

New research helps to de-gender the teaching profession

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Credit: University of Hertfordshire

A new qualitative study, published in the journal *Gender and Education* and carried out by researchers at the Universities of Hertfordshire and Hildesheim, found that teacher gender has no effect on how male and female teachers employ discipline strategies used in primary school classrooms.

As part of the study academics analysed the language that male and [female teachers](#) used when disciplining their pupils to find out if it fitted with Westernised [gender](#) stereotypes. The study's authors are hoping their findings, which demonstrate that the role of [primary school teaching](#) ought not to be seen as a 'female' profession, will help to de-gender attitudes towards primary school teaching and encourage more men to consider a career in teaching.

The teaching sector is facing a recruitment and retention crisis, with a current shortfall of 30,000 in [teacher](#) numbers, and although the primary recruitment target was met this year there is still a need to drive recruitment. As more than 85% of all primary school teachers in the UK are female, there are gains to be made by presenting the role of teacher as a gender neutral one.

Dr. Joanne McDowell, lead author and Principal Lecturer in English Language & Communication at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "Teaching is often thought as only suitable for those with female characteristics. Furthermore, we see recurrent government incentives trying to recruit more men with claims that they are needed to enforce 'tough' discipline and to be a 'male' role model to control boys, all claimed to be needed in order to close the persistent gender achievement gap. However, all this does is create further misleading job stereotypes.

"By raising awareness of primary school teachers' linguistic behaviour we may be able to start de-gendering attitudes towards the job and only then may we see more men taking up such professional occupations."

As part of the study, Dr. McDowell and Mr. Klattenberg compared the language and the discipline tactics of 8 male and 8 female teachers in the UK and Germany. Results from both countries show that both men and women use a mix of both direct (stereotyped as hard / masculine) and indirect (stereotyped as passive / feminine) linguistic styles to perform

discipline. The teachers use language that allows them to fulfil discourse tasks essential to their profession – in this case disciplining. Teachers need to constantly adapt and employ strategies that are best suited to each individual pupil and the study found that competent teachers use whichever style was required to perform their teaching role, teacher gender did not matter.

The study found that gender is not an overriding variable in being a teacher and the study's authors argue that the skills needed to teach are simply those required for the job, rather than being gender specific; this is of key importance in breaking the entrenched gendered assumptions about the role of primary [school](#) teaching.

Dr. McDowell added: "To shift the thinking about professions in a gendered way, we need to examine how they are linguistically performed and the professional identity that is constructed. Examining language can be the key to re-thinking these occupations and more still, who can work within them.

"De-stereotyping who we think can perform the role is of key importance as we need more qualified teachers in the UK. We need to stop thinking about occupations in gendered ways in order to recruit more of the 'other' genders into such roles. We need more male teachers not because men bring something 'different' to the role as government and recruitment initiatives may suggest, but because we need more teachers; and pupils need teachers that are representative of society."

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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