

# connexions

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Gaining a better understanding of

# men

IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In a profession dominated by women, Ron Blatz believes gender balance in early childhood education is good for children.

“This is about what children need and I think children need both (genders),” said Blatz, executive director of the Discovery Children’s Centre in Winnipeg, MB.

Blatz was a keynote speaker last November at the College of Early Childhood Educators’ Men in ECE roundtable. He is also a member of the World Forum Foundation group, Men in Early Care and Education.

The roundtable discussion brought together 13 male registered early childhood educators (RECEs) from throughout Ontario to discuss their working experiences in a female-dominated profession. More than 900 members of the College have

identified themselves as male, which represents about two per cent of RECEs in Ontario. The College hosted this roundtable discussion as part of its strategic priority to develop a deeper understanding of the diversity of its membership.

Blatz said that male involvement in early childhood education benefits children by providing positive role models, adding another dimension to play and teaching children to value gender diversity. Participants in the roundtable discussion learned about creating a positive touch policy to replace increasingly popular “no touch” policies. Blatz also spoke about the importance of boisterous, vigorous and very physical play that men may engage in easily.

Michael Agam was one of the male RECEs who attended the roundtable.

Agam works at PLASP Child Care Services as a relief resource to replace other RECEs at any of PLASP’s 22 locations. He graduated from Sheridan College in 2013 after a friend recommended the profession to him.

“I enjoy the nature of child care centres – working with children,





Text: Sharon Ho  
 Photography: Giuliana Tarini  
 Photos Left page: Top-  
 Participants in the  
 Men in ECE roundtable,  
 Bottom-Ron Blatz  
 Right page: Michael Agam

**“Getting men involved in early childhood education is not an easy sell, it takes constant work and constant conversation.”**

- Ron Blatz

supporting them, growing with them and watching them learn,” said Agam.

Although he doesn’t work with any other men, Agam has always felt supported as a male RECE.

“I’ve always had good relationships with the parents and staff,” said Agam. “As a male in the profession, I don’t have another male ECE to go to. But I’ve always felt comfortable going to my peers.”

After the roundtable discussion, Agam felt strongly that male RECEs need to advocate for men in the profession and for gender diversity in general.

“We’re not here to be completely different, but to show men and women working in harmony and to have that diversity in the room,” said Agam.

Participants in the roundtable also discussed ways of getting more men to join the profession. Suggestions included the following:

- Encouragement from high school guidance counsellors.
- Supporting men in female-dominated postsecondary classrooms.
- Making men feel welcome in the workplace.

Blatz believes that women in the profession have a leadership role to play by championing these ideas and supporting their male colleagues in building communities of practice and creating welcoming environments for men and fathers.

In Winnipeg, the Discovery Children’s Centre employs 14 male early childhood

educators. Blatz helped create a support group, Men in Early Childhood Education, which believes males will work as ECEs longer if they are connected to other men in the profession. In order to encourage men to practise the profession, the group has challenged employers to simply commit to interviewing at least one male for every opening.

“Getting men involved in early childhood education is not an easy sell,” said Blatz. “It takes constant work and constant conversation.” ■

*As part of one of its strategic priorities, the College is undertaking several initiatives to learn about different aspects of the diversity of its membership. We are looking for members who want to work with us on these initiatives and who may be willing to share their professional experiences.*

*This summer the College will be seeking expressions of interest from members. Watch for a College e-blast and your chance to get involved.*

For more information e-mail [diversity@college-ecce.ca](mailto:diversity@college-ecce.ca).