

Essay on quality

by Joseph James

Lilian Katz (1994) outlined five perspectives that can be used as to gauge quality within an early childhood setting. By drawing on a range of literature, and using Katz's (1994) perspectives as different lenses, I am able to explore the topic of male teachers, why there are so few, how they are perceived and treated, how their practice is unique, and ultimately, how it affects the quality of ECE services.

Katz's (1994) five perspectives are:

Top down: looking through the lenses of those in charge.

Bottom up: takes into consideration how the child sees things.

Outside-inside: how families see a service.

Inside: how the staff experiences what we are focusing on.

Outside: the viewpoints held by society in general.

I intend to use these perspectives to question how the inclusion of male teaching staff can affect the quality of early childhood education services within a New Zealand context.

Outside Perspective

I will begin by discussing the Outside perspective because this will give context to my essay by illuminating the conditions and settings in which male ECE teachers work in New Zealand.

Despite the dubious credibility and integrity of many outlets, our national media has a large part to play in forming the collective ideas and discourses of a nation. In the early 1990's Robb (1993, cited in Farquhar, 1997) argued that media attention turned public opinion against male teachers.

In recent years there has been a rise in attention on the issue, bringing more attention and publicity to the cause. In 2012 current events programme Close Up (2012 b; 2012 d) featured two successive articles on the shortage of male ECE teachers, one focusing on the overall perceptions and issues surrounding the topic, and the latter showing the success of the Y Men project. Close Up (2012a, 2012 c) also posted some questions on their Facebook site at the time, garnering an overwhelmingly positive response from the public in the comments section, suggesting that many New Zealanders see the need for males in education.

Close Up successor Seven Sharp has done little to support the work of its predecessor. One article (Seven Sharp, 2014a) in September 2014 met mixed reception when they focused on a Timmy P, an ECE teacher covered in tattoos who sings and MC's late at night in clubs. Although seemingly positive,

I question why they felt the need to choose an extreme individual such as Timmy to represent the often maligned demographic of male ECE teachers. Surely this was not the most tasteful or effective way to challenge the public's generally conservative opinions? Another article that screened on Seven Sharp (2014b) two months later actually showed male teachers in a negative light compared to their female counterparts, suggesting that men are scary and uncaring, and that male teachers are all "weirdos".

Despite Seven Sharp's slights, on the whole NZ media outlets have been supportive of the cause. Last year TV3 News (2014) featured an interview with Dr Sarah Farquhar, an advocate for male teachers. And both major newspaper companies, Fairfax Media (Dallas, 2014; Moir, 2014) and The Herald (Helliwell, 2013), ran a few articles about the need for more male teachers. These, along with recent articles about single gender classes at school, articles advocating activeness, rough and tumble play, risk taking and about doing away with "helicopter parenting" all contribute to how the public think about the education system, and what our children need in order to grow and learn as best they can.

It is apparent that there is still a common stigma that men should not be looking after children, either because it goes against their "natural tendencies", or because they are "sexual predators".

The Peter Ellis scandal of the 1990's has scarred the New Zealand psyche to the point that many people would still question the intentions of men who are early childhood teachers. However, many other issues such as children being raised fatherless and with a lack of male role models have given rise to a majority of the public being vocally supportive of male teachers (as seen in the comments sections of aforementioned news articles).

People's views are based on their own schooling, or parenting, devaluing the idea of teaching as a high professional standard (Johnson, 2010). The perception that ECE is unsuited to men, coupled with a typically low view of ECE as a profession in general, makes it hard for male ECE teachers to earn respect for their choice of career. This could account for why only about 1-2% of teachers in the NZ ECE sector are male (Farquhar, 2006, Caffell, 2013, Yang, 2013). The general public are warming to the idea of male teachers, but this is not enough to make many men actually pursue a career in teaching younger children.

Top down perspective

This top down perspective will consider how male teachers are viewed from those in authority, and how the inclusion/absence of male teachers affects services.

Government influence

The New Zealand Government has (at times) recognised the need for an increase of male teachers but has failed to act on this, leaving organisations like the Kindergarten association, ECMENz and tertiary education providers to start initiatives on their own. In 2013, a letter from Hekia Parata (current Minister of Education) essentially dismissed the role of the Government as having a part to play in helping to entice more males into teaching. This perception was reinforced in 2014 in the lead up to national elections, when a survey of the policies of seven political parties showed only one party

actually acknowledged the need for more male ECE teachers in their political manifestos (Palmer, 2014). This is disheartening when we consider Yang (2013) citing European research that indicates that the push for more male teachers was futile without Government support.

In a backwards effort against discriminatory practise, the Human Rights Commission have deemed male-only scholarships as unlawful, meaning that there are even fewer incentives to draw more males into the field of teaching (Moir, 2014). This is highly ironic, that anti-discrimination measures are perpetuating inequity.

The Wellington Kindergarten Association (n.d.) has launched an initiative in Wainuiomata called the “YMen project”. This was seen to have killed two birds with one stone, having not only equipped young men with skills so that they can escape the cycle of being unemployed, but also addressing the need for more male teachers in ECE services. I applaud the Kindergarten association for these efforts, but I am saddened that they even need to come up with such initiatives to help with social welfare when it is not their responsibility, especially in light of their decrease in Government funding in recent years.

Boys and schooling

Whilst not focused on Early Childhood, Francis and Skelton (2005) theorise on why there is a widening gender gap, with progressively more boys failing our schooling system. Proposed reasons include: Boys motivations and interests, different learning styles, ‘feminised’ schooling systems, biased assessment practise, and boys thinking that they need to live up to gender constructions, thus affecting their behaviour.

An increase in male teachers would address many of these issues. Mens’ interests are more likely to reflect those of the boys’. Active and interactive male teachers could appeal to boys’ learning styles better. An even gender mix of teacher staff would balance out a ‘feminised’ schooling system.

As for boys living up to perceived gender norms, these change depending on what the boys have observed. In his infamous bobo doll experiment, Bandura noted that children will replicate violence that they have observed on television (Olson & Hergenbahn, 2009). Dickie and Shuker (2014) conducted a study of pop culture and how it influences literacy. This study found that pop culture is hugely influential in children’s lives, especially with boys who love to carry out role play based on TV shows they watch. Some of the current popular programmes/films include superheroes, Ben 10, Toy Story, Transformers, Harry Potter and Star Wars. When boys watch action based programmes/films they are likely to copy the behaviour of the man who ‘fights the baddies’.

Berk (2009) discusses how gender roles are formed through influence rather than biology. MacNaughton (2000) agrees, but notes that many teachers don’t realise this, and feel powerless trying to “fight biology”. Children who cross gender lines are often chided by their peers – boys can’t wear dress ups or play with dolls! Boys must be tough, noisy and rough! I feel that MacNaughton almost agrees that it is true, that all males are violent and must be ‘fixed’, rather than looking at the underlying

causes and influences that form this behaviour. Berk (2009), however, takes a neutral response, merely implicating that this is what children observe, and then reinforce amongst their peers. As Lashlie (2005) points out, it's not always helpful having a woman doing studies on men, but researchers try anyway.

Green, (2013) has found through various studies that no matter how gender neutral one tries to raise a child, they will ultimately be more influenced by trying to fit in with their peers. However, this does not mean that children don't need positive gender role models. We still need men who can show caring as a gender norm. Attachment theory would also suggest that children are eager to please those who they look up to, and try to reflect the behaviours of their carers (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Olson & Hergenbahn, 2009).

Many children are still seen as sponges that soak up sex roles they are expected to adopt (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2000). 'Brent' (cited in Farquhar, 1997, p.33) summed it up well: "unless you have a gentle, caring male role model the images of males on the media or violence in the home are followed by children"

So who do we want influencing our boys? Because with the absence of male teachers, (and in many cases no father figures), boys will learn the 'acceptable' way for boys to behave from Hollywood stereotypes.

Most of what I have discussed covers the benefits for young boys, because they are possibly more disadvantaged from a lack of male teachers. But the benefits apply to girls as well. Not only do boys need to learn how to be men, but girls need to learn how to relate to men (Yang, 2013).

Teaching teams

Good teams carry a diverse range of experiences and expertise. The Te Whāriki strand of contribution states the importance that "Children experience an environment where there are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 66; Yang, 2013).

Farquhar (1997) lists some benefits she observed when studying the inclusion of men within a teaching team. These include better decisiveness during decision making, less conflict, different perspectives, wider conversation topics, more fun. Compared to female teachers, men were found to gossip less, not act catty, and hold less grudges. Men were seen as more honest, direct and calm in difficult situations. They offered unique perspectives and solutions that couldn't be found in all-female teams.

Bottom up perspective

The Bottom up perspective focuses on how children view male teachers.

Sumsion (2005) asked children in a Sydney centre about what they thought of their male teacher, 'Bill'. Children drew pictures of Bill "surfing, motor bike riding, playing soccer, and mowing the lawn" (p. 62). Children described him demonstrating masculine attributes such as "adventurousness, fearlessness, physical strength, stamina, dexterity, outdoor responsibilities and an affinity for the outdoors" (p.63).

The boys shared an affinity with Bill based on “wrestling, block play, construction toys and enjoyment of the outdoors” (p. 63). All of the children thought highly of Bill, and his teaching abilities, even a quarter of them couldn’t articulate why. They thought him competent, helpful, safety conscious and hard working.

The clip that Seven Sharp (2014b) aired November last year may have shown children saying that men are scary and uncaring, but I would argue against this, based on personal experience and literature. Male teachers are known for being fun and active. Children are drawn to men. This is partly because of a novelty factor due to scarcity of men, and most men’s willingness to get involved in play. Watch children greet a male teacher when they arrive in the morning, and more often than not you will see him treated like a celebrity.

It is important to note that being a male can still be enough to intimidate children. If children are not used to being around men they may take time to build trust. Children with a history of abuse can feel especially vulnerable (Farquhar, 1997).

Realistic role modeling.

The Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga framework outlined within Te Whatu Pōkeka (Ministry of Education, 2004) lists desirable traits of the demigod Maui that children should aspire to live by. Surely traits such as whakakata, whakatoī, and pātaitai/kaitoro are well suited to reflect the natural dispositions of many energetic boys (Ministry of Education, 2004). Rameka (2011) explains that cheekiness was actually encouraged in traditional Māori childrearing practices. I see this framework for assessment as flexible, one that can celebrate children for being who they are, instead of what we want to mold them into in a Westernised fashion. I think using Māui as a role model can be great, but having real life men as role models could potentially have an even greater effect.

Outside – inside perspective

The Outside- inside perspective explores how parents view male teachers.

Parent’s views

Parents have reported that male teachers can feel more like a friend than a teacher, with a less formal, less imposing role. They like how male teachers are seen to be more involved in play with their children. (Farquhar, 1997)

On the flip side, some close minded parents have withdrawn their children from services because of the presence of male teachers. There is a discontinuity between perceptions of fathers and male carers (Johnson, 2010).

The importance of building relationships is well documented, but it can be harder for an all-female staff to connect with fathers (Potter, Walker & Keen, 2012). Fathers (especially solo dads) seem to enjoy having a male teacher at their child’s centre, even more so if the father is single. They feel that there is more of a bond, with more to talk about. (Farquhar, 1997; Johnson, 2010). Hiring male teachers is one

way to make a centre feel more welcoming and inviting for fathers.

Inside perspective

This perspective focuses on teaching staff: How male teachers see themselves, how they are treated, and how their female colleagues see them.

Masculinity in New Zealand

Although it is not an academic text, an interesting theory can be found in Rob Cope's *Men wanted for hazardous journey*. He points towards the two World Wars as sources for many of our national concepts of masculinity. Many men were killed in action, leaving a generation of sons to grow up as men without father figures to guide them. Many soldiers who did survive were hesitant to discuss their experiences, opting to bottle it up. Many resorted to alcohol to cope. This led to a generation of men with two types of childhoods. Half of whom were fatherless and had to become the man of the house, and half of whom had fathers who did not express themselves, and who may have been drunks. So these men had to teach their sons how to be men, when nobody had ever taught them in the first place. And so on, with each successive generation. This could explain why we have a culture of stoic men who are not allowed to express themselves.

I see elements of truth in this theory when I reflect on my own whakapapa, and on the stories of the men of my family. No one is to blame for what happened, they simply hadn't been taught what to do, and had to try their best to make it up as they went.

Historian Michael King (1988) offered a look into the expectations of manliness with his book, *One of the boys?* The book was not analytical, but broadly anecdotal, featuring the accounts of many diverse New Zealand men. King's own account described growing up as a boy in New Zealand as confusing. One was expected to play rugby, be tough, never show weakness, lust after women, drink often and be loyal to one's mates.

I think this discourse is still largely ingrained in the New Zealand psyche, iconified by the Speights hard Southern man, Jake the Muss (Duff, 1994), and the farmer-type All Blacks squads of yesteryear (before they became a corporate enterprise). We still cling tightly to the concept that real men don't have emotions, other than anger; and that they are incapable of caring and childrearing unless they are homosexual. After all, that is women's work.

Herein lays some reasoning why ECE teachers are perpetually battling the concept that teaching is babysitting, and not a worthwhile profession. Anyone can do caring, because that's what mothers do naturally.

Entering the profession

In 1997 Farquhar proposed a number of reasons why men may be hesitant to enter the profession:

- Historically, men have been the breadwinners, so need to earn a decent wage in order to support

their family.

- The potential for allegations of abuse, especially in light of the Peter Ellis case.
- The perceived feminine nature of the role.
- Male teachers often have their sense of sexuality and masculinity questioned.

These reasons still seem just as relevant almost two decades later. Unitec lecturer Alex Williams supports this, citing commonly perceived reasons of low pay, low status and the potential for accusations of abuse as reasons why few men work in ECE. Williams doesn't agree that the pay and status are issues anymore, but concedes that potential allegations are always a real threat, and that the discursive gender stereotypes are still incredibly powerful (Caffell, 2013).

Many men don't initially plan on teaching in early childhood (Robb, 1993, cited in Farquhar, 1997, Caffell, 2013). Often it signals a change in career, even from teaching another age level. Some start with part-time work, or volunteering/helping out, and realise that they enjoy it enough to pursue a career. Many men report being motivated by a job that is both meaningful and fun (Caffell, 2013).

Many men would rather be seen as "good teachers" than "male role models" (Johnson, 2010, p. 21), but any positive affirmation of their work will suffice until we can attain that discourse.

Treatment

Research has indicated that many men have been mistreated in their roles because of their gender. They suffer from "identity bruises" (Foster & Newman 2005, cited in Johnson 2010, p. 20). Most men report that they have been treated with suspicion, called foolish, put-down, even if it is only light hearted jabs from their own friends. There is a sense of alienation and isolation being the only male in an otherwise all-female staff group (Farquhar, 1997).

Male teachers are given the quandary: how do they portray their gender? The three options are 'traditional', "profeminist" (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, cited in Farquhar, 1997), or androgynous. Do they play down their natural disposition or over-compensate? Each role can leave the man feeling conflicted, and vulnerable to attack from others. Many feel that they have to justify themselves and prove that they are capable of caring, and general domestic chores (Farquhar, 1997). It is interesting that men will be accused of inability in the kitchen, but nobody would bat an eyelid if a female teacher was inept at the carpentry table.

Of course not every man is treated badly all the time. Scan through the comments sections of any of the media articles I referenced earlier and you will see that the New Zealand public is becoming vocal in support for male teachers. However, the current shortage of men remains testament to the conditions men would expect from entering the profession.

Other teacher's views

Farquhar (1997) asked female teachers for their views. They sometimes found that men may become

too engaged in play to address other duties, neglecting children's physical needs in favour of interaction. However, they liked that men were actively involved in play, rather than merely supervising children. Men added more physicality to play that boys especially enjoyed, and they carried more authority that the children respected.

Additional discussion

Farquhar (2006) lists a number of reasons why the New Zealand ECE sector needs more male teachers.

- Children are missing out on positive male role models.
- The ECE sector promotes gender diversity, but does not practice it.
- We are in need of more great teachers in general, regardless of gender.
- Female teachers are likely to experience reduced pay and working conditions when they work in a female concentrated filled.
- New Zealand is not keeping up with the rest of the world, in terms of percentage of male teachers.

Conclusion

The potential for harm always exists, but had been blown out of proportion by high profile scandals, tainting the public's view of male teachers, and scaring men away from the field. Though the potential for harm is there, we need not take this deficit view. Instead, why not take a credit based approach and consider what men can bring to the ECE sector to improve conditions and positively impact our children?

With a push for the education sector to be more diverse and accepting of multiple cultures, sexual orientations, abilities, one would presume that an acceptance of multiple genders fits within this paradigm.

Most of the literature I have read suggests that having more male teachers would be beneficial for children, especially boys who need role models. Men bring balance, diversity, additional expertise and an extra degree of approachability to ECE services.

Using Katz's (1994) perspectives, we see that although not everyone supports male ECE teachers, they still bring a positive change to the sector. This becomes more apparent when we focus on relevant literature, and disregard less reliable notions, making the overall perception more just and balanced.

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