

The Case for Male Teachers

The lack of male teachers is a problem in America's school system. BY BRAD MACDONALD

PUBLIC EDUCATION IS BEING FOREVER DERIDED FOR its shortfalls, but the voices of discontent are largely overlooking one unsettling trend in public education: About 80 percent of America's teachers are female.

Does this really constitute a crisis? What difference does a teacher's gender make—one plus one equals two, no matter who teaches it, right? A recent study performed by Thomas S. Dee, an economist at Swarthmore College, indicates otherwise.

Dee discussed his findings in the fall 2006 issue of *Education Next*. "[L]earning from a teacher of the opposite gender has a detrimental effect on students' academic progress and their engagement in school," he wrote. "My best estimate is that it lowers test scores for both boys and girls by approximately 4 percent of a standard deviation and has even larger effects on various measures of student engagement."

Dee then highlighted the impact on America's boys. "Adverse gender effects have an impact on both boys and girls, but that effect falls more heavily on the male half of the population in middle school, simply because most middle-school teachers are female" (ibid.).

Further on, Dee stated, "Similarly, these results suggest that part of boys' relative propensity to be seen as disruptive in these grades is due to the gender interactions resulting from the preponderance of female teachers." Boys learn less when they are instructed by female teachers. This is a sobering find, considering that only one in five teachers in America's schools is male.

But the role of men in our education system lies beyond just their academic impact. Their role as examples and role models of manhood and masculinity is also critical, particularly for boys. Though they have consistently been outnumbered by female teachers, male teachers and administrators have a unique and profound impact on a school and its students. The firm presence of mature men is critical to the rounded development and maturity of all students, especially boys.

I think back to my own experience. My physical education teacher, for example, embodied what it means to be brawny, athletically competent and physically vibrant. His example inspired more than a few teenage boys to shed boyish flab in pursuit of more masculine traits such as physical strength, vivacious health and a spirit of healthy competition.

Tall and foreboding, the male principal of my high school was also a much-needed asset. An austere and serious man, he commanded the respect of even the most boisterous troublemaker. An enemy of few, friend and confidant of most, his deep voice of stability and experience empowered the dispirited and gave direction to the misguided. Masculinity means service and sacrifice, encouragement and affability—and this man was an example in all those respects.

Real masculinity also includes self-discipline, resilience, am-

bition, leadership, the courage to confront adversity, as well as the ability to act decisively and forcefully when conditions warrant. My male teachers taught these qualities by their example. I remember more than a few occasions where a fraught temp teacher hurriedly recruited the assistance of a battle-hardened and bearded 225-pound colleague to quiet an unruly classroom.

It would be misguided to consider male teachers markedly more important than female teachers to the education of children and teens. They are not. But the inherent differences between men and women mean that male teachers provide leadership and education in areas that female teachers are generally weaker in, while female teachers excel in the areas that men are generally weaker in. A balanced education supplies young students with a healthy dose of influence from both men *and* women.

This is why we need to be concerned about the void of male teachers and principals at our schools. The current ratio of four women teachers per male teacher is the lowest in 40 years. This statistic means that hundreds of thousands of America's boys and girls are missing out on essential elements of education.

Male teachers, according to Talladega, Ala., city schools superintendent Lee Messer, are critically important "as role models for male students, especially in the younger grades, because of single[-parent] families and the lack of role models in families" (*Daily Home*, Aug. 20, 2006). Growing boys, naturally, learn about manhood from the men in their lives. Even many female teachers, though they are pleased by the surge of women principals, are worried by the lack of male teachers.

Combine school faculties overwhelmingly comprised of women with a 40 percent divorce rate robbing many homes of full-time fathers, and the result is thousands of children with *little to no* male influence in their lives. Countless boys growing up without a stable, balanced man in their lives are absorbing a narrow, media-designed, shallow definition of what they are to become. Misguided, feminized boys often mature into misguided, feminized men. Never before have we had such a drastic void of stable, masculine role models. This constitutes a serious problem: History teaches that national success hinges on strong, masculine leadership—and that grows out of secure, hard-working, masculine boys and young men.

The Bible warns specifically about the declining influence of men in American society. Read the third chapter of Isaiah. Here God warns that prior to the return of Jesus Christ, strong, masculine men—outnumbered and overpowered by feminine and childish influences—will have become virtually extinct. The marginalization of men in America's schools directly fulfills Isaiah 3. The bright side of this gloomy trend is that it proves the veracity of biblical prophecy and the imminence of the return of Jesus Christ. ■

