



Jo Warin (2016)

Why do we need more male teachers in early childhood education? International debates and perspectives on gender balance and gender transformation

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Do we need more men in early childhood education in order to help boys achieve? Do we need more men in order to complement women's roles as teachers? Do we need more men to discipline boys and girls? Do we need more men in order to elevate the status of the early childhood education profession? These are just a few of the many questions that can be posed about the current prevalent plea for recruiting and maintaining more male teachers in the early years of education. All are problematic questions that signal the wide range of different arguments that are given for supporting this plea and it can be challenging to disentangle them and recognise the basis of the ideological assumptions and theories that uphold them. I aim to do this disentangling work through a reflection on the debates I have been involved in with male ECEC practitioners in my research studies in Sweden, the UK and in Indonesia. I will argue for a position that is based on purposes of gender transformation.

Author:

Jo Warin, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

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Centre for Social Justice &
Wellbeing in Education

Lancaster
University 

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on gender balance and gender
transformation

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Sources and Structure

Theoretical sources

Connell
Butler

Empirical sources

Swedish Research Council funded network (2011- 2014)
(contributions from participants in Brownhill, Warin and Wernnersson book,
2016 and various papers e.g. Adriany and Warin, 2015)

New research funded by Childbase Partnership: Case study of a nursery with a
'critical mass' of male staff

Structure:

Questions that invite controversial but well rehearsed lines of argument.
Case for 'more men' as **gender transformative**

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Gender in research relationships: being in a minority



An international phenomenon-with international variation

Uniform and persistent pattern across the globe
(Brody, Drudy) Why is the pattern so uniform across the globe? Because gender divisions are pervasive across the globe with deeply held assumptions about essential gender differences

The debate about 'missing men' and rationales for recruiting and retaining more men are **played out in very different ways in different countries** (Warin and Wernersson, 2016)

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Different emphases in different countries

Apologies for being a tourist!

Japan
Indonesia
USA
South Africa
Sweden



Tricky questions about the 'need' for more men

- Do we need more men in early childhood education in order to **help boys achieve**?
- Do we need more men to **discipline** boys and girls?
- Do we need more men in order to elevate the **status of the early childhood education** profession?
- Do we need more men in order to **complement** women's roles as teachers?

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Men to help boys achieve?

Boys 'under-achievement'? UK public concern with boys and girls comparative academic performance (A league-table by-product)

Boy-friendly strategies and resources



Men to discipline children



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Men to elevate the status of ECE



Men to perform complementary roles?



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Gender balance: the family

The concept of gender balance often, implicitly, draws on an ideal of adult complementary gender roles within the nuclear family (usually assumed to be heterosexual).

A nursery I visited recently with an unusually high proportion of male practitioners presented their staff team in exactly this way

Nursery foyer photo emphasising staff team as 'family'



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Do we need more men in order to transform gender?

Yes!

“In order to achieve gender equality it is necessary for learners to witness men in roles with young children;

HOWEVER

This can only occur if this male teacher is dedicated to upholding equity and **deconstructing** hegemonic masculinity

Danger! Reproduction of hegemonic masculinity

Educational settings are ‘masculinity-making devices’. Skelton, (2001, 2002), Francis and Skelton (2001), and Haywood and Mac An Ghail (1996) present the school as a medium in which ascendant definitions of masculinity will prevail over others.

“I predominantly enjoy working with other men in this nursery. You get a level of banter when you’re working with other men. I don’t mind working with the women too. It’s always nice to come into work and have something nice to look at...” (Focus group (male only). Male leader of preschool class with 3-4 year olds”)

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Gender consciousness raising

Only gender aware pedagogues can challenge gender stereotypes in the next generation.

ECE educators must develop gender sensitivity before they can deliver a gender sensitive pedagogy – and cultivate ‘gender flexibility’

Delivering a gender flexible pedagogy in ECE

Achieved by:

staff modelling of alternative forms of masculinities and femininities

“early childhood educators, both men and women, can model a flexible approach to the performance of gender which disrupts prescriptions for men to model masculinities and women to model femininities” (Warin and Adriany 2015p6) in line with Butler:

She says: “when the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one”. (Butler, 1990 p6).

**a mixed gender workforce
explicit gender teaching within curricula**

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Gender flexibility



Oscar's
Glitterbeard.

Dale as
Princess
Anna



Men challenging gender stereotypes in the UK

“we got all these fabrics out and I started dressing up like a pirate. And then I put a flower in my hair as well and all the children said “Pirates don’t have flowers” and I said, “Well this one does”. “Boys aren’t allowed to wear flowers”. “Well this one does” ...or the other day I was Rapunzel and the all plaited the back of my hair..... They just think it’s funny because **they’re seeing the both sides of what everyone can do**” (male worker with 2-3 age group)

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Men challenging gender stereotypes in Sweden

Karl told Warin that he believed it was important that the children should witness him changing the diapers of the infants in his care

Linus was deliberate in his intentions to have the children witness his laying of the table before the midday meal: *“They see me laying the table and doing everything that women teachers do’.*

Parental recognition of gender flexibility and equality

“My younger daughter has just moved to Butterflies (age group 3-4) , and has male practitioners there, and also during her time in Bumblebees (age group 2-3) when, at one stage, 3 of the practitioners were male. Apart from the positive image that it transmits to them of **‘everyone is equal in terms of the jobs that they can grow up and do’** [it is] a very helpful example when explaining to both of them that **girls can do everything that boys can, and vice versa**, e.g. you have men and ladies looking after you at nursery

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Gender balance and gender flexibility

We need gender balance

BUT

if we are to see **gender transformation** then gender balance needs to be interpreted as gender flexibility and not gender complementarity

Gender transformation

Wright's "emancipatory social science" (cited in Fielding and Moss, 2011) emphasises **transformation** as:

"critique of society (that) tells us *why* we want to leave the world in which we live; the theory of alternatives (that) tells us *where* we want to go; and the ***theory of the transformation*** (that) tells us *how* to get from here to there" (Wright, 2009b p17, emphasis added)

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How to get from here to there?

1. Teachers' implicit gender discourses are influenced by larger socio-political discourses so we need to **build a gender egalitarian infrastructure** e.g. equal parental leave, access to economic child care, representation in national and local government, equal pay, LGBT support and rights
2. **Develop gender awareness and sensitivity**



THANKS
FOR
LISTENING