

MENu 2018 - Male Educators on the Fringe

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Conference Highlights

[Ben Jackson](#) was the first speaker to go into details about the challenges that he has personally faced working in early childhood education. Ben's experiences as a young educator were to me a little shocking at first as he highlighted some of the comments that he had either heard directed towards himself as an early childhood educator but also the things that had been said to others.

Comments such as "You can't do that because you are not a dad" or "Men shouldn't be doing women's work" were just two of many that highlighted a level of paranoia, fear and outdated thinking that is still clearly evident today. Although at first this shocked me at the same time I was not surprised at the ignorance of some people having been often told how teaching is an "easy" or "cruisy" job.

What I did feel from not just Ben's talk but also from the general consensus around the room was that of fear for my own career and perhaps the prejudice that may even be directed towards myself as an upper-primary teacher.

One of the main points that Ben tried to emphasise is that defending against this mentality has to come from a unified approach of leaders within these workspaces to ensure that they are 100% behind all of their employees regardless of gender. For myself I feel that this is important not just from leadership but from all the members within the workforce team at every establishment.

[Professor Lester-Iribinna Rigney](#) provided as with some strong statistics and information about where we are at in regards to inclusivity within the education sector. Professor Rigney argued a sentiment to which I agree with sincerely in that discrimination does not lie within just the male-female demographic but across the board through ethnicity, background, race, sexual orientation and gender. Professor Rigney argued that male discrimination albeit highly important, is just another battle amongst the greater war against discrimination that has yet to make significant gains over the last 50 years.

By far the speaker who I gained the most insight from during the conference would have to be [Doctor Vaughan Cruickshank](#) from the University of Tasmania. Doctor Cruickshank's research focusing on practical strategies that male educators can use to cope with gender related challenges in their profession highlighted some of the main issues that male educators face not only in ECE but across the education system.

Some of the issues highlighted included feeling isolated in a female dominated school, feeling left out in conversations and being considered the main disciplinarian within the school based entirely on gender generalisations. Having experienced many of these issues myself it became apparent that these

assumptions still exist even in the secondary education system where a lot of my teaching experience has been situated.

What did I gain from the conference and how will you be sharing your learning with others?

Although I gained a heightened awareness from this conference around some of the challenges that early childhood educators face I feel that Doctor Cruickshank provided me with the greatest insight and motivated me to generate change. Most of the strategies were around being pro-active and communicate these concerns with all staff members to ensure they are aware of them. By simply highlighting these issues it can shed light on the topic and help reduce assumptions within not only the staff but also the broader community.

Since the conference I have given a presentation to all of the staff at my primary school (myself being the only male staff member) around some of the misconceptions highlighted towards male educators. I explained to the other staff members that although there are assumptions around male teachers doing sports, IT and “Handyman” work that these were actually areas that I enjoyed working in myself but only if the burden is not left entirely upon my shoulders.

From the conference, I developed two aims. My first aim was to ensure I fully understood the behavior management policy within the school and to try and encourage all staff members to be consistent across the board. This has so far been a great success with all classes maintaining a consistent approach towards behavior management.

My second aim was to discuss policies and procedures around student contact in order to ensure consistency across the board regardless of gender. This created several discussions within the school to better align the current practices. I feel that this has allowed everyone to remind themselves of what the standard practices are and what is acceptable for all staff regardless of gender.