

History taken from the proceedings of the 1st Men in Early Child Care and Teaching Summit in New Zealand. 2007 by S Farquhar

FOREWARD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If gender wasn't an issue in the early child care and education workforce there would be no need for this publication. The decreasing representation of men working in early child care and education is a problem that needed to be addressed at national level before it got to this point. It's not been good to be negative, to be talking about the problem year after year, and all the time it seemed nothing would change because no one with power to change the situation was willing to risk speaking up over what was perceived to be a men's only issue.

In 1982 I recall discussion of a remit to support and encourage more men into kindergarten teaching at the NZ Kindergarten Teachers' Association Annual Conference in Wanganui. Men were valued and wanted as teachers. It was a good time to be a male teacher. The male teachers I met at this conference and during my student teacher days, like Simon Easton, David Spraggs, Anton Wartmann, and many others, made me realise that early childhood teaching was something that men could do, and very well too! And I was, and still am a strong feminist. But my beliefs about men being important in the lives of children have been well challenged by the male teachers I've met, watched, and talked with. So if it was good to be a male in early childhood in the 80s, what happened to change this? In the 1990s we saw early childhood teaching becoming much more defined as a 'women's' profession.

Tremendous pride in this being so was projected and written about. No longer was it a good time to be a male teacher. Male teachers started to feel more professionally isolated, different, and not always welcome. The Christchurch Civic Childcare Centre and the Wellington hospital childcare centre abuse cases added the element of fear; that teachers who were male would always now be more likely than their female colleagues to be suspect. And to the mix of promotion of women's ownership of the profession and sex abuse allegation fears came greater government influence over the sector and workforce after administrative responsibility for childcare services was passed from the Dept of Social Welfare to the Department of Education, and the Dept of Education became the Ministry of Education. The NZEI (which incorporated the previous the kindergarten and childcare unions along with primary) appeared hesitant to promote men in teaching and the union's perception of the need to tell teachers not to touch children was explained to be regrettable but necessary.

In late 1996, I was contacted by Al Morrison of Radio NZ about research I was doing on men in early childhood teaching. He thought it was an important topic and wanted to do a story. Yet to be written up, I promised him a copy when it was in January 1997. He set up an interview on the Kim Hill nine to noon show. After

talking with Kim Hill I got back into my car in Wellington and my mobile phone wouldn't stop ringing. I must have talked to reporters from just about every radio station, major newspaper, and the story was carried as a second lead news item on TVNZ six o'clock news that night. But, early childhood sector leaders and the government were silent. No action resulted.

It's hard continuing to talk about something that's wrong (being negative and not positive) but when Adam Buckingham emailed me about an assignment he was doing on men in early childhood teaching and I read what he wrote, I was motivated into thinking that perhaps it was time to look at what had changed since 1996/7. Adam wrote an article, as did David Butler, Russell Ballantyne and Lance Cablk to include in a report. In May 2006 I contacted Jane Skinner, a reporter with the Sunday Programme at TVNZ, and asked her if she was interested in the topic and our report. Jane got back to me the same day to say yes her producer was interested, and as a field producer now she'd be doing the story. So we held off formally releasing the report until the documentary was made and later aired in Sept 2006.

For the first time a Minister of Education was interviewed as part of the Sunday documentary on national TV about men in early childhood. For the first time, a national early childhood group publicly voiced concern about the situation and called for change (the Early Childhood Council; thank you to Anthony Keesing and Sue Thorne for doing so much to get the ball rolling). For the first time a group of representatives and leaders got together to begin planning a campaign to get more men into the sector, including teacher education providers, Kindergarten, Montessori, the NZ Childcare Association and the Early Childhood Council. TeachNZ and the Ministry of Education are right behind the call for more male teachers and are keen to open the door for men.

We held a Summit for men in early child care and teaching. Resulting from the Summit, regional support groups have been formed and a national group is to be formalised at the next Men's Summit in 2008. New Zealand men in early child care and teaching now have their own website <http://www.ecmenz.org> This website has built on the very good one established by male early childhood teachers in Canterbury/Westland who successfully established their regional support network many years ago, doing much to encourage each other to stay in teaching.

So while this publication is about a problem, it is also an historical record that looks back on what has been and on where we are at now. We may not be at this point for much longer. Hopefully male representation will never be allowed to be as low as it has been again. Our attitudes and our acceptance of male under-representation may never be the same. It is therefore also a good news publication.

Thank you to all the men in early childhood and to everyone (men and women) who have contributed in small and big ways to getting to where we are now.

The material in this publication provides essential background reading for reflection and idea gathering. It can be used to help inform ways that will be effective in addressing the gender imbalance in the teaching workforce for the benefit of children and the profession.

Happy reading – and thinking!

Sarah Farquhar

Read More: <http://www.childforum.com/men-in-ece/nz-research-a-policy-men/831-the-first-summit-on-men-in-early-childhood-teaching-a-care-.html#ixzz2XauX1MZx>