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Sullivan, Victoria; Xu, Yuwei & (2022). **The Men's Centres: Does the clustering of men together in a centre support inclusion in the female-dominated occupation of ECEC?** Paper presented on the 30th EECERA Annual Conference, Glasgow/Scotland, 25.8.2022.

We take the unique circumstance of many men working together in ECEC to ask whether more men on staff within a centre improves the men's experience of inclusion, leading to their retention. Engaging men in ECEC is one of nine recommendations of the OECD (2019) report on the international ECEC workforce crisis. Rates of educator turnover are high with estimates ranging from 20-50% per annum (Thorpe et al., 2020; Totenhagen et al., 2016; Whitebook et al., 2014). Interpersonal relationships are powerful in communicating inclusion or exclusion in gender-segregated occupations (Sullivan et al., 2021). Exit is associated with experience of feeling 'other' perpetuated by judgements of men's sexuality, motives, and ability (Acker, 2012; Kossek et al., 2016). We undertake an abductive analysis of interviews with ten men comprising 20% and 25%, of the staff in two ECEC centres; ten times the national and international representation of men in the ECEC workforce. Ethics approval was gained through the University of Queensland Institutional Human Research Ethics Board. All participants and data have been deidentified. Our data identifies a developmental process in which supports and mentorship, from female and male colleagues, are critical to retention early in career. Beyond, the building of a distinct male contribution underpins continuing career engagement. Implications for inclusion and workplace productivity are complex as the presence of more men disrupts the established social order and new tensions emerge. Our findings challenge the assumption that increasing gender-minority numbers will necessarily improve inclusion in the workplace, as broader gender dynamics pervade.

Keywords

Early Childhood Education and Care, Male Educators, Workplace Environment, Gender and Education, Occupational Sex-Segregation

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Men Times Ten: Does the presence of more men support inclusion of male educators in early childhood education?

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Acknowledgment of Country

The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

This land has always been a space for teaching, learning, research and collaboration tens of thousands of years before it was established as a university campus, and continues today.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

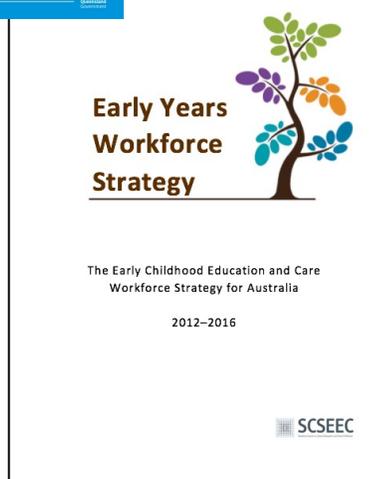
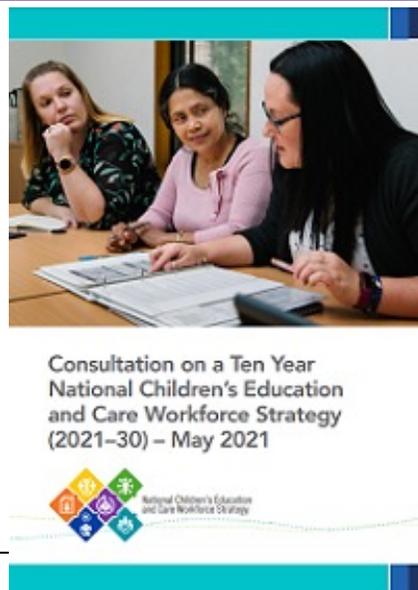
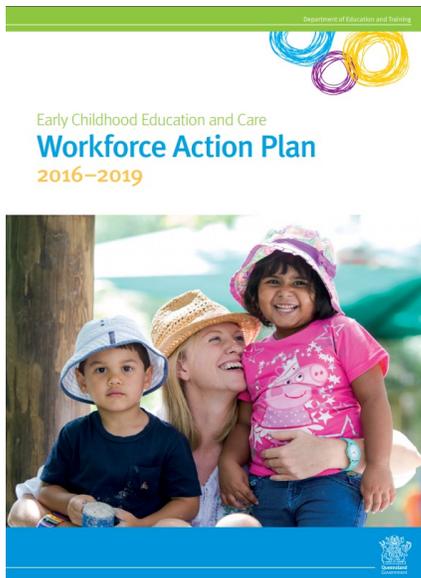


Setting The Problem

- ✓ Less than 3% of the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce are men.
- ✓ Globally the average is 2.4%, with divisions of 0.006 - 9% in the OECD.
- ✓ So, is this a problem?



It's a Problem of Labour Supply



- ✓ Estimated 16,000 shortfall in qualified staff.
- ✓ ECEC has a turnover of 30-50%.
- ✓ Recruiting male educators has been proposed as a solution to address labour shortages in the sector.

The Labour Supply Lens

Existing theoretical arguments for men's participation in ECEC:

- Principles of gender equity
- Gender role-modelling
- A catalyst for professional recognition

- ❖ Men's participation as one of the nine recommendations by OECD (2019)
- ❖ Focusing on methods to attract men into ECEC
- ❖ Silent in potential for disruption within the workplace and the attendant requirements for support

What happens when an individual and occupation gender do not match?

- ✓ Exclusion
- ✓ Discrimination
- ✓ Tokenism
- ✓ Exit

(Sex segregated occupation theory)

Tokenism: The Wrong Path to Diversity



ECEC as a gender segregated occupation

Educational and Intellectual

VS

Caring and Emotional



ECEC as women's work?

To what extent does men's participation in ECEC disrupts stereotypes of ECEC as a 'feminine' occupation?



Challenges particularly faced by men in ECEC

- Suspicion: why are you here? (Bhana et al., 2021, p.141)
- Questioned competency in caring for and educating young children
- Gendered expectations
- ***Can increasing male presence resolve those challenges?***

The inclusion and contribution of men in ECEC

- Advocacy from leadership
- Workforce relationships

Sullivan, V., Coles, L., Xu, Y., Perales, F., & Thorpe, K. (2020). Beliefs and attributions: Insider accounts of men's place in early childhood education and care. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 21(2), 126-137.

- ***Changing dynamics of workforce relationships when more than men cluster in ECEC?***

A focus on men's inclusion?

An inclusive ECEC workforce that values all workers and is valued by society as a profession that deserves higher pay and social status

The Diversity in Childcare Study

Methods

- ✓ Qualitative Study
- ✓ Interviews and Observation Methodology
- ✓ Purposeful Design

Challenges

- ✓ COVID Restrictions
- ✓ Redesign & Resubmit Ethics
- ✓ Maintained Unique & Novel Design

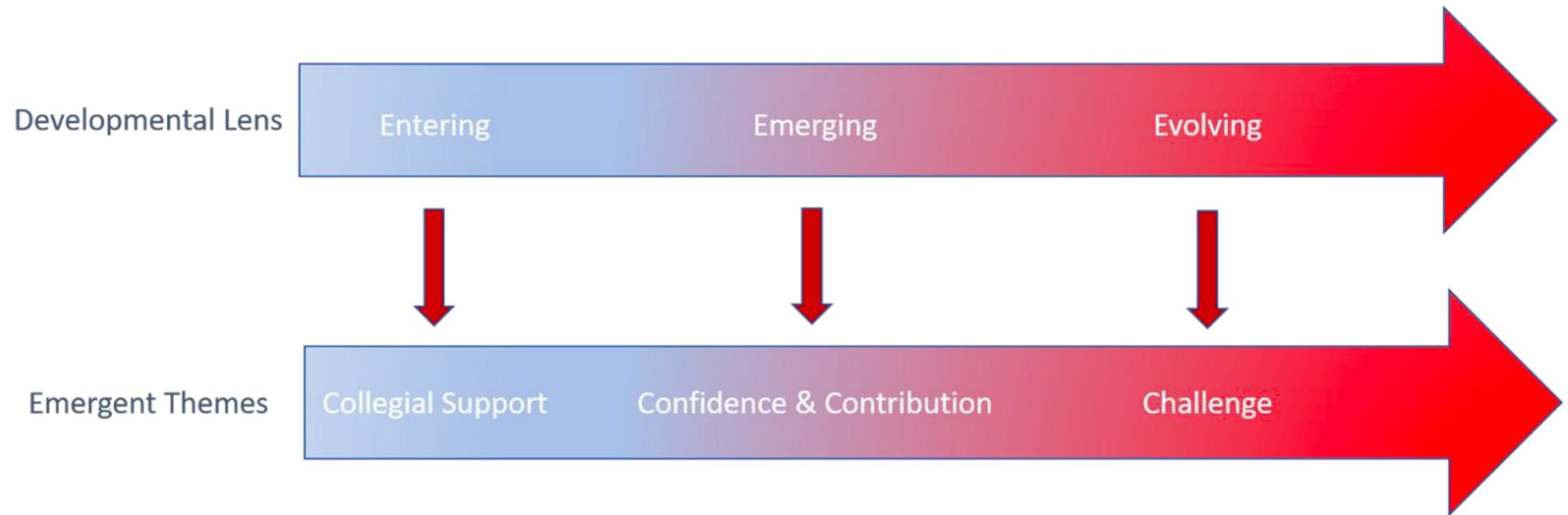


The two Australian childcare centres

- ❖ A male director in each centre
- ❖ Male educators comprised 20% (5/25) and 25% (9/36) of a culturally diverse staff



Analytical framework



The alien invader: Entering ECEC and the critical role of collegial support

I was this alien invader in this world dominated by females and (think), what am I doing?

...they just ate me alive [the female educators], like I'm male, and she's like 'don't worry'. Just took me under her wing and she's like, 'oh, I'll talk to the Director, maybe you can come into my room'.



When you're a male, especially in a new service, it's very daunting. It's a one hundred place centre, so it can be a bit scary, but he [male co-worker] assured it would be all right and he was really good at guiding and helping me throughout my journey.

I could go in there and see... [male] educators on the floor and then as well a male in a leadership role. [...] It kind of made it a little bit easier and took away those worries and that about being a male in that industry [...] Just having other males around is just a help, I think, just for anyone that wants to get into the field being a male.



She's really helped me grow my confidence: Emerging as a professional

[Michelle] talked to me about ways I could engage with the children and ways I can hold a group. Since then, I can run group times with 30 children. She's really helped me grow my confidence and... build relationships with children.

We had a really supportive room leader in our room who took me under her wing a bit and mentored me in a way which was really good for me with the transition to having key children to having more documentation to do and more responsibility.



But I'm happy because I've seen the change over the years [with increase in male participation] for great and that makes me happy because hopefully [Herbert] and [Tommy], when you spoke to them, they didn't feel that way (fear) like I did.

They [the children] participate in what we call the Big Brother program. It's an additional male educator that they're aligned with, and that male educator does some - depending on the child and what their learning journey is, it could be an excursion around the corner to the cafe for a milkshake and cookie.





We all bring a different perspective: Evolving as a team of men and women

It's funny, because our female team members are our biggest advocates. They really are. They're really out there telling families and showing the community, particularly like, they might go to training and they're like, 'oh you're from [Centre Name], how is it to work with all those men?' They're like, 'it's fantastic. We all bring a different perspective.'



You get a lot of the negative – if you're out in the playground, and I'm playing a game of soccer with the boys, and girls play too, I think sports really undervalued, especially to female staff because it's looked at as just – if you're having fun, you're not doing your job, or sport's just sport, it's not important. But I have that many children that socially can't interact and engage, but through sport, they'll actually come over and play. There's so many more pros to it. Yeah. I just wish they would do their research.

Sometimes it feels like if two male educators are doing something – having a chat or anything really, it gets blown more out of proportion than if it does if it's two female educators.



We even have a father's group. There was no mothers group where the female educators would give up their weekends and go to the park with a group of mums. But there were a group of guy educators here, we gave up our Saturday morning, and we'd go set up a barbeque and have a barbeque with parents and stuff, the dads. They'd bring their kids, and we'd just kick a ball around, and the dads would hang out.

I think I've noticed since more guys have come on, the laughing and the joking has increased. A lot of the other females love a good laugh as well, they jump in a lot more which is nice. Less bickering more laughing, I like that.

Old conflicts and new challenges

gender divisions of

‘fun and responsibility’ and

‘laughter and bickering’,

men claiming a distinct role that undermines and undervalues the long and deep taken-for-granted contribution women make in ECEC

Discussion: productivity for children's learning experiences

Long-term:

Structural issues of pay and conditions

Short-term:

Immediate workforce environment

- Collegial relationships
- Quality of leadership

Implications for practice

✓ Beyond simply recruiting more men

✓ Diversity sensitive policy frameworks

*(Missing guidance on supporting diverse workforce by **Shaping our futures** [Education Services Australia, 2021] or OECD [2019])*

✓ Inclusion training for educators and induction to new staff regardless of gender

✓ Mentorship *(foregrounded by diverse teams than the 'big brothers')*

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Thank you

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