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Men at Work:  
Sexism in Early Childhood Education

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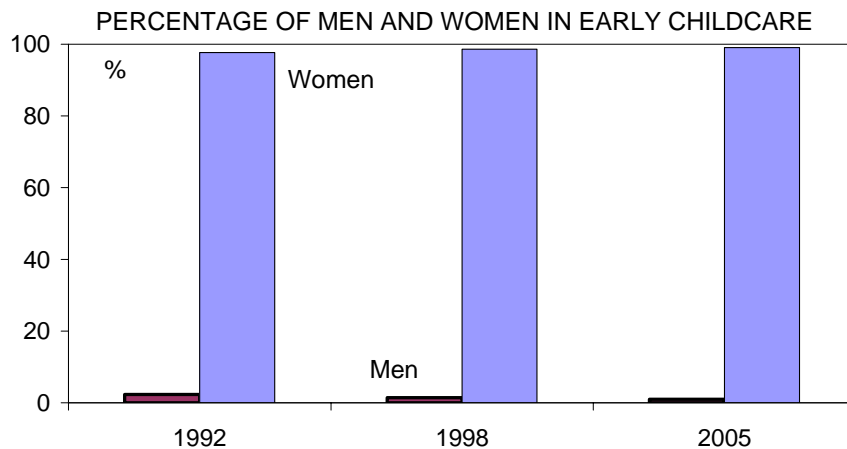
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ISBN-10: 0-473-11588-3  
ISBN-13: 978-0-473-11588-3

## Executive Summary

This paper has been prepared to draw attention to the need to promote and maintain gender diversity in the early childhood workforce in New Zealand – in other words, to involve men in greater numbers in the work of childcare teaching.

Currently just less than 1% of the people working in teacher-staffed government funded early childhood services are men. This is the lowest recorded figure and it is predicted that the proportion of men to women will continue to decline. In the early 1990s over 2% of staff were men.



A lack of men in the NZ early childhood workforce is an issue for six reasons:

- 1) The changing role of men in society, toward engaging more in children's care in families and wanting children, is not reflected in early childhood education policy and teacher recruitment and employment practices. Society has moved on, men are more actively engaged in caring for their children; yet the early childhood workforce seems stuck in the 1970s family model.
- 2) During their formative years of early learning and development children (0 – 5 yrs) are placed for up to 50 hours a week in childcare environments for education that are almost exclusively female. Children's time with adult males and their contact with positive male role models in the family and community is thus reduced.
- 3) Most early childhood programmes have goals of teaching children to be non-sexist in their attitudes, behaviours, and choices of play activities, yet the composition of the workforce shows that it is not practicing what it teaches.
- 4) NZ's tight labour market and the recently changed qualification requirement for early childhood staff means that employers are finding it harder to fill positions with people who (a) hold the approved teaching qualification, and (b) who are personally suitable for the position. They can not take a pragmatic approach to employing the best staff, because recruitment and training, and thus who comprises the pool of potential staff available for early childhood work, is influenced by education policy and tertiary education student

selection practices. Today women have more career choices and this makes it harder to attract talented women with other career choices into teacher training and to retain them as teachers. By not opening early childhood teaching more as a career choice for men, children are at a greater risk of substandard care and education.

- 5) The high concentration of women in any single occupation, including early childhood teaching, is problematic for women's overall economic and career advancement. The clustering of women in a narrow range of traditionally female-intensive lower-paying occupations has been noted to be a problem by government agencies concerned about women's equality and status in paid work. But there is a lack of awareness of the negative consequences of the early childhood profession, in particular, continuing to be a strongly protected woman's one. Strangely this protection of early childhood teaching as women's work seems to be acceptable in public policy and it has often been spoken about by leaders within the early childhood profession as something to be proud of.
- 6) When viewed in an international context it is an embarrassment to NZ that there has yet to be much in the way of debate about involving men and maintaining male participation in childcare teaching. Also, NZ has probably one of the lowest rates of male participation in childcare teaching. For example, Australia has 4% of men in childcare and 2% in preschools and raising male participation rates is recognised to be an important education goal, England and Wales have 2-3% male childcare teachers and targets have been set at 6%, and Denmark has 8% male childcare teachers.

This paper features articles written by four men working in the early childhood sector. The writers point to difficulties in being men in a predominantly female occupied job. Read the articles and you will get a strong sense that childcare teaching is work that interests men and that they can do it well.

What can be done to change the present situation?

First, debate on including men in early childhood teaching is needed in NZ. The veil of sexism inherent in the profession, due to it being a site for feminist activism since the 1970s and continued promulgation of the idea that men are not safe to work with young children, needs to be lifted and discussed. Mums and dads and the general public can help by asking questions of the Minister of Education, the Ministry of Education, the teachers' union, teacher education institutions, and early childhood associations about what they are, and are not, doing to make early childhood teaching more inclusive of men. Women's groups, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Human Rights Commission need to consider whether it really is in the best interests of women if nothing is done to bring gender diversity into this very female-intensive profession.

Second, there should be a combined focus on recruitment and retention. To be successful in the long-term this should be well-planned with knowledge of the needs and perspectives of men and the difficulties currently faced by men in the profession informing plans for advertising, recruitment, training and for ensuring optimal work conditions.

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## Introduction

Talk to anyone in government, the Education Ministry, the teachers' union, and teacher training organisations and they will say men are welcome in early childhood teaching. It is not stated anywhere that men should not apply for training and work in childcare teaching.

But the statistics, put alongside a clear lack of effort to encourage and retain men, tell a different story. It is a story of veiled sexism.

Early childhood teaching is a female dominated profession and it has become even more so in recent years. That this situation still exists and has got worse is unbelievable in 2006. The problem is that gender diversity is not considered to be an issue in the early childhood workforce.

An almost total concentration of women in this type of work seems to be considered good for children and for getting more women into paid work. It is a politically accepted situation, but it is not the best situation for anyone: women, children, men, mothers and fathers, the education profession, the economy, and NZ's development as a forward-thinking nation.

Today men represent just less than 1% of the staff in kindergartens, childcare centres and home-based childcare/education services (note that these are the services the government has chosen to provide fee-free childcare in for 20 hours a week for all of New Zealand's 3 and 4 year-olds from next year). During the early 1990s men made up over 2% of the staff in these early childhood services.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section presents:

- A statistical overview.
- The main reasons for the low number and the declining proportion of male to female childcare teachers.
- An overview of the political response to date.
- And, views from the profession.

The second section of this paper looks at what it is like to be a man in early childhood teaching, from the perspectives of:

- Lance Cablk (a teacher trainee in Auckland).
- Adam Buckingham (a recent graduate from teacher training in Auckland).
- David Butler (a teacher and manager of a university preschool in Wellington; former kindergarten head teacher).
- Russell Ballantyne (a teacher and part-owner of a centre in Dunedin; former kindergarten senior teacher and Kindergarten Association manager).

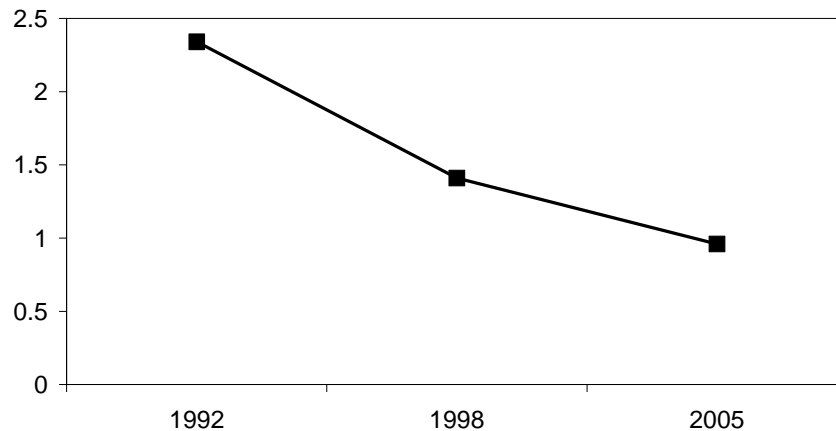
The articles by Lance, Adam, David and Russell show that men are interested in working with young children. All four men explain their commitment to teaching and belief in the importance of their work. They also discuss problems and issues for themselves and for men in general in childcare teaching. These problems and issues should be listened to if the early childhood field is to change to be more inclusive of males wanting to work with young children and their families.

The perspectives and teaching approaches of Russell, David, Adam and Lance are not identical. This highlights that men, like women, are not all the same; they can bring a diversity of experience, interests and perspectives to their work.

## SECTION ONE

### 1.1. A Statistical Overview

In 1992 men made up over 2% of the early childhood workforce. It could be expected that as fathers today are taking a greater interest in and responsibility for childcare within families and men and women are entering non-traditional occupations that we would also see an increase in the participation of men in the childcare workforce. This has not been the case. According to the latest July 2005 statistics from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, just less than 1% of people working in teacher-led government funded early childcare services were men (see the graph below).



The NZ Ministry of Education and Ministers of Education have been aware of the downward trend in the employment of men in childcare teaching for at least the past 8-9 years (attention was drawn to this by Sarah Farquhar's 1997 study and national media coverage of the findings). Gender bias in the early childhood workforce has been known for a lot longer than that, for example:

- A view expressed by Helen Cook in 1985 (now Prof Helen May at the University of Otago) that early childhood services have always been promoted by women, used by women, and worked in by women has been repeated without analysis in policy and professional papers and today this is commonly regarded to be a fact.
- A leading early childhood policy adviser for two decades, Dr Anne Meade, promoted policy change in the context of benefits for women: more jobs for women in the sector, salary increases for women, and lowering the cost of childcare fees (for example see "Women and Young Children Gain a Foot in the door" published in the *Women's Studies Journal* 1990).
- A Ministry of Education 1992 Census of "The Education Sector Workforce" commented on the dominance in number of women in the kindergarten sector.

- Sarah Farquhar had a paper published in the 1994 NZ Annual Review of Education that looked at gender bias as a problem in the early childhood field.

While the size of the early childhood workforce has grown substantially, men have rarely been included in promotional materials and attention has not been given to developing effective ways to recruit and retain male teachers. Since the early 1990s the percentage of male early childhood teachers has halved (from over 2 percent to just under 1%). Between 1988 and 2005 the total size of the early childhood workforce increased by 3,493 staff, and the number of men has dropped, not increased, from 145 to just 132 (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1.** Staffing numbers by gender and type of service, and total percentage of male and female staff (1992, 1998 & 2005)

Type of Service	1992		1998		2005	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Free Kindergartens	12	1,577	20	1,658	26	1,756
Childcare Centres	142	4,703	125	8,178	106	11,529
Homebased Coordinators	0	134	0	280	0	324
<b>TOTAL (head count)</b>	154	6,414	145	10,116	132	13,609
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>	2.34%	97.65%	1.41%	98.59%	0.96%	99.04%

Internationally, New Zealand now ranks poorly for male participation in childcare/education work. Denmark has 8% male childcare teachers. Australia has 4% in childcare and 2% in preschools. England and Wales has 2-3% of males working in childcare and targets have been set at 6%. When Norway focused on recruiting men, the figure reached almost 10%. In Belgium in 2005 a campaign was run to recruit men and this increased the percentage of male trainees from 6.5% to 20% during the campaign; however this dropped again after the campaign, indicating that advertising campaigns alone are ineffective.

In New Zealand, male representation in the early childhood workforce is considerably lower than in most other traditionally female-intensive professions. For example, in nursing and midwifery male registered nurses now make up 6.5% of the workforce (Source Nursing Council of NZ, 2004). Flight attendants, once known as air hostesses have shed the dolly trolley party-hostess image, and around 33% of flight attendants are male (Source ATTO, 2001).

Women are entering traditional male professions. In dentistry today, 25.3% of dentists are women compared with 14.7% in 1994 (Source the Dental Council of NZ, 2004). Female General Practitioners now make up 39% of the GP workforce (Source NZ Medical Council). In 1978, men made up 70% of medical graduates from Otago University Medical School, this has dropped to just 39%.

Women have entered in large numbers in a range of other traditionally male professions such as law and journalism. In the trades, women's participation remains low but progress has been made. For example, 3% of heavy truck and tanker drivers are now women (source Dominion Post 17/8/06). The NZ Fire Service has put effort into supporting women into paid fire-fighting work. Initiatives to attract and retain women have included regular forums along with help in preparing for physical entry tests. One in ten new recruits into paid fire-fighting are female (Source Ministry of Women's Affairs panui, Sept, 2005).

The Human Rights Commission reports that skill shortages are prompting employers to employ female apprentices. Pragmatism is said to be driving the change. "Faced with a skills shortage, some employers are thinking outside the box and bringing young women into trades training ... However there is still a long way to go, with female apprentices increasing from 6.6 percent in 2003 to just 8.5 percent today," according to Equal Employment Opportunities commissioner Dr Judy McGregor (source: <http://www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/newsandissues/skillshortagesopendoorsforwomenintrades.php>)

## 1.2. The Main Reasons Why Childcare Teaching is Female Dominated and What this Means

**First Reason:** Early childhood education and childcare has been a site for feminist activism since the late 1970s.

- The provision of early childhood care and education is commonly regarded as a major women's issue; for freeing women from childcare responsibilities in the home and increasing women's participation in paid work. "It's been jobs for the girls and the occasional boy" (Source, H. May "Politics in the Playground", book published 2001).
- However, it should be questioned if the continued dominance of women in childcare work is limiting women's capacity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to (a) compete equally with men in the wider labour market and (b) to achieve equal pay. "In NZ, 20 to 40 percent of the gender pay gap has been attributed to occupational segregation, with women clustered in a relatively narrow range of traditionally female-intensive lower-paying occupations" (<http://www.hrc.co.nz/home/hrc/newsandissues/skillshortagesopendoorsforwomenintrades.php>)

**Second Reason:** Childcare work is commonly viewed as an extension of the role of women as mothers.

- The traditional association between childcare work and mothering has been cited in research and in policy papers internationally as a major reason why men are reluctant to enter this area.
- But in the private sphere of the home Dads are participating more in childcare and more dads are single parents (for a good discussion on some of the reasons for this see a paper by P. Callister at <http://econ.massey.ac.nz/cppe/papers/cppeip04/cppeip4c.pdf>). The trend towards greater male participation in non-paid childcare work in the family is not being reflected within the early childhood sector.
- Further, the predominance of women in early childhood centres and the female context of these settings can constrain father's involvement in their child's formal education and care. ("It's being with a lot of women – not the kids, they're not the problem – its going into a setting where you're being surrounded by women", quote from a father reported in an article by T. Kahn "Father's Involvement in Early Years Settings: Findings from Research" in the NZ Research in ECE Journal, 2006).

**Third Reason:** Women are perceived to be doing a perfectly good job

- Yes many women probably are doing an excellent job as childcare teachers. However, this justification restricts the pool of potential workers to one half of the adult population. The demand for teacher qualified staff for early childhood centres is high in many areas, especially in Auckland. Employers often have little choice as to who they employ and may get only one or no applicants they deem to be highly suitable. Opening up the occupation to men would increase choice and the pool of talent – thus potentially raising the overall competency level of the early childhood workforce.
- The argument reversed – that men are doing a perfectly good job as politicians, as doctors, or in any other occupation so women should not be included in any great number – is not politically or socially acceptable. The belief that women are doing a good job as early childhood teachers should not be accepted as a reason for keeping the door shut on male entry to the early childhood profession.

**Fourth Reason:** Men who enter paid childcare work are often thought of as men who are not 'real' men or gay.

- Research suggests that this stereotype, along with the perception that gay men are somehow undesirable, can put men (both hetero- and homosexual) off entering childcare teaching and make being a teacher more stressful.
- In contrast, the sexuality of women in childcare teaching does not seem to matter. Lesbian teachers are not viewed as unsuitable candidates for working with young children.
- Human Rights legislation in New Zealand states that it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of sexuality.

**Fifth Reason:** All women are perceived to be safe to work with young children whereas any man is considered suspect if he goes for this type of work.

- There is no evidence in support of the belief that male childcare teachers are all potential child abusers, or that they are more likely to engage in child abuse than women in early childhood services. If anything, in recent years there have been cases of female early childhood teachers abusing and putting children's physical safety at risk.
- As research by Sarah Farquhar has indicated the case of Peter Ellis convicted in 1993 of child abuse at a Christchurch City Council owned community childcare centre put men off the idea of working with children. This was because it led to public suspicion of the motives of men who worked with young children, and the teaching profession did not argue otherwise or demonstrate support for men entering the profession. The moral hysteria surrounding men being with children affected the way male teachers felt about performing child care tasks and being close to children. It became difficult for male teachers to engage in the usual tasks of childcare such as changing nappies and giving children cuddles.
- Thirteen years on from the Ellis conviction it is time to see the hysteria and moral panic for what it was – a panic. It is time to move on. Lynley Hood's investigation of the Ellis case has shown that we need to be very careful not to nurture suspicion and paranoia (see "A City Possessed: The Christchurch Civic Crèche Case" by L. Hood, 2001).

**Sixth Reason:** Childcare and teaching work is a low-pay and low-status occupation.

- Research has indicated that the pay and status of early childhood teaching has been a factor influencing the decision of men not to enter the occupation. The men who enter early childhood teaching are more likely to be the primary income earner in their household in contrast to their female colleagues whose family may rely less on their income (see [http://www.childforum.com/publication\\_details.asp?REF\\_NO=4](http://www.childforum.com/publication_details.asp?REF_NO=4))
- However, today childcare teaching is more of a financially attractive career choice. From July 2002 pay parity with primary teachers began to be phased in for kindergarten teachers. The government is giving early childhood services that employ qualified staff a significantly higher rate of funding, and so services are able to afford to pay staff more. A shortage of staff with a teaching qualification means that in some geographic areas qualified staff are in a strong position to negotiate their wage and working conditions. The status of childcare teaching has also improved due to the qualification requirement being raised to a 3-year teaching-only diploma or degree.
- The revised Elley-Irving Socio-Economic Index (Elley & Irving, 2003) based on the 2001 Census places the occupational status of early childhood teacher at Level 3; some of the other occupations listed at the same level include: counsellor, dairy farmer, mechanical engineer, graphic designer, hotel manager, and fire-fighter. If the Index were revised again after the latest Census early childhood teachers could be placed at a higher level still.

### 1.3. An Overview of the Political Response to Date

The political response to date has been one of mainly acceptance of the situation as not a problem, and an unwillingness to challenge the status quo due to childcare teaching being a strongly protected women's profession.

In 1999, Education Minister Nick Smith announced an advertising campaign to get more men into teaching in schools and said he was considering using Teach NZ scholarships, then available only to Maori and Pacific Islands people, to attract men to primary teaching. It was not mentioned if this would also, or later, apply to early childhood teaching. A change of government from National to a Labour-led government did not see this plan eventuate.

The Minister of Education in the Labour-led government, Trevor Mallard, did not, as far as a search of available media releases and education speech notes can show, comment on the lack of male representation in early childhood teaching as a concern. It is not known at the time of writing this paper if the present Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, has a view on whether more men should be involved in early childhood teaching and what he intends to do about this. The Government's 10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education "Pathways to the Future" (2002) does not mention gender in its stated intentions for improving the quality of services through increasing the number of staff who are qualified teachers.

In September 2004 the Education Minister, Trevor Mallard, changed the eligibility criteria for Teach NZ scholarships from being a Maori or Pasifika person to people accepted into a Maori or Pasifika early childhood teacher qualification

course and people who have an annual income within the eligibility criteria for a community services card. This change was part of a move away from race-based policies. Thus, to introduce scholarships targeting men would now be difficult (unless, perhaps, training institutions offered Men's early childhood teacher qualification courses run by male lecturers and tutors?).

The Ministry of Education with TeachNZ have continued a focus on Maori and Pacific Nations people for early childhood work, but not men who are also an under-represented group. For example in December 2004 the Ministry contracted an organisation as part of the government's early childhood teacher supply strategy to run a recruitment campaign until June 2006 to increase the number and proportion of Maori early childhood teachers. The Ministry employs a number of recruitment brokers to encourage more people to consider enrolling in early childhood teacher education training programmes. The various recruitment brokers assist and support (a) Maori anywhere in the country; (b) Auckland Pasifika services, individuals and staff; (c) Auckland early childhood centres and home-based services; and (d) Pasifika peoples who live from Hamilton south to Invercargill. None support men specifically, and most focus on Maori or Pasifika peoples.

When Ministry of Education July 2005 statistics are reviewed on the gender and ethnic composition of enrolled children and staff in kindergartens, childcare centres and home-based education services it is apparent that these services are already doing reasonably well in employing staff that match the ethnicity of children. The data presented in Table 2 below indicates that there is a much stronger argument for campaigns and recruitment brokers to target men (alongside a focus on support in training and retention also).

**Table 2.** Proportion of staff to children by gender and ethnicity in early childhood services (kindergartens, childcare centres and homebased education) as at 1 July 2005

	<b>% of Staff</b>	<b>% of children</b>	<b>% difference</b>
NZ Maori	8	15	- 7
Pacific Islands	8	6	2
Asians	6	6	None
Other	2	2	None
European/Pakeha	76	71	5
Male	1	51	-48
Female	99	49	50

(Source: Data Management Unit, Ministry of Education)

Visitors to the Teach NZ website can read the stories of an early childhood centre manager, a teacher at a kindergarten, a teacher at a preschool, and a kindergarten team, **all of whom** are women (see [http://www.teachnz.govt.nz/early\\_index.html](http://www.teachnz.govt.nz/early_index.html)). On the site also are the stories of 32 teachers provided to inspire people to consider entering early childhood teaching as a career; and **all 32** of the featured teachers are women ([http://www.teachnz.govt.nz/case\\_studies.html](http://www.teachnz.govt.nz/case_studies.html)) (accessed February 2006).

Recruiters go into high schools to promote early childhood teaching. But adolescent men are usually not interested, and certainly not ready to admit to

their peers that they are interested, in early childhood teaching. Research has suggested that while women may see early childhood teaching as something they have always wanted to do, men mainly make the choice to do this after trying other careers and/or experiencing fatherhood (See Farquhar, 1997 [http://www.childforum.com/publication\\_details.asp?REF\\_NO=4](http://www.childforum.com/publication_details.asp?REF_NO=4)).

#### 1.4. Views from the Profession

From the perspective of the early childhood profession, any increase in men's participation is problematic for two reasons. First, early childhood teaching is highly valued and protected as a women's profession. Early childhood leaders and commentators have written about this and it is widely accepted. Second, there is a belief that if men were allowed to participate in any great number they would deny women advancement into senior teacher and other management positions.

The first reason, that it is a valued women's occupation, comes back to the strong historical link between feminist activism and the profession. The early childhood and primary teachers union NZEI Te Riu Roa is proud that women make up more than 75% of its membership. The Union operates a Women's Network with branches around the country that meet regularly. The Network is described as focusing on issues such as women's pay and employment equity, parental leave and women's health issues (See [http://www.nzei.org.nz/members\\_groups/womens\\_network.htm](http://www.nzei.org.nz/members_groups/womens_network.htm)).

The latest example of the view that women's position in teaching must be protected is the "Kindergarten Teachers, Head Teachers and Senior Teachers' Collective Agreement 2006-2007", between NZEI Te Riu Roa and the State Services Commission. The Collective Agreement contains the following section and does not mention recognition of the employment requirements of men:

##### GOOD EMPLOYER PRACTICE

Attention is drawn to the State Sector Amendment Act (no. 1) 1989 No.67 which outlines the responsibilities of the employer with regard to the operation of a personnel policy that complies with the principles of being a good employer and the equal employment opportunity responsibilities of the employer. These responsibilities include:

- Good and safe working conditions;
- Equal employment opportunities;
- Recognition of the aims and aspirations and employment requirements of Māori people;
- Opportunities for the enhancement of the abilities of individual employees;
- Recognition of the aims and aspirations and the cultural differences of ethnic or minority groups;
- Recognition of the employment requirements of women; and
- Recognition of the employment requirements of persons with disabilities.

([http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl7643\\_v1/kindergarten-2006-2007-word.doc](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl7643_v1/kindergarten-2006-2007-word.doc))

The second reason, that the involvement of men would prevent the career advancement of women in early childhood teaching was first argued in 1975 at a government sponsored conference on Education and the Equality of the Sexes:

The headline in the conference proceedings stated 'Early Childhood Education: An Angry Group'. Their report addressed the status of early childhood in the education sector. Noonan wrote: "An analysis of the staffing structure of early childhood educational services revealed a disproportionate number of women at the bottom and an equally disproportionate number of men at the top" (p.124) ...

In the aftermath of this conference the Department of Education advertised a senior position for a Director of Early Childhood Education. Geraldine McDonald [a member of the Angry Group at the Conference] was invited to apply, but in an unpleasant backtracking by the department ostensibly due to the possibility of an internal appeal, she withdraw her application ... Ultimately a male departmental appointee (but not the early childhood [woman] candidate who might have appealed) was appointed (Source, H. May "Politics in the Playground", 2001, p.125).

NZEI Te Riu Roa promotes a view that the best way to promote women's interests in employment and promotion is to keep the ambitions of male teachers in check through promoting the interests of women only and expecting male teachers to fall in sympathetically behind. For example see the NZEI's 2000 report on The Status of Women at [http://www.nzei.org.nz/archive/annual\\_meetings/AnnualMeeting2000.htm](http://www.nzei.org.nz/archive/annual_meetings/AnnualMeeting2000.htm). This approach needs to be revised as the barriers to women achieving senior positions are not what they used to be. For example, Ministry of Education figures indicate that in 2006, 86% of primary teaching staff were female and 81% of teachers in management positions were female. It follows therefore that allowing more men into early childhood teaching would not result in these men being appointed to senior positions over women simply because they are men.

## SECTION TWO – Four Articles on “What it is like to be a Man in the Early Childcare and Education Field”

### “Bungy-Jumping into Early Childhood Education” by Lance Cablk (Auckland)

In January I began study for a Graduate Diploma in Teaching (Early Childhood Education) at the University of Auckland, Epsom Campus. Being a new immigrant to New Zealand and a new father probably amplified pangs of “what am I doing here at University training to be an early childhood teacher?” Taking these steps toward a full-time job at an early childhood centre at times felt like the hours and minutes leading to my first bungy jump. So far, despite persistent doubts and amorphous fears, I am pleased with my choice.

All my teachers and fellow students are women. “Good God! It’s a bloke,” one of the University faculty staff half-joked to our group on seeing me. Refreshing honesty – I later thought. But having it acknowledged so publicly set off more waves of self-doubt, initially felt as numbness.

On campus I am the only male student in my programme that started with about 60 people. (One other man from Hamilton started with me on the programme as a flexible student, studying primarily online, along with about 60 additional women). On the first day students studying to be primary teachers joined us and there were a number of men amongst this group. I connected with some of these guys, several of whom talked about relatives who worried about their “risky” choice. The threats of sexual abuse allegations were clearly on our minds. One guy eagerly and sincerely suggested to me that it was “probably not too late to switch to primary.”

I had considered primary or secondary teaching before choosing early childhood. Under a variety of influences, upon moving to NZ last year I decided to shift my paid work to being an adult ally to younger young people and their whanau/families; not a classroom teacher. I have taken on that ally role for many years, including part-time in an early childhood centre. My previous paid work in the USA was in applied ecology, community-based conservation and tertiary teaching. I enjoyed my work in ecology very much and plan to continue using my skills in ecology, probably as a volunteer. Essentially I plan to swap the emphasis of work I do.

When Sarah invited me to write about my decision to change careers and my experience in entering the field so far I struggled and eventually wrote pages of disjointed ideas.

Perhaps it is worth summarizing some of the influences that have inspired the shift:

- The basic economics: there appears to be plenty of work, especially in Auckland, that is being increasingly valued (e.g. pay parity with other teachers).

- Social justice work: I want to be part of a team of adults that actively see themselves as allies to young people and their families and are working to understand what that means. My sense is that almost none of the differences in people's abilities to enthusiastically pursue interests, solve problems, and learn new things are inherent. Many people involved with ECE in NZ are oriented towards having things go really well for everyone—both as possible now with growing visions of possible futures.
- The allure of interesting, challenging work: Relationships are central to the caring and learning of early childhood programmes—and in my mind there is nothing more interesting, complex, and open-ended. Relationships can often be quite challenging both intellectually and emotionally, especially across societal-imposed differences such as gender, race, class-backgrounds, and age.
- I could be successful at this work, given the right conditions: anyone can choose to be an ally to young people; however, not everyone is ready to prioritise young people's needs and interests. I am committed to doing that and increasing my awareness and skills for it. I also have had feedback from young people and adults that I am already pretty good at it. However, without the right conditions (a team of adults with some shared fundamental perspectives and commitments; and sufficient time to refresh these and nurture our relationships) I think burnout is likely.
- My partner is supportive and I will work to build my network of support. One of the things I have worried about most is how this work would affect my job as a parent “will I have enough attention left over to be a great father for my son?” Having a substantial team of colleagues and other supporters will help me keep a good perspective about challenges, successes, next steps, and long-range goals.
- I like being an ally to young people and families. I find it very rewarding to connect with young people and within the broadening context of our relationships to be thoughtful, to be an ally. Much of the focus of education is on the quality of teaching. I want to focus on quality of relationships. It seems like this is possible with the current direction of early childhood education in NZ (e.g. the “reciprocal and responsive relationships” in Te Whaariki the early childhood curriculum document).

Recently I completed my first practicum at a centre—it was great! I was able to begin building relationships with staff, young people, and parents and generally be myself and feel present and creative most of the time. Being a man in a predominantly female occupation, I stand out as different. Mostly I hope the differences will be viewed as assets. In my first experience at a New Zealand early childhood centre I was openly appreciated and valued.

Still, on a feeling level, early childhood teaching regularly doesn't feel like important work. I sometimes feel like I might be walking into a trap. I continually have to remind myself of my thinking and interests. It does not surprise me that there are few men in this field. I am plagued by worries that my motivations are false or misguided. As a result I am pushed to “figure it all out” in my studies at the university. I realise periodically that of course I can't resolve all my conflicted or unclear ideas immediately, even if I wasn't time constrained as a new parent, and that the desire is largely fear based.

My upbringing as a man had me reaching for areas where I could be seen as succeeding because this is what society has expected of men. I became a scientist, in part wanting the respect it engendered. I have noticed a shift in my and other people's perceptions and awareness taking on my new work identity.

With a few key exceptions, for example my brother, men generally do not know what to say when I tell them of my choice to work in early childhood education. Women often say something uncomfortable like, "that's interesting" or enthuse "we need more men in early childhood". Often I feel uncomfortable as I tell people. Frequently I simply say "I'm studying education" and the conversation goes no further.

Sexism, by which I mean specifically the systemic mistreatment of women by men, will no-doubt make things tricky for me at times in this work. Like all men I carry unawareness and oppressive attitudes (even if they are often not obvious to me) that women don't like and shouldn't have to accommodate always. Of course I will do my best to shift things as I become aware of them and not be overly defensive about my mistakes.

I am curious about my future work. I hope it will be challenging and enjoyable. I'm hopeful that I can learn from the broad experience in this field and join this professional community to do the work of caring and teaching and to push the boundaries of what is possible.

## **“My Passion is Teaching” by Adam Buckingham (Auckland)**

“Men build bridges, send people to the moon, and perform delicate eye surgery. Yet rarely mentioned, but equally as important, men also care for young children. Fathers, brothers, uncles and grandfathers have been doing it for generations” (B.G. Nelson, 1982, *Real Men...* Men in Child Care. Minneapolis). And as early childhood teachers, men are now doing all that women in teaching and early child care do – and full-time as a career.

I am passionate about teaching children and I enjoy helping children to extend their knowledge. Being a teacher gives me the opportunity to help children understand new meanings, concepts and facts. I provide a male influence for children, a good proportion of children in one parent families have no man closely involved in their lives. I have experienced evidence of this a number of times, and on one occasion a child said to their mother “this is my new dad”.

I reflect on these moments and it gives me an incentive to work in a highly gendered profession. Parents and children seem surprised when they realise that I am an early childhood teacher, and not another parent or the boss’s husband. One parent asked “is it for real, a man working here?” Some mothers will stand and watch me while I am working with the children, checking me out and thinking “is he okay? Can I trust him?”

As a man working in a profession that must be a nurturing one, through my presence and actions I challenge the images of men as aggressive, powerful, unemotional and one-dimensional. Children ask me to be involved in their play and talk to me as though I am one of them. I notice that they closely watch my body language and actions. Children new to the centre often watch me comfort another child, until they get used to the sight of a man nurturing children.

I have experienced times when colleagues and parents focus on my masculinity, rather than my teaching abilities. There have been times when my professionalism has been questioned; this challenges my self-esteem and I question my choice of career. A good support network of family, friends and peers has helped me to maintain my self-esteem and provide me with honest feedback. This helps me to keep things in perspective. I am a member of the NZEI, teacher’s union. I attend professional development meetings, and this provides a support network outside my workplace. Most parents are supportive and encouraging; however I am aware that some children have not been enrolled at the centre because a man works there.

When my female colleagues eye up a dad that comes into the centre and talk about him, this is okay. But if I talked about a mother this way, what would you think? Being a man in a woman’s world is very isolating at times, such as going to conferences when all the teachers (women) stand and talk and there is no other man around for me to talk with.

I found my teacher training to be very female oriented, with female lecturers saying “hello girls”. I came across a few negative attitudes towards the competency of men as early childhood teachers and some classmates questioned my presence.

I could have been working full-time but instead I chose to put aside three years to train to become an early childhood teacher; the cost of which added up to over \$100,000 (including fees and my loss of wages). But for me it is not the money and it is not just a job, it is a career and a passion to empower children as they learn and grow. So I find it strange when my commitment is questioned simply on the basis of being a man and not a woman.

Children require warm, loving and caring relationships to provide the optimal conditions for growth and learning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory states that children's basic needs of food and water, shelter, safety, love, belongingness and self-esteem must be met before they can begin to learn. Children need emotional warmth, care, respect and privacy. This includes privacy for going to the toilet and having clothes changed.

I don't change children's nappies at work. I have decided that it's not worth the risk of being that close to a child in a separate area. When I am helping a child to change their clothing I take the child out into an open area and alert another teacher to what I am doing.

When I am looking for a job I look at the layout of the centre. Is it open plan and will it be safe for me to work there? I have to ask myself these questions; it is a sad fact of life. My need to be above suspicion overrides the children's needs for privacy.

In an ideal world the children's needs should come before the concerns that are created by teachers having physical contact with children. How should teachers develop caring relationships with nurturing interactions that involve touch? Adults touch to provide comfort and support, to acknowledge achievement, to give direction and instruction, and to provide safety. The teacher needs to question if the action of touch is given to meet the needs of the child or him/herself.

A male teacher can have advantages as parents may see them as a friend in their child's education rather than as a 'professional - expert'. Parents will chat with me about all sorts of things. They more formally ask other teachers (women) about their child's day or progress in learning.

Being a male teacher provides parents with a greater choice of staff to approach and talk with. A man can build a rapport with fathers who may otherwise find it hard to relate to women teachers or feel self-conscious in a female environment. I can provide friendship and support for fathers, especially those that are single parents. Discussions with fathers about sport, cars and their work can build relationships and lead to talking about their child. I provide fathers with an opportunity to talk with another man about their child.

As a man I can bring a different perspective or way of looking at problems and issues to a centre. I can expose sexism in a centre's environment, such as a lack of activities to challenge boys. A man can bring a balance to the centre and to the children's learning. I enrich the curriculum by incorporating more activities in carpentry and other masculine trades. I acquire good resources from contacts in different trades within the community; and my handyman skills are often utilised. I have made resources for the children to explore everyday objects at their level, which would otherwise be beyond their reach. I have made an activity centre that contains household items such as hinges, taps and switches for children to explore with their hands and senses. Another one I made contains car parts with

switches for the children to turn the lights on and off, and I have also made a 'bus'.

As a male teacher I am more physically active and boisterous, and more involved in outdoor play. I run around outside with the children and they like to play touch-rugby with me. This promotes their gross motor skills, but also causes more accidents and injuries. Other staff can find this annoying and think I get the children too excited so they lose concentration for other activities. But the children, boys and girls, love it and we all need the exercise along with the fun!

I want to encourage more men into teaching. I do this by being on the Auckland University of Technology web page and giving presentations to students. I have found the biggest barrier to be financial support for men to train.

## **“My View from One of ‘A Few too Many’ by David Butler (Wellington)**

I'd like to share with you three views of my role in early childhood (a) mine, (b) my colleagues and (c) parents/children/families.

Mine starts with my passion. I have worked in early childhood education for over 30 years and throughout this time I have seen changes in attitude toward men working with young children. My passion for teaching has remained constant throughout this. I have not given up teaching. I believe that the early years are so vitally important to a child's development that they need the best teachers available, no matter what the gender of the teacher is.

If a man decides to work in early childhood education then he, like his female colleagues, must take on board the whole philosophy of early childhood teaching and the New Zealand curriculum (Te Whaariki) and not choose to participate in the easy parts and leave the personally risky tasks. I am referring here to the care component of the job, the nappy changing, the clothes changing, the comforting on separation, the comforting after accidents and injuries. All of these caring activities are an integral part of my job and I will not hide behind the risk factor so that I can load my female colleagues with this work.

Why is this part of the job risky? Is the teacher at risk if policies, these include policies that teachers are not allowed to be left alone with children, and that excursions are carefully planned and that parents are notified about all outings, are adhered to? I don't think so. I personally have never had a problem and find the times that I change children rewarding one-to-one experiences. I have a mutually respectful relationship with the parent group of the centre I work at and hope that if they perceived a problem then they would feel comfortable discussing it with me.

Is the child at risk? I don't think so, after the Christchurch Civic Crèche case all centres developed policies and practices to safeguard the children.

I would describe myself as an average kiwi bloke who can turn his hand to most things D.I.Y., fixing my car or motorbike; but alongside these skills I have other skills. It is these other non-stereotypical kiwi bloke skills I try to model at work. Sure I fix things at the centre and I help at the carpentry table and kick balls around - I am as I said 'a bloke'. What else do I do? I sew with the children. When the cook takes time off work, I keep the kitchen clean and cook meals as well as doing cooking with the children as part of their learning. These are examples of the most important things I model.

I show the children that men can be sensitive and are not tied into the stereotypical macho roles. I refrain from boisterous play if I feel there is insufficient time to bring the children calmly back down to a quiet level. I have worked with women who are much better at carpentry and ball kicking than me. I encourage them to show and share their skills with the children, and even to teach me in front of the children how to be better at ball play, so that the female stereotype as well as the male one is questioned by the children.

The relationship I have with the parents' group is a little different from my female colleagues at the personal level. I tend to have greater rapport with some of the fathers and often have conversations perhaps on subjects that might surprise

you. I discuss linguistics, psychology, science; coincidentally these are the same things that I discuss with the female parents and what my female colleagues discuss with parents also, from their individual perspectives. The one thing that we have in common is the way we discuss the learning outcomes of the children and reporting to the parents. We do this in a professional manner not from a gender perspective but from a teaching perspective because that is what we are – we are professional teachers.

I have always encouraged a variety of young people to enter the early childhood profession, I do not believe in positive discrimination. I think that the best people who apply for teaching should train no matter what their gender.

Contrary to popular belief, I feel that the status of working with young children in society is the main discouragement to men, not salary and as the salary approaches parity with other areas within the teaching sector I still feel that men will not be attracted to early childhood teaching. Improving the salary will not be a quick fix.

A few too many? I am one of the few too many, sometimes I think that I am, I am never made to feel this by my colleagues or the parent group; but by uninformed commentators who feel that the only people who should work in childcare are women. Occasionally I have felt that as a male my voice has not been listened to and some educators have felt that men are unnecessary in any of the education fields but these people are in the minority and I have always felt that I am privileged to have been able to work in early childhood education.

Women build bridges, perform surgery, do industrial research, and are chemists, physicists and engage in many other typically male jobs. They are just like the men in early childhood. Male early childhood teachers are making a difference. Perhaps over time there will be more men in early childhood teaching and the balance will be more even, but this will take time and a quantum shift in societal attitude. Hopefully I do not have to wait another 30 years or longer before I see signs of change.

## **“Building Relationships” by Russell Ballantyne (Dunedin)**

I have invested 23 years in teaching in early childhood and despite the many changes that have “evolutionised” this sector, the one change that has not occurred has been the lack of males entering the teaching-force.

So why is this important to me? I have many reasons for advocating for this, but the main one is about building relationships. Children need skills to develop relationships with all people - this includes New Zealand Maori, Pakeha/Europeans, Pacific Islanders, Asians, and other ethnicities as well as women and men. Presently in early childhood this is not possible. Both in ethnicity and gender there is an absence of diverse people for children to relate to.

If education is about giving children the skills so that they can be active participators within society then it is important that they have experiences that are representative of society.

Mainstream early childhood work is a female scene and this should be an issue for all of us. Our children do not have the chance to build effective relationships with men, unless they have ongoing and consistently positive contact with their father or other males during the time that they are not in an early childhood programme. Some children are in a programme for up to 50 hours a week. Males who make up just over 50 percent of New Zealand society are sadly missing.

We have always felt smug about the diversity of early childhood education in New Zealand – but really is it so diverse??

I believe it is important that in this post-modern world multiple perspectives are heard. It appears to me that in early childhood there is what I would sometimes cynically call the dominatrix discourse (fem) in which one gender dominates. I do not believe it is healthy for any occupation to have such an imbalance of perspectives and yet within early childhood this seems to not only be tolerated but also closely protected.

An example of this is how the trainers advertise for applicants to train. Back in 1999 I raised this issue in an article in the Sunday Times newspaper in which I was intrigued how the promotional material for training in early childhood did not portray males at all. When I was trained in the “equal opportunities eighties” a large part of my training was focussed on how to counter sex-stereotyping. One of the main actions to counter stereotypical roles was to provide contra images – for example photos of women police officers, women doctors and so on. Therefore if we were truly committed to having a greater diversity in our teaching force one would think that those involved would be doing their utmost to attract that diversity. But 23 years later it appears that little has changed.

The latest offering from Te Tari Puna, the NZ Child Care Association (I am sure many other providers are guilty too), portrayed only females (no males) from many ethnic groups as the teachers. The subliminal message here is that this is a place where ‘Men are Not Welcome’. I understand that this is not the case (officially anyway) but unless our trainers are proactive little will change.

Or perhaps they do not want change and they like it this way? Years of inaction would suggest to me that is very much the case. Overseas there have been examples where recruitment policies have resulted in an increase of male teachers working in early childhood. A sincere commitment can achieve much and in Denmark they have achieved this (refer Peter Moss's chapter *The Parameters of Training*. In H Penn (Ed.) "Early Childhood Services: Theory, Policy, Practice", 2000). It is ironical, I believe, that in New Zealand we often look to Scandinavia for so much inspiration, but what they have achieved for gender-equity in teaching we have not replicated within New Zealand.

I was also interested to read Adam Buckingham's perspective and relate how supported he feels by the NZEI. Four years ago when I spoke on the role of males in early childhood and how some barriers had been placed because of their gender, I received an article from the executive officer of NZEI which stated that males portraying traditional masculine attributes – in this case the analogy was ripping car doors of the hinges – were not actually needed in early childhood. This was an interesting perspective as I do not believe that anyone was suggesting that this type of stereotype should be encouraged. I welcomed any other articles that she believed I would find interesting. As I have received no correspondence since, it is reasonable to assume I was being "noticed" for speaking out.

This, to me, is symptomatic of a culture of "protecting my patch" that is present in some areas of early childhood and one that needs to be addressed urgently. Barriers placed in the past by beliefs such as "we just do not want men because they are men" are easy to overcome if there is a commitment to do so. No one has ever suggested the lowering of the bar – what I am asking is: What does the service do to identify the bar in the first place? The answer is nothing because those in the decision making circles either like to keep it that way or perhaps find it in the too hard-basket to even consider.

When I was a visiting lecturer at the Dunedin College of Education in the early nineties there were a number of males training in early childhood. Not one to my knowledge is still in early childhood teaching. Some left during their training – they felt they weren't supported by the college – others left soon after graduating. One story a student related was that a head teacher from a kindergarten removed a child (a girl) off his knee when on posting – yet the female staff had both boys and girls all over them. This extreme action made him realise that this was a place where men were under suspicion and it wasn't long before he left the service.

The Peter Ellis sex abuse case at the Civic Childcare Centre in the early 1990s certainly put men off from looking at a career in early childhood education and this has its perverse implications for New Zealand society today. This can be best evidenced with the laughable response of our National airlines regarding adult male passengers as "risks too great to be managed" in terms of being safe for unaccompanied children to sit beside. Adam Buckingham's conscious decision not to change children is, to me, another example of this. Adam is not alone; other men who have entered teaching in recent years feel they have no choice but to respond in this way because they have only known the context of fear and societal belief that all men are potential child sex abusers.

But the reality is that children need to be changed by men – they need to see that this caring role is part of being male, part of the responsibility of caring for others.

And boys, especially, should experience males in the nurturing role. By not changing children a male teacher separates the caring role from his teaching. He is making a statement to children and families that “guys do not do this” – I acknowledge the reason behind such action but it is perpetuating the myth that all males are risks to children.

The way to challenge beliefs is to disprove them – having a male change children in a centre helps create an environment where children and adults (both male and female) become *normalised* to such a practise and hopefully then value this as part of teaching and caring. All centres should have in place risk management strategies that protect children from abuse irrespective of the staff’s sex. If a male teacher feels it is not safe for him to change children, I wonder then how safe the other staff must feel?

Am I different in my teaching? The answer, I believe, is both yes and no. I have never ever approached the job of teaching as “being male”. My sense of maleness has been constructed for me by others. I see the differences in others’ eyes – and this is something that we often debate at our centre now.

Being male is to me like being Pakeha/NZ European – it is a gift and a liability at the same time, which has been with me since birth. The difference of being a male is more of an issue to others I believe than to myself. Many beliefs I have in the way I teach and the interests I hold could be ascribed as traditional male pursuits but others can not be. So therefore I am both one of the team and a male, and my colleagues are one of the team and female.

I play rugby and cricket and have a natural affinity with ball games. I love sports and this is reflected in my teaching interests. But a large number of women also love sports. Probably the only aspect I use in my teaching that the other female staff do not is that I build. As a relatively new centre – into our third year now – we have been lucky to develop our centre with the children. We have built paths using Tonka trucks to carry out the excess soil, we have concreted ramps, we have built a sandpit for the “Babies”, made decking and a sandpit shed: real experiences that have authentic results.

My belief on child development has developed again back to the importance of the outdoors and physical play. This is something I believe to be more critical now in the time of PS2 and Xbox than it ever has been. We are always outside – the outdoors is as important as the inside, and we allow our children to choose their preference. I am a great believer of the attitude “there is no poor weather – just poor clothing”.

Our centre has large grounds for running – we purposely bought it because of this. We have ramps for speed and bikes - we have heaps of them!! - We have bush, we have rocks and we have risk. All these are important to help children develop the “I can do” attitude. We also have very competent, athletic children. We play cricket, rugby, soccer, wrestle and have sword fights. We have rules and we teach limits so that when the energy is being unleashed it has criteria to play by. One of the key elements I have read of boys is that they need to know how to get excited and then how to control that excitement when it is time to finish – that is why rules are important. We work with energies and we help our children learn to monitor them and control them.

One of the interesting aspects in my teaching has been the number of women who have created bike-less (trolley-less) days where the wheel toys have been put away. In all my teaching I have yet to see the easels put away – yet some children spend as much time there as others on bikes. There seems to be a value here that perhaps more learning is taking place at the passive activity. This I believe is seriously flawed – perhaps the observers can't keep up with the bikes to document what real learning is happening there!

Males are also a necessary curriculum tool. If one is to meet the underpinnings of our national early childhood curriculum (Te Whaariki) then I cannot believe this can occur in a female-only environment. Te Whaariki references adults throughout, and in the levels of learning it talks of the importance of home and family, and the Nation's beliefs (page 19). All of these aspects require male as well as female perspectives. Presently our children are not receiving this. The four Principles of Te Whaariki are also being ignored in terms of the male voice being heard within our early childhood centres. And this is permissible?

Thus to me it returns to the question of: Are we truly enskilling our children to be active members of New Zealand society to be free thinking individuals who are able to consider multiple perspectives? By default I do not believe that we are.

## About the Authors

**Lance:** I grew up surrounded by the Northern Hardwood forests adjacent to Lake Superior, a place of distinct seasons and especially snowy winters. My younger brother, with whom I'm in regular contact and plan extended visits, has a good life there still. My Kiwi partner and I settled in Auckland July of last year; our son was born here last December. As most of you reading will know, New Zealand is a wonderful place, with good opportunities for a comfortable, meaningful family life and a wealth of natural splendours. Along with ecology and education, I have pursued long-standing interests in Re-evaluation Counselling, music, and improvisational theatre. I am especially looking forward to connecting with other men in early childhood education and our strong women allies.

**Adam:** I was a scout leader for over ten years and have always related well with children. I drove trucks and then buses as a job for 20 years before a serious work-related accident prompted my career change (exposure to methyl bromide fumigating gas). I started early childhood training in 2001 and graduated in 2004. I have experience teaching in community and privately run childcare centres. I am a father and have been married for 14 years. I love tramping and travelling.

**David:** I am a 55 year-old father, stepfather and grandfather. I spend my spare time with family at our beach place riding my motorbike with my 12 year-old stepson and my wife, or riding my mountain bike or just walking on the beach or in the bush. But the best thing at the moment is looking after my 14 month-old grandson. My involvement in early childhood started in 1973 when I began my training as a Kindergarten teacher. I worked mainly in Lower Hutt near Wellington, with short periods of teaching in South Taranaki, Whangarei, and overseas in English nursery schools and in France and Switzerland in childcare. I decided to move from kindergarten to childcare in 1999 and am now employed by Victoria University of Wellington as a manager of one of their childcare centres. I have recently completed a course in New Zealand Sign Language and am continuing my studies in linguistics and language acquisition.

**Russell:** Coming from a large family where education was always valued it was natural that I would teach. I chose early childhood because of the flexibility of the curriculum, the perceived ability to be oneself amongst a structure and the excitement for learning young children displayed. After graduating in 1982 with a Kindergarten Diploma I have been a teacher, head teacher, senior teacher and general manager for the Dunedin Kindergarten Association. I have returned to teaching and presently I am a part-owner with my wife and colleague of Early Childhood on Stafford in Dunedin.

**Sarah:** I first become interested in men's involvement with young children as a working mother with a young son. The first paper I wrote on the topic of men in teaching was in 1994. In 1997 I published the first empirical study focusing on male childcare and kindergarten teachers and the views of their female colleagues. This research, although only a small study, attracted considerable media and public attention at the time, but little response from policy-makers. I have also written and talked about the problems of NZEI promoting a no-touch policy in schools for children and teachers. I have four and soon to be five young children (2 boys and 3 girls). I am an ex-kindergarten head teacher, teacher educator, and university lecturer. I have undertaken a number of different research projects including a study of breastfeeding support in early childhood centres, and writing the "Early Childhood Foundations: Characteristics of Quality

Teaching” Best Evidence Synthesis for the Ministry of Education. Today I continue to work as a researcher and run the Early Childhood Research Network, which has a huge national membership and a growing international membership, as one of the many activities of Childforum Research.

## Sources for Further Information

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### Other Relevant Websites

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<http://www.meninchildcare.co.uk/presentations.htm>

<http://maleteachers.com>

<http://www.vbjk.be/meninchildcare.htm>

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