

ENCOURAGING MEN INTO THE ECE SECTOR HAVING INFORMED CONVERSATIONS.

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ABSTRACT:

In the ECE sector, & indeed in our wider society, there is a growing awareness that the current dearth of men teaching in the ECE context is neither 'natural' nor 'as it should be'. The profound lack of men working in ECE merely reflects, & ultimately upholds, unhelpful, limiting & out-dated notions of what constitutes men's & women's work. This presentation draws on recent research to unpack some of the factors that might attract men into ECE, to consider some of the circumstances that may create opportunities for men to join ECE & to consider, from a distinctly male perspective, some of the intrinsic rewards found in a career in ECE. This information provides an informed platform from which to engage with men in conversations about ECE & to encourage men to consider ECE as a viable & attractive vocation.

UNDERSTANDING WHY THERE ARE SO FEW MALE ECE TEACHERS:

1. ECE as an extension of ‘mothering’

ECE has long been seen as a natural extension of the mothering role – a role that women do ‘naturally’ & one that men are in some way inferior at.

2. The fear of accusation

It has been argued that men shy away from the ECE context due to fears of being accused of ‘inappropriate behaviour’. The reduction in male ECE teachers as a result of the Christchurch Civic Crèche case supports this view. However the fact that men continue to be involved in wide range of other contexts involving children (ie children’s sports, Cub groups & primary teaching etc) suggests this is not the primary reason for the lack of men in ECE.

3. Low pay rates

Although ECE has historically suffered from low pay rates typically associated with ‘women’s work’ – this argument has less relevance in a context where ECE teachers are trained & fully qualified educational professionals. Again – the fact that men seem to readily engage in other areas of

employment with pay rates similar or less than ECE suggests that pay is not the primary deterrent.

4. Low status

Historically, working with younger children has been associated with 'women's work' & society has traditionally viewed such work as lower status than stereotypically male roles. However men appear comfortable filling many employment positions that maybe viewed as 'low status' (eg gardeners, rubbish collectors, window cleaners etc) & this argument offers an incomplete explanation.

5. ECE teaching is a woman's job

Clearly all the above factors help to explain the lack of men in ECE – however society continues to frame ECE as a women's domain & is seen as something stereotypically associated with women – not men. It is this pervasive, outdated gender role stereotyping that helps keep ECE teaching as a largely women's domain where men struggle to see themselves fitting into.

In the words of Peeters (2007)

“Childcare is seen as women’s work, something that women naturally do and are intrinsically better at.” (p. 15).

**THIS IS THE ATTITUDE WE NEED TO
CHALLENGE – THIS REALITY IS AT
THE VERY HEART OF WHY WE HAVE
SO FEW MALE ECE TEACHERS.**

THE NUMBERS:

1. A historical problem

Men have traditionally been under represented in areas working with young children – both in domestic & public contexts. Although this reality may have some historical biological basis – the biology element has little relevance in our modern society.

2. Some recent statistics

1992 = 2.4 percentage of ECE teachers were men

1998 = 1.5 per cent

2001 = 1.2 per cent

2003 = 1. Per cent

2004 = 1. Per cent

2005 = .97 per cent

2006 = .98 per cent

2007 = 1.1 per cent

2008 = 1.3 per cent

2009 = 1.6 per cent

2010 = 1.8 per cent

2011 = 1.9 per cent

2012 = 2.1 per cent (Ministry of Education)

POSITIVE STEPS FORWARD – WHAT’S HAPPENING?

As the above statistics indicate the situation is slowly improving. Although the percentage of men teaching in ECE is still alarmingly low – we need to focus on the positive reality that the sector is slowly attracting more men into the profession & this is what we need to celebrate & ensure the trend continues.

Although it is very difficult to pin point the many factors that may be contributing to this encouraging & relatively recent trend – there are a number of significant developments underpinning the gradual increase of male ECE teachers.

- Society continues to challenge traditional & outdated gender based stereotypes that have historically limited what men & women do both in the domestic & public domains...women appear to have been much more proactive in this process.
- The establishment of a national network for men in ECE (EC-MENz) – set up by men currently working in the ECE sector to support each other, to promote ECE as a valid & worthwhile career path for men &

to bring greater awareness to a situation which demands attention.

(<http://www.ecmenz.org/>)

- A growing awareness from both within the ECE sector itself & wider society that the profound lack of men in ECE is hugely problematic & has negative implications for children, families, the sector & society as a whole. This is a social issue – not just an educational one.

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE – SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MIGHT ATTRACT MEN INTO ECE:

The research

A qualitative research project that sought to gain a clearer insight into the factors that might attract men into the ECE sector and where they came from before deciding to join the ECE profession.

Ten male ECE teachers from the Auckland area were interviewed. The men worked in a wide range of ECE contexts (ie kindergartens, community centres & private centres) & carried out a number of different roles within their work place (ie beginning teachers, senior teachers, head teachers, centre managers & centre owners) but all were directly involved in every day teaching activities.

Where did they come from?

- Not one of the interviewees actively pursued a career in ECE as a school leaver
- All ten came to ECE as a second or subsequent career choice
- Most of the men had experienced some event or situation in their lives that allowed them to reflect upon their career futures ie an opportunity to re-evaluate their careers
- For many – having their own children was the first time they had considered ECE as a possible career direction. Many men have very little knowledge or experience of ECE – until their own kids start attending an ECE centre.

Why ECE ?

- The desire to be involved in a socially significant field ie to ‘contribute to society’
- An interest in ‘making a difference’ – particularly in the lives of children
- A need to have ‘fun at work’...to be involved in a field that valued & encouraged ‘fun, laughter & enjoyment’ while still doing a serious & socially important job

HAVING COURAGOUS

CONVERSATIONS:

- Notice the men engaged with their children & spending time at your centre. They need encouragement – make it clear through your conversations & actions that they are welcome & appreciated.
- Encourage men to spend time at your centre & with the children – talk to them about their interests & skills – find out what they can offer. Give them tangible things to do (guys like to have clearly defined roles) with the children – not just practical handyman stuff.
- Accentuate the importance of ECE as a career – tap into the men’s sense of social value. Let the guys know how important it is that they are involved with their own children & at the centre. Men sometimes need to be reminded that spending time with children is really meaningful.
- Allow & encourage them to have fun with the children. Let them see how much fun it can be

working in ECE & hanging out with a bunch of kids
– this was very strong in the research project.

- Talk positively to the children about men. Celebrate the men in children's lives & remind the kids how much men have to offer. Encourage children to invite significant men in their lives (ie fathers, grandfathers, big brothers etc) into the centre & to spend time – men sometimes need reminding that the children actively need their input, company & attention.
- Tell any interested men about the great new grants & scholarships specifically targeting men starting to train in ECE – now available through the ChildForum website.
(www.childforum.com/)