

## **Chapter #2**

### **"FATHERHOOD IN THE CLASSROOM": When Life as a Father meets the Teaching Profession**

**Ina Ben-Uri, PhD**

*School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel*

#### **ABSTRACT**

The current chapter deals with male-teachers perceptions of the meaning of being a father, in the teaching practice. The research is based on the reports of 43 Israeli teachers-fathers, using semi-structured interviews. The participants ages ranged between their early 30's and up to 60 years old. The age of their children ranges between children of a few months of age through adult children. Findings indicate that the main interviewees' perception, sees fatherhood as a significant experience regarding the teaching practice. The study presents 4 major ways these male-teachers see the use of their parenthood experience in their practice as teachers: 1. Recognizing different characteristics of their students; 2. Accomplishing better empathy toward the students; 3. Implementing parental personal-interaction experience with the students; 4. Understanding the students'-parents point-of-view. Implications for teachers'-training and counseling are discussed.

*Keywords:* male-teachers, teacher-father, teacher-student relations, fatherhood, work-family relations.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Teachers who are Fathers – Research Trends**

The current study focuses on a population, which in fact combines two separate issues, that are being widely dealt with in the professional literature: Male-Teachers and Fathers. The research that deals with male-teachers mainly focuses on Gender-aspects like men in a feminine professional-occupation (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; O'Neil, 2008; White & White, 2006); Minority-majority relations (Kanter, 1981; Simpson, 2005); or Different professional practices among male-teachers and female-teachers (Drudy, 2008; Wharton, 1994). Another popular research direction is the shortage of male-teachers in most of the public education-systems in the Western-world (Azman, 2013; Cushman, 2005, 2010). The research that deals with fathers and fatherhood mainly focuses on Traditional fatherhood VS. The "New Fatherhood" trend (Beaupre, Dryburgh, & Wendt, 2010; Carpenter, 2002; Coakley, 2006; Doucet, 2006), Work-Family integration in a fathers' life (Cooper, 2000; Daly & Palkovitz, 2004; Miller, 2010; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Segal, 1990) and different parental practice fathers articulate (Griggs, 2012; Hall, 2005; Lupton & Barclay, 1997).

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Parenthood among Male-Teachers**

Parenthood and professional-occupation are considered to be two of the most central roles in life. Parenthood among teachers is particularly interesting: review of the missions of the two practices, reveals a resemblance between them (responsibility for the

socialization processes, developmental aspects, role-modeling and caring for the well-being of the child). Due to the intersection of these two missions, it is intriguing to understand the meaning of their existence in the same person: a teacher who is a parent. Despite the potential interest in observing two such crucial social-roles together; there are not many research-papers on the subject. The studies which dealt with the issue, mostly focused on female-teachers (Cinamon & Rich, 2005; James, 2010; Sikes, 1997; Thomson & Kehily, 2011; White, 2008), apparently because of the social-identification of the teaching profession with the "natural" feminine tendency to care and nurture (Gieves, 1989; Sikes, 1997; Winnicot, 1964). Nevertheless, it is the fatherhood practice that is being increasingly addressed by a growing number of studies. Research in this area in the past twenty years, has been influenced by the transformation in the practice of fatherhood, among growing numbers of men in the Western world. This phenomenon, which has been called the "New Fatherhood", is characterized by the desire expressed by fathers to be significantly involved in raising their children (Beaupre et al., 2010; Carpenter, 2002; Coakley, 2006; Doucet, 2006; Griggs, 2012). From this point of view, the special characteristics of fathers who are teachers provide a unique case-study. It is interesting to understand the way these men, perceive the links between their similar tasks in these two different spheres. Do they find this resemblance helpful in coping with the missions of the two roles or is it rather confusing and laborious?

### **3. SAMPLE AND METHOD**

The present study focuses on the perceptions that teacher/fathers have of their parental practice and professional lives. The sample in this research included 43 fathers who teach in junior high and high schools and live in the central region of Israel. The ages of respondents ranged from 28 to 64 years, with an average age of 46.8 years. The average number of children per respondent was 2.1. The teaching disciplines of the participants were varied; two-thirds of them had additional positions within the same school (professional coordinator, assistant to the principal, etc.). More than a third of the respondents began teaching after having left a different profession; most of them are military retirees.

The methodology chosen for the present study is qualitative and the research tool used is in-depth, semi-structured interviews. It allowed us to get closer to the specific and unique perspective the participants had regarding the issues we were interested in (Josselson & Lieblich, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In the interviews, the participants were asked about their perceptions of their professional lives, their perceptions of being fathers and possible interfaces between the two areas. As expected in semi-structured interviews, some of the questions and issues, raised from the individual context of the interviewee's life formed the interview and where the issues we found to be relevant to the research. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed according to content-analysis techniques. After the initial reading of each interview, recurring themes were identified, defining the main themes of the study. The next step was to classify the various attitudes of respondents to the various themes. Once these attitudes were grouped and filtered, the categories that defined each theme were set (Pidgeon, 1996). The final stage of research included a thematic analysis conducted as a comparison, between the different aspects of the data, to find links, similarities or differences between them. (Lindlof, 1995).

## 4. RESULTS

The findings indicate that the main interviewees' perception sees fatherhood as an important experience that contributes to the teaching practice and their professional competence as teachers. The results are presented according to the 4 major ways in which these male-teachers expressed the meaning of being a father in relation to their practice as teachers:

### 4.1. Recognizing different characteristics of the students

In the eyes of the participants, one of the meanings of being "a teacher who is a father" is an increased sensitivity to the diversity of needs among the students. From this point-of-view, understanding the various characteristics (difficulties, different stages of development et cetera) of their own children helped them recognize those of their students.

*"I see in every child a whole world. Each and every one of them has its own needs and requests, every one of my students is like my-own child and I feel as attentive to my students as I am attentive to the different needs of my children."*

*"I am extremely sensitive to children with ADHD, much more than others...as I have experience with the issue. I am much more flexible than other teachers because of my son. You will never hear me shout, I will just tell the student to go and take a break of two minutes outside the classroom...I look at my son and I wonder how many times a teacher said a kind word to him..."*

### 4.2. "If it was my child" - Accomplishing a better empathy toward the students

The name of the category is actually a quotation of several of the interviewees. It means that sometimes thoughts about their own children formed the behavior of the teacher. It was a very dominant and clear voice regarding this issue. It includes *emotional aspects* such as the feeling that the fatherhood practice developed among the men sensitivity, forgiveness and patience towards their students. Some of the interviewees said that the experience as fathers enables them to be more responsible, understanding and encouraging as teachers.

According to the interviewees, their fatherhood emotional-experience helped them to establish a better emotional understanding (empathy) of their students. This empathy was frequently used to make professional decisions (academic, organizational and disciplinary).

*"I think that my private children made me softer...there is an interaction between my fatherhood and being a teacher. I am different now. I make a special effort, I am sitting with a student who is the same age my daughter is right now and I see that she is having the same problems with her math-exam, I see how frustrated she is...exactly like my daughter, so I could feel the need to help her once again"*

### 4.3. Implementing parental personal-interaction experience with the students

Fatherhood was often described as an opportunity for a practice-field for personal-interaction between adults and children. This gathered experience was used in professional situations.

*"I find myself many times during the day talking to students that I feel might need it...I don't have to do it, but I can see that something is wrong and I come to them and ask them about it. I became much more sensitive and I have experience in doing that. I think that I do it more because I have a son at home. I do not remember if I did things like that before I became a father..."*

#### 4.4. Understanding the students'-parent's point-of-view.

Another dominant voice expressed by the teacher-fathers was the way they feel that their parental experience contributed to their ability to understand their student-parents' point-of-view. Sometimes they felt that due to that experience, they can better advise the parents on how to act with their children.

*"When I interact with parents, I feel that I can see their point of view, I guess I can see myself in their position... I made a call to a mother of a student who had some discipline problems a while ago, and now she had started to get better, so I made that call, and I cannot forget how surprised and happy she was. I was very glad for her and I think that it is because of the experience I had with my own son this year. The same time I called that mom, I had some problems with my son at school and than his teacher called us and said that he is much better now. So I thought I might do the same..."*

In general, in some of the interviews, a few characteristics were mentioned as significant to understanding the meaning of fatherhood in the teaching practice.

For example, the *age of the children*. The closer the age of the teachers-children was to his students-age, the more he felt he can relate to his fatherhood practice as a useful component in his professional activity. Another characteristic was the teacher's age and his *fatherhood seniority*. Older and more experienced fathers were more convinced of the contribution of their fatherhood to the teaching and educating field.

Other teachers felt the fatherhood practice has an influence upon their discipline of teaching. Physical-Education teachers, for example, mentioned that watching their children play in the play-yard or in youth sport-activities, demonstrated for them the social and emotional importance of the Physical-Education classes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

A comprehensive view at the presented results, reveals a clear voice. The meaning of fatherhood practices in the teaching-profession has been described as a "*parental compass*". This compass is guiding teacher-parents and helping them demonstrate empathy for their students' difficulties and needs as well as assisting them in making professional decisions and serving as a basis for better understanding of their students' parents. These findings, regarding the contribution of fatherhood to the practice of teaching, join the existing literature, describing the parenting experience as having a significant emotional impact and being a practical catalyst for personal development in the process of maturing and the consolidation of the various areas of a person's life (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Palkovitz, 2007; Sikes, 1997). This thought can be taken into consideration in pre-service teacher education and educational-counseling processes. Empathy is mentioned as an important component in creating a positive interpersonal communication between teachers and students (Cooper, 2010; Fresko, Reich, Sjo, & Lonroth, 2013; Stoilescu & Carapanait, 2011). Empathy is also described as relevant to demonstration of coping skills among teachers who have students with diverse needs (Bennett, 2008; Mowat, 2010; Washburn, 2008). Fresko et al. (2013) argue that consistent narrative-building activities, can contribute to improving empathy and enhancing communication skills for teachers. Parenthood is definitely a crucial component in a persons' narrative. From this perspective, it seems that turning into the teachers or trainees "parental compass" can be important when he or she needs to gain empathy towards their students' situation or needs. This training of professional intercommunication skills can be done in work-shop classes, during the training processes for teachers. The current study also demonstrates the way the "parental compass" helps teachers to better understand their students' parents. School-parent relations

are widely mentioned in the last decade as a challenging practice for both sides (Addi-Raccach & Ainhoren, 2009; Kikas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lyyra, Lerkkanen, Niilo, 2011; Walsh, Harel-Fisch & Fogel-Grinvald, 2010; Yildiz, Yildirim, Ates & Rasinski, 2012). Hiatt-Michael (2006) proposed recommendations for future directions in development of family-school-community involvement programs. Two of them focus on explicitly incorporating family-community involvement knowledge, skills and values into pre-service teacher licensing programs. The "parental compass" can be used as a professional tool to establish better communication between teachers and parents.

## REFERENCES

- Addi-Raccach, A., & Ainhoren, R. (2009). School Governance and Teachers' Attitudes to Parents' Involvement in Schools. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 25(6), 805-813.
- Armstrong, P.I., & Crombie, G. (2000). Compromises in adolescents' occupational aspirations and expectations from grades 8 to 10, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56, 82-98.
- Azman, N. (2013). Choosing teaching as a career: perspectives of male and female Malaysian student teachers in training, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 113-130.
- Beaupre, P., Dryburgh, H., & Wendt, M., (2010). Making fathers "count", *Canadian Social Trends*, 90, 25-33.
- Bennett, M. M. (2008). Understanding the Students We Teach: Poverty in the Classroom. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(6), 251-256.
- Carpenter, B. (2002). Inside the portrait of family: The importance of fatherhood, *Early child development and care*, 172(2), 195-202.
- Cinamon, R. G., & Rich, Y. (2005). Work-family conflict among female teachers, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 365-378.
- Coakley, J. (2006). The good father: Parental expectations and youth sports, *Leisure Studies*, 25(2), 153-163.
- Cooper, M. (2000). Being the "go-to guy": fatherhood, masculinity and the organization of work in Silicon Valley, *Qualitative sociology*, 23(4), 379-405.
- Cooper, B. (2010). In Search of Profound Empathy in Learning Relationships: Understanding the Mathematics of Moral Learning Environments. *Journal of Moral Education*, 39(1), 79-99
- Cushman, P. (2005). Let's hear it from the males: Issues facing male primary school teachers, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(3), 227-240.
- Cushman, P. (2010). Male primary school teachers: Helping or hindering a move to gender equity?, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1211-1218.
- Daly, K., & Palkovitz, R. (2004). Reworking work and family issues for fathers, *Fathering*, 2, 211-213.
- Doucet, A. (2006). *Do men mother? Fathering, Care and domestic responsibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Drudy, S. (2008). Gender balance/gender bias: The teaching profession and the impact of feminization. *Gender and Education*, 20(4), 309-323.
- Fresko, B., Reich, L., Sjö, T., & Lönroth, C. (2013). Developing narratives as a pedagogical approach to fostering professional interpersonal competences. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 39(4), 232-239.
- Gieves, K., (1989). *Balancing Acts: On being a mother*, London: Virago.
- Griggs, J. (2012). *Just like Dad? A multigenerational study of fathering in Britain*, The Leverhulme Trust, Oxford: St Antony's College, University of Oxford.
- Hall, S. (2005). Change in paternal involvement from 1977 to 1997: A Cohort analysis, *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 34(2), 127-139.
- Hiatt-Michael, D. (2006). Reflections and Directions on Research Related to Family-Community involvement in Schooling. *School Community Journal*, 16(1), 7-30.

- James, J. H. (2010). Teachers as Mothers in the Elementary Classroom: Negotiating the Needs of Self and Other. *Gender and Education*, 22(5), 521-534.
- Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (1996). Fettering the mind in the name of "Science". *American Psychologist*, 51(6), 651-652.
- Kanter, R. (1981). *Women and structure of organizations: Explanation in theory and behavior*. In A. Miller George & O. Grusky (Eds.), *The sociology of organizations: basic studies* (2nd ed.) (pp. 395-424). New York: Free press; London: Collier Macmillan.
- Kikas, E., Poikonen, P., Kontoniemi, M., Lyyra, A., Lerkkanen, M., & Niilo, A. (2011). Mutual Trust between Kindergarten Teachers and Mothers and its Associations with Family Characteristics in Estonia and Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 55(1), 23-37.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverley Hills: Sage Publications.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, C.A.: Sage.
- Lupton, D., & Barclay, L., (1997). *Constructing fatherhood: Discourses and experiences*, London: Sage.
- Marsiglio, W. & Cohan, M., (2000). Contextualizing father involvement and paternal influence: sociological and qualitative themes", *Marriage and Family Review*, 29, 75-96.
- Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide*, London: The Falmer Press.
- Miller, T. (2010). "It's a triangle that's difficult to square: Men's intentions and practices around caring, work and first-time fatherhood", *Fathering*, 8, 362-378.
- Mowat, J. G. (2010). "He Comes to Talk to Me about Things": Supporting Pupils Experiencing Social and Emotional Behavioral Difficulties - A Focus upon Interpersonal Relationships. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 28(3), 163-180.
- O'Neil, J. M. (2008). Summarizing twenty-five years of research on men's gender-role conflict using the gender role conflict scale: New research paradigms and clinical implications. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 36, 358-445.
- Palkovitz, R. (2007). Challenges to modeling dynamics in developing a developmental understanding of father-child relationships. *Applied Development Science*, 11(4), 190-195.
- Pidgeon, N. (1996). *Grounded theory: "Theoretical background"*. In John T.R. Richardson (Ed), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods*, Leicester: The British Psychological Society Books.
- Segal, L. (1990). *Slow motion: Changing masculinities, changing men*. London: Virgo Press.
- Sikes, P. (1997). *Parents who teach: Stories from home and from School*. London: Cassell.
- Simpson, R. (2005). Men in nontraditional occupations: Career entry, career orientation and experience of role strain, *Gender, work & organization*, 12, 363-380.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. London: Sage Publications
- Stoilescu, D., & Carapanait, G. (2011). Renegotiating Relations among Teacher, Community, and Students: A Case Study of Teaching Roma Students in a Second Chance Program. *European Education*, 43(2), 54-73.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). *Grounded theory methodology – an overview*. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. (pp. 237-285). Thousand Oaks, C.A.: Sage.
- Thomson, R., & Kehily, M. J. (2011). Troubling reflexivity: the identity flows of teachers becoming mothers. *Gender & Education*, 23(3), 233-246.
- Walsh, S. D., Harel-Fisch, Y., & Fogel-Grinvald, H. (2010). Parents, teachers and peer relations as predictors of risk behaviors and mental well-being among immigrant and Israeli born adolescents. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(7), 976-984.
- Washburn, G. N. (2008). Alone, Confused, and Frustrated: Developing Empathy and Strategies for Working with English Language Learners. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(6), 247-250.
- Wharton, A. (1994). *Men's and women's responses to segregated work*. In M. R. Stevenson (Ed.), *Gender Roles Through the life Span*. Muncie, IN: Ball State University.
- White, M. J., & White, G. B. (2006). Implicit and explicit occupational gender stereotypes. *Sex roles*, 55, 259-266.

I. Ben-Uri

- White, S. (2008). Mothers who are student teachers: navigating their dual roles in pre-service teacher education. *Studies in Continuing Education, 30*(2), 159-173.
- Winnicot, D. W. (1964). *The child, the Family and the Outside World*, the Estate of D. W. Winnicot.
- Yildiz, M., Yildirim, K., Ates, S., & Rasinski, T. (2012). Perceptions of Turkish Parents with Children Identified as Dyslexic about the Problems that They and Their Children Experience. *Reading Psychology, 33*(5), 399-422.

## **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

**Full name:** Dr. Ina Ben-Uri

**Institutional affiliation:** School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

**Institutional address:** Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905

**Email address:** ina.ben-uri@mail.huji.ac.il

**Short biographical sketch:** Dr. Ina Ben-Uri is a holder of M. A degree in Educational-Counseling from The Hebrew University and completed her PhD in Educational-counseling at the same university in 2014. Her major research interests are Male-Teachers, Work-Family integration in teachers' life, Self-Efficacy among teachers and Professional-Leadership in School-Counselors. Dr. Ben-Uri is working as a lecturer and a researcher at the School of Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at the Education-Faculty at Beit Berl Teachers' Education College.