

Men in Early Childhood

An Update

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An enthusiastic 19-year-old applied for work at a small, urban child care program. He worked once at a summer camp with school-age children but never in early education. Despite his lack of experience, the program hired him after conducting a two-hour interview and checking his references.



During his first week on the job, he ran around and around, with the children chasing him until he collapsed from exhaustion. After resting a few minutes, the children piling on top of him, he got up and did it all over again. The children loved it.

Phoebe, an experienced teacher, encouraged his enthusiastic play with the children. After a week of observing, Phoebe met with him and said, "You're doing a fantastic job with the children. They love playing with you." He got a big grin on his face, and clearly he felt really proud. Then Phoebe said, "You know, if you were to sit with a few children and read them a book, I

know the children would love your voice. And of course, you could rest from all that running around."

It was great advice, and he used it because it was delivered with such a positive tone. Every week Phoebe made another suggestion, adding "so he could rest after playing so well with the children." A few months went by and although he still engaged in vigorous outdoor play with the children, he had added other activities to his repertoire—reading, block building, art, and dramatic play. He felt welcomed by Phoebe and the other teachers. He found early childhood education fascinating and challenging. He recognized the significance of work in this field, but he wondered, Where are all the other men?

This story took place in 1979. Now, more than a quarter century later, we know that the number of men teaching in the field of early childhood education hasn't changed much nor have the reasons why men don't teach (Nelson 2002). Men make up 5.2 percent of what the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) classifies as child care workers, 2.3 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers, and 17.8 percent of elementary and middle school teachers. The shortage of men teachers in early childhood and elementary education is similar in other industrialized countries. For example, 2.5 percent of early childhood caregivers in Sweden are men, and men teach only 6.1 percent of Sweden's preschool classes (Flising 2005).

Strikingly different from the United States, however, is the response to the shortage by governments in some other westernized nations. New Zealand and Australia provide financial incentives and propose legislation to help increase the numbers of men in teaching. In the United Kingdom, Men in Childcare sponsors an annual conference, and Britain's and Norway's governments fund offices to recruit male teachers for teacher training programs (Peter 2005).

The European Union recognizes the trend in the shortage of men teachers as part of a broader issue of equality in the labor market. Drudy and colleagues report,

Labor market equality has become a central plank of the European Union and national government policy relating to employment. International research has shown that women are underrepresented in courses and careers in the physical sciences, in technology and in engineering . . . the only courses which are as gender differentiated as engineering are primary/elementary teaching courses. If gender imbalance in the one is a matter of legitimate concern and policy intervention to foster equality, so too is it in the other. (2005, 16)

Some organizations and groups in the United States have increased their activity in recruiting men teachers by offering teacher training

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considers the topic of men caring for children, other than as fathers, relevant enough to spend money on.

Although the percentage of men teachers has decreased since 1980 (Nelson 2002, 3), the number of organizations, programs, schools, and universities welcoming men as teachers is now increasing. Educators may find the resources on page 36 helpful in their efforts to recruit and retain male teachers.

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programs specifically for men and financial aid. Clemson University's Call Me Mister program has successfully solicited funds from foundations and corporations to help recruit African American men to become elementary school teachers. The program received the Oprah's Angel Network award, which included a \$100,000 contribution. For FY2005 Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer helped secure \$350,000 in federal funding for Bowie State University's Men Equipped to Nurture (MEN) program.

In the last 15 years more books and articles have been written about men teaching than ever before (see "Books and Articles about Men Teachers"). In popular culture, moviemakers have focused on men as teachers of children, for example, *Daddy Daycare* and *Schoolhouse Rock*. Whether educators rate these films highly or not, they are an indication that the U.S. culture

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Books and Articles about Men Teachers

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World Focus on Men in Education

2006 "Men Teach, Children Grow"—A National Symposium in Atlanta

A daylong seminar is planned for November 8 at the 2006 NAEYC Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. www.naeyc.org and www.menteach.org


2007 World Forum—Men in Early Childhood Education Planning Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A preconference planning event is scheduled at the Child Care Information Exchange 2007 World Forum on Early Care and Education in Kuala Lumpur, May 15–18, 2007, for men and women from around the world who are interested in shaping the form and format of the 2008 Working Forum on Men in Early Childhood Education. www.worldforumfoundation.org

2008 Working Forum on Men in Early Childhood Education in Honolulu, Hawaii

Activities will capitalize on the professional knowledge and personal experiences of men and women from many cultures to help shed light on what men offer to early education, what attracts them to the field, and what enhances their sense of belonging in early childhood education. The forum is a project of Child Care Information Exchange through its World Forum Foundation. www.childcareexchange.com/wf

For more information and resources on men in teaching and on recruiting men for the teaching field, including upcoming national and international conferences and events, visit NAEYC Online Communities and the Men in Education Network (MEN) Interest Forum at NAEYC's Web site. www.naeyc.org/members



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