Teaching Men: Masculinity, Narrative and Pedagogy

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Key Words

Masculinity, Narrative, Teachers, Education, Deleuze & Guattari, Ricoeur, Britzman, Connell, Further Education, TAFE.
The Teaching Men project investigates masculinity, narrative and teaching by considering one central question; *(How) are male teachers influenced by fictional narratives in the construction of masculinities within education?* The exploration of this question is executed using three distinct yet corresponding research activities. Firstly by developing a methodological system of narrative analysis that is able to account for the influence of a fictional text alongside a reading of interview data. Secondly by focusing on a specific cohort of male teachers in order to measure the influence of a fictional text, illustrating possibilities of how masculinity can be enacted within education. Finally by assessing how the narrative nature of critical reflective practice enables the integration of fictional texts, and the literary tropes they contain, both widening and restricting perceptions of teachers and teaching. The work of the project demonstrates how fictional narratives and their encompassing ideologies can become a powerful force in the shaping of our professional identities, in this case as male teachers.

The Teaching Men project has two parallel research streams. The first stream focuses on a collection of 22 fictional narratives drawn from the teacher text genre. Each text describes the world of teachers and teaching from differing perspectives, in differing forms including, literary texts; dramatic works such as plays or musicals; feature films; and television and radio series. The teacher text genre is both popular and prolific; therefore three key criteria have been established to determine inclusion within the project. Firstly the text must centre on the story of a teacher not a student; secondly, teaching has been defined in a literal manner as a paid occupation operating within an institutional setting; and finally the project considers how masculine traits or positions might be utilized or strategically enacted by women in fictional texts. Through a thematic and Ricoeurian narrative analysis of the 22 fictional texts a taxonomy has been generated describing four consistent tropes that reoccur regularly across the genre namely: *The Redemptive Hero; The Transformative Intellectual; The Static Vocational;* and *The Rugged Individualist.* This taxonomy is utilised as a method of ordering both the fictional texts as well as investigating and understanding patterns within the interview narratives.
The second research stream focuses on a group of male teachers, based in Australia and the UK working within TAFE/FE environments. Within this group each member had recently been required to give up professional identities such as chef, gas fitter and carpenter and instead devise ways of becoming male teachers. The project charts the analysis of complex biographical narratives captured in interviews with this group of teacher in South London in December 2011; and Brisbane Australia 2012. As part of the analysis the Teaching Men project pilots an innovative methodological process which aims to manage the structural and textual differences between fictional texts and interview data in an effort to find points of commonality and influence across both. This methodology is derived from Paul Ricoeur’s conceptualisation of narrated time and three-fold mimesis in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of event and concept. It is by using both of these theories, transposed into a methodology, that enables an interpretation of interview data alongside the fictional texts and related tropes.

The Teaching Men project uncovers how teaching professionals utilise tropes and permissions found in fictional texts in chaotic and unstructured ways to manage points of professional intensity as they arise. Key features such as legacy, fear, belonging, reparation and violence are identified as themes that occupy male teachers when considering their identity and professional performance. Each of these key features is also represented in the fictional teacher text canon and therefore within the taxonomy generated as part of the project. Within the analysis of the interview data it is therefore possible to suggest where and how teachers are using tropes that have originated within fictional narratives, to manage the story of their own workplace.

Through this enhanced consideration of masculinity and teaching, the Teaching Men project can offer two key points of guidance for the profession. Firstly to encourage an acknowledgement of the influence of fictional tropes within teacher education and specifically in relation to the use of critical reflection. Secondly to encourage male teachers both pre-service as well as those who are established professionals to explore how they perform masculinities within their work place, how in fact they are becoming teaching men.
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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree or diploma at this of any other University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it includes no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text and the notes.

Ian Davis
July 2013
Completing a PhD is long and extraordinarily challenging task. Whilst the isolation of the PhD student is well-documented, what is less acknowledged is how doctoral study is a team event, a task which cannot be completed alone. During my research journey I have encountered a cast of characters who have all played their part in progressing the project and its aims. Some are expected such as supervisors, students, family and friends whilst others, such as cats, feature as a complete surprise.

Firstly I would like to offer a special note of thanks to all who have participated in the research, to the Teaching Men nineteen from the UK and Australia – your openness and trust is the only factor that has made this study possible and for that I heartily thank you. Also to all those who participated on-line I hope you enjoyed the button.

I have been very fortunate regarding the supervisory input I have received during my studies. Originating in Sydney University I would like to thank Elspeth Probyn and Raewyn Connell for supporting my formulation of a research question and a distinct area of scholarly interest. In the more formative stages to Scott Harrison whose critique of masculinities through example and scholarship taught me how to do the same. Finally to Greer Johnson whose support throughout this process, as a mentor, a manager, a co-writer and a fellow narrative scholar has been both inspirational and heartfelt. Within the professional field there are others to thank, Sorrel Penn Edwards, Jennifer Germon, Viv McGregor, Mark Vicars, Rachel Dwyer, Greg Shepard Jodie Taylor, Gillian Warry and the Finishing School thank you for the mentorship, mateship. To all the students I have had the pleasure to teach in London, Sydney and Brisbane thank you for helping me with your ideas and your imagination and for those of you that feature in these pages, an extra thanks. Finally two academics who will be unaware of how constantly they have been by my side during this process, Deborah Britzman whose ability to write and imagine remain my aspiration, and to Raewyn Connell who provides rational frames for what appears irrational.

When asked recently what was my ambition at reaching the end of the doctoral process I responded by hoping that I would still have family and friends left after listening to four years of my research angst. I have been more than very lucky in this regard and would like to thank
Marion Nicol, Sabrina Poma and Janet Smith for egging me on at the start. To my family Papa J, O, M & P who wore *Teaching Men* buttons at the train station, always asked how things were and maintained a complete belief that I could achieve this goal. To my Brisbane friends who have remained stalwart throughout. Especially to JJK, Freddie and Mickey who take a daily interest in my goings on, nudging me away from my desk and getting me soup. And finally to Bill who has made everything possible for the past fifteen years. Thank you for always supporting my every venture with doe eyed optimism, rapier intellect and a whole heart.

Finally I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother Heather Davis who sadly passed away before she could see it finished. It hasn’t gone unnoticed that when I was four, on a wet Sunday afternoon in Weymouth you took me to the pictures to see *Goodbye Mr Chips* … thank you Mum … look I finished!

Ian Davis
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List of Publications

"Vulnerable Practitioners: Fictional Narratives Affecting Masculine Teacher Identity"

Qualitative Research Journal, Emerald Publications - 2014
Currently in press and will be published in the first Volume of 2014