Koch, Bernhard (2013).

**Professionalization in ECEC and the persistence of gender segregation**  
Presentation on the 23rd EECERA annual conference, 29.8.2013, Tallinn/Estonia

**Abstract**

The research is based on a project funded by the Austrian Science Foundation (2012 – 2015) about strategies to increase the number of men in ECEC. It focuses on the links of gender and professionalism and analyzes attitudes and professional images connected to the aim of increasing the number of men working in ECE. The study builds up on recent research projects on men in Austrian kindergartens as well as on projects on "more men in ECE" in several European countries. The conceptual framework is based on a concept of two sexes and a large variety of masculinity and femininity (gender roles).

The methodical approach is both quantitative and qualitative. 50 teachers and 50 students responded to a questionnaire about men and women in childcare. Moreover, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Attitudes and behaviour of teachers in vocational training institutions regarding professionalism will be measured at the beginning and at the end of the project. The ethical principles include (according to the British educational research association) the categories harm, autonomy, privacy, reciprocity, equity.

First analyses show that the vocational training institutions reflect their “gendered identity” and plan measures to increase the proportion of men. There is a welcoming atmosphere for men and many men are in general interested in child care work. Nevertheless female norms of caring and education (“air of care”) still dominate the field. The preliminary findings will help to put the issue of “gender balance and professionalism” on the political agenda in Austrians ECEC system.

**Keywords**  
men, women, gender, professionalism, childcare workers

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Professionalisation in ECEC and the persistance of sex segregation

Bernhard Koch, Innsbruck University, Austria

Professionalisation in ECEC and the persistance of sex segregation

ECEC in Austria: Background

• profession associated with „caring & playing“ rather than „education“
• vocational training: secondary school level
• expansion (child care centres for children under 3, number of coworkers …)
• Staff: 60% full qualified
Professionalisation (some interpretations)

- Unique body of knowledge
- Selected entry into the field
- Higher level of quality in the work with children
- University level of training (academic)
- Higher recognition (salary...)

Sex segregation

- Gender and sex?
- Proportion of men: 1%
- Proportion of men in training institutions: 3%
- Work is seen as „women's work“
Research on gender (& sex):
more research on „mothers“ than on „fathers“, proportion of male researchers in gender studies < 5%

gender policy on career choice in Austria:
several programmes for girls (Girls Day, FIT, MUT) less for boys (Boys Day) e.f. legal frame für equality: „women will be preferred employed“ - in child care centres too?

Education Policy
worse educational achievement for young men (less men reach general qualification for university entrance: minus 7000/year);
discussions about the „acceptance test“ for medicine („is not gender neutral“), no discussion about acceptance test for educational training for child care work

Tradition: Screening test in vocational training:

Singing high not throwing high

Is the screening test actually gender-neutral? (or sex-neutral)?
„We try for it“ (director of a training institution)
Action research: „Strategies to increase the proportion of male child care workers“ (2012-2015)*

Project objectives:

1. Developing an intervention programme to increase male representation in pre-school education together with the stakeholders of a region (Tyrol)

2. Accompanying analysis of political, administrative and ‘interpersonal’ negotiations; analysis of resistance and factors of success

3. Evaluating empirically how the intervention programme affects attitudes, career choice and proportion of men in training and practical work

* Financed by the FWF - Austrian Science Foundation

Overview of qualitative and quantitative interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Groups</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Questionnaire (persons involved)</th>
<th>Group discussion</th>
<th>Interview (case study)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 young men and women prior to their career choice</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Male job seekers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Coworker in training institutions</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Managers of child care centers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Female child care workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Policy maker team</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research diary
Some findings

**Gender Policy:**

- "There are not yet so many men in parental leave as I desire."
- "There are not yet so many women in full-time work as I desire."

**Assumption:**

We get accustomed to that gender politics are made by women. Most (and the most powerful) men are not interested.
Example (huge announcement in the local newspaper, April 2013)

"Labour agency sponsors women in technical professions"

"We are not yet at the point to do such a support for males..." (expert in an interview)

What do you think can hinder the success of the project?

- Lack of interest of males for child care
- Lack of time for working for the project
- Female hegemony in the system of child care
- Lack of male-oriented gender politics
- Total support in the system of child care
- Lack of support from the government

Stakeholder group, N=19
The project shows some evidence for female hegemony in ECEC

- „A problem could be that the child care centres and the female workforce are mentally not able to accept male child care workers at eye level; the strong player in the field are women …“ (gender expert)
- „(in our institution) there is not really a discussion about the necessity of such activities…..“ (gender-expert of the school authority)

We asked 600 managers of childcare centres to work with us (to promote men in the sector), only 7% responded (previous, comparable research: 40% responded)

Some male job seekers report that they have problems to find a job (despite the fact that there is a need for co-workers and despite the political correct “men welcomed”)

Questionnaire: directors of child care centres (N=16) (agree, total agree):

Should there be more male child care workers? 100%
Have you thought about measure to get more men into the team? 66%
Have some coworkers mental reservations against male coworkers? 25%
Should there be more further trainings with the issue „mixed teams“? 80%

(Further training is planned for December, one was canceled because of less interest)
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**elementar**

**men in early childhood education and care**

**Questionnaire: male students in ECEC (N=35)**

- 33% say, for increasing the proportion of men, there must be measures directed to men,
- 75% say, that there must be measures directed to the vocational training institutions and to the workplace.
  “work with children is wonderful, but many institutions destroy this pleasure” (male student, 18 years)
- Their desired child care centre is described with terms such as „open“, „free“, „garden/nature/forest“, movement, „toleranz“
- Only half of the male students promote the occupation in his circle of acquaintances

**Questionnaire: teachers in vocational training institutions (N=28)**

- 78% say, for increasing the proportion of men, there must be measures directed to men, and 75% say, that there must be measures directed to the vocational training institutions and to the workplace.
- 70% say that in the vocational training and the workplace is dominated by female educational norms, which can be difficult for male students.
Results from the previous study:
Why do young men who are generally interested in a child care occupation, *do not* decide for the job at the end?

**Questionnaire: boys prior to their career decision**
(N=70)

- Attitudes before and after a *male child care worker* present his job (group of male pupils, lasting one hour)
  - „This is only a job for women“
    - Before the intervention: 50%
    - After the intervention: less than 10%
  - Scepticism against male child care workers („homosexual“, „no real men“…)
    - Before the intervention: 25%
    - After the intervention: 10% („Who’s interested shall do it“: 90%)
Case Study: The network works......

Some activities (planned and/or realised)

- Hotline und first information
- Network of partner – childcare centres (35 out of 597; 7%)
- Network of male professionals
- Further training for „mixed teams“
- Financial support of announcements in newspapers,
- Media presentations at meetings of employers (mayors),
  change of buildings/gardens,
- Change of job advertisements (men are especially invited…)
- Higher salary
- Presentations and discussions with teachers of vocational training institutions
- Media campaigns
- Job orientation
- Courses only for men
Bernhard Koch - EECERA 2013, Tallinn

Challenges in the communication with men:

- ECEC profession do not attract job seekers with high salary and high image (as many - not all - male dominated jobs)
- Activities have to be directed against the powerful trend of „feminisation of (paid) educational work”
- Lack of „brain power” and institutional resources (compared with female-specific activities in the last century)
- On the other hand: strong support from parents and the public
Breaking up the persistence of sex segregation

1. Establishing of a network (“Children need men too”)
2. Male connoted images
3. Exposition of the benefits for the female workforce and the companies/employers (gatekeeper)
4. Winning the (female) managers
5. Reacting “revolving doors”: Increase of the number of men, who remain in employment (Child care centres with men are attractive for men - example: “Seifenblase”: 6 out of 14 are males........)

Change of images
Measures in general:

- Increase of salary and status
- Positioning ECEC as a professional institution
- Campaign about the significance of men for children
- Further increase of governmental investment into the ECEC-system
- Different entrances into the profession
- Measures and special trainings for male job seeker
- More male orientated programmes in schools ("disarming the opponents")
- More "modern" child care centres (reggio-oriented, outdoor-preschools, "open" concepts)

First conclusions:

1. Expanding the ECEC sector is mainly discussed without sex/gender issue.
2. High proportion of young men who are generally interested.
3. Some hints for female hegemony in ECEC.
4. Lack of a "pressure group" ("there is no decision maker, for whom it is important" (political expert).
5. For decades many female decision maker in the region were accompanied by the women’s movement, there seems to be some scepticism against the aim of the project.
Some questions

What does professionalisation mean, if the sector continue the concept of „maternal care“ and selected entry into the field is strongly based on sex?

What effect has the entrance of men (differences between men and women in biography, body, educational norms…) for the „unique body of knowledge“?

Assertion: Professionalisation in ECEC can be put forward through increasing the proportion of men, because of

• men’s focus on job-identity (status, salary)
• relativising „mothering work“ via adding „fathering work“
• a mayor variety of bodies, experiences, biographies, interests, communication styles …(quality of work)

.....thank you for your attention
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men in early childhood education and care

Strategies
to Increase the Proportion of Male Child Care Workers (2012 – 2015)
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