

Bryan Nelson ('85) wants more men to teach in schools. He's shared this message in appearances on the *Today Show*, CNN and the *NBC Nightly News*. Nelson has received various awards including a Bush Leadership Fellowship to study at Harvard University where he researched men, fathers and children. He is a community faculty member at Metropolitan State and the founding director of MenTeach.

What was the path that led you to organize MenTeach?

A part of it was that I was a young man and needed a job. I was doing construction work at the time and I walked by a childcare program. I'd done sports for many years and liked working with kids, so I applied for a job as an assistant teacher. I was lucky that they hired me. What I found was that the work was pretty interesting, but I wondered why there weren't more men doing it. I started doing workshops at conferences, and there were a lot of men and women who were asking the same question, so we got together. That's how MenTeach started—there was a need for it.

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What percentage of teachers are men?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, early education from birth to age four or five is about 3–5 percent, in elementary school it is about nine percent, and in high school it is up to 39 percent.

In a study I did, I looked at why there are so few men teaching and I found three main reasons. One is stereotypes. People think men don't care about children or men can't do nurturing and so they shouldn't work with children. The second is fear of accusation of harm. People believe men are going to hurt children. And the third reason is low status and pay. We think it's all three of those things working together.

How do you encourage men to teach?

At MenTeach, we have several ways we approach it. We ask questions: What is it to be male? What is it to be female? How can we support children, particularly boys, in being nurturing? In this society, there's a way that we discount what's considered nurturing. There are more women becoming doctors, more women are becoming lawyers. Why shouldn't men go into work that women have traditionally done? We've learned so much from women about entering nontraditional fields.

When I was in some child care classes, I was the only guy. Some of the activities they had us do were things that I wasn't comfortable with such as making doilies—that is not my area. Men have been socialized in a certain way. I'll give you another example. I keep two iPhones on my table: one is black, one is pink. Women walk into the room and might take black or pink. If men walk in, very few men would take the pink one. So, there's a way we've been socialized, and we want to change that. Children need strong caring men in their daily lives.

How did MenTeach grow to be a national organization?

I was at Metropolitan State exploring the teaching profession. Then I worked with Head Start and other early education programs. After several years, I received a Bush Fellowship to attend Harvard. I was part of a group there that was concerned about the issue of supporting men as teachers, and we initially called the group "men in childcare." Then we realized it was "men in childcare and elementary education." As we thought about that, it seemed a difficult name for an internet URL. That's when I had an epiphany by asking, "What are we doing?" The answer was: men teach. Once I got that, we started our Web site—www.menteach.org. It just exploded—people could find our articles and find our information. My Web site has over a million hits a year. It's just an exciting time for me to finally see this coming to fruition.

