

Men in early childhood education: My interview with early childhood lecturer Dr. Martyn Mills-Bayne ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As a lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Dr. Martyn Mills-Bayne, from Adelaide, South Australia, has a lot of insights into men working in the field. Dr. Mills-Bayne took time out of his busy schedule to chat with me a little about ECE.

Q. When did you get into this field?

"I started studying to be an Early Childhood teacher (Bachelor of Early Childhood Education) in 2004 at the University of South Australia, and after graduation went on to teach in preschools and the early years of primary school in the north and north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide for a number of years. My favorite role was supporting young children's transition from preschool into the more formal schooling environment by making learning fun within a supportive and caring environment.

"Too often there is a big disconnect between these two educational spaces, and I believe that too much of a focus on sitting still, conforming to a rigid time structure and a sudden focus on academic achievement over social emotional well-being and holistic growth, can create negative foundations for young children's lifelong learning journeys."

Q. What do you see as the advantages of having male teachers?

"My opinion about this has changed and evolved over my career. I do not like the idea that male teachers are viewed as role models despite the fact that we often inadvertently fulfill this position for many of the boys and girls in our care (as well as modeling appropriate interactions for some parents!). This view places undue pressure and expectation on male teachers beyond their actual role as educators."

"I see the biggest advantage to having male teachers is the increase in gender diversity in early years settings. With more male teachers in schools, preschools and child-care centers, children will be exposed to socially appropriate interactions between men and women, men and men, and men and children. Seeing that men value education and care in a range of ways that are unique to us as individuals (regardless of gender) will help raise children's awareness of the positive and meaningful ways that humans can engage with each other in society."

Q. What school do you work at or what age group?

"I am currently a lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the University of South Australia where I coordinate the infant professional experience placement courses for undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts, as well as teaching the Social Emotional Development course that is my area of expertise and the focus of my Ph.D."

Q. What's your favorite memory working with kids?

"I have many fond memories of my time in the classroom, but the experiences that meant the most to me came when I was able to support those children who did not quite fit the box that school seems to want them to be in. One year I had the school principal ask me to take a young boy into my class halfway through the school term because his teacher could not cope with his energy and intense disregard for her teaching.

"While this boy continued to challenge the way I did my teaching, and push the boundaries of the classroom, we eventually found ways to work together to combine his needs and special interests with the requirements of the school curriculum and the rights of the other children in my class."

Q. How do you feel about the man who lost his job just because he was male?

"No one should lose their job or be at risk of unemployment because of discrimination. Directors, principals and site coordinators are constantly weighing up the needs of children, families and educators, and I think this instance was one where the decision was wrong. I would like to think that this sort of thing is so rare as to be an anomaly, but I think that this sort of decision happens all the time, but that it tends to happen in more insidious and hidden ways when it does occur.

"Many centers and schools are fantastic advocates for male teachers, and I am always hearing directors and principals being proactive and

supportive of their male employees. The struggle to meet the needs of all of those involved will continue to be a challenge ... but this sort of result has the potential to turn many great teachers away from a career in the early years."

Q. Anything else you want to tell us about working with young children?

"Be kind to them all – the child that causes you the most grief may need the most empathy!"

Q. Do you have any Facebook pages or a blog you would like to share with us?

"The MENtor Program for Males in ECE and the MENtor Program Facebook Group."

Q. What's your favorite book to read to class?

"Anything by Shaun Tan or 'Tadpole's Promise' by Jeanne Willis."

-reprinted from 30 Seconds

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