

Plaisir, Jean; Cole, Kirsten & Reich-Shapiro, Mindi (2018). **It's more than 'he jumps well with the kids': Recruiting and positioning men in early years settings**
Paper presented on the 28th EECERA Annual Conference, 30.8.2018, Budapest, Hungary.

Abstract

The study's aim is to examine school administrators' perceived benefits for recruiting men to support young children's (0-8 years old) social and emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings in New York City. This inquiry relates to previous research that has examined men teachers' roles as 'surrogate fathers' supporting children's SEL and behavioural skills (Wood & Brownhill, 2016, Cameron, 2011), while also suggesting that schools should recruit more men to fulfil these needs (Flouri et al., 2015, Jones, 2008). Men's participation in ECEC helps to expand SEL experiences for young children by enriching perspectives on curricular activities while also challenging gender stereotypes in the sector (Sumsion, 2000b, Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). Since the ECEC profession is constantly being renegotiated by practices and policies, the researchers used a place-based methodology that includes field observations and 14 interviews with school administrators as research methods to capture the paradigm shift toward professionalization, gender parity, and inclusion in the sector. Participants' identifiable information was coded, encrypted, and kept under lock and key to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. APA (2016) standards for protecting human subjects were applied. ECEC administrators in the study show strong commitment to recruiting and retaining quality male educators in their programs. Proactive recruitment efforts combined with equitable pay and opportunities for advancement may increase men's participation in the sector. Gender balance policy along with salary parity and proactive institutional supports are likely to increase men's participation and capacity to provide young children with SEL in ECEC settings.

Keywords

men, education, children, gender, equality

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IT'S MORE THAN 'HE JUMPS WELL WITH THE KIDS': RECRUITING AND POSITIONING MEN IN ECEC

EECERA 2018, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

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RATIONALE: WHY MEN IN ECEC

- Male educators in ECE settings can support children's SEL and behavioral skills (Wood & Brownhill, 2016; Cameron, 2011).
- ECE male workers can assume "surrogate fathers' roles" to children from single mothers' homes.
- Men teachers can enrich perspectives on curricular activities while also challenging gender stereotypes in ECEC (Sumsion, 2000b; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013).

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STUDY'S CONTEXT & METHODS

- NYC/UPK place-based study
- Funding source: Foundation for Child Development
- Partnership: NYC ECE Research Network
- Data collection methods:
 - 65 completed survey Questionnaires: 46 ECE men & 19 ESE men
 - 14 ECE Administrator Interviews: 8 women and 6 men
- 20 individual educator interviews: 15 ECE “persisters”, 4 ESE “persisters” & 1 ECE “leaver”

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What sets of values motivate men who stay in ECEC?
- What do program leaders expect of male educators in ECEC settings?

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**FINDINGS:
PUSHING BACK AND RE-DEFINING MASCULINITY**

I don't consider myself a macho person...growing up, especially in a Latino household, if you weren't strong enough or if you weren't getting into conflicts or fighting that's "Oh, yeah, you're not man enough." Or you would hear, "Don't cry, men don't cry."...I feel confident in myself, I'm like... Well, yeah, just because I don't yell and scream and push people around or get into conflicts doesn't mean that I'm not man enough, you know.

**FINDINGS:
CHALLENGING SEXIST STEREOTYPES**

[Working in ECE] It's not any less masculine, because it's real fathering, it's how fathers need to be, truly...so, yeah, it's changing stereotypical views of masculinity and it's enforcing what real masculinity is to me.

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**FINDINGS:
ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES
WITH CHILDREN**

You hear children say, 'Oh, this game is only for boys' or 'this is only for girls.' In the dramatic play area, I hear a lot of, 'Well, no, you can't take care of the baby because you're a boy.' And so...we address it, we're like, 'Well, actually boys can take care of babies, too.' ... Or, you know, girls can actually climb, too.'" (ECE teacher)

Everyone is equal here. She can play. We can play. This is a classroom where we all have a choice to play. (ECE teacher)

**FINDINGS:
MASCULINITY AS AN ASSET IN CHILDREN'S
PLAY & DISCIPLINE**

I don't want to put so much light on the sex difference, but I think it's definitely there. I allow the kids to be a lot more physical and rowdy and to expel their energy in a more kinesthetic way. (Teacher in ECEC center)

I can hear one of my student teachers and my assistant tell her to do the same thing six times and I turn, I lower the register of my voice and she'll immediately do it. So that is an advantage I have. It's not necessarily a strength. (Teacher in ECEC center)

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**FINDINGS:
AGENCY, ADVOCACY & FULFILLMENT**

Every day you have to build up a certain amount of stamina and know that it's going to be difficult. But... something keeps pulling me back to wanting to work with people in this local neighborhood of mine. It seems to be a place that I love to serve... And then you keep coming back, because you love it... I feel fulfilled. And I feel happy. And I know I'm doing something right.

**FINDINGS:
PROGRAM LEADERS' PREFERRED
CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE TEACHERS**

I look for individuals that, um... are flexible. People that are more reflective in their process. I look for individuals that really believe in community and family. Um, I think that schools are like families in the sense that you select to be part of a community because of a shared belief and a shared value and that those shared values guide everything that you do when you're working in your classroom, like with kids, and so I want to make sure that we identify individuals that understand, like, what we're trying to create here within this space. (Excerpt from a Principal of an elementary school in a low resource area)

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**FINDINGS:
DEEP AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

One of the things that I think [unclear] helps with retention is this. I actually believe ... when you give people the ability to form these deep and meaningful relationships, they are motivating, and they are sustaining, and I think that you probably could ask any of the teachers here, um, and they would say it's these relationships that they have with these kids, and with their parents. (Executive Director of an ECEC center with 4 men in a moderate resource area)

**FINDINGS:
MORE THAN ATHLETIC (PHYSICAL)
ABILITIES**

It's more than he jumps well with the kids [Laughs]. He can lift that shelf for me when I need to get under it, right? Um... y'know it's, it's more than that and I think that that message needs to happen on all different levels. When they go to college, when they're in high school and they're thinking about careers, when they get to be in the field, um when as administrators when we're talking to parents and they're, and in many instances particularly in our program, there are parents who may be looking for, or thinking about careers and sometimes we have young parents here who are thinking about what their careers are gonna be and for those male parents, it'd be great to have um... early childhood promoted more. Um... to ask them to volunteer more. I mean we have 'Take Your Child to School Day,' what is it, once a year for the fathers and we make a big deal about it. And that's an ACS thing so most programs do participate in that but if there are fathers who are um interested in the field of education or like being in the classroom that we as, whether classroom teachers or family service workers or administrators, kind of promote that idea of, "Wow, you know, you'd make a really great teacher." [Laughs] Y'know. (Admin3: Director of an ECEC center in a high resource area)

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CONCLUSIONS

- Men in ECEC are re-redefining themselves while also challenging long-standing social barriers.
- Building strengths, agency and advocacy are important values for men in the field.
- Program administrators have high expectations of male ECEC educators in their workplaces.
- Shared values and a common vision are key aspects of recruitment and retention efforts.
- Intentional recruitment, retention plans, and supports are likely to increase men's participation in ECE.

POLICY & PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Redefine masculinity with new theories of gender
- Push back and challenge sexist stereotypes with empirical data
- Send clear message about gender equality in recruitment and retention efforts
- Incorporate gender equality clauses in organizational mission statements

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Q & A

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