What do we know about male early childhood teachers and their professional responsibilities? Perspectives from China.

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Proportion of men in the EC workforce:

• In general, in many countries = <10% (1-4% in most western countries)

• Denmark & Spain: 8%-highest (Jensen, 1996; Sumsion, 2005);
• U.S: 2.3% of staff who work in pre-schools and kindergartens are men (MENTEACH, 2012)
• UK: 2% of staff working with the under 5s are men (Children’s Workforce Development Council, 2011)
• China: men comprise only 2% of preschool teachers (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2012).
From the literature review

Considerable debate on whether or not to attract more men to the ECE profession

For ♂:
• Children's developmental needs, sense of identity and gender construction (Craig, 2004; Tsigra, 2010).
  • Children lack a masculine 'role model' that is aligned typically with the child’s father (Jensen, 1996; Craig, 2004; Rentzou and Ziganitidou, 2009; Tsigra, 2010).

Against ♂:
• Children may encounter various gender identities at home, in their families (extended families) and in the community (Heward, 2000).
For ②:
  • Role models for boys  (Craig, 2004; Peeters, 2007; Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill, 2012).

Against ②:
  • No precise description of what an appropriate male role model is; the boundaries between masculinities and femininities are ambiguous  (Frosh et al, 2001; Robb, 2001).

  • Men may behave as other female teachers do, in order to make themselves fit the environment  (King, 2004).
Against 3:

- Confirming hierarchical views towards men and women (Sumsion, 2000).

- Female teachers' educational contribution is denigrated (Ashley, 2003).

- 'Glass escalator effect' (William, 1999), which confirms 'the ultimate domination of high status occupations and positions in society by males' (Ashley, 2003, p.265).
Research gaps


* Despite the policies that many countries (such as New Zealand, Denmark, Norway and Britain) have launched in recent years to attract more men into ECE (Mills et al, 2004; Peeters, 2007), the relative gains in attracting more men into the profession have been limited.

* The voices of women EC teachers about men in ECE have not been sufficiently heard.

* No studies about Men working with children birth to 3 years
Research objectives

• To bring new forms of evidence and insights to well-rehearsed debates about men in ECE

• To examine these debates in a previously un-researched context
ECE in China

- Public kindergartens (2-5)
- Private kindergartens (2-5)
- Early Childhood Centers (0-5/6)

- Not compulsory
- Not free
Political context

Calling on men to work in EC settings is seen as a way of increasing ECE quality and is among the catchphrases or slogans being used by the Chinese government.

* No nation-wide policies to date

* Regional policies in some developed provinces:
  --- **Jiangsu Province:** Boys could enjoy free higher education if he chooses to study early childhood education in university.
  --- **Zhejiang Province:** A goal to achieve 5% of male early childhood teachers has been set.

* What happens to male teachers in the rest parts of the country?
* Whether a political call should be made to encourage male participation in early childhood education in other cities or even nation-wide?
Theoretical framework

* Social constructionist theoretical approach
  (Skelton & Francis, 2003)

Research questions

* What are the professional values and beliefs underpinning the work of ECTs working in China today?

* What do ECTs in China understand about their professional knowledge and skills, personal qualities and workforce responsibilities?

* How do ECTs in China today perceive the employment of men as ECTs in their country?
Method & Participants

Method

• Recruitment --- 'Snowball' sampling

• Data collection
  --- Semi-structured online interviews
  --- Online questionnaires

Participants

8 men and 8 women (n=16) from 3 regions in China, namely Beijing, Tianjin, Taiyuan

See Table 1 for participants' information
Beijing: China’s capital city
Tianjin: One of the municipalities
Taiyuan: Capital city of Shanxi Province

Economic level: Beijing>Tianjin>Taiyuan
Key themes

--- Professional values and beliefs

--- Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities

--- Workforce responsibilities

--- Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs
Professional values and beliefs

--- Motivations to choose a career as an ECT
* Love for children/education;
* ECE majored;
* 3 men (out of 8) has referred to their gender as an advantage in getting a position in the ECE job market.

--- Future professional plans
* Willing to remain working in ECE;
* Both male and female teachers showed their ambitions in moving up to managerial or research positions, such as being an ECT trainer or a director.
* Only one male and one female teacher said that they won’t be working in this field any more
Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities

--- **Strengths and talents**

* 5 men (out of 8) stated in particular that their gender is a merit, being a role model or being popular among parents;

* 6 women (out of 8) teachers regarded their kindness and patience as advantages, meanwhile only one male teacher who worked in a private EC center in Beijing said he is as kind and patient as female teachers.
Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities

--- Interactions with colleagues

* One female teacher from Beijing said it’s easier to work with men teachers because women are more judgemental.

* One male teacher from Taiyuan City, being the only male in his workplace, thought that there seems to be a distance between him and his female colleagues, which makes him feel uncomfortable and lonely.

* Two other men, both working in EC centers, each described a type of gender division of labor during their interactions.
Professional knowledge, skills and personal qualities

--- Gender differences in teaching

* The most remarkable differences (indicated by 5 men and 4 women) lies in their teaching styles, with male teachers adopting a more flexible and open style whilst female teachers employing a more reserved and disciplined one.

· Female teachers are meticulous, are patient and kind with kids. But even male teachers in good temper may sometimes lose their temper when interacting with children. [...] Men are born to play, hence my dream is to be a 'child king', and play with children. Through playing, I can improve my relationship with children, and make them grow up happily. (Male, Tianjin)

· For those female teachers I have seen, they may be quite reserved and stick to the policy. (Female, Beijing)
Teaching methods of female teachers are exhaustive, attentively careful and more traditional. While male teachers normally use flexible teaching methods, generous but appropriate. (Male, Tianjin)

They [Male ECTs] are more daring to let children take risks and try new things. Male ECTs are open-minded. (Female, Tianjin)

*In addition to the distinctive teaching styles, male and female ECTs also demonstrated a range of different personal qualities/characteristics according to the majority of the participants.

--- Qualities such as being meticulous, patient, gentle, rigorous, and kind are more often attached to female ECTs;
--- Male ECTs are more likely to be rough, physical, ‘playful’, lively and/or passionate.
* Other less frequent but interesting differences:

- Female teachers often give children roles like bunny and cats, while male teacher usually ask them to play soldiers, cops, guardians, etc. (Female, Taiyuan)

- Female teachers normally teach children to be quite in daily life and teaching. As a result, some boys are gradually becoming too shy. Whilst male teachers teach kids more about perseverance and hard-working. Boys may also be brighter when taught by men. (Male, Tianjin)

- Maybe some male teachers may have more patterns. There are some physical things that women teachers cannot do, including lifting children high. Women teachers are more intimate to children, with less big movements. (Female, Taiyuan)

- Most female teachers regard themselves as conductors in the teaching process, while males are more likely to perform themselves as children’s peers. (Male, Tianjin)

- I treat kids as equal, and not regarding myself as a teacher. To children, I am an elder brother who plays games with them. (Male, Beijing)
Workforce responsibilities

* Men and women ECTs are recruited to undertake more or less the same responsibilities.

* 2 men and 3 women think that there is some work that men should not be doing, particularly working as teachers with children from birth to two years age.

* One female teacher, as the director of a public kindergarten in Tianjin City, described some roles that are more suitable for men, and provided relevant explanations:
D: They[Men] are more suitable for teaching elder children (4-6 yrs old), participating in school management and research, and taking their advantages in areas such as bilingual education, physical education, and arts education, areas that require creativity and motivate strong will.

R: Could you please explain the reasons?

D: Well. When teaching younger children, there involves more caring work which male teachers are weak. For example, when kids piss, how could a male teacher respond to that? Not that they cannot do that, but lack experience. But in order to cultivate children’s qualities like hard-working and tolerance, male teachers’ masculinities are needed to be modeled from, to encourage children. Men and women are essentially different, and it is necessary to take advantages of each group’s merits in the workplace.
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs

--- Male ECTs’ perceptions

* All 8 male participants were positive about the differences that men can make to ECE and to children’s development, such as providing boys with male role models.

* Except for the one male teacher who has already quit his job as an ECT, all the other male ECTs said that they would recommend teaching in ECE to other men (actually some of them have already done so). They also thought that there will be more boys working in ECE in the future.
• From my point of view, ECE is a profession sustained by women, while men are responsible for moderating in this field. Calling for an increase of male participation is not indicating that males are more suitable for this area than women, but is recognizing particular influences that men could have on ECE. Such influences are reflected in both child development and gender balance. Further, in term of numbers, the ratio of men and women in kindergartens should be scientific, with women outnumbering men. (Male, Taiyuan)

• As a male ECT, I would like each kindergarten to have male ECTs so that children could learn to be strong from male teachers and boys could learn to be men. Having been working in this job for one year, I see lots boys who are attached to their mothers and are less masculine. I want boys to be responsible and man since childhood. (Male, Tianjin)
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs ②
--- Female ECTs’ perceptions

* All overwhelmingly supportive:

"I am supportive of having men who are interested in ECE and love children to participate in ECE. Male participation could balance the gender ratio in ECE, moderate the environments; it could also help with the construction of children’s masculinities, enrich teaching styles". (Female, Tianjin)
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs

--- Children’s responses as reflected by ECTs

* 7 male ECTs, together with half of the female ECTs, found that children treat teachers of different gender differently.

* One male and two female teachers suggested that teachers’ gender was not salient in the eyes of children below 3 years old, whilst older children may start to recognize the differences between the genders.

* Two female ECTs, absolutely denied the possibility of children treating teachers differently because of their gender.
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs

--- *Parents’ responses as reflected by ECTs*

* All ECTs except one either agreed or completely agreed that parents have different expectations of male teachers.

* Parents often prefer classes by male teachers to those by female teachers.

* Parents normally were less rigorous and were more considerate and tolerant with male teachers than with female teachers.

* Parents were sometimes worried about male teachers’ inability to care for children.
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs

--- Public perceptions as reflected by ECTs

* 4 participants, all female, thought male ECTs have high social status and their impacts are valued.

The majority of male teachers (5 out of 8) considered their social status to be moderate.

3 male and 4 female ECTs, in contrast, claimed that male ECTs have low or poor status.

* Some negative comments about male ECTs included being abnormal or ‘girly’/feminized or being dangerous.

* The society lacks an understanding of ECE, assuming it is only about caring, and about education. Meanwhile in Chinese tradition, caring for children is regarded as ‘women’s job’. In such cases, ECE as a profession is largely considered to be weak and men who work as ECTs are especially discriminated.
• To say in this way, if a child says that ‘my father is an ECT’, he may feel ‘humiliated’. In this country, ECE is generally regarded as unpromising and financially disadvantaged, as ‘women’s job’. Male ECTs may be considered to be ‘girly’ or something like that. (Female, Beijing)

• Affected by traditional views, people currently have misunderstanding for EC workers. They think EC workers are ‘aunts’ who care for children, and even those who only attend secondary school are competent. If a girl works in a kindergarten after graduation from university, most people would be surprised, even feel sorry for you, doubt your competence and abilities. Not to mention boys. What is more, male ECTs are usually described as unambitious, unpromising and incapable. (Female, Taiyuan)

• A parent would very much like his son to be taught by a male teacher in kindergartens, but when the son grows up and are choosing his own career, the parent would never allow him to be an ECT because he/she thinks it’s shameful, it’s unpromising. (Female, Tianjin)
Perceptions on the employment of men as ECTs

--- Reasons for male under-representation in ECE in China and corresponding solutions

* Reasons

* Low social status accompanied with low salaries;
* Lack of understanding about ECE, just caring, no education;
* Traditional views that men are bread winners, that ECE is a ‘women’s job’;
* Lack of professional development space/platform.

* Solutions

* Community education to change traditional views about men's involvement in ECE (which requires long-term endeavors);
* Promote the real value of ECE;
* Increase ECTs’ salaries;
* Provide male ECTs with access to appropriate professional development and support;
* Support men to choose ECE as a career by supporting their university studies, with financial incentives (e.g. scholarships);
* Joint efforts by the government and other social groups.
Reflections

∗ The circumstances of male ECTs in China are quite similar to those in Western countries in relation to low salaries and low status;

∗ Overwhelmingly all participants agreed that male and female ECTs have different working styles with children, and this was based on their gender;

∗ Participants in studies from Western countries were more critical of the possible gender differences between how male and female ECTs work with children. Instead, they take into account of other factors such as personal qualities, academic qualifications, and experience.
A tension between dreams and realities

- Love of Children (dangerous)
- Working as an ECT (education)
* Professional qualifications and continuing development

----- urgent

Can the professionalisation of the ECE sector raise its social status and salaries?
Recommendations for policy

* Policies could be made to encourage men to work as ECTs, but meanwhile female ECTs' interests should not be disregarded.

* An established framework for ECTs' professional development is necessary.
Recommendations for further research

* Voices of a mix of stakeholders including male & female ECTs, parents, children, and other EC professionals;

* Cross-cultural studies, preferrably between Western and non-Western countries

* If male and female ECTs work differently with children, what is the long-term impact?
References


• Chan, A. (2011) Feminising and Masculinising Primary Teaching: A critical examination of the interpretive frameworks of male primary school principles in Hong Kong, Gender and Education, 23:6, 745-759.


Questions/Discussions
The end

Thank you!

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