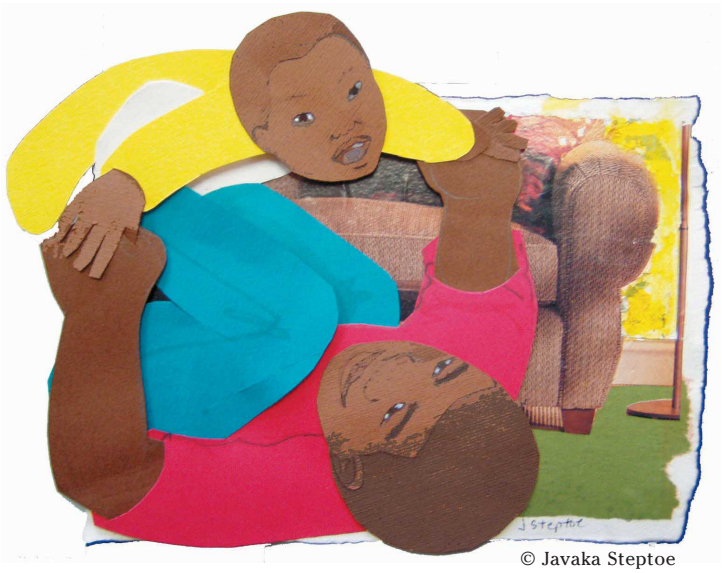


© Javaka Steptoe

Bruce Cunningham and Lemuel W. Watson

Recruiting Male Teachers

A QUICK PEEK into any child care center, preschool, or elementary school will show that there are very few men who work with young children. This absence of men raises a number of important questions for our profession. Are we providing positive role models for girls and boys? Are we responding to the concerns of fathers and mothers in the families we serve? Are we the inclusive, diverse profession we claim to be? The answers to these questions would be positive more often if there were additional men working in early childhood programs.

A major barrier to men becoming early childhood teachers is the pervasive belief in our society and in our profession that men are less able to care for and educate young children than are women (Kennedy 1991; Neugebauer 1994). This belief can affect hiring decisions, teacher education programs, and career counseling. Consequently, it can be difficult to recruit men into careers of teaching young children (Seifert 1988).

To counter this belief and recruit more men to work with young children will take a comprehensive and systematic effort. There is a role for many players in this task, including administrators, teacher educators, career counselors, and the teachers of young children themselves (Cunningham 1998, 1999).

Administrators

Program administrators such as center directors and principals can set the tone and create the expectation that male teachers will be welcomed and supported in early childhood education settings. Each institution's policy, vision, or mission statement on staff diversity should include as a goal the active recruitment of men. Staff development sessions on gender issues in the workplace can encourage all staff to put aside their preconceived notions about the roles of teachers of different genders. Colleagues should not expect men to assume the role of disciplinarian, playground manager, or substitute custodian, just as they would not expect females to have predetermined roles based on gender (Sargent

Bruce Cunningham, Ph.D., is an education coordinator at Puget Sound Educational Service District with the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). He has written articles and brochures and given presentations about involving men in the lives of children.

Lemuel W. Watson, Ed.D., is a principal researcher for the Call Me MISTER Program and a senior research fellow for the C.H. Houston Center at Clemson University. In addition, he is a research fellow for the Institute of Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina.

This article appears in the November 2002 issue of *Young Children* (Vol. 57, No. 6, pp. 10–15).

2001). Instead, men should be supported in exercising the full range of practices available to all teachers.

With a welcoming environment in place, administrators can focus on recruitment. Successful strategies include writing "men encouraged to apply" in advertisements, advertising strategically in publications read by men such as the newsletter of a men's group, using word of mouth, offering cash incentives for staff who recruit male staff, extending personal invitations to men to apply, and establishing a résumé bank of potential male applicants.

Another way administrators can recruit male staff is to hire men for entry level positions such as teacher assistants and paraprofessionals. Many states require minimal qualifications for such positions. Men can complete further training or courses to meet the criteria for becoming teachers. Administrators can also encourage male bus drivers, cooks, and janitors who enjoy working with children to pursue training opportunities in early childhood education. These men may already have relevant skills that can be applied in the classroom, and with further training and education, they can grow into teaching professionals.

Another way to involve men in the classroom is to recruit volunteers from high schools, colleges, and universities. Students in education, psychology, child development, family life, and occupational education are often required to complete service learning, community service, career exploration, or volunteer hours. Contact instructors to provide information about the program or school setting. Male volunteers who have rewarding experiences working with young children might consider teaching as a career. It is important to give volunteers a thorough orientation, offer choices of meaningful tasks, and let them know their presence is valued.

Check Your Own Attitudes

We can all contribute to the recruitment and retention of male teachers. Use the following questions to review your beliefs and assumptions about men teachers.

- What do you think is the value of having male teachers?
- What are the drawbacks of not having men teachers for young children?
- What beliefs do you have about how well men can fulfill the role of teaching young children?
- Do you welcome all men as teachers or only some kinds of men? Which kinds? Why?
- What do you believe happens when males enter the early childhood field? Do they strengthen the field? Do they take away power from women? What other effects do they have? Why?
- What would your program be like if half the staff were men?
- How do you encourage families to welcome and accept men as teachers of their young children?

Teacher educators

Teacher educators can do much to actively recruit men into teacher education programs that lead to careers working with young children. For example, they can provide information on the early childhood field to career counselors and guidance personnel. Many young men may not consider teaching young children as a career unless it is pointed out to them. Effective recruitment materials depict men as teachers and use language that specifically speaks to men and addresses their questions and concerns. The NAEYC brochure *Careers for Men in Early Childhood Education* is one example of this kind of recruitment material (Cunningham & the Washington State Male Staff Task Force 2001).

When recruiting male students, it is important to think in terms of critical mass. Recruiting one man can be an achievement for a teacher education program, but a single man is likely to feel quite isolated. Recruiting two or three men may reduce the isolation, but these few men may still be seen as a novelty. Recruiting significant numbers of men, particularly in large teacher education programs, can help build a more genuine acceptance of males as teachers of young children. Teacher education

institutions can become even more proactive by starting a program that specifically recruits and retains male students. Such an effort would recruit a group of men, keep them together as a cohort for the length of the program, offer mentoring, and provide assistance with studying and tuition as necessary. (See "Call Me MISTER Program," p. 5, for a description of a successful program.)

Education for men

To support men in teacher education programs, it is important to consider individual characteristics and past experiences and factors that will keep them enrolled. The literature suggests that male elementary teachers will be different from women because of their backgrounds and perceptions about their roles. One study found that males as a group "were less academically oriented than other candidates; had fewer years of academic coursework in high school; were less likely to have chosen teaching because they enjoyed school; reported more experience with children than secondary [education] male candidates; were more confident in their teaching abilities than females; reached the decision to enter teacher preparation later than their [female] peers; and reported lower expectations of the usefulness of teacher preparation for developing the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching" (Brookhart & Loadman 1996, 208).

These findings suggest that male preservice teachers have a different perspective on the teaching profession than that of their female counterparts. Indeed, this issue deserves investigation because we do not know enough about boys' orientation toward the educational process (Sommers 2002). Some pedagogical changes or adaptations are needed to support men.

It is important for teacher educators to assess the culture and environment of the their classes. For example, do textbooks and other curricular materials portray male teachers? Do bulletin boards and promotional materials feature men as teachers? Do instructors assume that men and women have had similar prior experiences when relating anecdotes about teaching, leading discussions, and facilitating reflective activities? Do instructors use "she" when referring to teachers, most of the time? Are both men and women invited as guest speakers? Does the class take field trips to sites where men are on the teaching staff? Do practicum and student teaching sites have male teachers? In short, do men have the opportunity to see themselves as part of the early childhood profession?

Students themselves can be another recruitment resource. Programs should survey current male students and recent graduates to learn what practices they found to be most welcoming and to ask for input on effective recruitment strategies.

Teacher educators can guide students on issues they are likely to face in their teaching careers While women deal with many of the same issues, some can be particularly daunting for men. A few examples follow.

- In many settings, men face suspicion that they are child molesters. They need to know the policies on touching and discipline, how to prevent suspicion (for example, by not being alone in a secluded place with a child), and how to build rapport with families.
- Administrators, colleagues, and families might believe that men are not well suited to work with

Strategies for Recruiting Men

A survey of licensed child care providers in Washington state (Cunningham & Charyn 2002) resulted in these strategies for recruiting men:

- Include the phrases "men encouraged to apply" or "men welcome" in ads for employees
- Place ads under "recreation" rather than "child care"
- Recruit and train men through high school and college work study programs, sports teams, and for work during school breaks
- Use men to recruit other men; if a candidate is reluctant to be the only man on staff, ask if he has a friend who might like to work with him
- Start men working with school-age children with whom they may initially feel more comfortable and accepted

young children. Like all teachers, men need to be able to articulate their approaches to teaching in terms of learning and development, describe clearly the reasons for their classroom practices, explain how these relate to district and school priorities, and share their previous education and training experiences.

• After a few years of teaching, some men may be pressured to move into administrative positions. They need to consider their own career goals, plan a career lattice through which they can progress, understand career satisfaction, and have a sense of when to stay in a position and when to move on.

Middle and high school educators

The decision to become a teacher of young children is rarely the initial career choice for men. Many men choose the early childhood field because of experiences they had working with young children earlier in their lives (Sargent 2001; Nelson & Sheppard 1992). Consequently, counselors and teachers in middle and high school can do much to introduce young males to careers working with young children. Young men can be steered toward early childhood sites when they need to fulfill a service learning, community service, career exploration, or volunteer requirement. If male teachers work at the site, they may influence students to consider a career working with young children.

Middle and high school teachers can also stress that volunteering with young children has value for the students themselves. Such an experience can teach interpersonal, problem-solving, teaming, communication, organizational, and parenting skills. Additionally, volunteers may have the opportunity to attend staff workshops or complete first aid and CPR classes. Volunteering with young children can complement a future résumé by demonstrating experience and skills that few other young men can list.

Early childhood educators

Early childhood teachers can begin to make children aware that males can be teachers by using language free of gender bias and by selecting, displaying, and reading children's books that show men as fathers, nurturers, and teachers (Heller 1994). Classroom materials, activities, and teacher interactions can support children in investigating a wide variety of careers. Teachers can invite parents or guests to speak to the children about their work, particularly when the guests' occupations cross traditional gender lines. Both boys and girls can learn that they can be scientists, business executives, nurses, and teachers. The curriculum can offer a variety of opportunities for children to explore the roles of fathers and other males and expand their notions of what men can do (Cunningham 1994).

Of course the most direct way for children to see that men can be teachers is for them to have a male teacher. For this to happen, more men need to work in the early childhood field as teachers of children from birth through age eight. More men will want to teach young children when they see that more men *are* teaching young children. We can make efforts to recruit men into our profession through the workplace, teacher education programs, experiences for young men in middle and high schools, and the environment, interactions, and curriculum in early childhood and elementary school settings. This is an important endeavor for our inclusive profession, and for the well-being of children.

References

Brookhart, S.M. & W.E. Loadman. 1996. Characteristics of male elementary teachers in the U.S.A. at teacher education program entry and exit. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 12 (2): 197–220.

Cunningham, B. 1994. Portraying fathers and other men in the curriculum. *Young Children* 49 (6): 4–13.

Cunningham, B. 1998. Recruiting male volunteers to build staff diversity. *Child Care Information Exchange* September: 20–22.

Cunningham, B. 1999. Hiring and retaining male staff. *Child Care Information Exchange* January: 20–22.

Cunningham, B., & S. Charyn. 2002. Men in child care. *The Link* (Spring): 5–6.

Cunningham, B., & the Washington State Male Staff Task Force. 2001. *Careers for men in early childhood education.* Washington, DC: NAEYC. Brochure.

Heller, C. 1994. Fathers, children, and books: Selecting picture books that portray nurturing fathers. *Texas Child Care Quarterly* (Winter): 14–18.

Kennedy, N.M. 1991. Policy issues in teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan* 72: 658–65.

Nelson, B., & B. Sheppard, eds. 1992. *Men in child care and early education: A handbook for administrators and educators.* Minneapolis: Men in Child Care Project.

The Call Me MISTER Program

Developed to directly address the shortage of male teachers in elementary schools, the Call Me MISTER Program (CMMP) is a collaborative effort between Clemson University and three private historically Black institutions in South Carolina—Benedict College, Claflin University, and Morris College. The goal of CMMP is to recruit, train, certify, and place two hundred African American males as elementary teachers in the public schools of South Carolina. With a current enrollment of approximately 90 students, the project planners expect at least 200 participants to complete the program by the end of the first seven years.

Program staff include a project director, field director, three graduate students, three coordinators (one at each historically Black institution), teacher mentors in public schools, and teacher education faculty in all of the institutions. The project structure combines the special strengths of a research-oriented land grant public university with the individualized instructional programs offered by small private colleges.

CMMP works as a support and mentoring program for most students. Once admitted, participants attend required workshops and seminars to learn about personal and professional issues in elementary education. Seminar topics range from test-taking skills to leadership skills, and there are other specially designed workshops to enhance the students' educational understanding. Participants are also required to meet with their assigned graduate student and collaborator to report any concerns they have as students in elementary education.

Students in CMMP begin spending time in community elementary school classrooms during their first year in college to get a clear understanding of the expectations and skills one must develop to be a teacher. To assist in this development, a participant may meet with three types of mentors. Students are matched with teacher mentors as soon as possible; these mentors provide examples of activities and behaviors of successful teachers. They also help students make the connection between theories of development, learning, pedagogy, and practice. Peer mentors provide examples of activities and behaviors necessary for success in college. Then village mentors provide role models, leadership examples, and connections for effective community membership. Students are also expected to take part in a service learning activity, which serves as a capstone experience in the program.

This program is unique because it makes the transition from high school to college to becoming a teacher a seamless experience. The collaborative efforts of the educational organizations involved show their commitment to this program and its potential. The teaching profession offers an excellent opportunity for African American men seeking a fulfilling career. CMMP is a model for making this possibility a reality for thousands of young African American men in the years to come (Owens et al. 2001). Those interested in further information should visit CMMP's Website at www.callmemister.clemson.edu.

Neugebauer R. 1994. Recruiting and retaining men in your center. *Child Care Information Exchange*, May: 8-11.

Owens, E.M., T.I. Parks, H.G. Green, C.G. Weatherford, & S.S. Warner. 2001. Call Me Mister Program. *The Clemson Kappan:* 2–9.

Sargent, P. 2001. *Real men or real teachers: Contradictions in the lives of men elementary school teachers.* Harriman, TN: Men's Studies Press.

Seifert, K.L. 1988. Men in early childhood education. In *Professionalism in early childhood education,* eds. B. Spodek, O.N. Saracho, & D.L. Peters, 105–16. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sommers, C.H. 2002. *War against boys: How misguided feminism is harming our young men*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Copyright © 2002 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. See Permissions and Reprints online at www.naeyc.org/resources/journal.