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Men in Education Network (MEN) Interest Forum member Donald E. Piburn, of Working Forum on Men in Early Care and Education, and cofacilitators Bryan G. Nelson and Frances M. Carlson wrote this article in consultation with MEN cofacilitator Rodney L. West Sr.

If your interest forum has ideas to share, contact Amy Shillady at ashillady@naeyc.org.

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Men in Education Network (MEN) Interest Forum

Men in Teaching: Gender Equality through the Promise of Gender Balance

CHILDREN'S AWARENESS of gender begins in early childhood. When most of their caregivers are female, young children may make stereotypic assumptions about male and female roles (Chodorow 1978; Johnson 2008). In many societies, traditional gender roles that define women as nurturers/caregivers and men as providers/disciplinarians have yielded to new social practices where women and men are expected to fulfill a full range of adult roles and responsibilities. As prominent features in communities worldwide, early childhood programs represent an opportunity for social transformation toward gender equality in the youngest generation (Piburn 2006).

With changes in family composition, high divorce rates, and a largely female early childhood workforce, many young children now have little or no contact with men. When men are scarce or absent in their daily lives, children may base their understanding of masculine behavior on media portrayals—often violent and angry. The media seldom show men capably nurturing children or managing home life situations (Cunningham & Dorsey 2004).

Caring for and teaching young children are appropriate and necessary roles for women *and* men. The assumption that careers in teaching are suitable only for females and not for males restricts opportunities for both genders. Children in most societies view early care and education as principally a female obligation. This is a “key aspect of gender inequalities,” because it reinforces stereotypic notions about gender attributes and roles (UNDAW 2004, 15) Assumptions and stereotypes

based on gender infringe on principles of equal opportunity, consequently narrowing education, career, and employment possibilities.

Not only are gender stereotypes artificial, but they also can interfere with children's learning about interpersonal relationships, caregiver interdependence, and caregiving skills that all children need as they mature. Social institutions with a uniform workforce do not inspire gender equality, social justice, and other important democratic values (Johnson 2008).

Addressing workforce gender disparities

Supporting gender balance and changing gender disparities in the early childhood workforce requires widespread change in early childhood education programs and services. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, researchers, policy makers, and professional organizations like NAEYC need to join in systemic efforts to recruit, support, and retain men as vital to a representative and diverse early childhood teacher workforce (Johnson et al. 2010). Leaders in the field need to show support for a representative and diverse workforce by using their influence to address current gender disparities.

Recommendations for programs

Early childhood programs convey their support for men as teachers of young children through what they say, the information they share, and what they do. When

programs banish stereotypes, dispel mistaken assumptions, and challenge hidden resistance toward men in the workplace culture, men who teach sense that their school communities are places where their contributions are equally valued, and their numbers will multiply.

Banish stereotypes. Non-discriminatory practices are at the heart of early childhood education, yet myths and stereotypes continue to discourage men from entering or remaining in careers working with young children (Nelson 2004). Use professional publications, program brochures, flyers, books, toys, and play materials that reflect gender balance and emphasize the importance of men in the teacher workforce.

Provide a non-stereotypic environment for children, family members, and staff. Gender-equitable curricula, learning materials, and classroom experiences have been linked to a greater flexibility in girls' and boys' gender role expectations (UNDAW 2004; Johnson 2008). Actively counter children's and adult's comments, attitudes, and beliefs that are based on stereotypes or that diminish non-traditional gender roles.

Support a gender-diverse workforce. Make male early childhood educators a standard, vital part of your teacher workforce. This exemplifies for children a world where women and men share caregiving responsibilities equally (Janairo et al. 2010). Having a balance of male and female early childhood educators helps expand children's understanding of gender roles and challenges stereotypic messages they may see elsewhere.

Use positive representations of men. When children see positive images of men and are cared for and taught by fathers, father figures, and male early childhood educators, they learn that nurturing behavior, caregiving, and teaching are attitudes

and activities typical of men as well as women (Davidson & Nelson 2011; Weaver-Hightower 2011). Put pictures of nurturing males on classroom walls. Read picture books that show men caring for and spending time with children. Tell stories featuring men in diverse roles—nurse, cook, stay-at-home dad, single parent, and caregiver.

Establish gender-neutral policies on teacher-child interactions. Quality programs provide clear policies about how all staff are expected to interact with children. For example, both men and women teachers change diapers, bandage injuries, provide guidance and discipline, and rearrange classroom furniture. Having different

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Create a Male-Friendly Environment

To promote change in the education field, all areas—teacher preparation programs, early childhood programs, professional development, and schools and classrooms—should welcome men and acknowledge their place in early childhood education. “Adjusting to gender differences requires faculty and staff to respond to men while neither perpetuating stereotypes nor limiting how men interact with children, such as not allowing men to change infants’ diapers” (Nelson 2010).

When planning male-friendly classroom environments, think about young boys also. Allow more open space so all children, but especially boys, can engage in boisterous big body play (Carlson 2011). Boys will feel more comfortable in this environment, and men interested in joining your staff probably will as well.

expectations for women and for men is discriminatory and diminishes the benefits of having male teachers.

Focusing on gender goals

The following recommendations for early childhood policy makers, researchers, program administrators, and organization leaders are adapted from the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (Johnson 2008). They offer practical strategies for analyzing gender disparities in the workforce and exploring ways to bring more men into the profession.

- Collaborate with teacher preparation programs to find methods to recruit more men.
- Work with other early childhood programs to advocate for gender equality and social justice, values that emphasize the important role of men in the early childhood education field
- Work with networks, working groups, nonprofit organizations, and researchers to investigate and respond to gender disparities and the many roles of men in early childhood education to encourage workforce diversity and eliminate gender stereotypes.
- Evaluate, monitor, and support existing early childhood programs that have a record of promoting diversity in the teacher workforce.

Apply the “Rooney Rule”

Named for Dan Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers and chairman of the National Football League Committee on Workplace Diversity, this approach to recruitment increased the number of qualified minorities in senior coaching and football operations positions in the National Football League. Early childhood programs can apply similar recruitment strategies:

- Place targeted ads for job openings to specifically reach quality male applicants. For example, place your advertisements under the General Help category instead of the Education section of newspapers and websites.
- Use ad content that encourages both men and women to apply. For example, when you advertise, use phrases like “Men encouraged to apply.”
- Interview at least one male for every opening your early childhood program has for a new teacher.

Conclusion

Gender balance in the early childhood workforce reflects diversity and anti-bias philosophies, fosters a more inclusive and diverse workforce, and most important, influences children’s attitudes and values, shaping who

they will become as adults (Piburn 2006). Recruiting, supporting, and retaining male early educators is vital to a representative and diverse teacher workforce. Such intentional actions and attitudes give the early childhood education field an opportunity to inspire gender equality by eliminating gender stereotypes—let’s seize the chance, take action now, and transform society for the benefit of all the world’s children.

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