J M Coetzee urges men to join teaching profession

RENNOWNED South African author and Nobel literature laureate Prof J M Coetzee has urged young male graduates to consider a career in education.

"It's good for children to have a man's hand guiding them, and it is also good for you and common social life," he said yesterday at the University of the Witwatersrand that was conferring on him an honorary doctorate in literature.

"What a relief it is to see so many young men among graduates in the humanities... What a relief that men have not entirely abandoned a field they once dominated."

Although he had been taught by phenomenal women throughout his life, the presence of male figures would have enriched the experience, he said.

"If there had sometimes been a male presence in the classroom, the experience would have been different and... fuller."

Coetzee warned against placing the teaching of children in the hands of a single sex. He urged male graduates to meet the country's need for hardworking, dedicated and well-humoured teachers.

"Look upon it as a challenge. Let us be a generation of young teachers who will transform school and make it a place of intellectual excitement where children can't wait to get to school."

He told the young women in the audience they had been the backbone of the teaching profession so far. He spoke against the "suspicious eye" cast on men who expressed an interest in young children. – Sapa