Teaching boys in neoliberal and post-feminist times: Feminization and the question of re-masculinization in the education system and policy field

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Abstract

This paper focuses on teaching boys, male teachers and the question of gendered pedagogies in neoliberal and postfeminist times of the proliferation of new forms of capitalism, multi-mediated technologies and the influence of globalization. It illustrates how a politics of re-masculinization and its reconstitution needs to be understood as set against changing economic and social conditions in which gender equity comes to be re-focused on boys as the ‚new disadvantaged'. This re-framing of gender equity, it is argued, has been fuelled by both a media-inspired backlash discourse about ‚failing boys' and a neo-positivist emphasis on numbers derived primarily from standardized testing regimes at both global and national levels. A media-focused analysis of the proliferation of discourses about ‚failing boys' vis-a-vis the problem of encroaching feminization in the school system is provided to illuminate how certain truths about the influence of male teachers come to define how the terms of ensuring gender equity are delimited and reduced to a question of gendered pedagogies as grounded in sexed bodies. Historical accounts of the feminization of teaching in the North American context are also provided as a basis for building a more informed understanding of the present, particularly as it relates to the contextualization of policy articulation and enactment regarding the problem of teaching boys. In light of such historically informed and critical media analysis, it is argued that what is needed is a more informed, evidenced based policy articulation of the problem of teaching boys and a more gender sensitive reflection on the politics of masculinities in postfeminist times.

1   Introduction

In this paper I focus on teaching boys in response to postfeminist and neoliberal concerns about ‚failing boys‘ and celebratory discourses about ‚successful girls‘. What does it mean to teach boys in these times of insecurity, intensified backlash and panic about changing economic and social conditions? How do the gendered and embodied dimensions of teaching get constituted in response to concerns regarding data-driven claims about ‚failing boys‘ in the education system? In attempting to engage with these questions regarding the gendered dimensions and specifically calls for the re-masculinization of teaching and the curriculum, I draw attention to how educational panic about boys‘ underachievement in schools gets linked to questions of increasing feminization, which, as Skelton (2002) points out, relates to three interrelated phenomena: (i) the increasing number of female teachers in schools relative to their male counterparts; (ii) the cultural context or environment of school which is considered to be more ‚girl friendly‘; (iii) a backlash politics fuelled by global capitalism, which has had an impact on traditional patterns of employment, relationships etc. (see Seidler 2006). This question of feminization has resulted, and continues to result, in the call for more male teachers as role models and for a fundamental re-masculinization of public education as a basis for addressing the problem of ‚failing boys‘ in schools. Such policy and media generated narratives are evident, not only in North America, Australia and the United Kingdom, but also in Europe, Malaysia and the Caribbean (Driessen 2007; Figueroa 2006; Hoque/Razak/Zohora/Islam2010; Neugebauer/Helbig/Landmann 2011; Pech 2011; Scambor/Seidler 2013; Timmerman, 2011).

My aim in this paper is to both interrogate some of the problematic claims about the role of male teachers as a panacea for addressing the problem of feminization afflicting boys' achievement and engagement in schooling, and to provide some insight into the postfeminist and neoliberal conditions enabling the proliferation of such a discourse. I draw attention to media-generated discourses in their capacity to fuel and drive a moral panic that has consequences in terms of influencing the direction of policy-making in education, in spite of the lack of evidence to support these claims about the supposed potential of male teachers in terms of their capacity to produce better educational and social outcomes for boys in schools (Holmlund/Sund 2008; Neugebauer et al. 2010; Sokol/Katz/Chaszewski/Wojcik 2005). In addition, I draw attention to the need for what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have identified as „an historically informed reflexivity in the education policy field” (p. 51), which I argue is essential with regards to providing a more informed empirical and theoretical basis for addressing the influence of male teachers in primary and elementary schools, as set against an historical analysis of the dy-

namics and politics of gender relations in the teaching profession (Blount 2005; Martino 2008; Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012a). I also situate the need for such critical analysis in response to addressing the problem of male teachers and their role in the teaching of boys within a broader neoliberal and post-feminist context in which educational panic over ‚failing boys‘ has led to a re-framing of what is to count as equity in education (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012b; 2013; Ringrose 2007).

2 The context of neoliberalism and postfeminism

Feminist scholars have documented the role of feminism in changing cultural and economic times, and have highlighted specific retrogressive conditions of backlash and new traditionalism, which are fuelled by a hostile media that blames feminism for a number of social ills and troubles afflicting both men and women (Genz/Brabon 2009; Fraser 2009). Ringrose (2007), for example, writes about a particular postfeminist and backlash context in which certain discourses about ‚successful girls‘ and ‚failing boys‘ have come to define the limits of gender equity in the education policy making field – a field which has also been influenced by media-focussed accounts of the ‚boy crisis‘, which I will elaborate on later (Lingard 2003). The intensification of such discourses in recent times needs to be understood in terms of a particular *zeitgeist*, one that is propelled by a sense of girls, not only having achieved gender equality, but as actually surpassing and outdoing boys, especially in terms of their academic performance. Such thinking has also been driven by the rise of a neoliberal emphasis on performativity that has been stimulated by an audit culture with its emphasis on neo-positivism in an era of what Lather and St Pierre have identified as ‚big data‘ and ‚metric mania‘ (Lather/St Pierre 2013: 629; see also Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012b; 2013; Lignard/Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013).

These conditions have fostered a policy as numbers emphasis (Lingard 2011) in which ‚failing boys‘ have emerged as hyper-visualized subjects and targets of intervention by both journalists and policy makers in the education field (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012c). Standardized test scores, disaggregated primarily along gender lines, continue to be used to establish certain truth claims about the achievement of boys, particularly with regards to documenting their lower literacy attainment in comparison to girls. This use of numbers, however, has resulted in a re-visioning of gender equity, with a focus on emphasizing the ‚disadvantaged status‘ of boys in the school system. Such a gender-focused emphasis on numbers has contributed to diverting attention away from the persistence and affliction of class and race inequities in educa-

tion that continue to impact on specific groups of boys and specific groups of girls (Gillborn 2008; Archer/Francis 2007). More significantly, such numbers have resuscitated and re-fuelled familiar backlash discourses about feminization as the source of the achievement problem for boys. These concerns about boys' underachievement and failure in schools have also served to support postulations about the need for an injection of more male teachers into the school system, supposedly given their capacities, simply as a consequence of their embodied presence and gendered dispositions, to assuage or ameliorate the supposed inimical influences of feminization, understood both in terms of the dominance of female teachers and their gendered pedagogical practices.

In such a postfeminist and neoliberal context in which boys have become heightened objects of concern by both policy makers and journalists – there is a sense that girls' achievement, as synonymous with the success of feminism, has come at the expense of boys (Ringrose 2007). But as Ringrose points out, such a gender-only emphasis on achievement, which focuses on a single variable for measuring inequality, not only conceals other sorts of achievement gaps, but also enables boys to become marketed as ‚the new disadvantaged' in response to narratives about *girl power* and celebratory discourses about successful girls:

„… more than two decades of feminist theory has illustrated the conceptual problems with gender analysis organized as a binary between man/woman or masculine/feminine that does not account for how gender is always differentiated by other ‚intersecting' or ‚articulating' axes of experience and identity, and multiple social discourses including those that are productive of social, class, race and ethnic based inequalities …" (ibid.: 480).

However, it is a neoliberal rationality, with its emphasis on individualization, autonomy and self-responsibilization that continue to shape how agency, in the form of ‚girl power' and self-realization vis-a-vis girls' achievement and success in schools, comes to be understood or at least expressed in such terms within the context of debates about ‚failing boys' and the impact of feminization. It is in this sense that success comes to be defined as a gendered phenomenon, according to the terms set for endorsing a neoliberal social imaginary in which winning and beating the odds becomes an elusive *girls only* domain. In other words, it is this idea of girls winning in spite of the instabilities and insecurities that have accompanied shifts in the global economy, as well as the increasing masculinization of education, with its emphasis on competition, entrepreneurship and measuring effective schooling in light of national and international testing regimes, that comes to be the driving discourse, or at least ‚the discursive unsaid', in how ‚failing boys' come to be constituted (Francis et al. 2008:30). But, as Ringrose points out, such postfeminist positions that emphasise ‚girl power' fuel not only postulations about feminization and its impact on boys, but further evade more nuanced analyses of the demands facing girls, as they are compelled to negotiate „new

subject positions', which require them to be ‚both ‚bright and beautiful‘, ‚heterosexual/feminine/desirable and successful learner‘, ‚aggressor and nurturer‘ among other highly contradictory subject locations enlivened through the discourses of successful girls" (ibid.: 485). A further effect, as already alluded to, is a bleaching of context from an understanding of multiple and intersecting factors, including historically specific considerations of persistent racial inequalities, that are important in making sense of *which boys* and *which girls* are not doing very well in the school system (Gillborn 2008; Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013).

3 The role of the media in fuelling a crisis about ‚failing boys‘ and the influence of male teachers as role models

These postfeminist narratives about ‚failing boys‘ and panics over an encroaching feminization as the source of the problem for boys in schools have been proliferated, not only in North American, but also across the European Union (Scambor/Seidler 2013; Budde/Mammes, 2009: 185). Faulstich-Wieland (2013) and Neugebauer et al. (2011), for example, specifically document this concern about feminization and the demand for more male teachers in primary schools in Germany, while Driessen (2007) specifically identifies this postfeminist phenomenon of a ‚male repair agenda‘ in the Netherlands (see also Timmerman 2011). A cursory glance at headlines and media reports on-line immediately enable one to define some of the limits of the postfeminist framing of the male teacher debate, and contribute significantly to setting the certain limits for thinking about male teachers and the teaching of boys:

„The endangered male teacher" (The Globe and Mail Newspaper, Canada).[1]
„Local schools need more male teachers as role models"(The Record, Waterloo, Ontario).[2]
„Raising Boys' Achievement Involves More Male Teachers" (The Educator's Room).[3]

„‚U.S. schools seek role models for boys'.U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan talks to The Globe and Mail's Kate Hammer about why boys are falling behind south

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1 http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/part-2-the-endangered-male-teacher/article4330079/
2 http://www.therecord.com/news-story/2627927-local-schools-need-more-male-teachers-as-role-models/
3 http://theeducatorsroom.com/2012/12/raising-boys-achievement-involves-more-male-teachers/

of the border, and what can be done to close the gap between genders in the class-room. Teachers, he argues, will be central to addressing this problem and he and his staff are looking at ways to recruit male minorities to teaching" (The Globe and Mail Newspaper, Canada)[4].

While these media sources refer specifically to the North American context, they are fairly representative of the ways in which male teachers are constituted across the globe. What becomes evident is the existence of a particular mediascape (Appadurai 1990) – a global flow of proliferating discourses, facilitated by growth in technological advancements, with the internet and social media functioning as an apparatus for facilitating communicative networks – with implications, in this particular case, for setting the terms and discursive limits for thinking about the role of male teachers and the education of boys (see Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013). Faulstich-Wieland (2013), for example, cites the German Minister of Social Welfare who ascribes the lower achievement of boys to the dearth of male teachers in primary schools. In an interview in *Der Zeit* on April 22, 2010, the minister is quoted as follows: „The reason for boys' worse performance is the fact that kindergartens and schools are female dominated" (as quoted in Faulstich-Wieland 2013: 68). The Ontario Minister of Education in 2004 also defines and understands the problem of boys' achievement in similar terms. He was quoted in the media and also in a report devoted to attracting more male teachers to the teaching profession as linking „male teacher shortage to the poor academic performance levels of boys and young men in Ontario classrooms", and, hence, to the „lack of male role models in teaching positions" (Bernard/Falter/Hill/Wilson 2004: 5). The report actually calls for the Ontario Ministry of Education to investigate the „correlation between academic achievement of boys and the presence of male teachers in Ontario classrooms" (ibid.: 3).

What we see with these and above examples is the familiar tendency to cast male teachers as agents who simply, as a consequence of their sex, are being constituted in terms of their capacity to address the gender achievement gap. More specifically, we see how the media functions to support certain discourses about the teaching of boys and male teachers as role models. These discourses about male teachers as role models who have the capacity to counter the negative effects of feminization come to function, in the Foucauldian sense, as *regimes of truth* (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013). Such discourses rely on a certain degree of naïvete and common sense, but also derive their status from certain disciplinary knowledge bases that offer explanatory frameworks which are grounded in sex-role socialization and brain-sex differences. The effect of deploying such discourses is to enforce certain truths about male teachers and teaching boys that rely on effecting a certain normalization of gendered bodies. As Foucault (1980) claims:

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4   http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/us-schools-seek-role-models-for-boys/article4329589/

„Truth is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under control, dominant, if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‚ideological struggles‘)" (Foucault 1980: 131-132).

The extent and effects of such regimes of truth are evident in the specific case of Canada's *Globe and Mail* national newspaper in 2010, which devoted a whole series of newspaper reports to addressing the question of *failing boys* (Abraham 2010a). It identified the gender achievement gap as *one of the mostpressing challenges* facing the nation in the next decade, along with publically funded health care provision and the future of military involvement post-Afghanistan. The journalist Abraham (2010a), in one specific article devoted specifically to male teacher shortage, immediately compares the presence of the male teacher in elementary schools to an endangered species: „The male elementary teacher is the spotted owl of the education system, the leatherback turtle, the Beluga". The report immediately is designed to provoke and incite a discourse of moral panic and urgency as it goes on to emphasize that boys are increasingly growing up without fathers at home, which further necessitates the need for male role models in the elementary school context. What is identified in this report is the particular problem of feminization, which is attributed to problem of boys' achievement and engagement with schooling. For example, one male Education professor from a reputable Canadian university is quoted as asserting that „the entire system has an intrinsic bias against boys". He goes on to state that „females are making all of the decisions, they're choosing the books, and setting up the class" in ways that „focus too heavily on sitting still, and stress co-operation over competition" (Abraham 2010b).

This form of rationality, in fact, serves as a basis for advocating for affirmative action to attract more male teachers to the profession, without attending to the politics and dynamics of the historically specific phenomenon of doing women's work (Williams 1993; Martino, in press). Re-masculinization, both in terms of injecting more male teachers into the profession and in terms of making the curriculum more *boy friendly* are the answer, according to this mode of rationality. Such a viewpoint becomes even more clearly articulated when the same professor (mentioned above) is quoted in a subsequent article as part of the *failing boys* series, which is devoted to medicating boys who are disproportionately being diagnosed with ADHD (Abraham 2010c). In this report, he states that the „decline of male teachers in primary schools is partly to blame for ballooning drug use: What are we drugging? Female teachers who don't understand boys like to run and jump

and shout that's what boys do". So discourses of normalization and particular constructions of boys, as naturalized gendered and sexed subjects who are actively predisposed in their behavioural orientations, are mobilized as a basis for both explaining the problem of feminization in the education system and for the necessitating its re-masculinization (Martino 2008).

This particular case, therefore, is an exemplary instance of what Foucault (1980) refers to as the operation of a „general politics of truth" – the „types of discourse it accepts and which it makes to function as true … the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (ibid.: 131) – in that it highlights the role of the media in setting the terms of reference that come to define the limits of thinking about male teachers and teaching boys in post-feminist times and within the policy-making context (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012a). Such truths are encapsulated by assertions and postulations that male teachers as role models and as a consequence of simply inhabiting sexed bodies can make a difference to boys' academic achievement and overall schooling experiences, in spite of lack of any evidence to support such claims (Neugebauer et al. 2011; Driessen 2007; Holmlund/Sund, 2008). So what is immediately evident, or at least brought into question, are the „general set of rules" or norms that govern the constitution of certain discourses and the status of truth claims about the role of male teachers and boys as specific sorts of subjects and „their system of referentials":

> *„that one defines the general set of rules that govern the different modes of enuncia-*
> *tion, the possible distribution of the subject positions, and the system that defines and*
> *prescribes them; [...] that one defines the set of rules common to all their associated*
> *domains, the forms of succession, of simultaneity [...] of which they are capable, and*
> *the system that links all these fields of coexistence together; lastly [...] that one can*
> *define the general set of rules that govern the status of these statements, the way in*
> *which they are institutionalised, received, used, reused, combined together, the mode*
> *according to which they become objects of appropriation, instruments for desire or*
> *interest, elements for a strategy" (Foucault 1972: 115).*

The system of referentials can be traced throughout the media reports mentioned above with the lack of male teachers in schools being connected to the increasing incidence of boys growing up in single parent households without a father, with the purpose of deliberately inciting a certain urgency accompanied by „talk of affirmative action" (Abraham 2010b). But the impetus driving and holding together such a system of referentials is the problem of feminization and its potentially emasculating influences. It is in this sense that such a system with its modes of enunciation serve, in important ways, to point to certain desired policy outcomes, and in fact, come to define the terms of a particular *policy habitus* that concerns itself with boys' education and which is governed by a recuperative masculinity politics. The *policy habitus* refers specifically to a particular field and interconnected networks of rela-

tions and flows of discourses in which policy making is implicated. As Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor (2005) explicate, a *policy habitus* refers to dispositional tendencies of policy makers and emphasizes the „sedimentation of history, structure and culture in individual disposition to practice" (p. 764). What I have tried to explicate is how the terms of such a habitus appear to be governed by retrogressive and re-traditionalizing, or at least neoconservative tendencies that are characterized by a particular logics of practice in which boys and male teachers are implicated as victims of the increasing feminization of the school system, which enable them to be cast as disadvantaged subjects.

The problem with such a mode of rationality and its system of referentials is that broader questions of history and systemic inequalities that continue to govern the status of doing women's work and the privileging of men within the education system are simply evaded (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2012a). Moreover, given the onslaught of neoliberal programs and agendas, there is clearly evidence of increasing and intensified masculinization at play both in terms of school governance, accountability systems and performance management systems that impact on teachers' roles and delivery of the curriculum in schools, with significant consequences for addressing equity education (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013; Mahony/Hextall/Menter 2004). Furthermore, there appears to be no evidence for the claims that male teachers make a difference. In fact, empirical research conducted by Sokol et al. (2007) in Canada, and Hoque et al. (2010) in Malaysia has found that boys, in fact, achieve better when they are taught by female teachers. Moreover, Driessen's (2007) research in the Netherlands found that „teacher sex has no effect whatsoever on the achievement, attitudes or behaviour of pupils" (p. 183). These research findings concur with those of Neugbauer et al. (2011) in Germany, who, in using large scale data from IGLU-E – an expansion of PIRLS – found „virtually no evidence of a benefit from having a same-sex teacher, neither for boys or for girls" (p. 669). Such research draws attention to the extent of the research-policy gap and raises some serious concerns about what is to count as equity and evidence (Luke/Green/Kelly 2010), particularly as it relates to the proliferation of discourses about male teachers and teaching boys.

4 Historical analysis as a basis for understanding the crisis of male teacher shortage

Both Rizvi and Lingard (2010), and also Brown (2010) highlight the usefulness of drawing on historical analytic accounts as a basis for building a more

informed understanding of the present, particularly as it relates to the contextualization of policy articulation and enactment. Brown, for example, argues that *methods of analysis* are needed which enable us to „examine how trajectories of the past help to shape how ‚ideas and events are constructed‘“ (Brown 2010: 300). These insights have a particular salience given the re-emergence of discourses and policy narratives about the teaching of boys, the moral urgency surrounding the feminization of schooling, and the call for more male teachers as gender specific role models under what has been identified or recognized in more recent times as postfeminist and neoliberal conditions of backlash and re-masculinization. Concerns about the feminization of the teaching profession have a long history and highlight that moral preoccupations about both the presence and capacity of female teachers to manage boys and to cater to their specific gender based needs are not new.

The historical and socio-political contingencies surrounding the resurfacing and reworking of such debates are invaluable in drawing attention to the persistence of various forms of backlash movements in response to the perceived threat posed by women to the established or taken for granted notion of male privilege and power. This is manifested in terms of re-asserting a system of enforced gender dichotomisation in the form of a polarization of masculinity and femininity as fixed attributes and capacities grounded in biological sex differences (see Harding 1998). The effect is to resort to a reclaiming of a heteronormative masculinity that is considered to be under threat or at risk, as a consequence of the feminizing influences of female teachers in schools (see Blount 2005). How did such concerns manifest themselves historically, say in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, and what light might they shed on the current debates about male teacher shortage and the politics of feminization in contemporary times as they are emerging under current postfeminist and neoliberal conditions? While the historical literature is extensive, my aim is just to shed some light on glimpses into the past and to reflect on how these historical trajectories of feminization can further enlighten and inform our understanding of how the dynamics of gender relations in the teaching profession are inextricably implicated in economic, political and social conditions. I refer only to the North American context, but there are accounts of such conditions provided by other scholars that address manifestations of the similar phenomenon of the politics of feminization in the teaching profession across other nations (see Oram 1989; Cortina/San Roman 2006).

A case in point is the historical account provided by Clifford (1989). She refers to the alarm in 1884 expressed by the president of Chicago's board of education at the growing numbers of female teachers and principals who, apart from being considered to be ‚too irritable‘ and lacking in ‚self-control‘, were thought to influence the development of ‚effeminacy in boys‘ (p. 296). Moreover, Clifford claims that from 1885 to World War 1 national maga-

zines and professional journals made reference to the ‚woman peril‘ in response to the increasing feminisation of schooling which was considered to be ‚driv[ing] the last man from the field‘ (p. 298). Furthermore, an apparent backlash fuelled by male school administrators and university professors also appeared to be emerging at the time. These men were afraid, Clifford claims, that the increasing numbers of women who were studying in the newly established teachers' colleges would invade their own professions. In fact, Clifford paints a picture historically of increasing panic and concern being expressed as women's presence in schools continued to grow into the 20th century. For example, she claims that ‚during the great Depression and following World War 2, strong efforts were made to recruit men back into teaching, in part to protect or restore the patriarchal position of men in the American family, as it was argued that exposure to strong male figures was needed in the socialization of adolescents, especially boys‘ (p. 298). An article published in *Educational Review* in 1908 even purported that a particular psychological state was at the basis of most men's aversion to embracing a teaching career (Clifford ibid.; see also Blount 2005).

Sugg (1978) claims that concerns about the feminization of schooling intensified after the American Civil War, once the increasing presence of female teachers was felt in secondary schools. This was expressed in terms of the effect that female teachers would have on adolescent boys. The problem was considered to be related not only to the capacity of female teachers to discipline 'big boys‘, but even more importantly to their potential detrimental impact on adolescent boys' developing masculinity: „[...] now the problem was usually said to be the psychological influence of women teachers on adolescent boys, who were thought to need masculine examples as well as discipline at school" (ibid.: 106). Sugg also draws attention to the fact that, from 1870 and throughout the later part of the 19th century, the increasing monopolization of teaching by women gave rise to a degree of public concern. Such concerns were documented in the Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1873, which noted that there were more females than male teachers in many northern states. The report also made reference to the „encroachment by women upon administration, regarded as properly a male domain" (ibid.: 110). Thus the concern was not so much incited as a result of the increasing visibility of women in elementary schools because this was considered sex-appropriate work, but rather was aroused in response to female teachers moving into secondary schools and into administrative positions. In the 1880s, however, Sugg notes, that these concerns were mild and amounted to a call for a better gender balance in teaching. But the alarm became increasingly widespread as time passed with the superintendent from Rhode Island expressing some concern about the increasing feminization of schooling, which was reflected in his assertion that „two types of mind and

heart [i.e., male and female] are distinct and were designed to have their combined effect on youthful character" (quoted in Sugg 1978: 112).

In a vein similar to that reflected today in current concerns about the male teacher shortage, the commissioner's report for 1891-92 noted declining numbers of male teachers entering the profession. This was presented as a consequence of the increasing feminization of schooling in addition to the low salaries:

„The business of school teaching is coming to be considered a woman's business, and, therefore, offers less attraction to young men than formerly, especially in the subordinate positions, where low salaries also operate to repel them [...] With the source of supply so curtailed it is not surprising that in many cases women have been promoted from subordinate positions and made principals because no man was available about whom enough was known to justify the belief that he could fill the place better [...] there is danger that the increasing femininity of schools, if such a term is permissible, may be productive of serious results. The already noticeable decrease in the proportion of boys in higher grades is ascribed by many to this cause, and with some show of plausibility" (quoted in Sugg 1978: 114).

These economic conditions and the status of teaching as women's work highlight that, despite the alarm expressed in response to the increasing feminization of schooling, it was considered to be something that was intractable. This was because to alter it would have required paying men higher salaries within a context in which the „cheapness of women teachers [had] already tended to depress the market value of the profession" (ibid.: 129). The dilemma was epitomised in the following statement by Superintendent Maxwell in 1908 in response to female teachers lobbying for equalization of pay at the time: „If there is to be equal pay for equal work [...] either men's salaries must be reduced [...] or women's salaries must be raised" (Maxwell 1908:122). The first option would have resulted in losing further male teachers, while the second would not have been tolerated by taxpayers.

Sugg does indicate that concerns expressed about the preponderance of women in schools often amounted to a focus on how male adolescent students were being affected: „Only rarely did anyone worry about prepubertal boys, and never about girls of any age; but everybody thought boys over twelve should have male teachers" (p. 117). Opposition to female teachers culminated in opposition launched by the *Male High School Teachers' Association of New York City* in 1904. In a manner that reflects how contemporary concerns about male teacher shortage have been articulated, the New York male teachers used figures which highlighted that nationally the number of men had continued to decline in schools, from 42 percent to 28 percent in 1900 (Sugg 1978: 118). They questioned the role of unmarried women teachers in schools and, more broadly, that of women in the workforce, as a threat to family-life, rejecting the notion that schools were an extension of the home. Moreover, they justified the lower salary scales for women on the basis that women simply 'cannot do the same work' (quoted in Sugg 1978:

120). In addition, they argued that the increasing presence of women in the teaching profession led to both a feminizing of the curriculum and of teaching practices, which was manifested, supposedly, in the female tendency to „overvalue the softer and more showy arts at the expense of the hard essentials" (ibid.). Male and female teachers were also presented as responding differently to students with the latter having a tendency to appeal to their emotions and the former to their sense of justice (ibid.: 121). However, there was an irrefutable sense that what men offered male students was a powerful confirmation of the status of their masculinity: „The man, as a man, is bringing into the boy's life what no woman can bring" (quoted in Sugg 1978: 121). Thus a strong belief that 'manliness in boys' was being severely compromised as a consequence of the increasing feminization of secondary schooling intensified at this time.

This concern about feminization led to the call for the influence of male teachers in secondary schools because of the belief that adolescent boys needed to be exposed to male teachers. Male teachers were also required for coaching older boys in athletics. Superintendent of schools at Syracuse, Bardeen, in fact, expressed concern in 1908 about the detrimental impact „of a lack of masculine vigor in their teachers" and its impact on adolescent boys, which he attributed to the feminization of schools and the removal of corporal punishment: „School discipline, like salaries, has been adjusted to women, and may as well be abandoned to them" (Sugg 1978: 126). In such a context, the popular belief that teaching was an affront to male teachers' masculinity persisted. Men who taught were belittled as a result of dealing with what were considered to be trivial matters of interest only to children and women. Moreover, as teachers, men, like their female counterparts and students, were positioned in relation to the external imposition of hierarchical male authority in schools. In addition, marital status also became an issue (see also Blount 2000). Under Bardeen single male teachers, aged 35 and older, were considered sexually suspect, and were required to provide an adequate explanation (see also Blount 2005). As for female teachers, Bardeen felt that they performed well to the age of 28, after which they were prone to become 'nervous wrecks' (Sugg 1978: 126).

The historical perspective on the feminization of teaching in the North American context provided by Sugg (1978) and others, such as Blount (2005), highlight the persistence throughout the 20th century, and into the present, of discourses pertaining to the status of teaching as 'women's work', as well as remasculinizing tendencies that were provoked by responses to increasing feminization of the school system. A number of points need to be emphasized:

1.   The emergence of public schooling as a site for the increasing feminization of the workforce was fraught with a politics of gender that enforced women's subordinated status relative to men;

2. Entry of females into the teaching profession historically was contingent upon certain economic and social conditions and were implicated in endorsing definitions of femininity which confirmed women's domesticity and capacity for nurturance;
3. The emergence and increasing feminization of teaching needs to be understood within the economic and political context of its devalued status as *women's work* relative to other male occupations;
4. The feminization of teaching historically has always aroused some level of concern at both the level of women's subordinated status relative to men in the labour market and in relation to questioning a male classroom teacher's masculinity and/or sexuality;
5. The issue that male teachers are needed as role models and to confirm boys' developing masculinity have a historical legacy that dates back to the early feminization of teaching.

So what lessons can be learned and how might such historical glimpses inform an understanding of what is happening today as it relates to emergent discourses about feminization of teaching as a defining feature of the *policy habitus* of boys' education? Such *historically informed reflexivity* draws attention to how questions of feminization have always been implicated in economic, social and political conditions, and cannot be reduced merely to a question of naturalized sex differences requiring re-masculinization of the education system to better address the educational and social needs of boys.

What is important is that such historical accounts provide a vantage point from which to understand how emergent postfeminist and neoliberal conditions are giving rise to re-articulated forms of re-masculinzation in response to unstable and changing economic and social arrangements that have been influenced by the forces globalization (Greig/Martino 2012). As Ringrose (2007) has explicated quite nicely, emergent discourses of 'successful girls' and 'failing boys' have become the defining characteristics of a new gender equity agenda, which avoids other more pressing equity concerns related to how a particular class and race dynamics continues to impact on the lives of minority students, particularly within urban school contexts. Our own recent work here in Canada, also supports such a position and has highlighted how emergent accountability systems and audit cultures have global and scalar ramifications, with implications for hypervisibilizing the gender achievement gap at the expense of drawing attention to more alarming and disturbing race and class disparities in achievement (Martino/Rezai-Rashti 2013; Lindard/Martino/Rezai-Rashti/Sellar, forthcoming; Gillborn 2008). Moreover, these global accountability systems, such as those that have been developed by OECD's PISA, have gained international notoriety and serve as a means by which nations are marketed and are marketing themselves in terms of how well their students are performing on these standardized measures (see Hargreaves/Shirley 2012). It is under such neoliberal conditions, identified by

Ball (2012) as *edu-business*, that a renewed gender crisis comes to serve as the defining characteristic of a *zeitgeist* or social imaginary in which boys are being re-constituted as the *new disadvantaged*.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to illuminate how dominant discourses about teaching boys have continued to re-surface, according to terms of a familiar set of family resemblances incited by an anxiety about the encroachment of feminization under postfeminist conditions. Such conditions continue to provoke an incitement to discourse (Foucault 1978) about the call for more male teachers and needs to be understood as part of a re-masculinizaing re-form agenda that epitomizes new traditionalist or neoconservative tendencies in response to the threat of feminization in postfeminist times. While this polemic of feminization is not new and has persisted for some time in response to changing social and economic conditions throughout history, what is important to highlight are the contingencies that underpin contemporary manifestations of re-masculinization in response to postfeminist concerns about teaching boys as set against the forces of globalization and neoliberal reform agendas in education. Given such conditions, what I have highlighted is how the pedagogical and policy context for teaching boys continues to get reconstituted in terms which resort to a neoconservative politics that endorses feminization as the problem and re-masculinization as the solution to addressing the problem of 'failing boys'. However as Scambor and Seidler (2013) explicate, such dominant framings of *the boy problem* simply tend to reproduce or reconstitute hegemonic masculinity rather that supporting a more „gender sensitive reflection on masculinity" (p. 14). Furthermore, as Budde's (2006) research in Germany shows, boys are not being provided with the opportunity to reflect on gender identity, relations and practice with the view to providing a social imaginary that is consistent with promoting more democratized and progressive versions of masculinity (Martino/Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003).

This issue of reflexivity and pedagogical praxis also raises the question about the need for critical awareness of the psycho-social dynamics and politics of gender in classrooms and schools to be incorporated into teacher education programs. As Scambor and Seidler (2013) argue and which the discussion and critique provided in this paper support:

„Most of the research results do not refer to a 'feminised' school environment as a driving factor for boys' disengagement but rather to the fact that boys ascribe traditional patterns of masculinity to themselves, often reproduced in the mass media and

the video games that are circulating, which prevents them from educational success"
(ibid.: 15).

The question that remains, therefore, is how to best create pedagogical spaces in schools and teacher education contexts for fostering a critical consideration and interrogation of masculinities. The answer is not re-masculinization, but a commitment to fostering in both men and boys more equitable and nurturing expressions of masculinity that avoid recuperative tendencies. As Griffiths (2006) argues, „schools would benefit from having both men and women, in all their cultural diversities, but only insofar as the profession is able to create a culture that values difference" (p. 388).

Note

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