

MENU conference No. 6 Engage in professional learning

The MENU conference was really good and for so many reasons. While I was a bit hesitant to attend initially due to it being for the whole day and what I thought solely focused on early childcare workers I am now really glad I made the investment of attending. I made these concerns known and Martyn the organiser reassured me that even though I am a primary school trained teacher I would still walk away with a valuable experience which I now agree with him.

Here are my highlights to the conference.

Ben Jackson (Keynote)

Winner of the 2017 Australian Family Early Education & Care Awards National Educational Experience Rising Star

I enjoyed Ben's sharing as a professional in the field and encountering many of the common behaviours we can sometimes encounter he understood where we as educators are coming from. The isolation in staffrooms and the looks we can receive when parents are dropping off their children are just two examples of the treatment we can receive. Interestingly many made that observation. However Ben made us feel that we're not alone in this treatment.

Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (University of South Australia)

The professor gave us a more professional and academic perspective concerning the imbalance that is present in the staffing in the teaching profession. He is especially looking at it from an ethnic background, as to the values a gender and ethnic balanced teaching profession will earn. This was highlighted to me when I had a private chat to him about trying to gain permanent employment as a teacher. I lamented that it was hard for me and he suggested that it was even harder for Muslim, Aboriginal and many other ethnic and minority races who are teachers. Which really makes you think - where is the diversity in the teaching profession? Go to your average school staff room and see the bias that is present. Surely this is harming our children's educational experience.

Official launch of the Australian Association for Men in Early Childhood A positive move to support men in early childhood and address the imbalance that is present in the staffing of these childcare settings.

Dr Vaughan Cruickshank (University of Tasmania)

Vaughan's research is focused on practical strategies that male educators can use to cope with the gender related challenges they face in their profession. Vaughan started his presentation

with an online survey previously set up. This was great and gave all of us an understanding that we're not alone in our challenges and backgrounds. The questions he asked were those in his study. I didn't personally feel I related to them but could easily see how they would come about. For example that males were given more behaviour challenging students. That being said I won a contract for that very reason so it was employment for me which is what I needed. He also mentioned that his studies showed that men were often called upon to do more repairing of infrastructure and moving furniture within schools. He said this was noted in his studies and is a subtle stereotype that males should do the heavy lifting in schools simply because they are males.

Molly Rhodin (Down to Earth Practical Solutions)

I missed a lot of Molly's talk but I know she does good work to support men in education.

Dr Kate Liley (Goodstart Early Learning)

Kate is the National Research Manager for Goodstart and recently presented research addressing male educator perspectives at the European Early Childhood Education

Research Association (EECERA) conference in Italy. Kate had a good and robust presentation to the topic. Her company I would suggest is leading the way to a more balanced workforce in the early childhood sector because they have seen first-hand the positive results a gender balanced workforce can bring. This has got to be a good thing. She spoke about the formation of her organisation and the commitment it has to serving families. Goodstart are committed to helping children form healthy gender identities and having male role models assists that. This is her argument. I think this is a healthy and productive view point and in the end seeks to serve our society.

Panel members: Ben Jackson (Day One ELC), Steven Cameron (DECD Early Childhood Leader), Badakhsh Jeizan (City West CCC) Brett Gent (Lady George Kindergarten), Rob Lister (GowrieSA), Ben Cooper (St Peters ELC).

The men discussed various views and shared about their backgrounds it was good to hear the different viewpoints.

Details how you will contribute at your staff/site or network level

There is very little you can do to share information about this conference. The vast bulk of teachers, principals and leadership or otherwise are not interested in hearing the outcomes of the research from the studies from this conference. As a relief teacher you will simply not get any employment if you bantered this information in staff rooms. Sounds harsh but it's true.