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EECERA Special Interest Group

Plaisir, Jean-Yves (2019). **Open the front door and close the back door: Making recruitment and retention intentional and inescapable for men in early learning programs.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 22.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

This three-year inquiry aims to uncover effective strategies for engaging more men in the early learning (EL) workforce in the United States (US). It evolves at a time of major restructuration in American EL programs. This study draws on research that previously analysed male teachers' impact on fulfilling young children's social and emotional needs (Provost, 2011; Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015) with focus on gender inclusion in EL programs (Flouri et al., 2015). Theoretically, male teachers challenge gend er stereotypes while also expanding social and emotional experiences for young children in curricular activities (Sumsion, 2000b; Hedlin & Aberg, 2013). Since the American EL system is undergoing major reform while the study unfolds, the researcher utilises qualitative designs that include place-based observations and interviews with 16 male educators of differing ethnic backgrounds (i.e., Black, Latino and White) to collect timely empirical data and formulate actionable recommendations for guiding policies and practices about gender inclusion in early years programs. APA (2018) standards were applied to ensure confidentiality, and identifiable information was coded and encrypted for human subject protection. The data suggest that intensive trainings on gender bias, societal challenges, culturally mediated behaviours, and inclusive teaching practices for EL administrators and teachers are key for making recruitment and retention intentional and inescapable for increasing men's participation in early - years programs. Lastly, ongoing analyses of early learning staff compositions focusing on inclusionary policies and practices as well as massive recruitment and retention of mixed-gender staff may reduce the dearth of men in early years settings.

Keywords

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Making Recruitment & Retention Intentional & Inescapable for Men In ECEC

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Aim of the Study

The aim of this presentation is to share some strategies that may be effective in recruiting and retaining men to the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce within and beyond the United States.

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Current State of ECEC in USA

- --Over 80 white female;
- --3% male;
- --about 1.5% Black and Latino male;
- --a split system (infant & toddler (Birth-2); preschool (3-5))
- --Lower salary in preK vs elementary vs secondary
- --Program types: CBO, private, public

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Hypothesis:

Men who work within female-dominated professions such as early childhood education (ECE) are challenged by a set of invisible factors (i.e., *glass door effect*) that become apparent only after they enter the workforce (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). Simultaneously, they are influenced by other factors that support their aspirations within the ECE field.

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Structural Factors

Male EC educators often find themselves taking up the mantle of "role model," which can have many implications. They may be precipitously pushed to administrative positions (*glass elevator effect*) because they are rare (2.5-3%) in ECE settings. They are also likely to benefit from unofficial coaching and mentoring by experienced men and decision-makers in ECE settings.

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Personal Aspirations

By the same token, personal aspirations influence men's decisions to work in ECE. Despite the challenges they face in venturing outside the stereotypical masculine niches, men who join the ECE field are motivated by their passion for working with young children and by the opportunity to make a difference in their communities and to "give back." Many also express a sense of personal fulfillment in *intentionally* challenging gender stereotypes and identifying a broader view of masculinity.

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Societal Barriers

Despite the advantages that men may enjoy in ECE structures, they are challenged by societal barriers such as gender stereotypes, social marginalization, suspicions of child molestation and microaggressions that tend to impugn their masculinity and negatively impact their work performance (*glass walls effect*). These factors may also deter some men from joining the workforce.

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Why Does It Matter?

Understanding how the above factors interplay with other social constructs, such as race, ethnicity, class and gender identity, can help policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to develop initiatives for achieving relatively higher rates of gender inclusion and diversity in the ECEC workforce. The lessons learned can also be applied to innovate practices in other gendered sectors of the economy.

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Theoretical Framework

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Social Constructions of Gender, Race and Class

Foucault's theory on discourses holds that gender is socially constructed through the operation of social power.

The theory also informs us about the intersections between gender, race and class that advantage or disadvantage men and women in specific situations (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015; Skelton, 2011; Bauman & May, 2001; Connell, 1995).

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The "Glass Escalator" Phenomenon

Connell (1995) maintains that men generally benefit from their ability to perform "gendered" tasks in a patriarchal society.

Burn and Pratt-Adams posit that, although male teachers may be subject to microaggressions from female colleagues during initial training, "qualified men can be advantaged in their careers due to their rarity" in the ECE profession (2015:6).
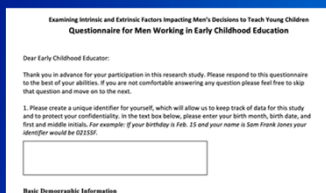
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Guiding Question & Methods:

The major challenge facing ECEC structures in the United States is to attract, develop and retain male educators who will make long-term commitment in the field. So, the presentation attempts to answer this important question: How can recruitment and retention be made intentional and inescapable for men in ECEC?

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Findings

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Raising Awareness and Challenging Stereotypes

"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 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?"

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Raising Awareness and Challenging Stereotypes

- *Explicitly* and *intentionally* challenging gender stereotypes and identifying a broader view of masculinity:
  - Men are caregivers
  - Men are affectionate and nurturing
  - Men are gentle, sensitive, empathetic
  - Men are dependable, kind and quietly strong

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A Focus on Gender Balance

A gender-mixed workplace:
- Providing gender balance in "female centric" EC classrooms and curriculum
- Offering a non-traditional perspective (modeling) of gender roles
- Allowing for a range of masculinities to be represented without tokenizing

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Pushing Back Gender Biases

A gender-balanced ECEC curriculum:

- ○ Making conscious choices about books that show both gender in ECEC settings;

- ○ *Explicitly* addressing issues of gender bias and inequality, so that boys and girls engage in all activities and areas of curriculum

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Ways to Attract and Support Men in ECEC

- • Volunteer or paid work experience in summer camp, after-school program, tutoring;

- • Alternative pathways to ECEC (e.g., Teach for America)

- • Focus on children and families (e.g., Big Brother/Sister)

- • Caring for younger family members/becoming a father

- • Support of family, friends and communityEmotional Rewards for teaching young children

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Ways to Support Men's Retention In ECEC

- Collaborative and welcoming environment
    - Professionalism, support and encouragement of female colleagues
    - Sharing resources and effective teaching strategies
    - Welcoming male colleagues' ideas about curriculum and lessons
    - Informal mentoring

Factors That Support Men's Retention In ECEC

- PD focused on unique experiences and gender-specific challenges of men in ECEC (
- Create a caring pipeline
- Workshops for educators and administrators that provide a safe, judgment-free zone in which to unpack biases
- Support/affinity groups and safe spaces (men's cohort)
- Financial support for continuing education

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