

Original Research Study

Accentuating the Otherness of Men in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The highly gendered nature of early childhood education is highlighted by the statistical reality that currently less than one percent of early childhood educators in New Zealand are men. This situation is of significant concern and has potentially negative implications, not only for the early childhood educational experiences for both boys and girls but also for the sector as a whole. This paper explores the notion that men in the early childhood sector, as a statistical minority, may be perceived in terms of being unusual, different and even perhaps as outsiders. An analysis of nine 'Personal Stories' posted on the TeachNZ (the recruiting arm of the Ministry of Education) website was conducted to gain an insight into how men in early childhood education can be unintentionally positioned as outside the norm and how the differences between men and women early childhood educators can be accentuated within this specific context (i.e., the TeachNZ website). This paper considers how such positioning of men within the early childhood education sector not only highlights the difference and otherness of men within the sector but may also actively contribute to the perpetuation of such a perception.

Introduction

A Historically Located Issue

Although the shortage of men in early childhood education is an important issue for the sector in New Zealand, it is also an issue that is not exclusive to either the New Zealand context or to the contemporary time frame (Farquhar, 1997; MacNaughton & Newman 2001). Both local and international literature on the topic consistently indicates that the 'invisible man' in early childhood education is a historically long standing and widespread concern (Peeters, 2007; Sumsion, 2005).

Sumsion (2000), writing about early childhood education in the Australian context, notes the highly gendered nature of contemporary early childhood education merely reflects a historical situation where the actual activities, tasks and work of the early childhood teacher mirrored traditional stereotypes of men's and women's roles. According to MacNaughton and Newman (2001) such gender roles are deeply embedded in the very structure of our society, therefore the gendered nature of the early childhood work force and how society

perceives teachers' work is best considered within a wider social view. Sumsion (2000) contributes to this debate by suggesting that nurturing and caring for young children is not only central to the early childhood teacher's role, but that such activities have also long been associated with notions of 'women's work' which reflect wider social norms and stereotypical understandings of gender roles. Peeters (2007) further adds to such discussion by stating "Childcare is seen as women's work, something that women naturally do and are intrinsically better at" (p.15).

Such a view encapsulates a pervasive and lingering historical stereotype. The legacy of this can still be seen currently in the gendered imbalance of early childhood teachers where women are over represented and men are an almost invisible minority. As discussed by Peeters (2007), there continues to be a widespread and popular belief that men's ability to operate effectively in the early childhood teaching environment is somehow inferior to that of women. In the context of the United Kingdom, Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) suggest that the current shortage of men in early childhood education is not easily attributed to tangible professional qualities of the male or female teacher but rather lies in outdated notions of what constitutes men's and women's work. MacNaughton and Newman (2001) further add "why don't men work in early childhood? Because it's 'women's work' or, more importantly, it's not men's work" (p.152).

Although such increasingly irrelevant and historically located social constructions are consistently challenged in our wider society (MacNaughton & Newman, 2001), it appears that the early childhood sector is tenaciously clinging to the notion that early childhood care and education is primarily a woman's occupation (MacNaughton & Newman, 2001). MacNaughton and Newman further suggest that since the 1970s women have been vigorously pursuing traditionally male dominated careers. Conversely, Peeters (2007) points out that men appear to often be less eager to move into areas associated with 'women's work' and although issues such as remuneration and working conditions are critical factors they are not, according to Peeters, the fundamental reason underpinning men's slow uptake of employment in early childhood education.

Both Cameron et al. (1999) and Peeters (2007) agree that the commonly held perception that early childhood education is an inherently women's career, is a key factor hindering men's uptake of the many opportunities present in the sector. Farquhar (1997) listed a number of factors significant in contributing to male under representation in early childhood education at that time, including relatively low pay rates, false child abuse accusations and the low status often associated with the sector. However Farquhar also indicates that the social perception of early childhood education as women's work is pervasive and has helped to discourage men from entering the sector, both historically and in the current situation.

Men's Under-Representation: A Local or Global Concern?

While this paper is primarily concerned with the gendered nature of early childhood education within the New Zealand context, it is important to recognise that this situation is certainly not unique to New Zealand but is rather indicative of a much wider issue that appears to be facing many developed countries across the world. A review of international literature on the topic (Farquhar, 1997; Harty, 2007; Peeters, 2007; Sargent, 2005; Sumsion, 2000; Sumsion, 2005) demonstrates the wide spread nature of the concern.

Although specific statistics regarding men's participation within early childhood education and care contexts differ across individual countries, the overarching theme is that men are profoundly absent from the sector. Discussions on the issue from the United States (Cooney & Bittner, 2001), England (Harty, 2007), Australia (Sumsion, 2000; MacNaughton &

Newman, 2001) and the European Union (Peeters, 2007) all highlight the gendered nature of early childhood education “Early childhood education remains one of the most gender-skewed of all occupations” (Sumsion, 2005, p.109).

However, it appears that the situation in New Zealand may be worse than in many other developed countries. Farquhar (1997) bluntly stated, “In contrast to other developed countries New Zealand has one of the lowest rates of male participation in early childhood teaching” (p.1). Although this statement is potentially discouraging, the fact that it was made over a decade ago leads one to hope that our situation might have improved in the ensuing years. Unfortunately this appears not to be the case, as statistics provided by Farquhar (2007) indicate that the under-representation of men has actually worsened in the last decade, rather than improved (in 1992 men made up 2.34 per cent of all early childhood educators, this figure had dropped to less than one per cent by 2005).

According to Peeters (2007), despite concerted efforts to address the issue within European Union member states, the situation there has largely followed the New Zealand trend and male participation has also shown an alarming decrease. Clearly both nationally and internationally, the gender issue in early childhood education is rapidly approaching crisis point and although steps have and are being taken to remedy the situation, progress appears to be painfully slow.

The Otherness of Men in the Early Childhood Context

The term ‘otherness’ in relation to men in early childhood education primarily relates to the sense of gendered minority and conspicuous difference that appears to often accompany men’s experiences in the sector (King, 1998). According to Sumsion (2000) male early childhood teachers are “highly conspicuous and subject to considerable suspicion” (p.129). Sumsion (2005) further adds to this discussion by suggesting “men working with young children will continue to be regarded as aberrations” (p.110). The ‘highly conspicuous’ and ‘aberrant’ nature of the few men currently employed in the sector is clearly problematic and is something Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler and Ballantyne (2006) imply is directly linked to the continuing male under-representation. In an employment environment where men make up less than one percent of the work force it is inevitable that these men may experience a sense of isolation in the workplace “Being a man in a woman’s world is very isolating at times” (Farquhar et al., 2006, p.14). The reality that men in contemporary early childhood education may at times feel both conspicuous and isolated is oddly paradoxical. To feel that one stands out from the group, yet is not really included in that group, must potentially highlight the sense of otherness that Sumsion (2000) indicates is a core reality for many male early childhood teachers.

Sumsion (2000) suggests that men in the early childhood education sector clearly fail to “conform to conventional images of early childhood educators” (p.130) and thus highlight their otherness regardless of their actual teaching and pedagogical practices. Men sit outside the mainstream norm for early childhood teachers merely by way of their biological reality and this situation creates a raft of complex social and personal tensions that underpin the male’s work in this sector. In describing these tensions, both Sumsion (2005) and King (1998) argue that male early childhood teachers are constantly being challenged by their otherness in term of both how they are different and similar to their female colleagues. In this light it becomes clear that the isolation and otherness that pervades the male early childhood teacher’s working life is maintained and perpetuated by both external forces including female counterparts, parents and children, and internal forces, primarily the male teacher himself.

Buckingham (2006), writing as a man teaching in the early childhood context, indicates that although men in the sector may find themselves positioned as the focus of attention, much of this attention may neither be desired nor positive and may ultimately further contribute to the overall sense of difference. According to Buckingham, the novelty factor of being a male in an early childhood environment can actively undermine the male's self esteem as the focus is generally based on his gender rather than his abilities as a teacher. In this scenario the unusual and different nature of being a male in early childhood education may actually overshadow the many positive qualities these men bring to the sector.

Within the New Zealand context Farquhar (2007) notes that it was not until as late as 2006 that planning for a campaign to attract more men into the sector started in earnest. This initiative was to involve a wide range of interested agencies including the Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Council, pre-service teacher education providers and TeachNZ (which acts as the recruitment division of the Ministry of Education and has its own recruitment orientated website (<http://www.teachnz.govt.nz/thinking-of-becoming-a-teacher/early-childhood/personal-stories>)). Jacky Robertson, in her role as early childhood education co-ordinator for TeachNZ, points out that although TeachNZ does not currently offer financial assistance specifically for men wishing to become early childhood teachers, there is now promotional material available that actively targets the recruitment of men into the sector. "We now have profiles of male teachers up on our website" (Robertson & Le Quesne, 2007, p.35) and it is the nature of these profiles that is of central interest in this paper.

An analysis of the nine 'Personal Stories' (TeachNZ, 2008) posted on the early childhood education page of the TeachNZ website is the focus of this paper. This analysis indicates that these stories appear to highlight the differences between men and women early childhood teachers and may actually accentuate the otherness often associated with men working in early childhood education. Although the positioning of men in the sector as something unusual clearly has relevance in the current gendered situation, it may be argued that the subtle accentuation of this reality in promotional material that aims to attract males to the profession may indirectly frustrate this aim.

Methodology

Clearly the notion of men being positioned as unusual, different or other in the early childhood context is of central concern to this paper. However, the primary aim is not to consider such notions within the wider context of the early childhood education environment itself but rather to examine how such positioning can be reflected within material produced for the specific purpose of attracting men into the sector. This is therefore a bounded study that only seeks to examine such positioning within the specific context of the TeachNZ website.

As discussed by Farquhar (2007) although the push to actively recruit men into early childhood education is long overdue, the process has started and is gradually gaining traction as agencies such as TeachNZ are now releasing material that seeks to reposition early childhood education as a suitable vocation for men. The TeachNZ website at the centre of this study is an example of such material that aims to attract more men into ECE. Within its early childhood section, this website has nine 'Personal Stories' in which the workplace experiences of practising early childhood teachers are shared. In an effort to promote early childhood education to men, four of the nine 'Personal Stories' are about male early childhood teachers. This in itself is a matter worthy of notice. Nearly 50 per cent of the

stories are about men, whereas in reality men make up less than one per cent of the total early childhood teaching work force.

An examination of these nine 'Personal Stories' is the core thrust of this paper and although these stories provide a limited source of data they do offer interesting and useful insights into how male early childhood teachers can be subtly positioned as different and unusual when juxtapositioned with their female counterparts. Although the material analysed is narrative in its nature (i.e., it tells a particular 'story') the methodology underpinning a study of this type is not, according to Gray (1998), perceived to be a narrative enquiry because it relies on secondary documentation rather than direct conversations with those telling the stories. Despite traditional understandings of what actually constitutes a document being largely focused on printed matter, a more contemporary and useful definition of 'document' suggests that other mediums, such as the electronic material at the centre of this study, can also be considered as documents (Duffy, 2000). Wellington (2000) suggests that the analysis of electronic documents is a valid form of 'documentary research' which has the ability to provide a wealth of data within the educational context.

Both Duffy (2000) and Wellington (2000) indicate that a core limitation of using documents as a central data source is the potentially interpretive nature of such documents where the bias, agendas and assumptions of those writing the documents must, to varying degrees, influence the final written product. Wellington (2000) adds to this idea by stating that documents are inherently "social products" (p.110) directly impacted upon by the authors' intentions. This view certainly has relevance in the case of this study because the documents analysed are not direct transcripts of conversations with the nine early childhood teachers, but are instead, interpretations of these conversations. However, these stories can still provide a valuable insight into how such promotional material can subtly accentuate the otherness of men within the early childhood context.

For the purposes of this study a relatively straightforward methodology was employed where the 'Personal Stories' of nine early childhood teachers were analysed to provide specific information and data. The content of each 'Personal Story' was carefully analysed to identify the extent to which differences between male and female early childhood teachers were highlighted or accentuated. Initial analysis indicated that there were significant differences in how the women and men were portrayed in the 'Personal Stories' and it quickly became apparent that further in-depth analysis could help illuminate exactly how such gender differences were being accentuated.

According to Duffy (2000) such "content analysis" (p.111) is a useful tool for identifying areas of bias, agenda and stereotyping in documentation. Duffy further indicates that a simple process of counting and recording how often a selected term or concept occurs within a sample can help quantify the degree to which such bias or stereotyping is actually represented in such documents. To understand how the 'Personal Stories' accentuated male and female differences and to introduce a degree of quantification, three specific aspects of the stories' content were analysed. Both the men's and women's stories were examined to identify the extent to which the following three areas contributed to the overall accentuation of difference between the two gender groups. The three focus areas were selected based on an initial examination of the 'Personal Stories' seeking to identify areas where the men and women early childhood teachers were clearly portrayed differently. Following this, the number of times that each of the following focus areas was discussed in the men's and women's stories was counted and recorded. The three focus areas are listed below:

1. Discussion of men/women in early childhood education;

2. Discussion of stereotypically male/female areas of interest or behaviour; and
3. Discussion of own family (specifically own children).

Findings

Initial analysis of the nine 'Personal stories' indicate that within the context of the early childhood education page of the TeachNZ website, it appears that there are significant differences both in how male and female teachers discuss their work in the early childhood sector and how the two gender groups are portrayed. Overall it appears that these two factors may work collectively to create a clear differentiation between men and women early childhood teachers and this differentiation appears to operate on a number of different levels.

Discussion of Men/women

The five 'Personal Stories' about women teachers contain no direct references to their own gender and offer no discussion or mention of women in general working within the sector. None of the women talk about their own experiences as being a woman in early childhood education and none make any direct or inferred references to their gender.

In contrast, the four 'Personal Stories' about men in the sector, make numerous direct references to their own gender. These stories also make a number of direct references to men working in early childhood education generally, and in all four stories the men offer discussion about their own experiences as men in the early childhood education sector. For example, "kids can form strong bonds with their male early childhood teacher", "seeing a male teacher around also helps", "male teachers bring out different aspects to the way they deal with behavioural issues, they have different body language and ways of talking to the children" (TeachNZ, 2008).

Overall the men's 'Personal Stories' contain sixteen separate examples of references being made to either the man's own gender or to men in early childhood education in general, whereas the women's 'Personal Stories' include no examples of references to gender.

Discussion of Stereotypically Male/female Areas of Interest or Behaviour

It appears that women early childhood teachers may be much less likely to discuss interests or behaviours that could be associated with their gender than their male counterparts. Of the five women's stories, none included any comments or references to interests or behaviours traditionally associated with women or offered discussion on the gendered nature of their work in the early childhood educational context.

The men, it appears, are much more sensitive to the gendered nature of the environment. All four men's 'Personal Stories' contain multiple references to interests, activities or behaviours commonly associated with men, for example, "regular sort of guy who likes surfing, snowboarding, and going out for a beer with mates" (TeachNZ, 2008). These references also include comments and discussion about how the men are able to engage in stereotypically male activities and behaviours within the early childhood education workplace. For example, "I could work as often as I like outside", "making paper planes", "I try to bring the real world into the centres I work at so that children learn how ordinary everyday things work" (TeachNZ, 2008). A total of eleven such references were found on analysis of the four men's 'Personal Stories', compared to no such references in the women's stories.

Discussion of Own Family (specifically own children)

This focus area was initially not included in the analysis of the 'Personal Stories' as its immediate relevance to the wider focus of this paper was somewhat unclear. However as the analysis of the first two focus areas unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that the topic of family was addressed very differently in the men's and women's stories (and therefore the two gender groups were being portrayed very differently to each other) and thus warranted inclusion in this study.

Within the women's stories, eleven direct references to the women's own children were identified, such as, "has brought up five children", "once I had my own family", "it was having her own children at Playcentre that opened her eyes" (TeachNZ, 2008). All the women made at least one reference to their own children (one participant made a total of five) while only one of the four men's stories made any such reference. Three of the men's stories omitted any discussion or reference to their own (or lack of) children. The only male to make such a reference did so only once within his 'Personal Story'.

Discussion

The current metaphorical face of the early childhood education work force in contemporary New Zealand is most likely to be a woman's one. Statistically, men make up a tiny minority of early childhood teachers (Farquhar, 2007). This situation has the potential to create a raft of tensions and challenges not only for those men currently employed in the sector, but also for those who may be considering a future career in early childhood education.

There continues to be a commonly held perception that early childhood education is an inherently gendered occupation where the predominance of women appears to be underpinned by a stereotypical belief that men are not really suited to such a profession (Peeters, 2007, MacNaughton & Newman, 2001). Such perceptions combined with the obvious absence of men from early childhood centres does little to encourage new men into the sector and may ultimately help to contribute to the overall sense of otherness and isolation that appears to underpin many men's experiences in this context (Farquhar et al., 2006).

Given that men currently represent less than one per cent of the total early childhood education workforce (Farquhar, 2007), it is understandable that those men may experience some sense of isolation and self consciousness in a work environment where men are something of a rarity. Farquhar et al. (2006) argue that although such a situation is clearly problematic and uncomfortable for those presently employed within the sector, it also has the potential to actively discourage further men from seeking positions in early childhood education.

In light of such discussion it may be suggested that the otherness and difference associated with men in early childhood education is problematic, helps to perpetuate a negative perception of early childhood teaching as a career choice by men and may ultimately contribute to the ongoing shortage of male early childhood teachers. Any efforts to promote early childhood education as a positive career for men, and recruitment material that actively targets men, must take considerable care in how the otherness issue is presented and negotiated. Recruitment material that consciously or inadvertently accentuates the unusualness of men in the sector may actually be counter-productive by highlighting the reality that men in this environment work in varying degrees of gendered isolation.

Analysis of the nine 'Personal Stories' posted on the TeachNZ website suggests that the men and women teachers are portrayed very differently. All three areas focussed on in this analysis contained significant and quantifiable differences between the men's and women's stories. Although in isolation such gender orientated variation in any one focus area may not be overly significant, the fact that considerable differences were identified in all three focus areas creates an overall impression that men appear to experience the early childhood education work place very differently to their female colleagues.

It seems that the men's stories are much more focussed on the participants' gender than the women's. The men were much more likely to be portrayed as making direct reference to their own gender when discussing their experiences in early childhood education. For example, "They like seeing this big bloke picking kids up on their shoulders and swinging them around" (TeachNZ, 2008) whereas the women were totally silent on this. This suggests that the men experience a greater level of gender based self-awareness where their difference and otherness is constantly highlighted via their minority positioning. Farquhar et al. (2006) indicate that men working in early childhood education are potentially hyper-aware of their gendered differences. Conversely, it is unlikely that women share such gendered self-awareness as they are very much in the majority and thus sit comfortably within the common stereotypical image of the early childhood teacher (Sumsion, 2005).

Buckingham (2006) suggests that men in early childhood education are constantly reminded, either overtly or subtly, of their differences, generally not due to any specific aspects of their practice, but rather due to their biological make up. Women, as the 99 per cent majority of early childhood teachers, are unlikely to pay much attention to the fact that they are women within the early childhood education context as evidenced in the analysis of the 'Personal Stories'.

According to Sumsion (2000) there is a strong expectation that men working in the sector "fulfil normative roles" (p.131), that is, that these men demonstrate stereotypically male interests and conform to socially constructed notions of what men do and are interested in. This idea formed the second focus area of the 'Personal Stories' analysis and again the men were found to have been portrayed very differently to their female counterparts.

The women's stories make no reference to interests or behaviours that could be interpreted as being stereotypically female, whereas the men's stories contain a number of discussions and direct quotes focussing on stereotypical male areas of interest and behaviour. The men are portrayed as being very keen to highlight opportunities in early childhood teaching where they are able to do traditionally 'bloke stuff' and behave in stereotypically male ways. The men talk about rough and tumble play, physical outdoor activities, sword fights, exploring everyday gadgets and technology ("demonstrate the workings of everyday things such as taps and light switches" TeachNZ, 2008), science and a wide range of other areas traditionally constructed as male. In stark contrast to this the women appear to feel it unnecessary to accentuate the feminine behaviours and activities that accompany their work.

In this context it may be argued that the women's stories merely reflect an underlying assumption that women's interests and behaviours are a normal and natural dimension embedded in the everyday life of the early childhood teacher and thus require no mention. Men's interests and behaviours however may not be assumed to be a normal part of early childhood practice and thus both those commenting on male teachers and those men themselves working in the sector may unconsciously highlight the potential for stereotypically male interests and behaviours in what is a largely feminised environment (Farquhar et al., 2006). MacNaughton and Newman (2001) further add to this discussion by indicating that men are often expected to demonstrate typically male behaviours and

interests. This expectation has the potential to create something of a paradoxical tension where men in early childhood education may be attempting to maintain their own gendered qualities within a context where the work force is predominantly women.

As discussed in this paper's introduction, the nurturing and caring of young children is a fundamentally important aspect of the early childhood teacher's work. "Think about the work you do. It is about nurturing and educating" (MacNaughton & Newman, 2001, p.153). Cameron et al. (1999) indicate that effective early childhood teachers must be able to not only provide high quality educational experiences for their young charges but must be also able to provide the care and nurturing often associated with a parental role. This is partly due to the young age of children found in early childhood centres but also linked to the reality that children in these contexts are often separated from their parents for significant periods of the day. Thus early childhood teachers are at times required to adopt a surrogate parental role, where physical, emotional and educational needs of the children may need to be met during the parents' temporary absence.

Sumsion (2000) points out that although caring and nurturing qualities are generally closely linked to effective early childhood education, they are also highly gendered qualities that are largely associated with women. MacNaughton and Newman (2001) add to this discussion by stating "Society sees the care and education of young children as strictly the job of women, really the work of mothers" (p.152). Stereotypical notions that women are better at nurturing than men in both the parenting and early childhood educational roles seem to still prevail and such socially constructed beliefs may not only undermine men as parents, but can also further contribute to the perception that men are in some way inferior to women as early childhood professionals. It maybe further suggested that such perceptions (however fundamentally incorrect) do little to promote the message that men have a positive contribution to make in early childhood education and may also help to accentuate the real or otherwise differences between men and women working in the sector.

In only one of the four men's 'Personal Stories' was any reference made to the participant's own family or children and such a reference was made only once. In comparison all five of the women's 'Personal Stories' made direct (and often numerous) references to their own family and children and all the women were portrayed as positioning their own family as being important and significant elements of their lives. The exclusion of such discussion, except in one isolated case, in the men's 'Personal Stories' further highlights the differences in the ways in which the men's and women's stories are portrayed. It is this portrayal that is of significance as the men in the stories may well have discussed their own families in initial interviews but such discussions were excluded from the final 'Personal Stories' posted on the website. Such exclusion may also be seen as subtly endorsing the stereotypical perception that women put greater value on family and parenting, with the associated qualities of caring and nurturing, which are central to both parenting and early childhood education, than men.

According to Cooney and Bittner (2001) the continuing stereotypical notion that men are somehow less able to care for and nurture young children as both parents and early childhood practitioners, compared to their female counterparts, is both potentially unhelpful and discouraging in attracting men into the early childhood sector. These authors state that, "The stereotype that females/ mommies are the nurturers and that males don't do this emerged as a barrier to recruiting males into the field" (p.80). In this light it is apparent that the differential positioning of the men and women early childhood teachers in relation to family within the nine 'Personal Stories' contributes to the overall sense of difference in the ways in which the men and women teachers are portrayed in the TeachNZ website.

Conclusion

There appears to be little doubt that the under-representation of men in the early childhood teaching context is a potential source of tension for those few men currently in the sector. It may be argued that the isolation and sense of otherness (Farquhar et al., 2006; Sumsion, 2000) that seems often to underpin the experiences of men in the sector can be both problematic and inherently negative for those men who find themselves in the situation of being seen and/or positioned as unusual and different within their chosen profession. Although, as with their women counterparts, men find much in the way of reward and fulfilment within the early childhood workplace (Farquhar et al., 2006), an underlying sense of otherness and gendered isolation is more likely to be an issue experienced by the men.

The under-representation of men in the early childhood sector has been the topic of significant consideration. Efforts both internationally (Peeters, 2007) and locally (Farquhar, 2007) have been initiated to address this concern. The proactive recruitment of men is seen as a central factor in rectifying male under-representation. And, although as Farquhar suggests, this process is finally starting to gain momentum it is important to recognise that any efforts to encourage willing men into the sector must negotiate the many complexities and challenges currently facing men in the early childhood sector with sensitivity and care.

The TeachNZ 'Personal Stories' are, as indicated by Robertson and Le Quesne (2007), part of an active campaign to promote the early childhood sector to men. Although these stories seek to present early childhood teaching as a positive and rewarding career for males, it may be suggested that the 'Personal Stories' also appear to subtly accentuate the difference and otherness which is often an ingrained reality for the male teacher. By unintentionally emphasising the differences between the women and men early childhood teachers, the 'Personal Stories' appear to not only further position men as being outside the norm within the early childhood context, but may also indirectly help to perpetuate the unhelpful stereotype that early childhood teaching is somehow an inherently women's vocation.

In light of these findings it may be suggested that material actively targeting the recruitment of men into the rewarding world of early childhood teaching should take care to avoid over-accentuating the sense of otherness and difference that often underpins men's experiences in the sector. Surely men contemplating a career in early childhood teaching need to be reminded of the many rewards and satisfactions associated with working with young children. It may be further suggested that these hesitant men need constant reassurance that there is indeed a place for them in the sector, that there is nothing inherently abnormal about a man wishing to make a career as an early childhood teacher, and that men have a very real and valuable contribution to make.

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