

Promoting Diversity and Equality in Early Childhood Care, Education and Training - Men in Childcare

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I am very happy to be here in this beautiful Dublin Castle to present, together with my colleague Colette Murray, the work of the European DECET network. I will first discuss the mission and the goals of the DECET network and then present a concrete example of a diversity project that we did in Flanders to attract more men to jobs in childcare. This project is called: *Men in Childcare*.

Let's start with a short history of DECET. In the first half of the 1990s we noticed not only an increase in various European countries of so-called multi and/or intercultural projects, but also an attempt to study multi-cultural education in a European context.

In the second half of the 1990s, a meeting took place at the Bernard van Leer Foundation's (BvLF) headquarters, a philanthropic organisation that supports early childhood initiatives all over the world. This Expert Meeting (May 1996) brought together a group of Early Childhood Development trainers and practitioners from nine European countries and resulted in a practical guide for trainers and teachers, published in English, French and Spanish (*Anti-bias Training Approaches in the Early Years*).

In May 1998, the DECET Network got funding from the BvLF and started its activities.

As a European network, DECET brings together experts, trainers and researchers in the field of early childhood education. The network aims are to promote and study democratic childcare, and acknowledge the multiple (cultural and other) identities of children and families. We view early childhood provisions as meeting places where people can learn from each other across cultural and other borders, and therefore as public provisions that can effectively address prejudices and discrimination. In this sense, early childhood education makes a clear contribution to the construction of European citizenship.

Mission Statement

The DECET Mission Statement is:

All children and adults have the right to evolve and to develop in a context where there is equity and respect for diversity. Children, parents and educators have the right to good quality in early childhood education services, free from any form of – overt and covert, individual and structural – discrimination due to their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (with reference to Article 2, UN).

Goals

The European network DECET promotes equity and celebrates diversity in early childhood education services and in training. Steps towards accomplishing the aims stated in the mission statement include:

- 1 Networking with trainers, practitioners, researchers and policy makers throughout Europe;
- 2 Actively and critically promoting quality in early childhood education services, which includes equity, accessibility and respect for diversity:
 - For cooperation with parents, this means empowering them to fully participate in early childhood services and in their community as democratic citizens;
 - For working with educators, this means addressing stereotypical thinking and institutional discrimination;
 - For working with policy makers, this means working towards equal access and challenging discrimination and unequal power relations in early childhood education services.
- 3 Developing new knowledge and insights in this field;
- 4 Working in collaboration with other networks in and outside Europe.

In its action program 2001-2003, DECET has taken the following strategic actions:

- 1 Each partner will commit itself to taking appropriate actions to implement the mission and the goals of the network in their country;
- 2 A European curriculum for training of trainers on equity and respect for diversity in early childhood education services is developed and will be published in Autumn 2003;
- 3 A video documentary ("Lullaby for Hamza") on equity and respect for diversity in early childhood education services with examples of good practices in four countries has been produced;
- 4 Books, brochures, videos and training materials are disseminated throughout Europe.

Future Projects of the Network

In its action program 2004-2006, DECET will take up the following priorities:

- 1 Enlarge the network with new partners;
- 2 Develop a trans-national training for trainers;
- 3 International exchange on methodologies with trainers as well as practitioners;
- 4 Evaluate, promote and disseminate research on diversity and equity.

The partners include:

ACEPP (Association Collectifs Enfants Parents et Professionnels), Paris, France

ACEPP is the national association of French “crèches parentales” (parental day care centres) and an innovator in the fields of parental participation and citizenship in diverse, multicultural and deprived areas of France.

CAF, Glasgow, Scotland

Childhood and Families: Research and Development Centre (CAF) is based within the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow in Scotland.

ESSSE (École de Service Social du Sud Est), Lyon, France

ESSSE is a training institute for “éducateurs jeunes enfants” (educators of young children). The college develops training modules for initial as well as on-the-job training regarding the place of families in society in general and in day care in particular, in a diverse and multicultural context.

ISTA (Institut für den Situationsansatz), Berlin, Germany

ISTA is an institution for initial and continuous training as well as action research situated in the Internationalen Akademie gGmbH at the Free University Berlin (Freie Universität Berlin). It organizes training for trainers as well as pilot programmes in the field of day care and research projects on diversity, prejudices and equity.

MUTANT, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Mutant is a non-profit organization that provides training and advice on diversity and equity all through the Netherlands. It also sets up pilot projects and supervision with major day care providers.

Pavee Point Travellers' Centre, Dublin, Ireland

Pavee Point Travellers Centre is a non-governmental organisation where Travellers and members of the majority population work together in partnership. The aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement of the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers, through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights.

Resource and Training Centre for Child Care (VBJK), Ghent, Belgium

The Centre is associated with the Department of Social Welfare Studies at the University of Ghent. It has a resource centre that develops training materials and handbooks for early childhood education and school age childcare, including issues such as diversity and equity. It also initiates and leads pilot projects and action research in the field of child care on issues such as quality, diversity, gender and others.

Σχედία (Schedia), Athens, Greece

This is the Centre of Artistic and Educational Training. "Schedia"-which in Greek means "Raft"- is a non-profit organization seeking to improve the living conditions of marginalized social groups nationally, through the application of a pedagogical approach that is based on the use of art as a means to promote respect for diversity.

'Men in Childcare': A Gender Diversity Project in Flanders

Childcare in the Flemish Community of Belgium is, just as in many other countries, a highly gender-segregated profession. The number of men who worked with children under three in August 2002 was very small: of the 3,417 child care workers, there were only twelve men (0.35%). A relatively new sector, out of schools clubs (such as Initiatives for After-school Care) also scored badly as far as the number of male child-carers is concerned; out of the 904 school workers, there are thirty-five men (3.87%) (Pauels and Stevens, in Peeters, 2003a).

But within the community, the legislative context has recently become more favourable towards men in childcare. In early 2002, the Flemish government approved new regulations concerning quality, of which UN Article 12 is significant: "*Active attempts will be made to hire males as well as females and autochthonous as well as ethnic minorities as childcare workers and in staff functions.*" *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family), the public agency responsible for childcare, had already changed the name of the profession from 'child carer' to 'day-care educator' in 2001. By doing this, the gender-neutral perspective has been expanded to include the educational aspect of the job. The Minister of Welfare and Equal Opportunity, whose sphere of responsibility includes childcare, has increased salaries in the day-care centres by approximately 30%. Within a few years, when the maximum effect has been achieved, the salaries in the childcare sector will be comparable to those in other sectors.

On the labour market there is, at the moment, a shortage of childcare workers, so that the umbrella organisations and the employment office are more easily convinced to participate in campaigns to attract more men to this profession. In September 2001 - within the framework of the European Social Fund (Objective 3) - a consortium of organisations submitted the project 'Men in Childcare'. The promoters are the Training and Resource Centre for Childcare, which is affiliated with the Department of Social Welfare Studies at the University of Ghent and the Emancipation Officer for the city of Ghent. Important partners from the childcare sector include the governmental organisation *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family) and the umbrella organisations for the day-care centres. Two organisations which have the expertise at their disposal with regard to gender and equal opportunities were also involved. Very important also was the collaboration of the national employment office. They recruit approximately 150 people a year for a training course for school-age children.

A Campaign

The project's first objective was to create a campaign on the theme 'Men and Childcare', inspired by similar campaigns in Denmark. It appears that it is important to create an image of the male childcare worker that is different from the typically feminine image that is associated with caring for children. That is why the Flemish poster campaign refers to professions that are attractive to men: manager, book-keeper, construction worker and treasurer. The posters were widely distributed among job seekers at the employment office. During the recruitment of students for the training course 'School Age Childcare', the posters were used throughout the entire region of Flanders. The campaign aim is also to attempt to stress the importance of male educators to parents.

The campaign began in early 2003 and concluded in November 2003 with an open conference in the Belfry of Ghent. Just about all forms of media picked up on the theme, putting it firmly on the agenda, and it was also discussed in a positive light in debating programmes and talk shows on television.

The poster campaign is part of a broader project on men and childcare that is being subsidized by the European Social Fund. In this vein, the recruitment of the candidates and the training courses for after-school childcare organised by the national employment office have been screened for gender neutrality. Moreover, a manual is being created for childcare initiatives in order to make their selection and recruitment policy more male-friendly. Since January 2003, in each issue of the childcare magazine KIDDO, an article was published about men in childcare and there were interviews with male childcare workers and articles that emphasised the need for male educators. Last but not least, a qualitative research project on Men in Childcare was carried out by the University of Ghent (Department of Social Welfare). All men employed in the childcare sector were invited to a meeting in May in order to participate in an exchange of ideas on the results of the research and on the role of men in the lives of young children.

Profile of the Male Day-Care Worker

In order to gain insight into the profile of male childcare workers, the University of Ghent carried out thirty-four in-depth interviews with men who have been working in childcare in Flanders for a considerable time. We used the same questionnaire that Cameron *et al.* (1999) used for the study published in 'Men in the Nursery.' This makes it possible to compare the profile of English and Flemish men working in childcare.

What is striking about Flemish men who work in out-of-school care is that few of them, despite being deeply committed to working with children, had taken a training course in secondary or high school that had anything at all to do with children. After they had finished their education, they had first a series of widely varying jobs: barber, salesman, printer, gardener, truck driver, sailor, etc.

Most of the male after-school care workers are in their twenties and about half of them still live at home with their parents; only three of the men have their own families with children. The men who work with very young children (the male family day-care provider and the workers at day-care centres or nurseries) are a good deal older (generally in their thirties) and half of them have families with children.

Preliminary Training

All of the childcare workers in after-school care have taken a short, two-month course within a re-training project. In spite of the fact that there was a predominance of women in these courses, they did not feel that the course was specifically geared towards women. Some of the activities taught, for example, could actually be described as wilder, more 'masculine' games. The co-workers of nurseries and one male family day-care provider received the Diploma in Childcare, but it is striking that four of those who took this training course had first worked in more technical professions. In this group of co-workers from day-care centres, there is no consensus on the question of whether or not the training course was gender neutral. Three members of the group were extremely annoyed because they felt that the course was oriented, in the extreme, towards women; the others had a more balanced view of the course.

Finding Work

The men who work in out-of-school care were able to find work quickly, after their completion of the course, through the Initiative for Out-of-school Care, thanks to the arbitration of the VDAB (Flemish Department of Employment). It was somewhat more difficult for the men who wanted to start working with under threes in day-care centres or nurseries.

How Many Hours do they Work per Week?

A large number of the interviewed men in out-of-school care work full time - seven of the twenty-two - while there are practically no fulltime positions available in this sector. Moreover, the number of men working in after-school care who combine this with training courses in continuing education is large: seven are already taking such a course and five intend to start soon. The remaining men take on odd jobs. Some of them work in sectors that have something to do with children; others work in completely different areas.

During the meeting, several of the men commented that more fulltime positions could be created for men in after-school care by involving them in the kindergarten during the day.

It is, in particular, those who work part-time who find the low salaries a problem. For the fifty per cent of the men who still live with their parents, this is less of a problem, although this group is afraid that the salary will not be sufficient when they have to

support themselves. Some of them feel that the part-time work is a problem, others find it an advantage because it gives them more time to do odd jobs, study or take care of their own children. Another problem for the part-timers is the scheduling of working hours that makes it difficult to combine with another part-time job.

In the care of under-threes, there are more full-time jobs available and it is, therefore, not surprising that all but one of the interviewed male family day-care provider and co-workers at day-care centres work full-time.

General Reactions to Interviewees Employment Choices

From a British study (Cameron *et al.*, 1999), it appears that men who choose to work in day-care experience resistance from their family and friends. The interviewed men in Flanders who work in after-school care refute this. Most agreed that friends and families were initially surprised but supportive. One male family day-care provider says that the reactions have been neutral and one colleague has had negative reactions from his father.

Acceptance by Female Colleagues

There are only three centres for out-of-school care in Flanders with more than 1 male childcare worker. The men who work in these centres find this a very positive experience. In contrast to what foreign studies have reported, the Flemish male childcare workers in out-of-school childcare claim that they have been warmly received by their female colleagues. The only thing that some of the men appear to miss is being able to chat with other men about typically 'masculine' subjects, such as football. As far as the day-care centres are concerned, three of the childcare workers claim that acceptance from their female colleagues has been difficult. The others are satisfied, but there has not been the enthusiastic acceptance in this group that has been seen among their colleagues in out-of-school care.

How do Parents React to Men in Day-care?

From the in-depth interviews, it appears that the majority of the parents reacted enthusiastically to the recruitment of a male childcare worker. The others had some reservations at first but later also appeared to react positively. For parents from ethnic minorities, the arrival of a male childcare worker appears to be a bit stranger and they needed more time to get used to the man. During the workshop, we heard some statements that were less positive. Some of the men who worked with young children told us that the parents were distrustful, at first. In this vein, one mother doubted whether or not a certified male child-carer was able to take the temperature of her sick child. Another man who worked with children from ethnic minorities said that he had made a conscious decision to work with the oldest group (nine to twelve-years-old) because these parents thought it was very strange that a man would care for young children.

It is often said that recruiting male childcare workers would improve contact with fathers. This has not been confirmed by the interviews. In the out-of-school care sector, according to most of those interviewed, it is primarily the mothers who bring and fetch the children. The fact that there is also a man working in the centre hardly changes this at all. In none of the centres did the male colleagues set up activities that were specifically geared towards the fathers.

With one exception, the interviewed men had not come across any prejudices regarding sexual abuse, but twenty per cent of them said that they were certainly careful or reserved with the children. According to those interviewed, this difficult subject would be discussible if there were ever any problems but, for the moment in any case, it is not a topic within the team.

Is a Network Necessary?

In answer to the question of whether or not a network for men in childcare is necessary, slightly less than half of the men said that this would be a positive development. As far as the other half is concerned, this is not really necessary; they fear that it would set them apart even more if they were to meet separately. Only six men in this group feel that a network of male childcare workers would be advisable for mentoring young male interns or newly-hired childcare workers.

Job Satisfaction and Dreams for the Future

Of the twenty-four men questioned who work in out-of-school care, there were only four who said that the job did not meet their expectations; they admitted being on the lookout for another job. The other twenty were extremely enthusiastic about their job. In comparison to their previous jobs, they were very happy doing this work.

It is striking that most of the childcare workers who work in day-care centres are satisfied with their salaries. The salary increases – by approximately thirty per cent - that have been promised by the Flemish Minister of Welfare have brought the salaries of the childcare workers up to the level of other technical vocations. The male family day-care providers, on the other hand, are extremely dissatisfied; the new statute concerning care families is not sufficient to guarantee the men financial security.

The Campaign Increased the Number of Male Students from 6.5% to nearly 20%

Recent figures from the VDAB (Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency) (Loomans, in Peeters 2003a) demonstrate that this campaign has certainly had an effect on the number of men starting a course in out-of-school childcare. Before the campaign started, there were eight men (6.45%) among the 124 students. Since February, this number has doubled (twenty-five men of the 183 students; 13.66%).

However, if we examine the figures more closely, we can ascertain that the effect of the campaign has only been felt since April. Before March, there was no effect at all: six (or 6.89%) of the eighty-seven students were men. Starting in April, however, we see a rise that is rather considerable: nineteen of the ninety-six students are men (19.79%), or nearly one in five. This result is fairly spectacular. In Denmark, for example, after years of campaigning to increase the number of men in training courses, the number of male students is lower than this: 17.5% (Jensen, 1998). At the end of 2003, eleven of those nineteen students had found a job in an out-of-school centre. Another five men have since found a job in this sector and in total the number of men working in the out-of-school centres has increased from thirty-five to fifty-one (an increase of 68%). In November 2003, 5.62% of all out-of-school workers are male (in July 2002 it was 3.87%). In contrast, in the day care centres (birth to three), we still see no increase in the number of male workers. There is also no effect in the students that take the 'Childcare course' in secondary schools. It seems to be very difficult to motivate male adolescents (who are developing their identity) to choose training that is, in their view, typically female.

What's next?

Apart from Flanders, there are some inspiring 'men in childcare' models from other European countries, such as the Sheffield Children's Centre in the UK, Acidules et Croques, in Paris and '*Menn I barnehager*', in Norway. There have also been some media-led initiatives in the Netherlands. On the 28th of November, 2003, in the historic Belfry in Ghent and on the 8th of December in the Town hall of Edinburgh, an international double conference was held as an interim conclusion to our project. It brought together speakers from all over Europe to discuss men in childcare projects.

In the final phase of the Flanders project we published a handbook for managers in the day-care sector which was distributed to all day care facilities by the governmental organisation, Child and Family. A number of useful tips are provided in this brochure about how to develop a gender-friendly personnel policy.

The project has finished, but as a result of the conference new plans have been made by different partners from the 'Men in Childcare' project in Flanders. In November we will start a new project on paternal involvement in the city of Ghent, supported by the BvLF. The number of male childcare workers from ethnic minorities is still very limited and needs to increase and we will focus on ways to achieve this.

It is obvious, that as in most European countries, we still have a long way to go. We are aware that it will take a great deal of time to achieve a noticeable change in one of the most gender-imbalanced professions in the world. However, in Flanders, we have used this project to put the theme 'men and childcare' on the agenda and hope that, through

this project and the campaign, an impetus can be given to allow men to play an equal role in the raising of young children, as fathers and as professional care givers.

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For more information:

www.vbjk.be

www.meninchildcare.com

<http://www.kindengezin.be/KG/>