Coetzee urges young men to be teachers

AWARD-WINNING South African author and Nobel literature laureate Professor JM 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 at the University of the Witwatersrand, which was conferring on him an honorary doctorate in literature yesterday. "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 which they once used to dominate."

Although he had been taught by phenomenal women, he was certain the presence of male figures would have enriched the experience, he said. "It has nothing to do with personal qualities, but if there had sometimes been a male presence in the classroom, the experience would have been different and, I am convinced, fuller."

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

He told the young women they had been the backbone of the teaching profession and he spoke against the "suspicious eye" cast on men who expressed an interest in young children.

Coetzee was born in South Africa but emigrated to Australia. – Sapa