

Brownhill, Simon (2019). **Lessons learned! Exploring the efforts of partners to build a mixed gender EYE workforce.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 22.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

The aim of this research set out to explore the lessons that can be learned from practising professionals, educational settings, training institutions, support groups and policy makers in their efforts to build a mixed gender EYE workforce. Research by Peeters et al. (2015) and Brody (2015) recognise various endeavours undertaken in international contexts to increase the number of men who work in sector equivalents in EYE but acknowledge the limited success that these have had. This research considers practical ways in which different partners can effectively help to improve male representation in the EYE workforce. Underpinning this research are the works of Erikson (1963), Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) which collectively provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of males in childhood development, thus emphasising their importance in EYE settings. With a strong subscription to the interpretivist paradigm, the research embraced a mixed-methods approach to data collection, conducting semi-structured individual telephone interviews with four male professionals in the EYE sector (35 minutes each) and analysing contributions (n9) to an online special interest group post. Of the ethical considerations applicable to this research, informed consent and participant anonymity were carefully managed through the use of detailed written consent forms and gender-appropriate pseudonyms (BERA, 2018). Analysis of the findings stress the importance of positive collaborations, the sustained investment of time and available funding, and 'creativity and ingenuity to enlist men into participation in early childhood settings' (Honig, 2006: 686). The research has positive implications for policy and practice at all levels.

Keywords

men in early years, mixed gender, partners, lessons learned, workforce

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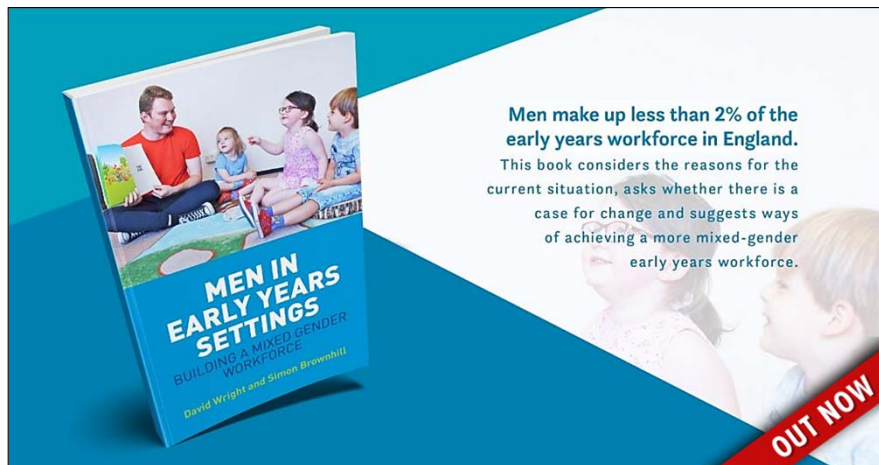
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***Lessons learned!* Exploring the efforts of partners to build a mixed gender EYE workforce**

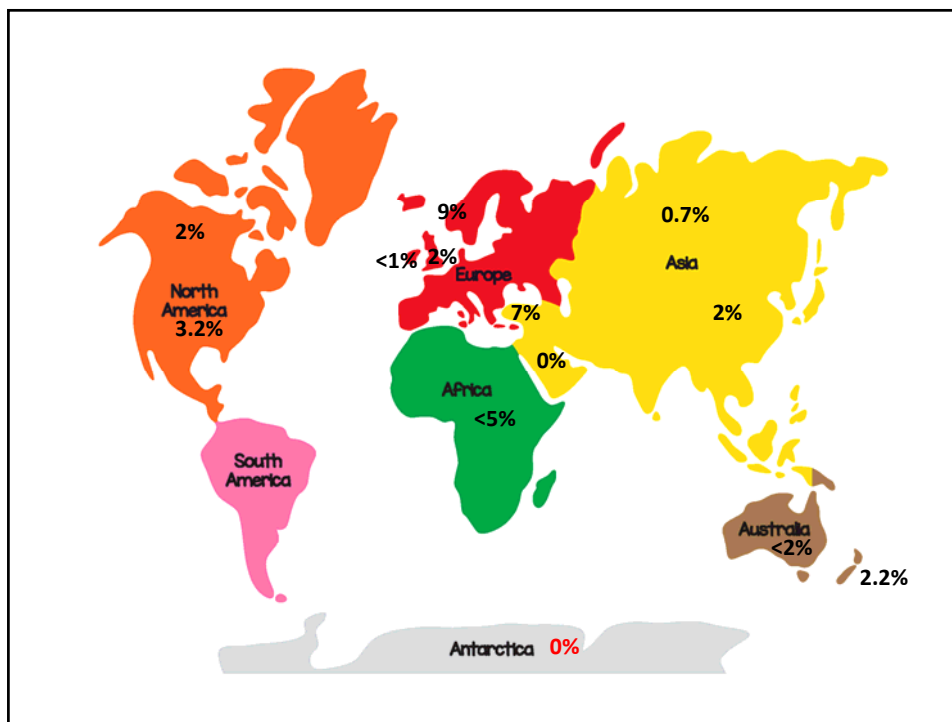
Dr. Simon Brownhill (SPB)

Strategies for a better gender balance in ECEC (EECERA 2019 – D23 SIG)



Men make up less than 2% of the early years workforce in England.
This book considers the reasons for the current situation, asks whether there is a case for change and suggests ways of achieving a more mixed-gender early years workforce.

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Challenges to recruitment

- **Presence** – lack of male ‘beings’ in educational schools/settings
- **Financial** – ‘Child care workers and those in birth-preschool are some of the lowest paid in the workforce’
- **Systematic obstacles in society** – the need for cultural code switching and the pressures of social stereotyping



(Adapted from Meidl, 2019, pp.574-579)


- **Not wanting to feel isolated** – ‘to be a man in ECE is to be a man in the land of women’ (Kokoros, 2012)
- **Not knowing that the Early Years is an employment choice** – young people ‘need time to learn about and consider all the options’ rather than making ‘hurried, expedient decisions, which may not be for the best in the long-term’ (Lang, 2013)
- **The appeal of other forms of employment** – research suggests that men are more interested in business and financial operations and computers and mathematics than in the traditional ‘caring professions’ (Indeed, 2016)



- Brownhill (2019, p.35) highlights how ‘[i]n the 2000s there was a **noticeable surge of initiatives**, largely driven by several western governments (for example the UK, Canada, the USA and New Zealand) to increase the number of male primary school teachers (Skelton 2009)
- Practical strategies included:
 - *aggressive targeting*
 - *setting male quotas for ITE providers*
 - *offering ‘taster courses’, and*
 - *providing financial incentives*
- **Unfortunately, all these strategies failed to sufficiently improve male recruitment.’**



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Country	The importance of...	Source
Denmark Norway Sweden	Long-term, continuous campaigning	Johnson (2010)
Australia	Having targeted audiences for planned campaigns	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in the State of Victoria (2009)
Scotland	Government funding and the use of simple recruitment strategies	Spence (n.d.)
New Zealand	Recognising the prior learning of individuals	Taguma <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Belgium	Gender neutral job titles and terminology	Peeters (2007) 

The research

- Given ‘the desperate need for affirmative action’ (Uba with Cleinman, 2013, p.25), the research sought to **identify various ways to successfully attract, recruit, retain and develop (ARRD) men in the EY sector**
- The research was **conducted** by SPB
- The research was **not funded** by any internal/external research grant



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Research design		Qualitative (Astalin, 2013)	
Stage	Data collection method	Participants	Data analysis
1	Semi-structured individual telephone interviews (~35 minutes each)	4 practicing male professionals in the EYE sector (various roles)	Summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005)
2	Online special interest group post (Facebook)	9 individuals (mixture of male and female respondents)	
Data collection period		May – July 2017	

<u>Government</u>	<u>Training Providers</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioning of large scale ‘longitudinal research’ – <i>impact</i> (II1) • Compulsory national ‘gender training’ (II3) • Review of pay and conditions (II2) • A national Men-in-Early-Years advocate/better ‘advertising or good PR’ (II3) to make EYrs ‘cool’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible vocational training in terms of time, duration, location and mode • Developing catchy marketing slogans, e.g. ‘All Men Can Care’ (II2) • Recruiting male students/ graduates to act as Student Ambassadors to support Open Days/events • Setting realistic no. targets

Schools/Settings

- ‘Speak to parents from all backgrounds about the **benefits** of employing male practitioners’ (‘Wendy’, online post)
- Get UKS2 boys to ‘help do sports activities with the infant school children’ to **gain experience** of working with younger pupils (‘Marylyn’, online post)

Men’s Groups

- Setting up a **network** to ‘help you to see that you are not alone’ (II2)
- Inviting **guest speakers** to talk about research and practice, ‘market[ing this] as CPD’ (II1)
- Facilitating **recruitment events**, e.g. interactive workshops, Q&A sessions and Job Evenings

Conclusions



- It is important to recognise that ‘**different contexts, situations and expectations**’ (Brownhill, 2015, p.210) can influence the success or failure of implemented ideas
- There is a need for ‘**creativity and ingenuity** to enlist men into participation in early childhood settings’ (Honig, 2006, p.686) – think *social media, videos, personalised emails, ‘Dads and Lads’ events, radio adverts...*

- Our fundamental aim [should] not just about attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing a greater **quantity** of men in the Early Years sector; it [should] also about raising the **quality** of those who are attracted, recruited, retained and developed. The idea that ‘any bloke will do’ is simply unacceptable ... **young children will not flourish and succeed in their formative years if they are not supported by the best practitioners performing the best practice’**



(Brownhill, 2019, p.177)



Thank
you



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QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

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Recommended Readings

- Brownhill, S. (2019). A Call to Action! **In:** Wright, D., & Brownhill, S. *Men in Early Years Settings: Building a Mixed Gender Workforce* (pp.175-203). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Davies, J. (2017). *How can we attract more men into London's Early Years workforce?* London: Fatherhood Institute. [Online]. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y6rm3q7u> (Accessed: 22 July 2019).

