

nursery or out-of-school club, rising to 38 percent of men who were fathers themselves. “We are seeing some kind of beginning of a cultural shift,” said Stephen Burke, director of the Daycare Trust. “Now what we need to do is support men who want to go into this career.” However, 57 percent of those asked identified fears of pedophiles targeting children as the main barrier to male childcare providers—even though only one man has ever been convicted of sexual abuse in a British nursery. Burke said fears could be tackled by proper vetting of nursery staff; when parents

trusted the management, they were inclined to believe their children would be safe around the staff (Hinsliff, 2003).

In England and Scotland, targeted marketing to men includes television, newspaper, and poster campaigns featuring male workers, handing out brochures (including one with the provocative title “Are You Man Enough for Childcare?”) at venues where men are likely to be found, and providing men-only orientation sessions at secondary schools and career fairs. Several Nordic countries also use targeted marketing (Bertrand, 2008: 173).

INSIDE

LOOK

My decision to pursue a career in early childhood education came about quite haphazardly. It was during a pediatric rotation as a student nurse that I realized that my true calling lay not with treating the symptoms associated with illness and disease. Instead, I was lured by the prospect of promoting holistic health and wellness through education and, thus, preventing many of the illnesses and injuries that currently plague young children in this country. As I began my studies at George Brown College in Toronto, I was well aware of many of the stereotypes that follow men into female-dominated vocations. The brief time I spent in nursing ensured encounters with such discrimination—both subtle and overt. Would my interest in working with children be misconstrued as pathological? Would families, faculty, and colleagues judge my competence as a nurturing presence in the lives of children based solely on my skill as an early educator or simply on the basis of my gender? Would my decision to enter a profession with so few males as front-line workers yield assumptions about my sexual orientation and promote further discrimination? These questions were initially the source of much hesitation and self-doubt.

Fortunately, two years and four placements later, the fears that gave me pause in the beginning have not yet materialized. First of all, my college faculty epitomized what one frequently seeks in a mentor. Their encouragement and support served as the foundation from which I’ve been able to grow as a competent, integrative, and comfortable member of the early childhood community. Second, centre staff and supervisors have welcomed my involvement in their centres and bestowed upon me a definitive sense of belonging. In fact, my second placement with school-age children led to full-time summer employment. Of particular importance, however, is the way in which children and families have embraced my presence in their lives. I frequently receive positive feedback from parents who are excited by the reports they receive from their children about our daily interactions. In their eyes, I am seen as both an educator and a role model. The rapport I’ve established with the children in my care is most evident in their sense of trust in my abilities, driven by consistent response to their individual needs and manifested through the frequent interactions and displays of affection that one would expect in a nurturing relationship.

The experiences I have garnered thus far have put to rest my earlier fears about being a male early childhood practitioner. As time passes, the notion that males and nurturing are somehow incompatible is no longer at the forefront of my thinking, nor has it affected the partnerships I have established with children and families. Instead, I hope to focus some of my efforts on encouraging continued recruitment of men into this profession. Clearly, the potential benefits for society as a whole are numerous.

Source: Ryan Campbell, ECE graduate