

2018 MENu Conference: Male Educators on the Fringe

Adelaide, Saturday 17th February 2018

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A brief overview and highlights of the conference: I had been in contact with Martyn Mills-Bayne for some time leading up to the conference, so I was quite excited to attend. There was quite a good turn out and some attendees had come from interstate. The conference began with an Acknowledgement of Kurna Country and then was preceded by Martyn Mills-Bayne. He talked about last year's conference and some of the changes that have occurred since then. His main point in discussion was that it is not just about the number of males in the workforce, but you can't have 'X' number of males in work if they don't go through university first. He informed us that we need to encourage males to enter the sector through university. There was also a discussion on feeling isolated in the workforce due to lack of other men doing the career.

Ben Jackson spoke next on overall growth mindset and grit that men must challenge themselves throughout this career. His point of a quality teacher devotes time, is enthusiastic about his job and presents himself, was inspiring to me. He also mentioned his background coming from being a stand-up comedian and other varied careers until finding himself through working in Early Education. His other point in saying not to worry too much about the stigma of men and young children as an excuse to not get into the workforce was well presented to the audience. He presented a slide which had three main points on it, these included:

Great teachers engage students and get them to look at issues in a variety of ways.

Great teachers are masters of their subject matter.

Great teachers form strong relationships with their students and show that they care about them as people.



(insert: Dr. Martyn Mills-Bane)

After Morning tea, we heard from Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney. He stressed the point of lack of Aboriginal Teachers in the workforce. He also talked about involving our indigenous and first peoples in the process of gaining employment and careers. During his talk he cited the book “Nonsynchronous Educational Theories” by Mc Carthy and Apple (1998). This led to a discussion on class, race and gender and he mentioned four moves that included:

Provocation, Problem (Aboriginal teacher decline), difficult climate and what can be done.

He also stressed the point that diversity is everyone’s business-Teachers need to be involved. This can be achieved by asking children to bring in their culture, have a neutral aspect (funds of knowledge) with children, and aboriginal children are inspired when they see their own kind in front of them (role models). He also provided many statistics of Australia’s Education workforce which described the lesser amount of Men involved in this sector. His talk was well presented and inspiring.

We had the official launch of AAMEC (Australian Association of Men in Early Education) followed by lunch and then we heard from Dr. Vaughan Cruickshank. He talked a lot about strategies to put in place on topics such as behavior management and how to keep yourself safe as a male in Early childhood. He had good hindsight on the gender-related challenges that men face in early childhood education. He talked about the discouragement men might get during their career and strategies to overcome this.

After Vaughan we heard from Molly Rhodin. She enforced the catch phrase “Change the channel” A theme that was to be repeated throughout her talk. A very inspiring talk on advocacy for men in the early childhood setting. She reinstated the importance of clustering males together in workplaces, so they can encourage each other. Positive role modelling to

newcomers also was beneficial. Changing signage and male visibility were two other priorities mentioned in Molly's talk.

Next to speak was Dr. Kate Liley from Goodstart Early Learning. She wants to start a special interest group on gender balance for the Goodstart model. This was to encourage males in Early Childhood to work in their centres. It is called the 'Climcut' Model. She expressed her interest in inclusion of males in their centres and the benefits it had on the children.

At the end of the conference there was a panel set up to take questions and have an open discussion on any topics raised. Some of the questions seemed to link back to the negative image of men and young children and how we can overcome this. It was good to hear the varied answers on this topic and how we can get over that hurdle as it can be a discouragement for men to enter into the work force. The overall conclusion of the panel was that it should be males wanted for quality education not just for being male. Also that we don't succumb to our gender stereotype as in for example "mate can you move that heavy table" because we are blokes. It needs to be a shared workforce and finally, that we should all be able to enjoy the benefits of working with children and shaping future minds together.

How will I contribute to my workplace and my fellow staff after attending this conference?

I was very enlightened after attending the conference. It was good to hear other men sharing their stories and giving hope that we should never have feelings of isolation in our chosen field of work. I started in childcare back in 2002, I was the only male in my class during my TAFE Diploma. I had some struggles during placements and some of the centres that I worked. I think times have changed and I have been fortunate to work for many years in a centre that encouraged gender equality and supported men in early childhood. The way in which I will contribute to my workplace and fellow staff will be the way I always have; that is to be a positive male role model to the children in my care. For me it is always about the children first. With that in mind it takes a team of devoted workers to 'get your back' at times when you need some support. I am going to contribute also, by becoming a member of AAMEC so I have a support network for me as I continue in the sector as an Early Childhood Teacher. I'm going to keep contact with other males and try to role model when other male students are on site with me.

I will share aspects of my learning from the conference through social media forums and keeping in touch with contacts made on the day. I am slowly creating an expanding network resource of many people and this is a great start. I want to be able to go to the next conference to show my commitment and advocacy in 2019.

(insert: the educator panel session)

