

## Introduction

Great concerns have been raised regarding the feminisation of primary teaching and its association with more general, gendered implications for teachers, teaching work and the workplace (Addi-Racah, 2002; Cortina & San Roman, 2006; Griffiths, 2006; Li, 2014; Skelton, 2002). Some studies clearly point out that female teachers have no voice in educational policy and, moreover, seem unaware of their silence (Griffin, 1997; Llorens, 1994; Pagano, 1990). As Llorens (1994: 7) argues:

This should not be surprising given the predominance of women in teaching positions subordinate to a male-dominated administration. Even as these gender ratios change slightly, the established patterns of authority and deference may not. What seems important is a recognition of different voices, voices traditionally silenced or marginalised.

Another argument to come out of research is that in addition to lacking voices, women seem to be powerless despite their substantial presence in their workplace. As Cockburn (1991: 70) succinctly claims, in organisations ‘power and authority are defined as precisely masculine.’ Therefore, what makes this research distinct is its attention to women’s voices and pro-activity, and to the exploration of the relations between gender and power in Taiwanese feminised teaching workplace.<sup>1</sup> Davis (1991: 83) suggests that ‘power relations operate in

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<sup>1</sup> According to official Taiwanese statistics, for the past two decades, over 68 per cent of primary school teachers are females (Ministry of Education ROC (Taiwan) [MOE ROC (Taiwan)], 2013a).

a specific context.’ In contrast to previous studies,<sup>2</sup> in this article the issues of teacher surplus provide an especially interesting context to understand the dynamics between gender and power within the Taiwanese primary teaching workplace.

Drawing on official statistics and data from an ethnographic study, this article aims to examine how gendered power manifests itself with reference to the situation of the teacher surplus issue and the responses of teachers, particularly female teachers, to it. The article begins with a brief discussion of theories on the relations between gender and power and proceeds to describe the research methods and the study context. Next, the study addresses these central issues: why female teachers appear as a silent majority, what women have done to actively challenge their male principal’s authoritarian leadership, and how this contrasts with women’s previously silent presence. Moreover, do women and men, when facing identical challenges from, and stressful conflicts with, their male principal, act differently? To gain a fuller understanding of gender and power in the teaching profession, this article also suggests that power relations exist not only between men and women, but between men. It is worth noting that this study is situated within the broader international field of research (including work conducted in the UK, and the US) focusing on the relations between gender and power, but specific discussions dealing with the situation in Taiwan will be presented later as the findings.

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<sup>2</sup> Abundant research has pointed out the issues related to teacher surplus that include teachers’ increased workloads and negative feelings such as stress, anxiety (Hung, 2011), surplus teachers’ maladjustment (Tseng & Chang, 2010), tensions or conflicts that arose among teaching staff or those between teachers and the STA (Shih, 1998), reforms of teacher training (Fwu, 2000), the lessening of class numbers, even the number of schools (Li, 2007) as well as the hiring of substitute or part-time teachers affecting teaching quality, pupils’ learning, and school administration (Wang, 2012).