parents with dependent children, 91% of these single parents were found to be female.

It is probable that these children may turn to their male teachers to fulfil that role and McGrath & Sinclair (2013) have reported that males were perceived as role models and father figures for the young students. Nonetheless, this view has been criticised by Bricheno & Thornton (2007) who dismiss claims that male teachers act as role models for boys and help to improve their attainment and behaviour. They found only 2.4% of their sample mentioned teachers as being significant role models in their lives, casting doubt that under achievement and problematic behaviour could be improved by the use of role modelling. Other studies support this claim that gender specific role models have little impact on student attainment and behaviour (Carrington et al. 2008; Francis et al. 2008).

Nonetheless, despite the evidence, the male teachers in this study still held the more traditional view that in some way providing a male role model would be beneficial for the children they taught. Participants spoke more generally about their perceived influence as a role model and did not mention academic outcomes specifically, but alluded to more positive societal concerns in general. Cushman

(2009) interviewed head teachers and found they felt male teachers were not so important for academic but societal concerns where there was often a lack of a positive male adult in their children's lives. This positive outcome of being a male primary teacher is clearly a strong motivating factor, which enables the participants to display resilience in the face the risks they face in starting in this career.

Limitations and ideas for future research

The findings from the present study need to be considered in light of the potential limitations. Firstly, the participants from this study were trainee teachers who had only been on one school placement and therefore had relatively little experience working as a teacher within schools. To extend these findings further interviews could be conducted before teacher training begins and also at the end of the course and once Qualified Teacher Status has been gained to examine more in-depth the dynamic nature of motivators and barriers across time. Secondly, only six participants from a single course provider volunteered for this study. Although this was sufficient for qualitative research and could uncover the participants' personal experiences and opinions around choosing primary teaching as a career, recruiting other participants from different course providers would be insightful. Finally, a more detailed and in-depth interview could have been conducted with the participants. Key issues such as relationships with their peers, colleagues, parents could have been expanded upon to produce richer data and gain more of an insight into this phenomenon. Perhaps adding in other qualitative methods to further research such as diary entries and focus groups would help to expand the barriers and motivators experienced by male trainee teachers.

Implications for Intervention

The aim for the current research was to explore how males who choose to pursue a career in primary education could overcome the barriers they face and maintain motivation for the profession. With the clear gender imbalance within the profession currently, recruiting more males (and also other minority groups) should be of concern to the Department for Education (DfE). It is important for children to see teachers of all backgrounds pursuing a career they are passionate about (Skelton, 2009).

Specifically for male teachers, the current study identified that key motivators were, being perceived as a role model by the children, seeing teaching as a positive career choice and having a supportive environment. These can all help overcome any of the potential barriers they face maintaining in the profession. Where possible these motivations could be further enhanced perhaps by using case studies in recruitment drives from previous trainees.

The male trainee teachers however, within this study identified three key barriers. The first was the barrier of physical contact with young children. In order to reduce this influence incorporating more training about safeguarding to ensure male students are confident with the issues and have the skills needed to teach without worrying about physical contact could be adopted. Teaching listening skills and rapport that do not depend upon physical contact would be beneficial. Secondly, working within a female oriented environment was perceived as a potential barrier. Training course that add quality mentoring for male teachers is particularly important (Mistry & Sood, 2015). Male students have reported enjoying the training course to a greater extent when they were around other males students, as they feel 'safe', comfortable seeking help and more motivated to learn (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003).

It has also been reported that attending 'men's' groups aided feelings of contentment about the course as these groups had made significant enhancements in their professional development (Warwick et al, 2012). The final barrier that arose from the current research was the negative outsider perceptions that males have to overcome when choosing to become a primary school teacher. Attempting to end stereotypical opinions from staff, pupils, parents, and the wider community could aid in this regard. Policy interventions in recruitment campaigns could acknowledge how stereotypes are established and can ultimately be eliminated (Skelton, 2009), as this could be particularly important for recruitment.

Conclusion

To conclude, the current study explored how the barriers faced by male trainee primary teachers could be overcome. Three barriers were highlighted: physical contact, negative outsider perceptions and working within a female orientated environment. Nonetheless, these barriers were able to be overcome by other strong motivating factors, these were understating that teaching is a positive career choice, being within a supportive environment and being perceived as an effective role model. The participants within this study have therefore demonstrated resilience. They have shown that resilience is a common human adaption rather than anything extra ordinary (Masten, 2001)

All the participants within this study identified different degrees of the barriers mentioned, nonetheless all participants recognised that a male pursuing a career in primary teaching was challenging. They were however, able to overcome the risks to their chosen career, and this was possible with the motivations or protective factors that they mentioned were supporting them. The participants have not avoided the risk

but have been able to respond to it within a positive way and ultimately overcome the odds (Rutter, 1999), reflecting the strengths they possess as individuals and the effective support they received around them

In increasing our understanding of the barriers and motivators faced by male trainee primary school teachers, resilience can be promoted for this important group of individuals. What has been found within this study could help inform interventions that need to be both asset focused in promoting competence, and risk focused in reducing barriers. Ultimately promoting males into primary teaching could help to challenge stereotypes and allow for more tolerance and acceptance of different practices of masculinity and femininity to be displayed (Cushman, 2010).

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