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Why are there still so few men within Early Years in primary schools: views from male trainee teachers and male leaders?

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One of the challenges facing the Early Years (EY) sector is how to encourage more male practitioners to counterbalance a largely feminised workforce. Using case studies of male trainees at different stages of their primary undergraduate Initial Teacher Training course at one university, we attempt to consider data why there is under-representation of men within the leadership strata in EY settings. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with the male sample groups and male leaders in primary schools to gain an overview regarding gender stereotyping. Our findings suggest that male trainees enjoy working in the EY sector, but they need mentoring by strong leaders to help them overcome the perceived contextual barriers of male stereotypes in that setting. In conclusion, we consider some of these barriers of stereotypes, attitudes, values, beliefs existing and the actions needed in addressing such stereotypes if a long-lasting change is to happen.

Keywords: Early Years; ITT; male; attitudes; stereotyping

Introduction

The Early Years (EY) sector in England plays a pivotal role in providing quality care and provision for children aged 0–5 years (Randall 2000; Lloyd 2008). This supports the 10-year childcare strategy in England setting out the Government's vision of childcare to 'ensure that every child gets the best start in life and to give parents more choice about how to balance work and family life' (Daycare Trust 2008, online). The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE 2012a) curriculum currently consists of seven areas of learning and it became statutory from September 2012 for all EY government-registered settings. Moss (2006) has identified a push by the Government into raising the quality and status of EY practice and provision, which is also supported by the Nutbrown review (DfE 2012b), emphasising the importance of having a highly qualified EY workforce. However, a challenge for the EY sector is how to encourage more male practitioners to balance the largely feminised workforce (Miller and Cable 2011).

Over time, primary schools seem to have become organisations that have established what Connell (2002, 53) has termed a 'gender regime', which maintains existing gender norms. In such primary schools, for example, it is more likely that everyday practices may operate to reinforce the dominant construction of EY teaching as more suitable and natural for females than for males. Male practitioners in the EY setting are perceived to be seen to be highly conspicuous and may be subjected to considerable suspicion

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(Smedley 2007). This highly gendered perception can cause problems for male practitioners wanting to work in the EY sector. There is also this rather unhelpful message from the media for the involvement of more males to compensate for the occupational gender imbalance of EY. There is a common perception that males who choose to work with young children are often assumed to be ‘either homosexuals, pedophiles or principals in training’ (King 1998, 3, reported in Sumsion 2000, 130). Such perceptions need to be challenged through research evidence using a much larger sample than what has been used in our study and also to conduct research to assess how these perceptions and myths arise within society using sociological, power dynamics and collective identity theories. The next section considers some of the literature based on theorising gender and education.

Literature

The mainstream theories on gender and education and critical management studies appear to focus their attention on power, discourse and deconstruction, so the scholarship on gender tends to be dispersed (Powell, Butterfield, and Parent 2002). There are studies reporting on several gendered processes such as valuing men’s work over women’s (Grimshaw and Rubery 2007), gendered division of labour in management (Legge 1987) and gendered division of authority in management (Marshall 1991) where organisations are dominated by masculine values and behaviour (Hopkins 2000; Kimmel 2004). So, what we see are gendered processes and their interrelations as often being paradoxical and open to multiple interpretations. In the context of our study, the challenge is to synthesise and analyse how such gendered processes influence and shape organisational setup. Schools are part of society and we need to consider the benefit of a balanced workforce that male and female have in education, rather than viewing gender in a dualist way of sex/gender role models (Connell 1987). In reviewing the literature on gender in education and looking at how feminist theorisation can offer new understanding to the debate about EY, role models and stereotyping, we note some very detailed abstractions based on socio-biological to equality issues, but many fail to deal with the gender-blind nature of much organisational/management theory.

There are many research papers charting the challenges of progress of women leadership and management (Shakeshaft 1989; Blackmore 2006), but less so on the reflections of male practitioners in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) sector regarding EY. This paper looks at the progress made in understanding the experiences of male trainees in one higher education institution (HEI) in England. We analyse some of the key themes of gender and EY, identity and the notion of ‘otherness’ and conclude with ideas of action as a way forward.

Gender and EY

Within the context of EY in primary schools and in wider society, the major discourse that more male practitioners are needed has a significant impact and is accepted as common sense. Yet there appears to be no clear explanation of why this should be so. The issue of gender and ethnicity in education appears to alert in people signs of ‘silence, blindness and fear’ (Rusch 2004, 19). The gender imbalance in the EY setting is stark, with EY workforce being some ‘99% despite policy shifts in favour of men working in this setting’ (Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill 2011, 119). The debate that females are more caring, sensitive and creative (Browne 2008) than males has moved on, but as noted earlier, society still views males in the EY/primary school settings as suspicious, thus deterring some

males from entering the profession. The numbers of males applying for ITT courses are very low in comparison with those of females, despite many positive initiatives by HEIs promoting such career pathways such as taster courses for males in primary schools. The low status of the profession and the perceived notion of a secondary wage earner (Cushman 2005) compound the entry of males into EY settings.

There are contrasting views of males versus females as professionals in the EY sector. A number of authors advance the male model rhetoric (Cook 2006; Mills, Hasse, and Charlot 2008) suggesting that males make as good role models as females, arguing that they can better meet the educational needs of boys who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Odih (2002) advocated that men in the EY setting, in particular, seem to complement the ‘soft pedagogical practices of women’ (Odih 2002, 91, cited in Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill 2011, 124). Such envisioning of male masculinity (Connell 1995) thesis needs to be tested out through longitudinal research.

There are a number of studies that challenge the male role model theory (Bricheno and Thornton 2002; Sabbe and Aelterman 2007) where boys’ educational attainment is thought to make a difference by having male practitioners, with one study suggesting that boys’ attitudes towards learning may be more positive when they are taught by female practitioners. But it appears that some of the research evidence on role model argument may be highly contested, with some research considering that the knowledge and pedagogical and interpersonal skills are more important in engaging children as learners, regardless of gender (Carrington et al. 2007). This poses a challenge for recruitment and leaders to think and lead differently. To that end, Lumby and Coleman (2007, 7) suggest that ‘the act of leadership may need to metamorphose’, by suggesting that the skills and techniques that might have worked in some settings may not be as effective or appropriate in different contexts such as EY. The notion of collective identity is explored next.

Collective ‘identity’

The concept of a collective identity refers to a set of individuals’ sense of belonging to the group or collective. Males and females in the educational sector are considered as professionals, but to be viewed as a professional, in the context of teaching assistants, for example, they would need to ‘build a credible identity within their organisations and local communities’ (Lowe 2008, 17). We would contend that males’ professional identity and perceptions of their status are influenced by their treatment within the organisation. Wenger (1998, 6) suggests that people belong to a number of ‘communities of practice’ in their lifetimes and it is partly these that influence how they shape their identities. A community of practice denotes that the members have a shared field of interest and that they interact and learn through that interaction whether consciously or unconsciously. The implication is that the community creates a ‘shared repertoire’ of practice (Wenger 1998, 82). McGillivray (2011, 98) rightly indicates that ‘how we see ourselves in the workplace and the influence of others in creating a self-image are both significant’. Therefore, consideration has to be given to how males may perceive themselves within their professional contexts and how that perception is formed. A starting point is how their role is defined by others and the underlying issues that are involved. The notion of ‘collective identity’ (Adams 2008, 208) raises many issues, which shows some of the difficulties in this area.

McMillan and Walsh (2011) (cited in Miller and Cable 2011, 57) suggest that we need shared training and equality of resources to achieve professional identity. So, the challenge for EY is how to better understand gender stereotyping and how to make the EY sector more attractive to male practitioners. Equally crucial are the voices of male trainees regarding

their thoughts in relation to this age phase. Sargent (2000, 417) suggests that male homosexuality may have been 'conflated with paedophilia' as a mechanism of social control.

The notion of 'otherness'

There are many research papers addressing female perspectives within EY practice, with paucity of accounts of male EY educators' perceptions and experiences from different EY childcare settings (Sumsion 2000). What is even scarcer is any research on the notion of identity and 'otherness'. Sumsion (2000, 130) reconceptualises King's (1998) notion of otherness in terms of how males differ from females and how 'they enact these differences'. Of course, there may be such male practitioners who have led rewarding careers regardless of the need to negotiate otherness. In Denmark, practitioners appear to be largely female in EY settings (Moss 2006) despite having restructured employment terms and conditions, but gender stereotypes or sensitivities about child abuse may mean that men meet prejudice (Lumby and Coleman 2007, 45); therefore, only few males become EY practitioners (Cushman 2001). But what we have observed in our research of the literature is a recurring theme of representation of males in EY as a source of suspicion (Cushman 2001).

Understanding group dynamics is complex and we all behave differently towards individuals when they are a member of a group, where we perceive the individual not as an individual, not as part of a group, but as female, male or gay. Our relations with others are shaped by the fact that they are 'strangers' (Lumby 2007, 31, citing Gudykunst 1995, 10). Thus, we suggest that the interaction and dynamics between people are multifaceted. Lumby (2007) reminds us that at both levels, individual and group, responding to 'strangers' will involve both cognitive and affective conscious and unconscious strategies (32). These outcomes may well manifest as well rage, confusion or anxiety (Di Tomaso and Hooijberg 1996; Prasad and Mills 1997; Rusch, 2004). Milliken and Martins (1996) explain that strangeness may increase anxiety within relationships, suggesting that there is a greater negative reaction to gender (or to ethnicity) than to age; therefore, understanding the notion of strangeness is a complex matter.

Developing action

Lumby and Coleman (2007) talk about 'mindful and persistent renegotiation' (96) to change attitudes, power and structure, which we argue pervades the whole educational system. Strong leadership in a setting can influence change through the exercise of power and its formal role. We acknowledge that to change hearts and minds on issues such as stereotyping in EY and the valuing of otherness/strangers will take time. It also requires leadership at different levels within the institution and may also involve alliances and allegiances from community groups such as school partners and parents. In addition, policy development, its leadership that fosters collaboration, and staff training and development, together with many practical steps, will likely enhance the culture that is positive for gender diversity in EY. As male trainees enter EY in schools, potentially, there is a special place for mentoring and in the use of role models in developing the former (Lumby et al. 2005; Bush, Glover, and Sood 2006). The valuing of difference is important to develop the conscious state (Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian 2006), as is the need to critically debate on how the principles outlined by Law (2006) interact and inform gender, race, class, age, disability and sexuality, amongst other diversity issues.

Research questions

This paper investigates the lack of male trainees in the EY age phase in primary schools in England. We wanted to hear voices from different male perspectives, namely, the primary teacher trainees at the early and final stages of their undergraduate ITT course, and from male leaders in primary schools. We also wanted to gain more knowledge and understanding on how they were supported and encouraged in the EY age phase during school placement. Therefore, the main research questions were

- (1) What are the perceptions of male trainees on gender stereotyping in EY?
- (2) What are the challenges of addressing gender stereotyping in EY from trainees' and leaders' perspectives?
- (3) What are the strategies for the way forward in addressing gender stereotyping in EY?

Research methods

A small-scale research project was undertaken to investigate male trainees' perceptions and experiences of working in the EY area of primary schools. The sample group consisted of undergraduate primary male trainees at the early stages of their ITT course, as well as male trainees in their final year of the same course. A phased timetable of events to capture evidence within the fieldwork was constructed. We undertook a pilot questionnaire with nine male trainees (from each of year 2 and 4 groups) at the autumn term prior to their teaching placement. Our research questions were drawn from the literature reviewed and piloted to ensure the consistency of treatment (Burton, Brundrett, and Jones 2008).

Although it could be argued that a sample of 18 is rather small as a representative sample, the responses across the various groups were so consistent in content that we decided not to increase the sample size. There were also very few male trainees in the undergraduate ITT course at the University who formed the total sample group, and the views of male head teachers in primary schools allowed for triangulation. We interviewed 13 primary school male head teachers either face to face or by telephone interviews depending on their availability. Our research schedule helped to guide the discussion and, when required, to allow time and space for free thinking if there were any areas of particular interest mentioned by the participants.

The data generated were analysed against the key themes highlighted in theory. The responses were grouped according to their similarities so that trends could be identified and common themes highlighted. For pragmatic reasons, we called the trainees 'year 2' or 'year 4' and the head teachers were given anonymous letters to maintain confidentiality. The following presentation of findings and discussion is limited to the issues-based questions (1–3 above). Verbatim comments from the participants are included throughout for illustrative purposes. We envisaged that from grounded data would emerge a hypothesis. The ethical issues (BERA 2004, online) were adhered to and each participant was given a letter of introduction and code of conduct for research. Suitable arrangements to access schools were made to interview the head teachers.

Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion will be undertaken from the three research questions cited earlier and be selective of the evidence against the key themes identified.

Our findings given in Table 1 show that the perceptions on gender issues differed amongst different communities of male teacher trainees and leaders. However, the leaders could articulate their reasons more deeply given their experience than the trainees. Discussion centred on reasons for stereotyping, masculinity, role models and low staff ratio of men in the EY sector and whether men trainees were less caring/nurturing than women in this sector.

Carrington and Skelton (2003) in their research found that a few female students had suggested that the male students ‘were just not suited’ to working in EY as ‘it wasn’t natural’ for males (260). This claim that nurturing and caring are viewed as female characteristics can inadvertently exclude males from the EY age phase, a view that is echoed by Y2 male trainee 2. Interestingly, findings from Szwed’s (2010) study on gender balance in primary ITT in England suggest that anxieties related to child abuse and physical contact with young children are not gender specific and Szwed posits that stereotypes need to be challenged, a view supported by Y2 male trainee 1.

Rusch’s (2004) research had suggested that the issue of gender appears to alert in people signs of ‘silence, blindness and fear’ (19), with Lumby and Coleman (2007) arguing that having male teacher trainees in the EY sector has seen relatively superficial change and fundamentally little attitude change. What is needed perhaps is a balanced workforce that attracts the most competent teachers, male or female, as suggested by Leader C and supported by research undertaken by Cushman (2005).

The Y4 male trainee 3 reflects positively on the need for male role models being good for all children in the EY stage, which differs from what Brownhill (2010) found.

Table 1. What are the perceptions of male trainees on gender stereotyping in EY?

Y2 male trainees	Y4 male trainees	Male leaders
You have to be much more cautious as stereotypical views mixed with misconceptions can cause a lot of problems. (Y2 male trainee 1)	In EY, my worry is being judged by the parents more as they seem to be more involved at this stage of their child’s education. (Y4 male trainee 1)	As a male practitioner in EY it was difficult to begin with, but over time parents saw me as a good practitioner, and not as a male in EY. (Leader A)
EY teaching is viewed as a woman’s profession and as a nurturing stage and females are viewed as more nurturing than males. (Y2 male trainee 2)	There seems to be a lack of male role models in EY, so people’s perception is that it is only fit for females. (Y4 male trainee 2)	Schools should have a mix of gender in order to help eliminate gender misconceptions, but this is not easy. (Leader B)
It can be daunting for males. It is difficult for any minority because they feel like the outsider as we can do as males in EY. (Y2 male trainee 3)	Male role models are really good not just for the boys but also for the girls. It is good for parents to see men working with children. I have had difficulty from some parents because they are afraid because it is such an abstract concept to have men in EY. (Y4 male trainee 3)	A good practitioner is a good practitioner regardless of gender and we all need to understand this. (Leader C)
Men can/are perceived as intimidating/threatening to some early years children. (Y2 male trainee 4)	Increased risk of being wrongly accused of indecent behaviour in EY due to the close contextual nature. (Y4 male trainee 4)	Unfortunately, we are in a sensitive culture whereby misconceptions happen very easily for both males and females. (Leader D)

Brownhill's (2010) research found that there was a lack of consensus on what is a role model, as this could be male and female, and to be mindful of the 'unreported negative impact' (1) that role models can have on children's lives.

We may balk at the idea of only males being seen to be more productive than females, but it may well signal the attitude of society today. Our survey findings showed that the perceptions of male trainees on gender issues were partially linked to the perceived or real barriers on why there were so few male teachers in EY. For example, 'it is perceived by many males and females as a woman's work' (Y2 trainee 5).

From the male leaders' perspectives, the perceptions of male trainees on gender issues were treated as a non-issue, in that one male leader commented that 'we consider all teachers as professionals and gender should not be an issue' (Leader E). What was more important than gender was the professionalism that they showed and they had 'good knowledge and understanding of the EY context and curriculum' (Leader A); 'were knowledgeable about how children learn and develop' (Leader B); 'had clear ideas about developing the individual and believed in the EY philosophy and culture' (Leader C); had 'good vision' (Leader D); had 'skills to be empathetic with the younger children' (Leader F); and 'had good emotional intelligence and were good with both parents and staff' (Leader G).

When probed further about who makes a good/effective practitioner in an EY setting, these were some male leaders' comments:

I look for the right people: skills, qualities and attributes and those who have good knowledge and understanding about EY, regardless of whether they are male or female. (Leader G)

I've worked in many infant and primary schools with males and females in EY, and obviously I know both now. The most important point is how a practitioner relates to children and adults, not whether they are male or female. (Leader H)

It's the style of the individual that is more important for me, as you can have good male and female EY practitioners. In my career I have also come across incompetent female practitioners in EY. (Leader I)

Reflecting on the literature on EY, it can be suggested that people have less of an understanding on how EY works and this may well generate stereotypical views. However, comments by Leader I (above) seemed to suggest that males have to work harder than females in EY in an attempt to avoid being judged harshly; therefore, he implied that he has yet to come across an incompetent male in EY. Having a diverse workforce where males and females are seen to be doing a range of tasks and using diverse skills is mirroring society (Connell 1987; Lumby et al. 2005). The challenge, however, is for all leaders to develop that mindscape where high-quality professional development opportunities are offered to all staff to attract the wider workforce.

The main message from interviewing the male leaders was the need to care for and nurture young children, and this was not the domain of females' work only (King 1998; Aubrey 2011). Males were seen to be '*as* capable in nurturing young children' (emphasis added as a comparison) (Leader A). Many of the leaders explained that some of the ambiguous and stereotypical views were still pervasive in the profession, but with more males entering EY and taking on a whole variety of roles that were once considered to be highly gendered, these were now slowly counteracting some suspicions, noted by Smedley (2007). However, there was a view, as exemplified by one leader (Leader B), that gender should not be an issue when recruiting, as long as the workforce balance reflected the local context. Leaders, teachers, trainees and parents have to work together

to tackle what Connell (2002, 53) had described as the perpetuation of ‘gender regime’ or the maintenance of gender norms.

What was unclear from our evidence was how males negotiated their otherness. May be our questioning did not adequately explore this issue. Interestingly, Sumsion (2000, 130) noted that little was known on how male EY teachers ‘cultivate, resist or acquiesce’ in gender stereotyping when constructing their professional identity. We explored with the male leaders the notion of teachers being role models and whether male EY teachers were seen to be role models. Indeed, none of the leaders asked us to define role model and we assumed, correctly or not, that role model was understood to be ‘a person you respect, follow, look up to or want to be like’ (Brownhill 2010, 4, cited in Bricheno and Thornton 2007, 385).

One leader (J) commented that ‘two of our male teachers are very good role models for all our children’ without detailing any such practice, and leader C noted that ‘as a male head some children were initially fearful of me, thinking they have been sent to him for doing something wrong ... but over time now ... they feel more relaxed and confident with me’. Here, Bricheno and Thornton’s (2007) notion of a role model being followed or looked up to does not quite emulate these behaviours. This challenges the notion of males only being the role models; indeed, as Brownhill (2010) posits, both genders could be considered to be role models (9) ... as long as they can model both ‘natural’ masculine and feminine traits (12). It is therefore crucial to challenge the trivialising of ‘feminisation and masculinisation in primary schools’ (Chan 2011, 746), and it becomes necessary that school leaders (re)examine their beliefs and discourses of gender difference and work together to develop a common understanding for the good of all children and staff (Table 2).

A number of studies have shown that males find teaching unattractive or to be too female friendly or that their maleness always attracts attention from others or the focus is on males as role models (Skelton 2007; Brownhill 2010). But there are very few studies to substantiate these assertions for males entering the EY sector. So, these challenges have to be addressed by investigating what are the reasons for such barriers, perceived or real.

Table 2. What are the challenges of addressing gender stereotyping in EY?

Y2 male trainees	Y4 male trainees	Male leaders
Challenge of a less formal approach to learning in EY, therefore the harder work in terms of planning may not be recognised. (Y2 male trainee 5)	Challenge of a male providing the emotional support that younger children in the EY need without being judged. Also having the right mind set to want to work in EY. (Y4 male trainee 5)	Challenge of perceived barriers that are unwritten, such as parents or a culture that a female workforce is better. (Leader K)
Challenge of stereotypes from society, and especially parents that males should not be in EY, and if they are then they have an ulterior motive. (Y2 male trainee 6)	Challenge of the stigma attached to sexuality with males providing any form of physical contact (comfort), which younger children need. (Y4 male trainee 6)	Challenge of public and parental perception that EY teachers should be female and upper KS2 teachers male. (Leader L)
Challenge of the assumption that females are better suited to work with young children than males. Also feeling pressured by more females in EY. (Y2 male trainee 7)	Challenge of female dominance and attitudes of some female practitioners in EY who also feel that it is no place for males. (Y4 male trainee 7)	Challenge of there being no real barriers to entry, it is only the perception of barriers. (Leader M)

Addressing such misconceptions arising from reality or myths is complex, requiring analysis based on the culture, attitudes, societal values and beliefs, and the mindset of people. Lumby and Coleman (2007) had talked about shifting attitudes through ‘persistent renegotiation’ (96), and this suggests the need for leadership styles that are enabling and empathetic to win hearts and minds.

On the basis of our evidence, male trainees (in both years 2 and 4) were looking for support in their development in schools through ‘mentoring, clear periodical feedback, guidance and support in planning and assessment’, ‘opportunities to enhance understanding and impact of outdoor learning’, ‘support from other EY peers and staff’, and ‘helping me to feel comfortable within a large female staffroom’. From interviewing the leaders, it was found that they were well aware of the need to support, mentor and train the trainees in their charge and had assessed their policies and practices to ensure that there was equality of opportunity and they promoted the ethos of valuing all staff. Indeed, one study reported by Hopkins (2000) had identified dominant masculine values and behaviour in the organisation, and leaders were mindful that their own organisation’s systems and structures did not inadvertently promote such practices (Table 3).

Earlier, one of the research questions posed the challenges faced by the trainees and leaders in addressing gender stereotyping. The challenges for leaders is that leadership needs to be embedded in context, focused on task performance and focused to develop relationships, where all these activities may be working in highly complex and ambiguous ways (Glatter 2004). So, the style of leadership, male or female, will need to continue to work across boundaries with parents and communities for building trusting relationships and for staff internally to work holistically to manage change and challenge stereotypical and unacceptable practice.

One leader commented that parents, children and staff perceive male styles of leadership differently from female styles of leadership and suggested that this needs challenging. From the male trainees’ perspective, leaders in the EY sector need to challenge gender stereotyping in a number of ways: not be afraid to break down stereotypes; be a good role model and aware of family issues that children may have; have an ability to gain respect and form good relationships with peers and children, as well as self-confidence and valued opinions; and be authoritative, disciplined and strong headed.

Table 3. What are the leadership strategies for the way forward in addressing gender stereotyping in EY?

Y2 male trainees	Y4 male trainees	Male head teachers
By not being afraid to be in EY and this can only happen if all ITT trainees are given the opportunity to have EY experience. (Y2 male trainee 8)	All males and females in EY need to be good role models. (Y4 male trainee 8)	The inequality in EY needs to be addressed, through stronger mentor and leadership support to all EY practitioners. (Leader H)
To try to give all trainees the opportunity to work with male leaders during at least one placement so that males and females working effectively together can be observed. (Y4 male trainee 9)	Being aware of the barriers in a female-dominated EY environment. (Y4 male trainee 9)	In my view, all male practitioners in primary schools need to have EY experience so that they understand where children start from and how they have developed. (Leader K)

This opens up an interesting scope for further work to identify the features of the more effective leader(ship) based on gender difference (Lumby and Coleman 2007) and a key challenge in our view is how are the leaders of the future in the EY sector going to manage diversity. Lumby and Coleman (2007, 110) remind us that for diversity issues to be addressed, and we have taken gender to be such an issue in this paper, the attitudes, practice and structures, in addition to effective leadership, need to be investigated. A key feature of change management was to listen. In listening, Maznevski (2008) suggests that it is not enough to empathise but to put oneself into other's cognitive position. Changing organisational structures and processes are also necessary as a strategy to manage attitudinal and behavioural change (Di Tomaso and Hooijberg 1996).

In summary, a number of specific issues in tackling gender stereotyping are beginning to emerge from our study. First, a whole new school of understanding about the concept of gender equity is required for specific contextual and cultural settings of EY. This necessitates school leadership to make connections between the local communities and the world beyond to access resources and to listen to and communicate with each other for the benefit of all children and staff (Law 2006; Lumby and Coleman 2007). Second, as Wenger (1998) suggests, communities of practice need to be built. Third, embedding the ideas and opportunities of gender issues in planning in the EY curriculum has implications for school leadership that can be facilitated by developing an enabling team structure. Fourth, as McGillivray (2011, 98) notes, 'how we see ourselves in the workplace and the influence of others in creating a self-image are both significant', and this needs to be a shared vision holistically, with clear role descriptions. This implies that leadership will have to learn an entirely new set of skills for a new and more indirect form of influence for effective leadership (Glatter 2008; Aubrey 2011, 3). Lastly, as McMillan and Walsh (2011) (cited in Miller and Cable 2011, 57) note, we need shared training.

Conclusion

The key findings pointed to the following distinctive features: the issue of sex/gender is a complex notion, requiring more than change of practice organisationally, but more so an understanding of how society manifests such views of gender, male or female. Good leadership and support through mentoring and explicit role clarity by head teachers and staff are good starting points to encourage more males into EY teaching. Stereotypes, perceived or real, of gender inequality, homophobia or identity need to be challenged and addressed by leaderships in organisations. With a greater diverse workforce, and a variety of organisational settings, chains of schools, education centres and academies will require leaders to think and lead differently to manage for and with diversity (Lumby et al. 2005). With the change (Tickell 2011) of the EY curriculum, this leadership becomes even more imperative. Our findings also suggest the need for networking and partnerships, involving developing new ways of facilitating knowledge mobilisation and transferring best practice in order to develop more effective teaching and learning and more effective leadership development in EY for the future.

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