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Should We Re-Masculinize the Boys School? A Case Study

Abstract: This study suggests that male students of School Q do not necessarily believe that teachers’ gender is the determining factor in effective teaching and nurturing. They valued discipline and tolerance, time management, getting along with others, and handling conflict as important for their holistic development. They felt that the school developed most of these qualities and skills to a satisfactory level, and a significant number associated discipline, time management, honesty, courage, and handling conflict with their male teachers. The findings have implications for how male teachers relate to their male students and for how educators view holistic development of all students, regardless of gender.

Introduction and background

The context of this research is but one example among many internationally that reflect a dilemma regarding the relevance of teachers’ gender in the context of educational provision.

Though limited to a specific small setting, the initial research issue and consequent findings are undoubtedly mirrored beyond the confines of Trinidad. This is evident in the literature examined in this chapter.

The issue of how to deal with male students has been a burning one for a long time. This is so for students at all levels especially because their levels of achievement have been so much lower than girls’ in many settings. At the same time, academic achievement is but one goal of schooling. The examination of what we do in schools to adequately cater for all students highlights the need for a re-evaluation of the way we view gender. There has been much research in the past two decades that has focused on the issue of educating young males. There seem to be two major stances—one that says that we should focus on ensuring that we provide for male interests and strengths, while building the underplayed needs of young males, while the other, while not opposing this view, forcefully cautions against the essentializing of the male identity and the domination of the male hegemonic identity in the portrayal of the male. Apart from academic publications emanating out of the US, the governments of Australia and the UK have demonstrated due concern for the educational provision for male students and have facilitated research in this area through their own agencies and divisions such as their departments of Education and local universities.

The issue of the suitability of female teachers as teachers of male students is one that falls within this framework of provision for male students. Central to the discussion is whether these students need male role models (Kindler & Thompson, 1999; Smedley, 1998). A range of other controversial matters provide further reason for rational argument and further research to ascertain, for example, whether “men and boys are lost souls who are on the verge of becoming depressed, suicidal and violent offenders” (Pollack, 1999: xxi), or whether boys put on a proverbial male armor to survive in school (Biddulph, 1995), or whether male teachers are the ones who represent discipline as opposed to females. Calls for scholarly evidence to inform recruitment and for teachers’ own voices to inform policy-making have been made by Burn (2001), and Martino and Frank (2006) suggest further research into the nature of