*Reflection:*

*This artifact demonstrates my ability to formulate an inquiry question related to an educational topic, locate relevant research studies, and compare and contrast the findings of those studies to produce a small scale literature review.*

*This task was a reminder of the significant amount of time it often takes to find relevant research studies. However, I feel a sense of accomplishment from the fact that I invested the time necessary to learn about a complex issue that directly relates to me by finding, then reviewing research studies that have been completed on that topic. I also plan to incorporate what I learned from this assignment into the approaches I use in the classroom.*

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Small Scale Literature Review

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For decades, people have been calling for more male teachers in primary classrooms. The movement to hire more male elementary teachers is based on the assumption that male and female teachers treat children differently, and specifically that male teachers will be a role model for boys which will reduce learning problems in boys (Fagot, 1981). The purpose of this literature review is to determine what research supports the demand for an increase in male primary teachers. I am interested in this topic because I am a male pre-service elementary teacher and I want to learn what (if anything) I can integrate from research findings on this topic into the work I do in the classroom to make me a more effective teacher. My original inquiry question was, “What benefits do elementary students receive from having a male teacher in the their classroom?” After reviewing many articles and studies on this topic, my revised inquiry question is, “What effect do male primary teachers have on young boys’ adjustment to, attitude toward, and achievement in school as compared to female primary teachers?”

I reviewed the findings of five studies to prepare this literature review. The studies were classified based on the effects male primary teachers had on boys as compared to their female counterparts. The classifications were defined as:

1. The presence of male teachers has a more positive effect on boys than girls
2. The positive effect male teachers’ have on boys as compared to girls is inconclusive
3. Male teachers’ effect on boys is no different than female teachers’ effect

***The presence of male teachers has a more positive effect on boys than girls***

Mancus (1992) studied the effect male teachers have on stereotyping of school children and their assessment of male and female teacher competence. Roughly 200 1st – 5th graders in two elementary schools, a college laboratory school and a Catholic school, participated in the study. The laboratory school had 33% male teachers and the parochial school had no male teachers. Students were asked to attribute twenty statements regarding competence to a hypothetical male or female teacher depicted in a cartoon drawing. The study found that male and female students gave significantly different responses regardless of their school. However students with male teachers (the laboratory school students) made more non-stereotyping attributions than the students in the parochial school. While the inclusion of male teachers affected both boys and girls in the laboratory school, the data from the study suggested that the presence of male teachers had a greater influence on boys. Mancus (1992) went on to predict that boys are more likely to see themselves as academically competent and therefore more disposed to achieve when they have male teachers.

***The positive effect male teachers have on boys as compared to girls is inconclusive***

Less convincing than the results of the Mancus study were the findings produced when Fagot (1981) observed forty experienced and inexperienced preschool teachers (20 male and 20 female) during free play periods to determine if male and female teachers treat boys and girls differently. Fagot (1981) maintained that previous studies of male and female teachers had the sex and experience of the teachers confounded. Therefore, the teacher groups in the study were evenly divided into experienced and inexperienced sub groups. The children participating in the study were 3 – 5 years old, and 600 observations were made for each teacher. The study found that male teachers gave more positive comments and physical affection to students, and joined in children’s play more than their female counterparts. However, experienced teachers (regardless of sex) interacted more with boys and girls when they engaged in feminine-preferred activities. Fagot (1981) suggested that the male stereotype and school environment are less congruent than the female stereotype and the school environment and that both male and female experienced teachers encourage students to work on school-type activities.

***Male teachers’ effect on boys is no different than female teachers’ effect***

Contrary to the assumptions behind the calls for an increase in male elementary school teachers, the three remaining studies found no difference in boys’ behaviors, attitudes, or achievements when taught by male (vs. female) teachers.

Gold and Reis (1982) produced a literature review of studies examining the development and behavior of boys and girls in primary school in relation to the sex of their teacher. Findings based on two major theories of sex-role development, the social learning and cognitive developmental theories, did not support the argument that male teachers will benefit boys’ in sex identification, academic achievement, or school adjustment. Instead, Gold and Reis (1982) asserted that increasing the number of male teachers in early school grades is unlikely to be effective. Boys experience difficulties in school due to the incompatibility of the male sex role and the role of the student, which is more congruent with the female sex role. Both of the roles are defined by factors much broader than by the presence (or absence) of male teachers.

Bricheno and Thornton (2007) studied whether children see their teachers as role models. Over 350 students in the UK were presented with a dictionary definition of “role model” and then answered a questionnaire that had both qualitative and quantitative aspects designed to determine who their role models were and what they thought were important attributes for a role model. The majority of students identified relatives and good friends from their social networks as role models. Less than 3% of the students referred to a teacher as a role model. Similar to the findings of the Gold & Reis study, Bricheno and Thornton (2007) concluded that there was no indication that the students surveyed identified with their teachers regardless of their sex. The boys in this sample did not see male teachers as role models.

Etaugh and Harlow (1973) observed the classroom behaviors of 2 male and 2 female teachers and 87 5th and 6th graders over a 3-month period to determine if the behaviors of the teachers related to the behaviors and attitudes of the students. Tests were administered at the beginning and end of the study that included questions to measure the attitudes of students toward their teachers and their school. Like the two aforementioned studies in this classification, little evidence was found to support the claim that male teachers facilitate the school attitudes and behaviors of male pupils. According to Etaugh and Harlow (1973), the findings of their study suggest that the school behavior of boys is not likely to change simply by adding more male elementary teachers.

***Summary***

The majority of findings from the articles in this small-scale literature review refute the commonly held assumption that male elementary teachers will have a more positive effect on boys in their classrooms as compared to female teachers. Of particular importance is the relation between the male sex role, the female sex role, and the role of the student in school. The issues related to boys’ adjustment to, attitude toward, and achievement in school are complex and cannot simply be addressed by assuming that male teachers will be role models for boys and make schools more masculine on their behalf.

References

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