

## ian carragher

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I would like to submit my views on the problems facing boys in today's Education System. I am a High School Mathematics Teacher with 20 years experience and I am also the father of four children(2 girls,2 boys);Kate(17), David (14), Matthew (9) and Abbie(4).

I think that the major factor affecting the progress of boys in our schools is the lack of male academic role models i.e. there are not enough men in the teaching profession. We need to have a gender balance in teaching which reflects society as a whole but, unfortunately, the number of males in teaching is diminishing. This trend is even more evident in our primary and infants schools. My own children have, so far, an aggregate of 19 years in the state's infants and primary school system, yet only one of those nineteen school years has been taught by a male.

This trend will continue. I did a survey using the N.S.W. Department of Education and Training "Education Gazette", (7th June, 2000), Looking at the new teachers on probation. I eliminated the names for which I couldn't determine gender and found that of the remaining 147 names, only 30 were male (a mere 20.4%). Of those thirty male teachers, only 7 were primary teachers.

The school at which I teach, St Ives High School, is a public, co-educational high school on Sydney's North Shore. Only one third of our teaching staff are male.

If you consider the fact that there is now a higher incidence of single parent families there are literally thousands of boys in our education system whose only male role models are on T.V. kicking a football or hitting a cricket ball. Don't get me wrong, I love sport and think that people such as Steve Waugh make excellent role models (although the likes of Hansie and Warnie are a bit of a worry), but the fact remains that boys at an early, impressionable age in our school system are seeing that academic pursuits are not the "male thing to do".

When I think back to my own schooling, in my four primary school years during the 1960's, I had 3 male teachers and 1 female teacher. This would be unheard of in today's system. I also remember my high school mathematics teacher having a positive influence on me in determining my career.

The dwindling number of male teachers is related directly to the decline, in real terms, of teacher's salaries. Since I signed up for a teacher's scholarship in 1975 the salary for a top of the scale class-room teacher has dropped by about 30% in real terms. The recent wage deal has done little to change this. In 1975 a top of the scale class-room teacher made about the same as a State Parliamentarian. We now make about half their salary. It saddens me that I worked hard at University to become an Honours Graduate with a distinction average and now, with 20 years experience on the job, I make about the average weekly wage. I see colleagues who need to bar-tend to make ends meet. I see my 24 year old niece driving ferries on Sydney Harbour and making more money than me. Essentially a teacher's salary is only seen as an adequate second income for a family. Hence the dearth of males.

I have seen capable teachers leave the profession because of the salaries. In my circle of friends and family I know of four qualified male teachers who don't teach. One of them, my cousin Craig (a qualified Primary teacher), did a two week training course in laying cork floor tiles and floor sanding and now he can't afford to go back to teaching.

The only alternative to changing careers is to seek promotion, but this just takes more men out of the class-room. This is why men are over-represented on a per capita basis, in executive positions in schools.

This decline in salaries is not only affecting the number of males entering the profession, it is also affecting the quality of H.S.C. Graduates being attracted to teaching. The universities continue to drop the UAL cut-offs for teaching courses just to fill their quotas.

If the Governments at both State and Federal levels are sincere about correcting a situation which essentially disadvantages half of the student population, they need to put their "money where their mouth is" and restore teachers' salaries to a level which will attract quality graduates of both sexes in equal numbers. Something needs to be done now to correct this anomaly as it will take a number of years for the effects to filter down through the system. This is an ongoing problem that requires a long-term solution.

Yours Sincerely

Ian E. Carragher

Please contact me at       35 Anita Ave  
  Lake Munmorah, N.S.W. 2259  
as I am interested in your views.