

Challenges we face to increase the numbers of men in early childhood education

It is essential for children to have both men and women working together in their care and education. Men have something to offer that is different to what females have to offer. Both men and women together can make fundamental contributions to the care and education of young children. The following outlines the tasks that all stakeholders face as we strive to: encourage acceptance within early childhood services of the vital role of male staff, prevent men's professional isolation, encourage and support males to enter and stay in the field, and enhance the profession of early childhood as a whole.

Challenges for employers

- When families (who are engaged in a partnership with the service) express fear or negative attitudes towards male workers the employer may come to the view that to employ a male is fraught with too many difficulties.
- Some female workers still view the field as a "women's place", so employing a male and placing him in an all female staff team could present difficulties. There are two sides to this challenge for employers. The male worker could receive well-intentioned and protective behaviour from their women colleagues, therefore not allowing him to develop professionally to grow into a respected team member. On the other hand, a male worker in this environment could be ostracized and made to feel isolated, therefore causing frustration and perhaps his resignation.
- Employers are required to examine their policies and practices to ensure the service is male-friendly. Included in these considerations would be the service's attitude towards male educators, the environment, the communication methods the service uses (including advertising for new staff) and what is in place to help men feel comfortable.

Challenges for men as potential employees

- Men working or studying in isolation from other men is a difficult situation to be placed in. It has been found that

males can be made to feel invisible or unimportant through social, physical or professional isolation. Compounding this isolation is the apathy in the profession towards males and their concerns. This is especially true when considering the barriers to involvement, for example the fear of being branded a child abuser.

- Entering early childhood is undertaking a low pay, low prestige job. If a male worker has a family and is in a breadwinner role, then in most cases his wage would not be sufficient to support a family. There is a challenge here to weigh up the sustainability of earning less than in other careers.
- It takes a great deal of experience and support for a male educator to interact with children within his own particular male identity. The environment in early childhood services is female dominated, so men may suffer conflict and stress when they try to live up to the expectations of playing this role.
- Many men have to deal with the attitude that males are seen as "transient" workers. It has been found that men are viewed as wanting to use the early childhood area as a stepping-stone to other careers so therefore their commitment is questioned. There is some general resentment that men will aim only to go into a management role.

Challenges for educators / training institutions

- Developing an explicit approach through advertising materials and course information that specifically targets men as potential students.
- Ensuring that when a male is in a course, often by himself or with one other, that the female students aren't given the impression that the male students receive preferential treatment.
- To support a male student, it is important to consider adapting course materials to take into account learning





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In addition, he is also the Australian member of the leadership team for the World Forum on Care and Education project – Men in Early Childhood Education. He is the facilitator of the National Males in Early Childhood Network, which he established in 2002.

Craig's most important job is being a husband and dad to his 6 children.

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styles of male students and also the male perspective on children and families.

- Seeking mentoring opportunities to decrease the isolation of male students by placing them with experienced male workers on practicum placements.

Challenges for policy makers

- To seek equitable recruitment or employment policy strategies so that males are equally represented. Traditionally this argument has been linked to a claim that the group as a whole is oppressed or discriminated against, e.g. Indigenous or women. In the case of males entering early childhood, the general case (that men are oppressed) does not support addressing male issues.
- Previous attempts to actively recruit and support men into teaching, including scholarships, have been met with claims of inequity towards women.
- The early childhood workforce is facing very high turnover rates and there are projected shortages of staff predicted. There are policies in place that aim to increase the number and diversity of potential recruits, but men are not specifically mentioned within the documents.

The challenges as outlined above are vast, but with courage not impossible to address. It is important to remember that at the heart of this work, the focus at all times remains on obtaining the best outcomes for children.

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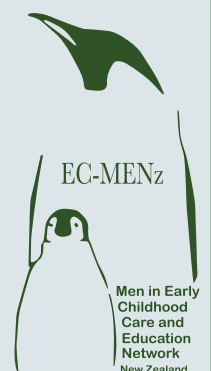
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