

My personal story

R: Well, I've been a teacher for over 15 years now because it is about nearly 20 years ago when I first actually got involved into this. Before that, I used to work in Local Government in a fairly mundane job, it was ok, it was very well paid, I had a good circle of friends at that time, you know, I was younger, it was all quite a laugh in some ways. But I got very kind of fed up with it, I actually left my job voluntarily in the end, which is quite an unusual thing to do. And I wasn't actually sure what I wanted to do at all. So I spend a bit of time just to try to think through what I was going to do, if as much as anything. And I kind of got interested in teaching but I had never been interested in teaching secondary school children. I mean, my background is in history and geography and the idea of teaching 14 year olds who aren't interested in history and geography just never appealed to me. I actually thought, well: 'I want to teach children something that is really important like being able to read and write and add up and get on with each other'. So, I started to look at kind of, yeah, primary school teaching, particularly infant school teaching and in my own head there was a bit of like: 'well, is this actually something that a man can do?' I mean, at this stage, I mean, looking back, I packed my job in, I hadn't got a car, I wasn't married - I had a girlfriend at one stage but I hadn't got a partner - I had no children, I'd got no house, you know, I was just renting a room. Which in some way was built up as a problem, but I actually used it to my advantage, it gave me the ability to be able to pack my job and kind of do what I really wanted. I kind of was getting into looking at infant teaching, I had no children of my own and before I could get on the course, you needed to get various bits of experience. I found myself in what was for me quite an odd situation. I kind of turned up at a local playgroup to help out and, you know, was very odd. I mean, I felt quite uncomfortable in some ways there, that was the first experience I had ever had at working with very young children. Although the people they were nice enough I don't think could quite understand where I was coming from. You know, I did some other work in school and that. So, there was big question in my own head about whether or not - not just was it right for me, but was that right for a man? At the time as well there was a lot of stuff going on - we were going back to early mid '90. There had been - I think it was when in this country big cases about child abuse first started to come through and it is when people first have to fill forms in: police checks to work with children for instance. And, I mean, I remember at the time I did lots of different voluntary work, I did some voluntary work with older refugees and probation things. At one stage I filled in 7 different police checks! And there was - I don't know - there was always a feeling, I suppose, in your mind as a man, people questioning, I think: 'why are you doing this?' Particularly, as a single man, without any children of their own. It was quite a kind of hurdle to get over in my own head.

I: I think that the atmosphere has changed a bit that, you know, you used to be not guilty until proven guilty...

R: Absolutely.

I: (...) and with all these abuse cases all of a sudden it feels as if you are guilty until proven not guilty, which obviously you cannot prove that you are not guilty in such a situation. Is that a bit what you felt?

R: Oh, I think so, yeah, definitely. I mean, I'm used to it now. I mean, I've worked in teaching with young children for so long it doesn't really bother me and I can answer those questions. But, I suppose, in my own mind, I was searching for why I was doing this in some ways.

R: But, anyway, I did all that, I did all the training. When I did my teaching training course it was about 30 people on the course and there was only 3 men and I don't think these figures have particularly changed in the last 20 years either. So, there wasn't many of us men doing infant teaching at that stage. (...) And I was quite surprised actually, when I eventually got my first job, I was - you know - applying for many different jobs. It was with the 'reception class'. In England, reception is the first year, so we are talking about children who are 4 or 5, that particular year. They are the youngest children in school. They are a group of children who even now colleagues I work with - who work with 6 and 7 year olds - can be very reluctant to work with reception children. I was quite kind of pleased and surprised in a way that I was given the opportunity to work with reception children. Because, again, I imagined as a man - although I was a fully qualified infant teacher and although I had worked with young children either voluntarily or in some of the teaching practices I had done - for some reason I never think I'd be given a reception class, which looking back now, is quite strange (laughs). Why I wouldn't be? I mean, that was my first job. I really enjoyed that I'm from city A, so city A is quite a different city from where I am now, that was basically a Muslim school. Most of the children were Muslim, again I felt quite privileged to be involved in a community that normally you don't have a lot of access to.

R: I mean, after that I worked with Years 1 and Years 2 but when I moved to city B again I eventually got a job in a reception class and I actually spend over 8 years working in reception. And although I haven't worked there for 4 or 5 years, I have to say it is the bit of teaching I miss the most. But, I mean, again I remember the first... when I came to the reception job I had here, I had a couple of... we did parent interviews before children start, just to try to go through some of those questions that parents ask before starting. And there are a couple of parents who said to me: 'have you got children of your own?' I said: ' well, no because I haven't got to that stage' and, you know, it was quite... the implication was almost like 'why you are doing this?', 'Are you up to doing this?' Almost, because you are a man. I think since I've had a child of my own, it actually makes thing much easier. Because, of course, people don't ask you those questions. It is something about having a child of your own suddenly makes you....

I: An expert?

R: An expert!

I: Which is strange because, I mean, you need to get a diploma to do it.

R: Absolutely. The number of parents that I've come across who were not experts at all imply quite the opposite. Just having children of your own does not make you an expert a looking after children. But I think it has certainly changed, I mean, obviously I have become more confident over the years about dealing with those kinds of questions. But I think having children of your own and being married of course - again in people's minds - this gives you a credence to do this job.

I: It puts you in the 'safe' category?

R: It puts you in the safe category, yeah, and I wouldn't say that people - you know - were funny about it at all, but there was always people who would ask these questions almost give you a look. And perhaps this is me imagining things, but I don't think it was, but you know: 'have you got children of your own?', 'are you married?', and, you know, kind of : 'why are you asking these questions?' You know, 'why is it relevant?'. I mean, I work - I said before generally always worked in an all-female environment. There have been male teachers at the schools that I have worked at, but they kind of come and gone to be honest, so I'm quite used to be the only man in the environment. And interestingly people never ask colleagues of mine who are female teachers who are not married and haven't got children, have never related to me any anecdotes about people saying: 'have you got children of your own, or something like that'. So, I mean, looking back, I kind of realise it was quite a leap really for me to get into this.

I: It is, yes, courageous...

R: Yeah, perhaps it was. ... And it was quite an odd time. I remember some of those first bits of volunteering for things and turning up and not - you know - I had never worked with small children at all, I had no idea at all what to do with them, and I did sit there sometimes wondering: 'what on earth am I doing really?' But, anyway, I got there in the end and I'm quite kind of happy, confident in what I do now.

I: So you are enjoying your job?

R: Yes, I don't enjoy it as much part time as full time, but I think that is because teachers like to control their own environment. That's an interesting thing... I still find that for secondary teachers, there is much more of a career structure built into that. I mean, there used to be some statistics a while ago that although there is a very small number of men in primary schools teaching in this country. Those that were there, was a much higher proportion actually who were head teachers or deputy head teachers. I feel that probably my career - I'm not very ambitious to start with, to be honest with you - but there is not very many places to go. Really all you can do is being a deputy head teacher and then a head teacher. And that is not something I particularly wanted to do or it is not just arisen in the school I work at. So again, that has been - probably in terms of pay and things like that - that is why I don't feel like pay has gone any further at all. When, again, before we had children, we were both working and that was never an issue, but as soon as children come along that becomes far more of an issue.

I: Ok, thank you very much.

Metadata

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RAKTAŽODŽIAI: fatherhood, marriage/co-habitation, roles/role pattern, choice, different treatment, (not) questioning/(no) doubts, fulfilment, ambition, career path, leave from work, occupation/job, part time/full time, promotion/selection, reconciliation private/professional

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Gender did matter