INSIGHTS INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THREE MALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to understand the lived experiences of three male elementary teachers working at the Kindergarten to Grade 4 level in a single school district in northwestern Alberta. The study investigated how the participants saw their roles as male elementary teachers, the work-related challenges they faced, and how they responded to those challenges.

Three male teachers with single-grade assignments ranging from Grade 2 to Grade 4 participated in the study. The participants were asked to reflect on various aspects of their experiences of teaching in the traditionally female-dominated profession of elementary education. Data were collected through individual interviews with each participant between May 2011 and June 2011.

Data were analyzed with respect to the participants’ approaches to physical contact with students, their attitudes about role modelling, and their perspectives on men in elementary education. Andrew, Brian, and Peter had various degrees of physical contact with their young students with most of the physical contact in all three participants’ classrooms being initiated by students. All three participants saw role modelling as an important task for male elementary teachers; however, they tended to model socially acceptable human behaviour for all students rather than attempting to serve as “father figures” who modelled stereotypically male attributes for male students to emulate. Finally, all three participants were hopeful that more men would decide to enter the profession in the future.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From September 1990 to June 1999, I was an elementary school student in a small rural community in southeastern Ontario. Like most children before and since, I was taught almost exclusively by women from Kindergarten to Grade 8. I had a male teacher only once, in Grade 6. At the time, the gender of my teachers was unimportant to me. I held all of my teachers in high regard and thoroughly enjoyed attending their classes.

My enjoyment of school as a student influenced my decision to become an elementary teacher. In September 2003, I enrolled in the Concurrent Teacher Education Program at Queen’s University. It was during my pre-service education that I began to take notice of the gender imbalance in the teaching profession. As a teacher candidate in the primary and junior divisions (K-6), I grew accustomed to being one of only two or three male students in classes of 50 or more. I spent just 2 of my 24 weeks of practice teaching under the guidance and supervision of male host teachers.

In August 2009, having completed my B.Ed. and one year full-time in my M.Ed., I moved from Ontario to a First Nations community in northern Alberta, where I spent one year teaching Kindergarten at a K-12 school. Although I had several male colleagues at the school, most taught at the secondary and upper elementary levels. Indeed, I was the only male teacher below Grade 5. To my knowledge, I was the community’s first male Kindergarten teacher. While I was readily accepted in my role by most parents and community members, some were surprised that a man had chosen to work with such young children.
I have since moved to another community in Alberta, where I teach Grade 1. I enjoy my work, and I am supported in it by my family, friends, and colleagues. As a man who was taught primarily by women, was trained in the profession alongside primarily women, and am currently working in a field comprised of primarily women and traditionally regarded as “women’s work” (Johnson, 2010), I was well positioned to conduct the present study. I have experienced firsthand the balancing act that is working on a mostly female staff, deciding where to set boundaries regarding physical contact with students, and attempting to make sense of the extent to which a male teacher is a role model for the students in his care. At some point, I began to wonder if other male teachers whose interests lay in the Kindergarten to Grade 4 range had had similar experiences. Those wonderings, while naturally infused with my own biases, were the impetus for the present work.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the present study was to understand the lived experiences of three male elementary teachers working at the Kindergarten to Grade 4 level in a single school district in northwestern Alberta. The following research questions guided the study:

1) How do the participants see their roles as male elementary teachers?

2) What are the work-related challenges that the participants face?

3) How do the participants respond to the challenges associated with their work?
Rationale

In Canada and other Western countries, men constitute a minority within the teaching profession (Bernard, Hill, Falter, & Wilson, 2004; Foster & Newman, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Research into the lived experiences of male teachers is a necessary step towards an understanding of why so few men choose to teach. Given the continuing decline in the number of men engaged in the profession (Bernard et al., 2004; Wiest, 2004), knowledge of the challenges they face is critical to the formulation of effective recruitment and retention strategies. Current pre-service teacher education programming, which has been criticized for failing to sufficiently prepare men for the challenges they will face in a traditionally female-dominated profession (Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001), could be improved through research aimed at understanding the challenges male teachers encounter in the workplace. The dissemination of research findings of studies pertaining to the experiences of male educators may also serve as an impetus for both formal and informal dialogue about the position of men in the education of young children.

Overview of Project

This project investigates the lived experiences of three male elementary school teachers. In this first chapter, I have presented an autobiographical statement that explains how I became interested in the study of male elementary teachers. I have also explained the purpose and rationale for the study. In Chapter 2, I provide the background for the research by reviewing the literature related to male elementary teachers and describing the methods used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. In Chapter
3. I introduce the three participants and present the results of the study. In the final chapter, I reflect on the key learnings that emerged from the research. I also present implications for research and practice, together with my personal reflections on the process.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND FOR THE RESEARCH

In this chapter, I begin by presenting an overview of the literature related to male elementary school teachers. To situate the present research within the body of existing knowledge on the topic, I summarize and critique publications pertaining to the lived experiences of male elementary teachers and the demand for more male elementary teachers.

After reviewing the pertinent literature, I describe the methods used in conducting the present research. First, I describe the process of obtaining ethical clearance for the study. I then outline the methods of participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Literature Review

The literature related to male elementary school teachers can be divided into two main categories: (a) studies pertaining to the lived experiences of male elementary teachers, and (b) studies pertaining to the demand for more male elementary teachers. The literature review that follows is organized into these two sections.

The Lived Experiences of Male Elementary Teachers

Men who choose to teach elementary school do so within the context of a female-dominated profession. In Ontario, men comprise just 10% of teachers at the primary and junior levels (Parr, Gosse, & Allison, 2008). There are similarly low numbers of male elementary teachers elsewhere in Canada (Bernard, Hill, Falter, & Wilson, 2004), and in other countries such as Australia (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005), New Zealand (Cushman,
Men who teach young children often must contend with issues such as physical contact with students (Cushman, 2009), being perceived as homosexual or suspected of pedophilia (King, 2004), and the expectation that they act as “role models” for their students, particularly the boys (Sargent, 2000).

A study by Cushman (2005b) took as its focus the declining number of male primary teachers in New Zealand. Cushman (2005b) examined the extent to which four factors—physical contact with children, working in a predominantly female environment, salary, and job status—contributed to this phenomenon. Seventeen male primary teachers were recruited for focus group participation. Cushman (2005b) found that issues around physical contact with children, including the potential for accusations of inappropriate touching, could be particularly stressful for men who taught at the primary level. For some participants, working in a female-dominated environment added an extra element of pressure because of expectations that male teachers would assume the rather ambiguous role of “father figure” for one or more young boys. Salary was an issue for male teachers who saw friends with similar qualifications earning substantially more at other occupations. Cushman (2005b) suggested that primary teaching is regarded as a low status profession. However, the criteria by which the status of a profession may be judged are subjective. Garbage collection is an occupation with such low status that, in certain social situations, its members may be hesitant to disclose the type of work that they do. Primary teaching is not similarly low in status. It is highly unlikely that, in any social circumstance, a primary teacher would be too self-conscious to state his or her occupation. When considering job status as a potential factor behind the scarcity of male
teachers in primary education, it would be more appropriate to conceptualize teaching young children not as a profession of low status unto itself, but rather as one of lower status than some of the other occupations—medicine, law, academia, and so on—from which men, and indeed women, are free to choose.

In another study, Cushman (2005a) sought to determine the factors that attracted men to primary teaching, the experiences they had before entering the profession, and the ways in which their families and friends reacted to their career decisions. Seventeen male primary school teachers participated in focus groups. The participants’ reasons for choosing primary teaching included their love of working with children, the opportunity to spend time playing and interacting with children, their own positive experiences of schooling, and the idea that they were making a valuable contribution to society. All of the men reported high job satisfaction. The participants reported a wide range of reactions from friends and relatives upon disclosing their intention to teach at the primary level. While some persons they knew were supportive, others were concerned because primary teaching tends to be seen as women’s work. Some persons in the teachers’ lives suggested that secondary teaching would be a more appropriate vocation for a male educator. Teaching was a second career for 12 of the 17 participants. However, given that career changes among both men and women are far more common now than in decades previous (Kagia, 2005; Norris & Gillespie, 2009), it cannot be assumed that the men who entered the profession later did so because of initial hesitations brought on by societal messages that the primary classroom is not an appropriate place for men. Cushman (2005a) provided no breakdown of the participants’ marital status; however, she noted that, especially for the unmarried men, being perceived as homosexual or a pedophile
was an issue of concern. Cushman (2005a) knew all of the participants through previous professional interactions. By recruiting participants with whom she had never discussed educational issues, Cushman (2005a) would have reduced the potential for bias in her study.

Klecker and Loadman (1999) focused on the job satisfaction of elementary teachers. The researchers mailed questionnaires to 4428 elementary teachers at 129 schools in Ohio. The number of surveys completed was 1877; of these, 1848 were used for analysis. Approximately 15 percent of respondents were male. Years of teaching experience was significant only in that participants who had taught for 26 years or more rated their satisfaction with colleagues lower than participants who had taught for fewer years. Klecker and Loadman (1999) concluded that “elementary school teaching is a satisfying career for both male and female teachers” (p. 512). However, male teachers tended to rate their job satisfaction more negatively than female teachers in terms of the degree of challenge associated with the job and interactions with colleagues. Klecker and Loadman (1999) recommended mentoring programs as a means of supporting and retaining men who choose elementary teaching as a profession. A follow-up study consisting of interviews or focus groups in which the experiences of both male and female teachers could be shared in greater depth would provide insight as to the reasons why participants rated their job satisfaction as they did.

Coulter and McNay (1993) interviewed seven early career male elementary teachers to get a sense of the issues they faced as men in a predominantly female profession. All the men were white, between 28 and 40 years of age, and from middle class backgrounds. Their teaching assignments ranged from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The men
participated in focus groups every two months from the conclusion of their teacher education program until the end of their first year of teaching. Some of the men had encountered others who were suspicious about their sexuality, and whether or not they were pedophiles. Some had been told by female teachers that there was no place for men in primary teaching. Some had experienced gender stereotypes at play in the workplace, such as male teachers being expected to teach physical education to multiple classes. In the classroom, the men were active in challenging gender stereotypes. They also found that their masculinity could be helpful when they needed to be firm in disciplining students. According to Coulter and McNay (1993), “several of the men thought it important to let students see men ‘feeling emotional’” (p. 407). One of the participants reported that he had cried in front of his class on more than one occasion. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that, irrespective of their gender, teachers who cry in front of their students are quite anomalous. Therefore, male teachers who choose to cry in the presence of their students may go too far in their attempts to challenge gender stereotypes.

The pervasiveness of gender stereotypes in elementary schools and erroneous associations between male teachers and homosexuality and pedophilia were also addressed in a study by Sargent (2000). Twenty-three American male primary teachers were interviewed. The participants, most of whom reported middle-class upbringings, came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Some had been teaching for more than three decades, while others were relatively new to the profession. Three of the participants disclosed that they were gay. The study consisted of individual interviews, follow-up interviews with four of the participants, and two focus groups of three participants each.
Sargent (2000) found that the male teachers were often asked to perform stereotypically male tasks such as lifting heavy objects and taking responsibility for student discipline. The men worked under scrutiny, reluctant to make physical contact with their young students for fear of being suspected of being gay or a pedophile. The findings also suggest that the men tended to be looked to as role models for their students, but that the expectations of male teacher role models were ill-defined. Sargent (2000) identified three ways in which male teachers might choose to compensate for the fact that they could not nurture or “mother” their students in the same ways or to the same extent that their female colleagues might. First, they might downplay the necessity for nurturing in the primary classroom, focusing instead on the curriculum-based aspects of their roles as educators. Second, they might choose to ignore policies that prohibit physical contact with students. Third, they might compensate with a lack of physical closeness in their classrooms with less easily misconstrued forms of contact, such as handshakes or high fives. Sargent (2000) concluded that policymakers must consider the reasons why men might hesitate to enter female-dominated occupations such as teaching. Men who become primary teachers need assistance with what can sometimes be a difficult transition into the profession.

Foster and Newman (2005) used the term “identity bruising” to describe what results when male primary teachers meet with negative comments about their decision to work in a field dominated by women. Foster and Newman (2005) conducted focus groups with four groups of male teacher trainees in the UK over a four-year period. There were approximately 12 trainees in each group. They also collected data from a separate group of 35 teachers and trainees. Four participants were selected for semi-structured interviews.
and additional focus group discussions. Foster and Newman (2005) provided narratives of each of the four men’s experiences with identity bruising. The narratives suggested that some male primary teachers were perceived as settling for an occupation of lower status and lower financial compensation than they needed to when other, more lucrative, more respected occupations were easily accessible to members of their gender. The authors also suggested that, while the male primary teachers might have been looked to as role models for young boys, parents did not always take well to the idea that their male children might be aspiring to enter the same field of work as those role models. The experiences related by participants also pointed to male primary teachers being under greater suspicion and watched more closely by parents than their female counterparts. Participants’ methods of dealing with identity bruising situations included working to gain trust and acceptance before making physical contact with students, and working to see themselves as they might be perceived by others. Foster and Newman (2005) found that, the longer the teacher stayed in the profession, the less damaging instances of identity bruising became. However, this claim might have been better substantiated had more long-serving teachers been included in the final stage of the research.

In their study, Hansen and Mulholland (2005) investigated the ways in which a group of Australian male elementary teachers at the beginning of their careers saw and lived out the caring role that is typically associated with their profession. This role requires men to cross gender boundaries because it does not align with common conceptions of masculinity. The researchers interviewed 16 men who had just completed a four-year B.Ed. program. One year later, they interviewed 8 of the 16 for a second time. The data were presented as narratives. Some of the male teachers were apprehensive
about being assigned to work with the very young, but, with experience, discovered that they enjoyed the work and were capable of acting as carers of elementary students. The narratives suggested that men who announced their intention to become teachers were likely to be assumed to be preparing for secondary teaching, since teachers of older students are not required to perform the responsibilities of caring in the same ways as teachers of younger pupils. Caring behaviours, such as taking time alone with a child or comforting a student with a hug, that might be acceptable for female teachers might pose too great a risk for male teachers. The research of Hansen and Mulholland (2005) demonstrates that there are other ways, such as taking time to talk with a student who is having difficulties rather than physically embracing the child, that both male and female teachers can use to fulfill their responsibilities of caring while still remaining unquestionably professional and above suspicion. The study was limited by ever dwindling numbers of participants. This shortcoming might have been averted had the methodological design of the study been slightly altered such that it followed graduates of two or more consecutive B.Ed. cohorts, rather than the members of just one graduating class.

Cushman (2009) examined the ways in which male teachers approach the issue of physical contact with students. She interviewed 12 men: three from England, five from Sweden, and four from New Zealand. The study included data from three of the men. The first, Ronnie, was a 25-year-old Year 1 teacher in London, England. Ronnie had learned about issues of child protection during his postsecondary studies, and also at a school in-service held not long before the research took place. While he was aware of the risks associated with making any sort of physical contact with his young students, he
nevertheless believed that it was an important aspect of the teacher-student relationship. As a result, he carefully monitored the nature and frequency of his contact with pupils. Ronnie observed that his female colleagues tended not to monitor themselves to the same extent. The second man, Ivan, was a 32-year-old Year 4 teacher in Malmo, Sweden. He had been given no advice as to how he should approach teacher-student physical contact. Although it was not in his nature to hug often, Ivan would hug students who were in difficulty. He was especially careful of the way he hugged girls, seemingly an acknowledgement of the potential risks therein. Ivan chose to engage in physical contact with his students by wrestling with them on the playground, an activity which Cushman (2009) suggested was less risky for Ivan than hugging children within the confines of the classroom. The third man, Tim, was a 36-year-old Year 6 teacher in Christchurch, New Zealand. Tim saw himself as a role model for his male students, and related to them through football, often putting them in headlocks. Cushman (2009) concluded that, when male teachers routinely hear messages about the risks associated with physical contact with students, they tend to behave in ways consistent with male hegemony, and therefore do not serve to challenge gender stereotypes in the schools in which they teach. Although the men selected for the study might have been somewhat representative of the other nine interviewed, Cushman’s (2009) article could have been strengthened had she drawn on the experiences of additional participants. Although the sexual orientation and marital status of a male teacher may impact the way in which he approaches physical contact with students, Cushman (2009) did not specify who among the men was married and who was homosexual, if any. By neglecting to include these details about the participants, the
author effectively assumed that all men are the same in sexual orientation and marital status.

The significance of sexual orientation was given closer consideration by King (2004), who wrote of the difficulties associated with being a gay male teacher of the primary grades. While himself a closeted gay teacher, King (2004) found it necessary to closely monitor his behaviours to ensure that those behaviours would not be called into question by parents and others who believed that exposure to homosexual people was harmful to children. According to King (2004), some people believe that gay teachers can influence students’ sexuality, and that they “will recruit young boys into homosexual lifestyles” (p. 124). King (2004) suggested that, as primary teachers, gay men can serve as role models for students who will lead homosexual lives as adults, and may help children to see homosexuality in ways not represented at home or in the media. The credibility of the claims made in the article might have been strengthened had King (2004) been more diligent in supporting them with previously published research and the experiences of other gay men who teach or have taught at the primary level.

A study by Oyler, Jennings, and Lozada (2001) took as its focus the experiences that one of the authors, a former U.S. Marine, had as a pre-service elementary teacher. Philip (Lozada’s first name) experienced difficulty in his first practicum when his suitability to teach young children was questioned. During his second practicum, all three researchers met on six occasions to discuss the difficulties Philip encountered in his first practicum, and how those difficulties were related to his gender. In addition to their discussions, the researchers analyzed documents that included Philip’s student teaching journal, his practicum evaluations, his autobiographical statement, four letters he was
required to write as a result of the difficulties of his first practicum, and the first author’s meeting notes. Oyler et al. (2001) noted that, in his move from the Marine Corps to elementary student teaching, Philip left an occupation commonly associated with masculinity for an occupation commonly regarded as women’s work. They suggested that Philip’s pre-service program could have done a better job of acknowledging the transition that he underwent. Philip was criticized for disciplining children physically, making sexist remarks, and the way in which he related to children on an emotional level. Oyler et al. (2001) suggested that, because of his gender and his former occupation, Philip might have been exposed to a high level of scrutiny from the individuals supervising his student teaching. Later in his pre-service year, teaching colleagues became satisfied with Philip’s practice, not so much because he had changed his ways of doing things, but rather because he had learned “the ‘care talk’ that serves as an entry into this discourse community” (p. 376). The authors recommended that teacher education programs attend to issues of gender in teaching though means such as dialogue between supervisors and others responsible for guiding trainees through the program, including more course readings about men’s experiences as primary teachers, thereby providing student teachers with detailed information about classroom culture.

The research presented in this section provides insight into the experiences of the male elementary teachers who participated in the studies. Although those who remain in the profession for many years may enjoy what they deem to be a satisfying career, male elementary teachers are unquestionably aware of other similarly qualified individuals who earn substantially more money in occupations to which society ascribes a higher status. Men who decide to teach at the elementary level may expect their decision to be
met with a wide range of responses, both supportive and otherwise. Men who make elementary teaching their career typically work in female-dominated environments. As gender minorities in their places of employment, men may be expected to perform tasks associated with child discipline, heavy physical labour, and the teaching of physical education, all of which are activities traditionally associated with masculinity. Male elementary teachers are likely to be looked to as “role models,” even if the definition of same is unclear. For men, especially those who are unmarried, choosing to teach very young children may carry with it the potential for assumptions of homosexuality. Given the unfortunate but nevertheless prevalent associations between homosexuality and pedophilia, male elementary teachers may find their practices and day-to-day actions more closely scrutinized than those of their female colleagues. There also exists the potential for allegations of misconduct. For these reasons, many male elementary teachers are vigilant in self-monitoring their behaviours so as to ensure that these behaviours will not be misconstrued.

**The Demand for More Male Elementary Teachers**

The dearth of male elementary school teachers in North America and abroad (Bernard, Hill, Falter, & Wilson, 2004; Foster & Newman, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010) has been highlighted in the popular media (Abraham, 2010), and has been suggested as a cause for the academic underachievement of young male students (Carrington & Skelton, 2003). In recent years, the call for more male elementary school teachers has been strident (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Lahelma, 2000). The research pertaining to the demand for more elementary school teachers, however, provides no
evidence that having more male teachers will be beneficial to students in terms of increasing their academic performance or providing them with male role models.

At a time when men were actively being recruited as role model teachers as a means of addressing boys’ underachievement, Roulston and Mills (2000) posited that, instead of challenging male hegemony in schools, male music teachers actually reinforced it. The reasoning behind their argument was that, because music teaching had long been considered a female domain, men who entered it felt that they needed “to ‘prove’ their masculinity” (Roulston & Mills, 2000, p. 222) by conforming to common male stereotypes. Roulston and Mills (2000) analyzed data from two case-study research studies involving music teachers. One of the studies was conducted in Canada, and the other in Australia. In both studies, there were six participants (one male and five females). Tony, the male primary music teacher from the Australian study, sought to form positive relationships with his students by presenting himself as a “cool,” longhaired, and arguably permissive teacher who was knowledgeable about the sorts of music activities that interested his young students. Andy, the Canadian music teacher, spent extra time working with male students who were struggling with singing so that they could surprise the girls in the class with their improvements. For Roulston and Mills (2000), the approaches of Tony and Andy were problematic because they reinforced male hegemony rather than calling it into question. If the perpetuation of male hegemony is seen as undesirable for schools, placing more male teachers in stereotypically female teaching assignments may not be a favoured approach. Although the researchers expressed their disdain that male stereotypes were being perpetuated by the male music teachers they studied, they offered no specific suggestions as to how these men might
otherwise conduct themselves to challenge male hegemony in their classrooms. Their findings might have been more meaningful had the experiences of more than two male teachers been examined.

Harris and Barnes (2009) studied children’s perspectives of the roles that male and female teachers played in the Kindergarten classroom. The study took place in two Kindergarten classes in South Australia, both of which were team-taught by one male teacher and one female teacher. Thirty-seven four-year-olds (21 girls and 16 boys) and their teachers participated in the study. Individually or in small groups, each child drew a picture of his or her teacher. While the students were drawing, a researcher engaged in conversational interviews with them. The teachers were also interviewed. Harris and Barnes (2009) found that “the children identified both teachers as able to fulfill most of the roles that they associated with them” (p. 172). However, they tended to perceive male teachers as more likely to be involved in sports and as having more authority in the classroom than their female counterparts. Boys and girls were more likely to identify the teacher of their own gender as someone with whom they could build relationships. However, it is difficult to know whether they identified these teachers because of their gender or because of other attributes they possessed. While Harris and Barnes (2009) cited relationship building between boys and male teachers as a reason why it might be beneficial to have more men teaching at the elementary level, they also drew attention to the fact that, since the students tended to associate the men in their classrooms with stereotypically male activities, having more male elementary teachers in schools might actually reinforce male hegemony rather than calling it into question.
The research of Skelton et al. (2009) addressed “whether pupils and their teachers felt the gender of a teacher mattered to their experiences of schooling” (p. 187). The research was carried out in 51 classrooms in north-east and south-east England, with two days at each school. On the first day, 307 seven- and eight-year-olds (three boys and three girls from each classroom) were interviewed. On the second day, the researchers observed the students and teachers in their classrooms, and interviewed the teachers. Skelton et al. (2009) found that, while teachers’ professional capabilities mattered to the students, their gender did not. However, the students’ adherence to commonly held gender stereotypes was evident in the ways in which they wanted to emulate their teachers. The majority of the teachers reported that they distinguished between their male and female students. Skelton et al. (2009) noted that the underachievement of male students was a factor behind teachers’ different ways of responding to boys and girls. They stated that awareness of gender inequities in the classroom must extend beyond issues stemming from boys’ underachievement. Skelton et al. (2009) suggested that it is desirable for teachers to avoid relating to their students in ways that might be construed as gender stereotypical. It could be argued, however, that it is sometimes acceptable or even desirable (for example, in building rapport between student and teacher, or in motivating students based on interest) for teachers to relate to students along gendered lines.

Lahelma (2000) investigated teenage students’ perspectives regarding male and female teachers. Ninety Finnish students were interviewed at 13-14 years of age. The students were asked to describe the kinds of teachers they liked and disliked, and to describe their ideal teacher. Four years later, 60 of the original participants were
interviewed for a second time. For the most part, the students tended to like both male and female teachers who possessed certain characteristics such as a relaxed nature, a sense of humour, friendliness, and the ability to maintain order in the classroom. The characteristics of good and bad teachers, as described by the students, were not specifically associated with gender stereotypes. Lahelma (2000) also found that, contrary to popular opinion, the students did not suggest that more male teachers were needed to act as role models for young people. The findings of this study clearly do not support a demand for more male elementary teachers. Difficulty in interpreting the study arises because Lahelma (2000) failed to make note of how many of the students interviewed were female and how many were male. Particularly when issues of gender are being explored, a breakdown of the gender of the participants is essential.

Bricheno and Thornton (2007) investigated whether students see their teachers as role models, and which characteristics students see as most important for role models. Their research was carried out in two elementary schools and two secondary schools in southeast England. Participants from the elementary schools were all students 10 and 11 years of age who were present on the day of the research. Participants from the secondary schools were all students 14 and 16 years of age who were present that day. A total of 197 boys and 182 girls completed a two-part questionnaire. In the first part, the students were presented with a prepared list of characteristics and asked to select those they felt were desirable for role models. In the second part, the students had the opportunity to state which characteristics they considered most important. They were also asked to provide information about their own role models. Bricheno and Thornton (2007) found that the students wanted role models who were honest, hardworking, and helpful. They
also found that both boys and girls saw caring and trustworthiness as important role model characteristics. Boys were more likely than girls to value “surface attributes such as ‘looks,’ ‘fame,’ ‘success and money’” (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007, p. 389), whereas girls were more likely than boys to want role models who exhibited personality characteristics such as kindness. Relatives were named as the participants’ most important role models more often than anyone else. Second to relatives, boys named football players as their role models, while girls named their friends. Just 2.4% of the students in the study named their teachers as role models. Bricheno and Thornton (2007) concluded that the students tended not to see their teachers as role models, and that increasing the number of potential male role models in schools was not likely to improve the problem of boys’ underachievement. The study is limited in that, although students might not name their teachers among their most important role models, they might nevertheless seek to emulate the characteristics of their teachers that they find most desirable.

Carrington and Skelton (2003) critically examined the practice of recruiting men and members of ethnic minority groups into the teaching profession as role models as a means of addressing the underachievement of boys and visible minority students. The data for their research came from two previous studies conducted in England and Wales, where politicians had recently implemented recruitment policies aimed at increasing the number of male and visible minority teachers. In the first study, 49 teacher trainees from a wide range of cultural backgrounds were interviewed about the nature of their initial experiences in the profession and their attitudes towards the policies. The second study involved similar interviews with 36 primary teacher trainees, approximately half of
whom were male. Findings revealed that some of the male trainees had had the appropriateness of their teaching assignment called into question because it did not align with gender stereotypes. Some reported parents’ suspicions that the man working in their child’s classroom might be a pedophile. There was concern among trainees that their capability as educators might be undermined by affirmative action hiring policies if others supposed that their admission to teacher training programs had been based on their ethnicity or gender, rather than their academic merit or suitability for the job. Carrington and Skelton (2003) recommended that the definition of “role model” be clarified, and that consideration be given to ways in which the teaching profession might become more inclusive. Until these two recommendations are addressed, affirmative action policies for male primary school teachers are unlikely to be effective at raising the academic achievement of male students.

In 1979, Schell and Courtney published research that suggested that placing male students in the classrooms of male teachers was not an effective means of addressing underachievement among upper elementary boys. Noting the poor academic performance of boys who did not have male role models in the home, Schell and Courtney (1979) aimed to determine the extent to which having a male teacher affected the academic achievement of fatherless Grade 6 boys. The research, conducted in an urban area in the American Midwest, involved 193 father-absent male students in Grade 6. Ninety of the boys had male teachers, while the remaining 103 had female teachers. Intelligence quotients and the results of standardized tests that the boys completed in the Aprils of their Grade 5 and Grade 6 years were used as data for quantitative analysis. Schell and Courtney (1979) concluded that, “there was no evidence that assignment of father-absent
boys to male teachers, in and of itself, was able to enhance the academic achievement of these sixth grade boys” (p. 195). Their study suffered from limitations such as disregard for the individual differences among the male teachers themselves and the questionable reliability of high-stakes tests as indicators of achievement. However, despite these limitations, there was evidence more than three decades ago that pairing teachers and students by gender would not necessarily translate into better learning opportunities for boys.

More recent research supports the seminal findings of Schell and Courtney (1979). In a UK study that included data from nearly 9000 schoolchildren, Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell (2008) sought to determine whether or not having a teacher of the same gender had a positive effect on primary students’ academic achievement and attitudes towards school. Carrington et al. (2008) focused specifically on 413 classes of 11-year-olds. Three hundred of the classes were taught by women, and the remaining 113 by men. The students were administered tests of academic attainment, English vocabulary, and non-verbal ability. They also completed questionnaires to gauge their attitudes towards school and the primary core curriculum. Carrington et al. (2008) found that the gender of the teacher was not a significant factor in the academic achievement of students. That is, there was no evidence to suggest that students performed better academically if they had a teacher of the same gender. The gender of the teacher seemed to matter more in terms of students’ attitudes towards school. Students (both male and female) taught by female teachers were more likely than those taught by male teachers to have positive attitudes towards school. The findings of the study clearly do not support the popular call for more male elementary teachers. Carrington et al. (2008)
recommended that teacher recruitment efforts should be focused on finding “effective, high calibre teachers, whatever their gender” (p. 323). They maintained, however, that increased numbers of male teachers might prompt parents and students to see academic pursuits as acceptable for both girls and boys. A major limitation of the study is that it does not take into account that how students do in school depends on a variety of factors, of which the gender of the teacher is but one.

In a Canadian study, Sokal, Katz, Chaszewski, and Wojcik (2007) sought to determine whether or not male teachers helped boys do better in reading. The 180 participants were Grade 3 and 4 boys who had been identified as struggling readers. There was variety among the boys in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Data were gathered as to the boys’ perceptions of reading as a feminine activity, a masculine activity, or a gender-neutral activity. Measures of reader self-perception and reading levels were taken before and after a 10-week reading intervention during which each of the students worked with either a male or a female research assistant. At the conclusion of the intervention, Sokal et al. (2007) noted “significant gains in reading performance” (p. 655). However, the gender of the RA was not found to be significant therein. Working with a female RA tended to have a positive effect on participants’ self-perceptions as readers. The research of Sokal et al. (2007) stands in opposition to those who call for more male elementary teachers as a means of increasing the academic achievement of male students. “By incorrectly attributing causality between the presence of male teachers and boys’ schooling outcomes,” warned Sokal et al. (2007), “we may promote blanket interventions that are ineffective or even harmful” (p. 657).
In a similar study, Sokal and Katz (2008) explored the effects of computer-based books and male teachers on male students’ reading achievement and attitudes towards reading. A total of 119 Grade 3 and 4 boys who struggled in reading were selected for participation in the study, which was conducted in 12 Winnipeg schools. Before and after the study, data were collected on the boys’ reading levels, self-perceptions as readers, and views of reading as a gendered or gender-neutral activity. The duration of the study was 22 weeks, during which time the boys read with either a male or a female RA for 30 minutes weekly. For half of the boys, computer-based books were used during the reading sessions. For the other half, computer-based books were not used. Male RAs and the use of computer-based books were not significant factors in the boys’ reading achievement. The research of Sokal and Katz (2008) further substantiates the claim that recruiting more male teachers is not the solution to addressing the academic difficulties of male elementary students.

The preceding research demonstrates that the popular demand for more male teachers in elementary schools is not supported in the scholarly literature. Although some men may work to challenge male hegemony and gender stereotypes in elementary schools, others feel compelled to revert to hegemonic ways of behaving to demonstrate that, despite being employed in a traditionally female profession, they are masculine men. Despite suggestions that students, particularly boys, need male role models in the classroom, students consider certain personal characteristics and professional attributes—and not gender—important when choosing role models. In any case, teachers do not rank highly among most students’ lists of important role models. There is no evidence to suggest that male teachers bring out the best in boys academically. The demand for more
male teachers, while perhaps well intentioned, is unlikely to lead to increased student success.

Method

The following is a description of the methods used in conducting the study. I begin by detailing the process of obtaining ethical clearance for the study. I then outline how the research was carried out during the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis phases of the study.

Ethical Clearance

In late February 2011, I submitted an application for ethical clearance to the Education Research Ethics Board (EREB) at Queen’s University. After the application was approved by EREB, it was forwarded to the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen’s University for review. GREB granted ethical clearance for the study in mid-April 2011.

In mid-May 2011, I contacted the superintendent of the school division in which the research took place to request ethical clearance for the study. The school division granted ethical clearance for the study in mid-May 2011.

Participant Selection

Three male elementary teachers were recruited for participation in the study. In addition to their gender, the teachers needed to meet two requirements for participation: (a) that they were employed by the school district in which the research took place, and (b) that they were currently teaching at the Kindergarten to Grade 4 level.
I identified the first participant directly using personal contacts and sent him a recruitment notice (Rodham & Gavin, 2006) via email (see Appendix A for the recruitment notice). The recruitment notice provided details about the study and invited him to contact me by email for more information. I identified the second and third participants using snowball sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). At the conclusion of my interview with the first participant, I asked him to suggest other men who might meet the criteria for participation in the study. The first participant provided me with the names of two men. I subsequently emailed both men a copy of the recruitment notice, each of whom subsequently agreed to participate. All participants received a letter of information that contained details about the study (see Appendix B for the letter of information). Participation in this study was entirely voluntary; I obtained informed consent from each participant before his interview (see Appendix C for the consent form). The participant selection process resulted in the recruitment of three male elementary teachers: Andrew, Peter, and Brian (all pseudonyms).

Data Collection

I began collecting data in late May 2011 and finished in late June 2011. I obtained the data for this study by conducting an individual face-to-face interview with each participant (Crano & Brewer, 2002; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Meeting times and locations were prearranged with participants. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length. During the interviews, I asked the participants questions about (a) how they saw their role as male elementary teachers, (b) the work-related challenges they faced, and (c) how they responded to those challenges (see Appendix D for the interview guide). All of the interviews were audio recorded (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).
During each interview, I took notes to make a written record of my conversation with the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

**Data Analysis**

As soon as possible after each interview, I listened to the audio recording multiple times to review the conversation I had had with the participant. I transcribed all three interviews myself (Poland, 2002) and checked the written transcripts against the audio files to ensure accuracy.

Having interviewed the participants, listened to the audio recordings of their interviews, and done the transcribing, I was very familiar with the data. I reread each transcript multiple times to identify themes for analysis. The following themes emerged: (a) physical contact with students, (b) role modelling, and (c) perspectives on men in elementary education. I colour coded the data according to themes to facilitate the writing of results. These results are presented in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the cases of the three participants: Andrew, Peter, and Brian. Each case begins with a description of the participant followed by an examination of his (a) physical contact with students, (b) role modelling, and (c) perspectives on men in elementary education. Following the presentation of individual cases, I provide a synthesis for these themes across all three participants.

Andrew

Andrew was a Caucasian male of average build in his late thirties and married. At the time of the study, Andrew was teaching Grade 2 in a small town in northwestern Alberta. He had been teaching for 10 years. Andrew began his career in education as a teacher of English in Japan, where he worked for five years. During that time, he taught Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, as well as young adults and senior citizens. After leaving Japan, Andrew accepted a position teaching English in Mexico; he remained there for nearly two years. At that time, Andrew decided to return to his native Canada, where he entered a pre-service education program and became a certified teacher. Upon graduation, he was hired at the school where he was employed at the time of our interview. During his two years there, Andrew had taught a Grade 2/3 combined class, as well as a straight Grade 2.

Andrew invited me to conduct our interview in his classroom. Classical music played at low volume for the duration of our discussion about his experiences as a male elementary teacher. Andrew was friendly, although he could not be described as a conversationalist. Indeed, his responses were very short and to the point, even when
prompted to elaborate. Andrew offered little in the way of examples or classroom anecdotes to illustrate the various points and assertions that he made while we spoke. I did not get the impression that Andrew was interested in the topic, or that he took it seriously. However, this impression may have been borne of a certain degree of nervousness on Andrew’s part.

**Physical Contact with Students**

When I asked Andrew how he approached the issue of physical contact with his students, he replied, “I don’t even think about it.” In Andrew’s classroom, physical contact between students and teacher was “part of every day.” Andrew did not shy away from physical contact initiated by students: “There’s lots of hugs. I mean, every day, somebody comes with a hug.” Andrew described only vaguely the nature of the physical contact he and his students shared: “You know, hands on shoulders, hands on hands.” Andrew implied that he used physical contact as a teaching technique to direct students during their daily work.

Andrew gave the impression that he did not engage in any self-monitoring behaviours to ensure that physical contact between himself and his students would not be misinterpreted. Indeed he was not at all concerned about the possibility that his physical interactions with the young children in his charge could be misconstrued: “I don’t worry about it at all.”

**Role Modelling**

Andrew considered role modelling absolutely critical to the role of an elementary teacher: “That’s what I see is the most important part of our job.” Andrew based this belief on the fact that students tended to look up to their teachers: “You know what they
think of you, just because you’re their teacher.” Andrew hoped to instil various values such as “working hard” and “being a nice person” into his Grade 2 students. He also hoped that his example would encourage his students in “being respectful, helping others . . . trying hard even if you know it’s not your best, it’s not a strength of yours, you still have to try hard at all times.” These were the behaviours that Andrew attempted to model for his students on a daily basis: “I just try to make sure that I’m doing things and saying things that I would want them to say and do.”

At the early elementary level, Andrew saw a teacher as “a leader that [students] can talk about things and . . . learn more about life.” However, the burden of an ambitious curriculum made it difficult for Andrew to find time for teaching life lessons and engaging in casual conversation with students: “If it was less curriculum, you could help them learn more about life. It seems that way.”

Andrew felt that, because men and women “do things differently,” children should be exposed to both male and female teacher role models. He considered it imperative that children from single-parent households have teachers of both genders during their formative years: “It’s good to get . . . both perspectives from a mom and a dad.” Several parents had told Andrew “that they’re glad that [their children] have a male teacher at a young age.”

**Perspectives on Men in Elementary Education**

Male elementary teachers were not a minority at the Kindergarten to Grade 6 school where Andrew taught. At that school, three of the five teachers—more than half—were men. In contrast, during his time in Mexico, Andrew had had no fellow male teachers. During his time as a teacher of English in Japan, men accounted for roughly
one-third of Andrew’s teaching colleagues. That number was slightly lower at one-quarter when Andrew completed his practicum in a large town in central Alberta.

Despite the fact that Andrew had spent 8 of his 10 years in the profession teaching at schools staffed primarily by women, Andrew was under the erroneous assumption that there was little disparity between the number of men and women teaching at the elementary level. He thought it would be best if there were relatively equal numbers of male and female teachers at the elementary level: “I think it would be nice to have more, like, close to 50-50. I think it’s good for the kids, just the balance.” However, he offered little in the way of justification for this assertion.

Andrew began teaching “without thinking about it because I had an opportunity, and then after doing it for years, it seemed like it was the only thing I was doing, so I went to school and made it a career.” Teaching at the elementary level appealed to Andrew because “I had more fun with the younger kids, and it seemed that was a place to get a job the quickest.” Andrew believed that, as a male teaching elementary school, the challenges he faced were no different from those of his female colleagues: “I don’t think there’s anything different. I think we all have the same challenges.” Indeed, he rarely thought about being a man in a traditionally female-dominated role: “Other people point it out more than I would ever think of it.”

Some of those who drew attention to the fact that Andrew was working in a traditionally female occupation were working from their own stereotypical assumptions about a man’s place in the profession: “There’s always some people who are surprised. You tell them you’re a teacher, and then they assume you’re junior high or high school. . . because you’re a male.” For the most part, however, those persons closest to Andrew
were pleased with his choice of careers: “Friends and family . . . most people think it’s a really good thing.”

**Peter**

Peter was a heavyset Caucasian male. He was approximately 30 years of age and unmarried. At the time of the study, Peter was teaching Grade 3 in a small town in northwestern Alberta. Peter entered his pre-service education intending to specialize in secondary English and social studies. However, he soon discovered that his interests lay in elementary education. Peter completed his practicum placements in Grade 1 and Grade 2. Upon graduation, he accepted a temporary assignment in Grade 5. Teaching at the upper elementary level confirmed for Peter that he was most passionate about the Kindergarten to Grade 3 age group. His next job search resulted in a position at the school where he was employed at the time of our interview. During his three years there, Peter had taught Grade 3 for two years and Grade 2 for one year.

At Peter’s request, we conducted the interview in my classroom. Peter seemed to be genuinely interested in the topic. He was an excellent conversationalist, and had no reservations about sharing his experiences as a male elementary teacher with me. Throughout the interview, he remained relaxed, listening attentively to my questions and responding with detailed answers. Peter frequently elaborated on his responses by providing examples and sharing anecdotes from his classroom. As we spoke, he altered the tone of his voice for emphasis and invoked his keen sense of humour. Peter did not hesitate to seek clarification when he was uncertain about his interpretation of a question, or about whether or not he had strayed “off topic.”
Physical Contact with Students

Peter described himself as “not a completely huggy feely person.” However, his classroom was far from devoid of physical contact between students and teacher, which he saw as an important component of the teacher-student relationship: “When you’re working at primary, especially K, 1, 2, 3, they’re getting a little less touchy, and 4 even more.” Peter saw this physical contact as “physical affection,” a term that hints at the stereotypically female role of nurturer often associated with teachers of young children (King, 1998; Sargent, 2000). Peter, however, tended to be “not as much of a nurturer as female colleagues.” “I don’t go out of my way to be touchy feely, but I don’t go out of my way not to be.”

Physical contact in Peter’s class tended to be initiated by the students. “If a kid comes up to me and initiates a hug, I’m not going to walk away from them, and I’ve been adamant of that since the beginning.” There were, however, limitations to the sorts of student-initiated physical contact that Peter considered acceptable. “If I’m a high school teacher and there’s a girl wanting a hug, yeah, there’s more issues.” Indeed, the only type of physical contact Peter initiated involved hand-to-hand contact; essentially, high fives and handshakes.

Physical contact was part of the morning entry and afternoon exit procedures in Peter’s classroom. “In the morning, it’s shake their hands. In the afternoons, it’s high fives on the way out.” Hugs were part of these rituals only when initiated by the students: “They can give me a hug if they want. I always said, it’s a hug, a high five, or a handshake.” Each day, Peter expected his students “to leave with some kind of contact.” He believed that this was a reasonable expectation: “It’s not an issue to give somebody a
high five. You’re making contact with your hands. You make contact with lots of things in the day with your hands.”

Some of the physical contact in Peter’s classroom went beyond handshakes and high fives. When celebrating a student’s birthday, “we don’t, you know, just do a birthday clap. We do birthday hip checks where as the class is singing ‘Happy Birthday,’ they try to hip check me and I send ’em flying.” The hip checks were student-initiated: “Of course, they have the option to choose not to receive it.” Peter’s students enjoyed the birthday hip check tradition, and he saw it as “part of the playfulness” that is necessary in an early elementary classroom.

During his pre-service education, Peter was “told to be cautious about the amount of physical contact. … You know, hugs, pats on the back … those kinds of things.” In an ethics course, the instructor was “very adamant that there’s a different standard for males than females regarding what somebody may view as appropriate and where misinterpretation can occur.” Peter was advised that “males are seen as more predatory than females,” and that as “a male . . . in the lower grades . . . you may see some more careful observation of your behaviour.” Peter understood that these comments were intended to help him rather than to make him feel as though men were not welcome in elementary education.

Peter accepted that, as a male elementary teacher, he was “a little bit more under scrutiny” than his female colleagues.

I think the moms feel like you need a little bit more help. I don’t know. They don’t come in and say, “You’re a male, you need assistance,” but I think they’re more curious as to what’s going on and they’re more willing to be in the classroom and assist you.
Peter saw the higher than usual parent presence in his classroom as a “perk” rather than a challenge: “Last year when I taught Grade 2, the other Grade 2 teacher was a female . . . and she could not get home reading volunteers. I had four moms, one per day, come in every week for the entire year.”

Peter was comfortable with the nature and amount of physical contact between himself and his students. He recognized that there were limitations to the degree of physical contact that parents and administrators would feel comfortable allowing. “I think that would be the biggest obstacle . . . if you’re seen as being too affectionate.” However, Peter had never been questioned about his physical interactions with his students. As such, he had no intentions to change his practices. “I just do what I do . . . if somebody comes to me and says there’s a problem . . . then I can adjust that. But I’m not going to rise up to a challenge that doesn’t present itself in my situation.”

**Role Modelling**

Peter was the only male teacher at the school where he taught. He had close relationships with his students, “but not the nurturer kind of relationship that the lower grade females often are perceived to have.” Like many teachers, Peter had “strict expectations, and I don’t find that it hinders the children at all. They rise to those expectations . . . and thrive.” Peter did not view the roles of male and female teachers as a gender dichotomy: “There’s no stereotypical way for a male teacher to be and a female teacher to be.” However, he believed that, because of his gender, his classroom had “a different dynamic than it is with a female.”

Peter had experienced pressure to act as a male role model for his students, particularly the boys. “From anybody you tell what you teach, you get a positive reaction
that there needs to be more male elementary teachers, that they need role models, that it’s
too many females and not enough males in the lower grades especially.” Sometimes, this
pressure came from female colleagues: “Females will often see the male as having a
different role in the elementary school. As more of an authoritarian, disciplinarian, you
know . . . stereotypical macho role.”

In some ways, Peter saw himself as a male role model for the children he taught.
Mostly, however, he rejected the “male role model” label, having serious reservations
about being characterized as a role model for the male students at his school. “I don’t like
to [subscribe] to the fact that, if you’re a male, then you’re a role model for the boys.”
However, Peter recognized that, as a male teacher, he was well positioned to model
socially acceptable ways for men to act towards women. “If you’re talking about being a
role model and how males should treat or should be towards females in . . . not being
physically abusive or that kind of thing, I understand that.” Peter saw the concept of
maleness as “continuously changing . . . depending on what you grew up with, the culture
you’re in, and what your family and your peer group sees as appropriate.” Therefore, he
did not consider himself a role model of all things male: “For me, the whole male role
model, I just don’t go into it.”

However, Peter saw himself as a role model for all students, irrespective of
gender. “I do get a little bit miffed . . . when they say, ‘Oh it’s good to have males at
elementary to be a male role model.’” “I’m not doing it specifically for boys. I’m doing it
for girls and boys and all the students.” Peter believed “that every teacher is a human
being role model.” Peter considered it his and every teacher’s responsibility to model
appropriate human behaviour for all students: “You are teaching . . . your students
through your actions how someone with ethics and manners and grown-up abilities is to act. And, I think whether you’re male or female, that’s the case.” Peter saw it as a bonus if the male students he encountered chose to adopt a particular character trait from him because he was a man. “If boys are more willing to pay attention to that behaviour because I’m male, great!”

**Perspectives on Men in Elementary Education**

By the time Peter arrived at his current school as the only man on staff, he was practised at being “the odd man out.” In his first practicum, “out of . . . a Kindergarten, two Grade 1s, two Grade 2s, two Grade 3s, two Grade 4s, and two Grade 5s, at that school there was one male teacher at Grade 4.” It was much the same at his second practicum school, where there was a lone male teacher in Grade 5. When Peter accepted his first assignment, a temporary position in Grade 5, “there were no [other] male teachers below Grade 6.”

Peter was well acquainted with the challenges male elementary teachers can face as minorities in the workplace. Working in a predominantly female environment, Peter felt “kinda overrun.” Peter believed that there was much ambiguity as to the role of men in the elementary school. “There’s so few of us they haven’t figured out what it is we’re supposed to maybe be as a male in elementary versus the female.” For Peter, this ambiguity carried with it the message that “you’re supposed to learn to sit back and maybe be a little bit more reserved.” He was aware that, should his views be divergent from those of the female majority, he would likely be pressured to keep those views to himself. Not backing down could lead to reprisal: “You learn when to shut up. Or in my case, I haven’t. And that gets you into some trouble.”
When asked how strongly he felt that there should be more men teaching at the elementary level, Peter responded: “If I don’t buy into the male role model thing, if I believe in the human being role model, I don’t think that it matters.” Later, however, Peter revealed that it did matter to him, in at least one way. While Peter believed that male teachers possessed no specific “male” attributes, he also felt that “some kids seem to respond better to males, and some respond better to females. And so, from that aspect, it would be great to have more males, for those kids who respond better to males for whatever reason.”

According to Peter, “people who go into education are adhering to their own stereotypes . . . elementary is for females, and junior senior high is more for males.” He was insistent that men should not enter (or be pressured into entering) elementary education merely as a means of redressing the gender imbalance. “I think it’s important for prospective educators to go where they feel comfortable. If they don’t feel comfortable being in an elementary school, then there’s no point in them being there.” Nevertheless, Peter expected that there would be

a trend for more males coming into elementary as the nurturer . . . as the stereotypical male role of being macho in society is slowly fading away, you will find that . . . there won’t be as much hesitance for males to come in and take on a bit more of a nurturer role.

Regardless of the number of male teachers in the profession, Peter was convinced that “as long as the people who are in those classrooms want to be there and are doing a good job, I think the kids’ll be fine.”

**Brian**

Brian was a physically fit Caucasian male in his mid-fifties and married. At the time of the study, Brian was teaching Grade 4 in a small town in northwestern Alberta. He was a seasoned teacher with over 20 years of experience in elementary, secondary,
and adult education. After teaching in Libya, Brian returned to his native Canada and taught for one year at a secondary school in the community where he was living at the time of our interview. He then spent six years teaching at a local federal correctional institution. When a contractor assumed responsibility for providing teachers for the institution, Brian faced the possibility of a significant decrease in salary. As a result, he decided to return to the public education system. After approximately two years of substitute teaching and covering maternity leaves, Brian accepted a position in Grade 1. He held that position for one school year before moving to Grade 3 for five years. At the time we spoke, Brian had been teaching Grade 4 for seven years. Altogether, Brian had been teaching elementary school in the community for 15 years.

At Brian’s request, we conducted the interview in a multipurpose room at the school where I teach. Brian was friendly and clearly interested in the subject matter we were discussing. While he could not be described as an overly talkative individual, Brian seemed to be at ease throughout the interview. He listened attentively as I asked my questions, usually pausing briefly to formulate his responses before delivering them with considerable diction. Brian’s answers were detailed, yet not rambling. When he needed clarification about a question, he did not hesitate to ask. The examples and personal anecdotes he provided to elaborate on his responses were in no short supply.

Physical Contact with Students

Brian described himself as “not overly physical.” He tended not to initiate physical contact with students so that there was “not a lot of physical contact at school” between Brian and the children in his Grade 4 class, even though Brian was open to physical contact if it was initiated by students: “Sometimes kids will hug me . . . and I
don’t mind that.” In Brian’s view, the higher the grade, the less physical contact there tended to be. “I think that, as they get older, there’s less and less physical contact.” Earlier in his career, however, when Brian worked as a Grade 1 teacher, there was “maybe a little bit more” in the way of teacher-student physical interaction.

Furthermore, Brian used physical contact as a teaching technique: “Every once in a while I might put my hand on someone’s shoulder . . . just to help them refocus on their work.” He also saw physical proximity with the absence of touch to be helpful in facilitating student learning: “If I have to work on student work and I’m evaluating, I find it better to sit down on the chair, then I’m at their level, I can work on their desktop with them.”

On the day I interviewed Brian, an Aboriginal speaker had visited the school as part of the National Aboriginal Day observance. The speaker “had everyone in the school shake hands or high five or hug or whatever.” During that exercise, Brian observed that “some students are very open to a hug, yet others are not open to it.” Brian was practised at determining which students were open to which degree of physical contact at a given time: “You really have to . . . read body language and see how receptive they are to . . . what level of contact.”

**Role Modelling**

In Brian’s community, there were very few male teachers working at the Kindergarten to Grade 3 level. As such, most of Brian’s students came to his Grade 4 classroom having been taught exclusively by female teachers. “In this school system, I’m probably the first male teacher that a child will have.” Brian’s wife was the principal of another local elementary school. Grade 3 students would often tell her that they hoped to
be placed in Brian’s class the following year because they had “never had a male teacher before.” Brian attributed his popularity among prospective students to the fact that “it’s a novelty for them to have a man instead of a woman teacher.” It was obvious, however, that Brian’s gender was not the only quality that made him a teacher of choice for students. He knew that they also “seem to enjoy my delivery, my sense of humour.”

Brian made no references to being a role model for male students specifically. Likewise, he made no mention of modelling any stereotypically male characteristics. Brian saw himself as a role model for all students. He believed that, as a teacher, “you’re . . . another role model outside the family.” Brian considered teachers some of the most important role models for children.

I know that Wayne Gretzky said one time that, you know, “I’m not your role model. You might look up to me because I’m a good hockey player, but listen to your parents, listen to your teachers. Those are the two most important people in your life.” And I believe that that’s the truth.

It was Brian’s hope that his students would seek to emulate his positive example: “You model these things, and hopefully they’ll model them back, or mirror them back towards you.”

One of the attributes that Brian modelled for his students was caring: “I care about them, [and] I think that they see that I care about them.” As well, he modelled socially acceptable behaviours such as self-control: “[The students see] that I’m in control . . . I’m not losing it or anything.” For students who may have had no previous exposure to male elementary school teachers, Brian demonstrated that a man could participate in a traditionally female-dominated profession: “They see me up at the front of the class and prepared and giving good lessons and feedback and encouragement and that . . . I’m
available after class for any remediation that they may need.” Brian felt “that it doesn’t hurt [students] to see a man in that role.”

**Perspectives on Men in Elementary Education**

Brian was one of four male staff members at his school, which offered programming up to Grade 8. As a man working in an elementary setting, he was “definitely a minority.” In his career as an elementary teacher, Brian had “only had one fellow male educator” at the Kindergarten to Grade 4 level. Brian noticed a scarcity of male teachers across all grades: “When you go to convention . . . and that’s all grade levels, you get the feeling there’s so many more women than there are men in the profession.”

I interviewed Brian not long after some significant staffing changes at his school. “We had quite a few more male teachers at our school previously, and [several] of them have retired recently, so we have a really large female demographic at our school.” Although Brian was “fine [working] with women,” the nature of their interactions differed somewhat from Brian’s interactions with his fellow male teachers:

Sometimes I miss my male colleagues, the banter that we had and . . . the things that we’d share. Not that I can’t share with the women teachers, but it’s just a little bit different, you know, when guys banter, tease one another, whatever . . . socialize.

As a man working primarily with women, Brian considered himself “a man in a woman’s world.”

Brian discussed why male secondary and upper elementary teachers might be hesitant to make the change to lower elementary: “Sometimes . . . teachers that teach higher grades say, ‘I could never teach Grade 1,’ or, ‘I could never teach division one’ because they’re used to teaching high school, they’re used to the older students.”
thought that “the younger students almost frighten them because . . . they’re out of their comfort zone.” Occasionally, friends from outside the profession would ask Brian, “How can you do that? That must be so challenging.” However, Brian believed that men who might be considering elementary teaching as a career should not dismiss the idea without giving it a try: “Unless you’ve done it, you just don’t know what it’s all about.”

Brian was adamant that teachers should work at the age level where they felt most comfortable: “It’s a personal choice.” Brian “wouldn’t like to see mandatory service at elementary school as a requirement for . . . teaching certification,” but he felt that every prospective teacher should have “some elementary exposure” during their pre-service education. Brian, who had completed a practicum in Grade 4 himself, suggested that “if it was . . . a requirement for your practicum, I could see that, to give it a try.” Still, Brian maintained that no teacher “should be pushed into . . . that position if they’re not comfortable with it.”

Despite a dearth of male teachers at the elementary level, Brian was optimistic that there would be more in the near future. He expected that part of the influx of male teachers would be due to the scarcity of available jobs in the profession. Brian felt that, given a tight job market, men who might not otherwise explore the possibility of teaching young children would look at the option more seriously: “If a person’s looking for a job, let’s say, and they were a junior high specialist, but it so happened the job was Grade 4, I would tend to think that they’d probably jump at the job.” Brian also expected that some men currently teaching higher grades would decide to try teaching at Kindergarten to Grade 4 level.
Nearing retirement, Brian had “had some very good experiences” teaching elementary school, and intended to “finish off my career, hopefully, in Grade 4.” The enjoyment he derived from teaching at the elementary level led him to suggest that “maybe more men should try it.”

**Synthesis**

**Physical Contact with Students**

The three participants in this study described how they approached the issue of physical contact with students. One similarity across all three men lay in the way in which physical contact was initiated in their classrooms. In Andrew’s Grade 2 classroom, physical interactions between student and teacher were, for the most part, initiated by students. While Andrew would not hesitate to return a hug if a student approached him for one, it was unlikely that he would offer a hug to a child. Similarly, most of the teacher-student contact in Brian’s Grade 4 classroom was initiated by students. Peter also left it up to students to initiate most of the physical contact in his Grade 3 classroom, including the birthday hip checks. However, he regularly initiated high fives and handshakes. Through his afternoon classroom exit procedures, Peter was the only one of the three participants to require his students to make physical contact with their teacher on a daily basis.

There was less physical contact in the classrooms of Peter and Brian than was found in Andrew’s classroom, possibly due to the younger age group Andrew taught. In Peter’s experience, there tended to be much more physical contact at the Kindergarten to Grade 2 level than in Grades 3 and 4. While Peter was not overly physical with his
students, teacher-student contact was still very much a part of the classroom culture he created. Like Peter, Brian felt that, the higher the grade, the less receptive students were to physical interactions with their teacher. Earlier in his career, while he was teaching Grade 1, the level of physical contact between Brian and his students had been higher than it was with his current class of Grade 4 students. Indeed, Brian had little physical contact with the students in his class while maintaining physical proximity.

The participants engaged in various levels of self-monitoring to ensure that their physical interactions with students would not be misconstrued as inappropriate. Of the three men, Andrew taught the lowest grade and had the most physical contact with his students; however, it was he who engaged in the least self-monitoring. Indeed, Andrew was not worried that he might be seen as too affectionate. Peter was mindful of the boundaries around physical contact that existed between students and teachers, and he was careful not to cross those boundaries. Peter was aware that, as a male elementary teacher, he was under more scrutiny from parents than a female colleague might be. Peter was not bothered by the fact the he was under observation, since a higher than usual parent presence tended to translate into extra help in the classroom. Peter’s physical interactions with students had never been called into question, but he was prepared to re-examine his practices should they be questioned in the future. Brian, having limited physical contact with his students, engaged in relatively few self-monitoring behaviours. However, when presented with a situation that could involve physical contact, Brian was careful to read students’ body language to determine the level of contact to which they were receptive.
Two of the participants, Andrew and Brian, used physical contact as a teaching technique. Andrew would sometimes touch students while directing them in their daily work. However, he did not specify whether this contact was something he did often or on an occasional basis. Brian would place his hand on the shoulder of a student to help the student refocus on the task at hand; however, he gave the impression that this was a relatively infrequent occurrence. Peter made no mention of using physical contact as a teaching technique.

**Role Modelling**

All three participants in this study believed that teachers were important role models for their students. Andrew saw role modelling as a key responsibility for elementary educators. In his view, the early elementary teacher was someone from whom students could learn much about life. However, given the ambitious curriculum that he was required to teach, Andrew found it difficult to make time for teaching life lessons not directly related to the program of study. Brian also considered role modelling an important task for teachers. In his opinion, parents and teachers were the most significant role models for children. Peter had felt pressure, often from female colleagues, to act as a male role model for the boys in his class and school. However, he rejected the “male role model” label, and insisted that, as a teacher, he was a role model for all students regardless of their gender.

The three men each discussed which character traits they modelled for their students. Andrew was constantly modelling behaviours that he hoped his young students would notice and adopt in their own interpersonal conduct, such as working hard, being nice, treating others with respect, and helping others. Similarly, Brian hoped that the
students in his class would seek to emulate his example of caring and self-control. While Peter too considered himself a role model, he was careful to explain that he was, first and foremost, a “human being role model.” He modelled socially acceptable human conduct without bowing to pressure to be the token role model of stereotypically male traits at his school. Indeed, Peter saw himself as a role model specifically for the boys only when it came to modelling appropriate, non-abusive treatment of women by men.

Andrew, Brian, and Peter differed somewhat in terms of their opinions about the importance of having male and female role models available to students at school. Andrew believed that children needed role models of both genders. This view seemed to be aligned with that of some of Andrew’s students’ parents, who had told him that they were pleased that their children had a male teacher so early in their educational career. Brian was less concerned about the gender of the teacher role model, and in no way claimed to be a model of any specifically male traits. However, he related that children who have never had a male teacher before seemed to enjoy being in his class and tended to consider it a novelty. Of the three men, Peter was the least concerned about whether role models were male or female. What mattered most for Peter was that students had a competent adult, male or female, as the case might be, to whom they could look up.

**Perspectives on Men in Elementary Education**

All of the participants in this study had experienced firsthand what it was like to be a gender minority on an elementary school staff. The staff at the school where Andrew worked was comprised primarily of men. However, at all of the schools where he had taught previously, Andrew was part of a small minority of male educators. While teaching in Mexico, for example, he was the lone male on staff. Peter was the only male
teacher at his school, and had few male colleagues at the schools where he had taught previously. Until shortly before our interview, Brian had had many male colleagues. However, the recent retirements of several fellow male teachers had changed the gender demographic such that, at the time of this study, he was one of only a few men teaching at his school.

Despite his previous experiences as a man working almost exclusively with women, Andrew was largely unaware of the gender imbalance in his profession. He believed that the challenges of male elementary teachers were no different than those of their female counterparts, and had spent little time contemplating what it meant to be a male in the traditionally female field of elementary education. Peter, on the other hand, was keenly aware of the gender disparity. Peter felt that, as a man, he was more likely than female colleagues to be silenced for expressing views that departed from those of the majority. Although Brian was very content working on a staff of mostly women, he missed the camaraderie that he had once shared with his male colleagues.

Andrew felt that relatively even numbers of men and women in the profession would greatly benefit all students, especially those from single-parent households. Brian did not insist on a gender balance. However, he believed that all prospective teachers should have exposure to the early grades, and that more men should consider elementary teaching as a career. Of the three participants, Peter was the least concerned about the scarcity of men in elementary education. While he felt that male teachers were a benefit to those students who tended to respond better to men, he was adamant that the students would do well with teachers of either gender, provided that those teachers were passionate about their work and fulfilling their responsibilities as educators.
While Andrew was silent on the subject, Peter felt strongly that men should not be pressed to go into elementary education if it was not their calling. At the same time, he expected that, as society becomes more accepting of men taking on the traditionally female role of nurturer, the number of men teaching at the elementary level may increase. Like Peter, Brian thought that only those teachers who were comfortable working with young children should pursue elementary teaching. He hypothesized that teachers who were used to working with older students were frightened at the possibility of teaching at the elementary level, but insisted that prospective teachers could not fully appreciate what it was like to teach young children until they had given it a try. Brian was also optimistic about the possibility of more men deciding to teach at the elementary level in the future.
CHAPTER 4: REFLECTIONS

In this chapter, I begin by reflecting on five key learnings that emerged from the research that will inform my practice as a male elementary school teacher. I then present implications for research and practice, together with my final thoughts on the process of conducting this study.

Five Key Learnings

Conducting research into the lived experiences of male elementary teachers has allowed me a glimpse into the professional lives of three dedicated and experienced educators. My conversations with Andrew, Brian, and Peter have helped me understand how they approach physical contact in their classrooms, the extent to which they see themselves as role models for their students, and their perspectives regarding men in elementary education. As a male elementary teacher, there are several lessons that I can extract from this research for application in my daily practice. These lessons are (a) teach at the age level with which you are comfortable, (b) be a human being role model instead of a male role model, (c) let students initiate most physical contact, (d) continue the dialogue about male elementary teachers, and (e) be there for other men in the profession.

Teach at the age level with which you are comfortable

I have learned that men should not pursue a career in elementary education merely as a means of earning a living. To be successful teaching at the elementary level, men must be comfortable working in the elementary school environment. The three participants in this study were comfortable with their teaching assignments. Andrew
preferred elementary teaching to high school teaching because he “had more fun with the younger kids.” Peter found his niche when he transitioned from upper elementary to primary teaching following his first year at the Grade 5 level. Having taught overseas, at the high school level, and at a correctional institution, Brian had decided that Grade 4 was where he wanted to spend the remaining years of his career in education. When asked how strongly he felt that there should be more men teaching elementary school, Brian responded that no teacher “should be pushed into . . . that position if they’re not comfortable with it.” Similarly, Peter felt that “if they don’t feel comfortable being in an elementary school, then there’s no point in them being there.” Conducting this study has challenged me to reflect on whether or not I am comfortable teaching at the elementary level. I have decided that, despite the many challenges that male teachers can face working in a non-traditional occupation, I am comfortable in my role as a Grade 1 teacher and wish to remain at that grade level.

**Be a human being role model instead of a male role model**

As a teacher, I have always considered myself an important role model in the lives of my young students. However, it was only while engaged in the present research that I realized the complexities around male elementary teachers and role modelling. Male teachers can choose to be either male role models or human being role models. The aim of male role models tends to be modelling stereotypically male conduct for boys, particularly those without a steady male figure in their lives. Gender is less important for human being role models, who tend to model socially acceptable behaviour for both male and female students to emulate. All of the participants in this study may be regarded as human being role models. Although Andrew thought it important for students to have
“both perspectives from a mom and a dad,” the values he sought to model for his students—a good work ethic, being respectful, and helping others—were not inherently gender-laden. Brian was clearly a model of socially acceptable behaviour for both boys and girls, as was Peter. Reflecting on my own classroom practice and my beliefs about role modelling, I have concluded that I am also a human being role model rather than a male role model. My aim as a teacher is not to intentionally perpetuate male hegemony by teaching boys how to be men. Rather, it is to provide students with an example of sound judgement and morally informed conduct that they may choose to emulate.

**Let students initiate most physical contact**

Because of the unfortunate associations between male elementary teachers and homosexuality and homosexuality and pedophilia (Coulter & McNay, 1993; Cushman, 2005a; Sargent, 2000), men who teach young children tend to be regarded with suspicion, particularly where physical contact with students is concerned (Sargent, 2000). Having considered the ways that Andrew, Brian, and Peter approached physical contact with students, I have learned that most physical contact in the elementary classroom should be initiated by students. Letting students decide the level of physical contact with which they are comfortable eliminates any guesswork on the part of the teacher. It also helps to ensure that the teacher’s physical interactions with students, however benign, are unlikely to be misinterpreted. Peter initiated handshakes and high fives with his Grade 3 students; however, more easily misconstrued contact such as hugs and hipchecks were always initiated by students. Similarly, Brian left it to his Grade 4 students to initiate almost all physical contact. Even Andrew, who had a significant amount of physical contact with his Grade 2 students, spoke of students being the ones who came to him for hugs rather
than responding to his offer of an embrace. While I will offer a hug to a student who is injured or in distress, I tend to receive hugs rather than give them. Occasionally, I raise my hand to invite students to give me high fives if they wish. I am comfortable with the way I approach physical contact in my Grade 1 classroom, and I believe that my students are also. Therefore, like the three men in this study, I intend to continue to let my students take the lead in initiating physical contact in our classroom.

**Continue the dialogue about male elementary teachers**

Conducting this study has inspired me to continue the dialogue about male elementary teachers, including their positive experiences of educating young children, the challenges they face in the workplace, and the ways they respond to those challenges. When I began researching men in elementary education, I discovered that, while there is a body of scholarly literature related to the topic, it is lamentably small. Few educational researchers have made it their task to further the understanding of men who teach in the early grades. More troubling for me was that, while some male teachers such as Peter and Brian had taken time to reflect on their experiences as members of a gender minority in their professions, others such as Andrew have not. I have learned that, as someone who has investigated the position of men in the traditionally female-dominated profession of elementary teaching, it is important for me to share my understanding with others. Encouraging the dialogue about male elementary teachers, both within and outside the profession, will be a positive step towards a more complete insight into this seldom-studied gender minority group.
Be there for other men in the profession

Considering the cases of Andrew, Brian, and Peter and reflecting on my own experiences as a male elementary teacher have prompted me to take a more active role in supporting my male colleagues as they encounter the challenges that come with teaching at the lowest grade levels. As a male elementary teacher, I am well positioned to support other men who may be facing challenges similar to those of the participants in this study. Peter, who at times felt “overrun” working with primarily women, may have benefitted from having another male colleague in the community with whom he could discuss his frustrations and share strategies for thriving as a “man in a woman’s world,” as Brian summarized it. Teachers such as Brian, who feel comfortable teaching alongside female colleagues but miss the absence of their fellow male teachers, may find it helpful to have male teachers with whom they can interact and discuss both school-related and non-school-related matters. As I continue my career in elementary education, I will endeavour to seek out other men who have few or no other male colleagues at their school with the hope of offering them an opportunity to share their successes and challenges as gender minorities in the profession. I will also take time to get to know male colleagues with whom I might otherwise seldom interact that they might benefit from the camaraderie of a fellow male elementary educator.

Implications for Research

The present research presents at least three possibilities for future research. First, there were just three participants in this study, all of whom were Caucasian and employed in a single school division in northwestern Alberta. Two of the three participants, Andrew
and Brian, were partners in heterosexual marriages, and Peter’s sexual orientation was not disclosed. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples.

Second, this study explored only three themes around the lived experiences of male elementary teachers: physical contact with students, role modelling, and perspectives on men in elementary education. A more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of men who teach young children could be obtained through research focused on themes such as job satisfaction, the nature of professional relationships with female colleagues, and interactions with parents.

Finally, the present research focused exclusively on the perspectives of currently practicing male elementary teachers. To more fully understand the challenges that men in elementary education can face, it is important that future studies be informed by the perspectives of men who have left the profession partly or completely due to the challenges associated with being a gender minority in the workplace. Future research should also include the perspectives of prospective male elementary teachers.

**Implications for Practice**

Additionally, this research offers three main implications for practice in the field of elementary education. First, teacher preparation programs must work to ensure that prospective male elementary teachers are aware of both the challenges that men may face in the field and approaches for addressing those challenges. This goal could be achieved through the creation of undergraduate education courses open to both male and female teacher candidates that explore the complexities of gender in the elementary school environment. It could also be achieved by ensuring that there are both male and female
faculty members and host teachers available to mentor male trainees during their introduction to the teaching profession.

Second, supervisors such as principals, vice-principals, and lead teachers in the field of elementary education should be made aware of the issues concerning men who teach young children. Supervisors could be encouraged to obtain this knowledge through independent examination of the scholarly research on the subject. Alternatively, they may obtain it through professional development opportunities at conferences or as part of district leadership team meetings. A book study on a related work such as *Uncommon Caring: Learning from Men Who Teach Young Children* (King, 1998) would be appropriate. If all supervisors were aware of the challenges that male elementary teachers can face in the workplace, they might be better equipped to support their teachers through those challenges.

Lastly, schools and school districts should consider establishing formal or informal mentorship opportunities for men who are entering the profession or encountering difficulties associated with being a male in a traditionally female-dominated occupation. Having access to other men who face or have faced similar difficulties might help to lessen men’s experiences of isolation on predominantly female staffs and give them an opportunity to share their successes and challenges with colleagues who can relate personally.

**Final Thoughts**

The questions that informed the present study were borne of my own experiences as a male elementary school teacher. Throughout the process, I have reflected on the
complexities around interviewing members of my own gender and occupation. Andrew, Brian, and Peter were aware that I was a Grade 1 teacher. Given my experience in the field, I understood the nature of their work. There were some potential benefits to interviewing fellow male educators. For example, it is possible that the participants’ willingness to participate in the research was based in part on our similarities in gender, occupation, and geography. It is also possible that, knowing that I was likely to be able to relate to their experiences, the participants gave me more detailed responses than they might have offered someone without the same professional background. There were also some potential drawbacks to interviewing other men in my profession. For instance, participants such as Andrew, who offered very little in terms of content, might have neglected to elaborate on their experiences under the assumption that I could infer the details. There was also the possibility that I might be too eager to make connections between my own experiences and the participants’ responses, thereby exposing those responses to misinterpretation. As a result, I found it important to ask participants to elaborate on their responses where necessary and to clarify any points on which I was not clear. I was also mindful to regulate the amount of talking that I did during the interviews to ensure that my conversations with Andrew, Brian, and Peter focused solely on their experiences as male elementary teachers and not on my own.

While completing this project, I had ample opportunity to reflect on the participant recruitment phase of the research. Since this was a small study, I considered three a desirable number of participants. When I interviewed Andrew, whose responses tended to be vague and lacking in detail, I gained an appreciation for the importance of sample size in qualitative studies such as my own. Because Peter and Brian provided rich,
detailed responses, the research was hindered little by Andrew’s lacklustre interview. However, a second reticent interviewee would have made data analysis increasingly difficult. The timing of data collection also presented the potential for difficulties in participant recruitment since May and June tend to be among the busiest months for teachers. While all three of the teachers who received the recruitment notice responded and agreed to be interviewed, one of the participants found it difficult to arrange an interview due to the many other school-related duties that were demanding his attention. My own work schedule and academic program planning made it necessary for data collection for this study to occur towards the end of the school year. However, scheduling data collection for a less busy period in the school year will be among my priorities in the design of any future studies involving teachers.

One of my principal aims in completing the present research was to learn more about men’s experiences in the traditionally female-dominated profession of elementary teaching. Individual face-to-face interviews were an excellent means of data collection because they allowed Andrew, Brian, and Peter to tell me their stories in their own words. In similar studies, focus groups have been employed as a means of data collection (Cushman, 2005a, 2005b; Sargent, 2000). Including focus groups in the design of future studies on this topic might be useful in eliciting a broader range of issues and challenges from the participants. The group dynamic of a focus group might also provide less talkative interviewees such as Andrew with an increased number of jumping-off points for discussion, thereby enabling him to describe his experiences as a male elementary teacher in greater detail. I would consider myself most fortunate to conduct such a study in the future.
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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT NOTICE

My name is Arthur Cota and I am a Master of Education student at Queen’s University conducting a research study entitled LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS. I am also an elementary teacher with the [school division’s name inserted]. Another educator within the division suggested you as a potential participant for my research; I obtained your email address using the division email service. I will be performing interviews of approximately 45 minutes with each participant to better understand how men see their roles as elementary teachers, the work-related challenges they face, and how they respond to those challenges. This study is open to any man who teaches at the elementary (K-4) level with the [school division name’s inserted]. More details will be provided in a Letter of Information. If you are interested, please feel free to contact me at 3atjc@queensu.ca.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Arthur Cota
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION

“LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS”

My name is Arthur Cota, and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University, working on a research project. I am writing to invite your participation in research aimed at gaining insight into the lived experiences of male elementary (K-4) teachers. The ultimate goal of my research is to better understand how men see their roles as elementary teachers, the work-related challenges they face, and how they respond to those challenges. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen’s policies.

For the purposes of my research, I wish to interview men who teach at the elementary (K-4) level. I will conduct one face-to-face interview with each participant. Interviews will be approximately 45 minutes in duration with no follow-up. I will make an audio recording of the interview and take notes to make a written record of your interview. The recorded interview will be transcribed and maintained on a computer file and then the recording will be destroyed. None of the data will contain your name or any information that may reveal your identity. Data will be stored in a locked office, and any files stored on a computer will be password protected; your identity will be kept confidential to the extent possible. In accordance with Queen’s policy, data will be retained for a minimum of five years, after which time it will be destroyed.

There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable or which make you feel uncomfortable. You are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data. Any removed data will be destroyed immediately. There is no financial remuneration or compensation associated with this research.

This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, and books. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide; neither will your name be known to anyone tabulating or analyzing the data, nor will your name appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity to the extent possible. Even though all possible precautions will be taken to maintain confidentiality, it may be possible for your identity to be deduced due to a relatively small number of male elementary teachers in the school division. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, the data will contain no identifying information.
Any questions about study participation may be directed to Arthur Cota at 3atjc@queensu.ca or my supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at 613-533-6000 ext. 77298 or freemanj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Sincerely,

Arthur Cota
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

“LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS”

Name (please print clearly): ________________________________________

1. I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent Form and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I will be participating in the study called LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS, the aim of which is to better understand how men see their roles as elementary teachers, the work-related challenges they face, and how they respond to those challenges. I understand that my participation means that I will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview of approximately 45 minutes in duration, that the interview will be audio recorded, and that written notes will be taken.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time, and that I may request removal of all or part of my data. I understand that, even though all possible precautions will be taken to maintain confidentiality, it may be possible for my identity to be deduced due to a relatively small number of male elementary teachers in the school division. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data. The research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, and books, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality.

4. Any questions about study participation may be directed to Arthur Cota at 3atjc@queensu.ca or his supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at 613-533-6000 ext. 77298 or freemanj@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research:

Signature: _______________________________   Date: _______________________

Please write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Arthur Cota. Retain the second copy for your records.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. In your career as an educator, which grades have you taught?

   1.1. Probe: What parts of teaching these grades did you enjoy? Not enjoy?

   1.2. Probe: What made you decide to leave the older grades?

2. How long have you been teaching at the K to 4 level?

3. During your time as a teacher at the elementary level, how many male colleagues
   have you had?

4. What made you decide to become an elementary teacher?

5. How did others react to your decision to teach young children?

6. How do you see your role as a male elementary school teacher?

7. What are some of the challenges you face as a man teaching at the elementary level?

   7.1. How do you respond to this challenge (these challenges)?

8. How do you approach the issue of physical contact with your students?

9. How do you feel about working in a predominantly female environment?

10. To what extent do you see yourself as a role model for your students?

11. How strongly do you feel that there should be more men teaching at the elementary
    level?

12. Do you have anything additional to tell me?