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**Men in Primary Teaching:
A study of a cohort
at Dunedin College of Education**

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Abstract

This study examines factors contributing to decisions of men to withdraw from teacher education or from primary teaching within seven years of graduating and factors contributing to men remaining in the primary teaching service. It focuses on the cohort of 42 male students who embarked on primary teacher education at Dunedin College of Education in 1990. In 2000, a sample of 20 was surveyed with a postal questionnaire asking them to reflect on their experiences at Dunedin College of Education and subsequently in primary schools. Six men of this cohort were interviewed for in-depth information. These six men were representative of: those who had failed to complete their teacher education programme; those who had graduated but decided not to go teaching; those who had given up teaching within the first seven years; 4) those who were still primary teaching in 2000.

The research revealed a range of factors influencing men's decisions to withdraw from teaching or to remain in the primary teaching service. These factors were linked to the men's age at enrolment, and men were classified into three age bands - *school leavers*, *samplers* or *retrainers*. It was found that men within each group shared some factors contributing to their decisions to leave or remain in primary teaching. In general the most common reasons given by men in this sample for failing to complete the teacher education programme was their inability to adjust to the culture of teacher education or to primary schools in the early 1990s. The most common reason for men in this sample deciding not to teach, or to withdraw from the service, was lack of commitment and the confusion they experienced in their roles as male teachers in primary schools. Those men surveyed who were still teaching in 2000, were more likely to be teaching older children and to have clearer ideas about their roles as male primary teachers, and specifically their relationships with boys in their care.

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INTRODUCTION

This study starts from the premise that the primary teaching service in New Zealand should be more representative of both genders. It argues that the value of men teachers lies not in the claim that they make better teachers than women, but that schools need men, so that teaching is not seen as women's work and schooling as a feminine activity. The value of men in primary schools lies in the social and psychological effect they have on children, rather than in academic advancement of their pupils. However, more representation in primary schools may result in increased motivation and application of boys and therefore indirectly it may ameliorate some current academic concerns about boys.

In recent years, attempts to recruit and retain men in the primary teaching service have been disappointing. While teacher education providers target men in recruitment programmes, (television, radio and newspaper advertising 2000-2001) men remain under-represented in primary classrooms. There are three points at which males leave the primary teaching service. Proportionately more men than women fail to complete teacher preparation courses; not all men who graduate from teacher education choose to go teaching; and men appear more likely to drop out of teaching in their first few years in the primary profession. This research focuses on the poor rate of retention of men and probes factors that might impact on men's decisions to leave or remain in the profession at each of these points.

Chapter one begins with a discussion of the current literature as it relates to men entering the teaching profession. Firstly it considers the research relating to teacher education courses and the ability of men to adjust to them. Factors relating to this are the entry characteristics of men selected into teacher education, their subject strengths and preferences and their concerns about teaching.

Secondly it considers research into "preparedness to teach" at the completion of teacher preparation courses. By this time men will have experienced teaching children

and will have some idea whether they are equipped or suited to the classroom and to teaching as a career.

Thirdly, it considers research into aspects specific to primary teaching in New Zealand over the last decade, to ascertain factors which might have impacted on men's decision to remain in or leave teaching.

Since not all researchers are convinced that we need more men in primary teaching, the final section of the literature review addresses research into the value of men in primary schools. It looks at current concerns about boys' academic and social development and focuses on research that suggests that men in primary schools might have some effect on boys' attitudes to school.

The literature review highlights some aspects worthy of further study. Chapter two focuses on the research questions for this study and describes the research design. The study targets a group of men who began their teacher training in 1990 and asks them in 2000 to reflect on their experiences of training and teaching, in order to explore those issues which impacted on their teaching careers during the preceding ten years. The reflections of these reveal some of the concerns and rewards of teaching as a career for men.

The pool from which subjects for this research were drawn was the full male complement of forty-two men out of a total of 267 students enrolled as first year primary trainees at Dunedin College of Education in 1990. Dunedin College records were accessed to identify individuals in the cohort and each was surveyed by way of a postal questionnaire. After the respondents were classified into three groups based on their entry characteristics, two men from each group were interviewed. In the six interviews, the focus was on these men's perceptions of their preparation for, and experiences in teaching.

Chapters three and four report the findings drawn from three sources: Data from Dunedin College of Education records relating to the first year intake of 1990 and the completed questionnaires from those men in the 1990 cohort who responded to a sample

survey are reported in chapter 3. Chapter 4 gives an analysis of each of the interviews with six individual men from that sample.

The discussion section examines how the literature study informed the work. It deals with the information gleaned about men in the primary teaching profession, from a representative sample of a cohort at a College of Education to find out what factors impacted on their decisions to continue in or leave teaching.

The conclusion highlights some key points of interest, makes specific recommendations and signals directions for future research in this area.