



Burn, E., & Pratt-Adams, S. (2015). *Men teaching children 3-11—Dismantling gender barriers*. London: Bloomsbury.

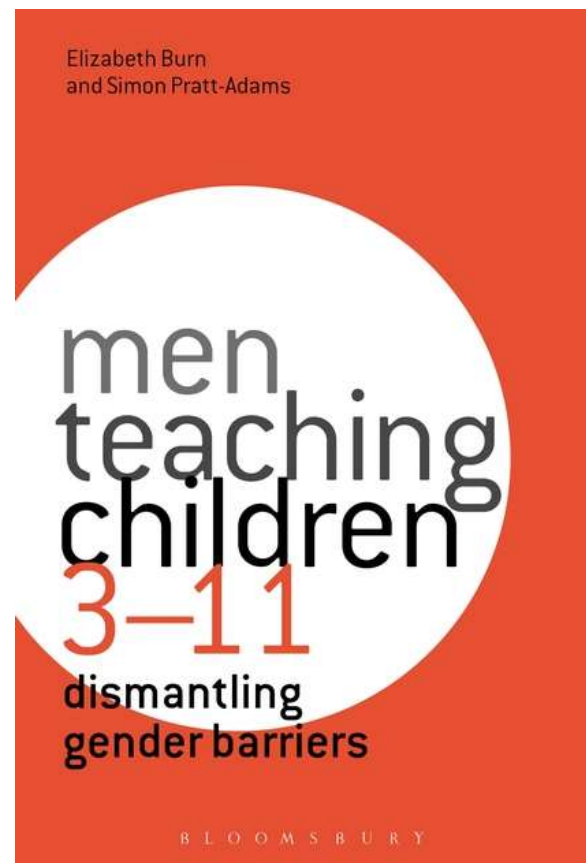
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In their well-researched book, *Men Teaching Children 3-11-Dismantling Gender Barriers*, Elizabeth Burn and Simon Pratt-Adams discuss the history of gender barriers and barrier dismantling strategies for men who choose to teach elementary aged children. Each organized chapter includes an outline, easy-to-follow headings, and discussion questions to engage the casual reader, academic, or perhaps, scholarly book club member. Their research took place in England, so the reader should expect slight differences in the academic terms used in the text. To satisfy this challenge, the authors provide a glossary to define specific terms not familiar to Americans, such as supply teachers, NQT, reception, and others.

Both authors are well-equipped in the subject, starting as primary school practitioners and then moving into teacher education. Burn qualified as a primary teacher in 1970 when she completed her work at an all-female Training College, where she became



professionally engaged with a few male preservice teachers at that time. Throughout her career, she held positions such as Deputy Headship in an all-female infant (PreK) school, and temporary supply posts in Mathematics, Art, Science, and Nursery. It was in the 1990s where she met the co-author. Pratt-Adams trained as a primary teacher in the mid-1980s, taught mainly Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds) throughout his career, became Deputy Head and acting Head Teacher, and then moved in to higher education at the Anglia Ruskin University. Pratt-Adams continues his research on this topic due to former colleagues' comments about his promotions; several colleagues stated "that his promotions were due to the fact that he was a man and he can recall some challenging and testing times from older female colleagues" (p. 4). The authors agree that the goal of *Men Teaching Children 3-11-Dismantling Gender Barriers* is "to contribute to the development of a more balanced workforce, by helping to expose the actual consequences of the gender barriers many of our male interviewees identified" (p. 3).

Throughout the text, Burn and Pratt-Adams referenced three research groups, which significantly support the topics at hand. Chapter 2 revolves around the voluntary Male Student Teacher Support Group which met during an academic year, and the students provided the researchers

an opportunity to listen to and reflect critically on, how a small number of male student teachers 'negotiated' the complex, emotional, conscious, and unconscious processes implicated in the ongoing production of our internal and external 'selves' within a specific context and at a particular time (p. 34).

The original group started with seven members in their second year of study, and four men from Year Three joined them after the third meeting. The support group was designed to meet the needs of the male students who

suffered from a higher dropout rate than their female counterparts. Although the authors did not direct the discussions, five "issues" or themes resulted from the conversations. These issues included 1) the "attacked" male student, 2) social class differences, 3) homosexual innuendos and heterosexual flirtations, 4) discipline men, and 5) men, mathematics, and ICT (computer science). In the text, the authors provide research and generalizations from field notes collected around each of the key issues that developed during the meetings.

In addition to the previous group, the researchers also referenced 18 key informants. These individuals took part in in-depth interviews and had a background of teaching in English inner-city state schools. This longitudinal study collected work stories over various periods of time and at different career stages, and Burn conducted the face-to-face interviews along with participant observations. The informants ranged in age from 23 to 49, and several had over 25 years of experience in the educational setting. In addition to the informants, one other group is referenced in this text. Burn collected an international peer commentary in 2014, with the purpose "to enrich the data set." The international group came from England, Canada, Finland, and New Zealand. More information about each research group can be found in Appendix 1.

Much of *Men Teaching Children 3-11-Dismantling Gender Barriers* is spent discussing the four dominant and historical scripts that have developed through the circulation of powerful paternal and maternal discourse, and these scripts "work to maintain male advantage in status and promotion, providing the male teachers adhere to them" (p. 51). First, Walvin (2000) explained the male teacher as a sportsmen script which was "needed and necessary for the teaching of football and PE to working-class boys" (p. 51). Second, the male teachers as disciplinarians is a common script due to "men being positioned as being able to instill good behavior due to fear of their physicality and their inherent violence if they are not obeyed"

(p. 68). Third, the role model discourse is discussed in chapter five as the authors detailed the National Association of Schoolmasters' 1930's campaign to attract more men to the field simply because they "had unique qualities that ought to be further valued and rewarded," such as leadership, discipline, and sportsmanship. Finally, the promotion male script is discussed in chapter six. This script refers to the male teacher as a senior manager who is destined for "early leadership, whether they accept it or not" (p. 103). Each of these four chapters allow the researchers a chance to provide historical context along with agreements/disagreements from the eighteen key informants.

The latter part of the book covers moral panics, international experiences and perspectives, women teachers talking, and removing gender barriers. Readers may find the moral panic chapter or "silent discourse" as the authors referred to it, as extremely current due to the increased conversation in the public about whether men should even be

elementary teachers. In 2000, Connell stated that "it is distressing to see (this fear) where parents are made constantly anxious and gay men, schoolteachers, and child-care workers are under constant threat of accusation" (p. 192). This is where the authors shine, as they quote many of the key informants, international peers, and male preservice teachers who still describe the fear that they encounter in their workplace.

All in all, the book provides a text with an in-depth review of the topic of men who teach elementary aged children. This text is supported by countless journal articles (possibly over 450) as well as three previously mentioned research groups. This book is perfect for a reader who has a passion for gender equity issues or others who want additional research on the topic. Specifically, teacher trainers, along with male and female K-12 teachers, may find this text useful and eye-opening, as this is a topic not thoroughly discussed in university classes.


References

- Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
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About the Reviewer

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