

Media relations to promote men in ECEC centres – a balancing act between gender sensitivity and news values

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“And if one day, ballet with boys and football with girls has become an everyday part of his work, then maybe Huber's sex will not be an issue any more.”

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16 August 2013

The experience gained in model projects and at the Coordination Centre 'Men in ECEC' show that the issue 'Men in ECEC centres' is of interest to the media. The general tenor in the articles published over the past years is that men are wanted in ECEC centres. This can be seen from the more than 500 articles published in high-coverage media, such as regional and national daily press, weekly magazines, as well as radio and TV, gathered by the Coordination Centre 'Men in ECEC' alone.

But can articles really help attract more male ECEC workers to early childhood education and care? Do they help to overcome the stereotypes that prevent greater diversity of personnel in ECEC centres? How is the issue dealt with in the public discourse under the aspects of gender equality? And what conclusions can be drawn for future media relations work?

To answer these questions, this paper first of all explains the general programme objectives that are to be promoted through media relations, as well as the options available to media representatives to process the information journalistically. Taking into consideration these programme objectives on the one hand, and journalistic working methods on the other, I analyse some articles from the years 2010 to 2013. The results of this analysis will then lead to recommendations for gender-sensitive media relations work, which show the possibilities for preparing media events on the issue of 'Men in ECEC centres', taking into consideration gender-sensitive aspects.

Men in ECEC centres – conviction and a change of perception within society

The model projects and the Coordination Centre were asked to approach the issue 'Men in ECEC centres in media relations work' from a perspective of gender equality. The work of the ESF model projects was aimed at contributing towards achieving equality for boys and men in the female-connoted professional field of early childhood education and care. On the one hand, very young children should be given the chance to experience male attachment figures who assume educational tasks. On the other hand, the programme aimed at an equal representation of men in early childhood education and care. This was the reason why the media relations work aimed to support a tangible change of social perceptions on two levels and in the long term. Firstly, men must be able to imagine working as an ECEC worker in an ECEC centre. Secondly, however, the attitude in society must be one which accepts men working with very young children, caring for them, educating them, etc. As part of public relations, the media relations work was aimed at conveying this image to the public and questioning obsolete gender images.

The objective was to draw the attention of as many people as possible to the issue of men in ECEC centres using mass media such as the daily press, weekly magazines and newspapers, as well as radio and TV. Because:

“Media representatives and journalists are dialogue partners and ECEC centres should establish and maintain a relationship with them. Why? Because they are external opinion makers.

[...] This means that the media play a key role due to their high coverage: journalistic diligence means they are ideally independent (critical) and credible. Therefore they have the ability to steer opinion among the public.

When journalists report about ECEC centres in the local press, they are multiplying and spreading information - and sometimes an opinion - to a large number of people. [...] And even the best journalist is unable to report a hundred percent objectively. Personal impressions of the ECEC centre will inevitably influence the report.” (Edelmann 2013)

With respect to 'Men in ECEC centres' it can be said that journalists cannot simply cast off their personal ideas concerning male professional images. In addition, the professional standards of the editorial department must also be considered.

Drama, sex and progress, or the unpopular issue of gender

Thomas Gesterkamp, himself a journalist, describes how journalists deal with the issue 'Men in ECEC centres' as follows:

“ [...] gender issues have a bad image in many editorial departments. They are considered to be of minor importance, complicated and exotic. This applies even more to the subjects 'men' and 'boys' than to traditional 'women's issues' - no doubt because most decision-makers in journalism are male [...]. However, headlines such as 'The Disadvantaged Sex' or 'Leave Men Alone' (Die Zeit) are not only a result of the unwillingness of journalists to learn, but also of the tendency for dramatisation in the sector as a whole.” (Gesterkamp 2011, p. 5)

Although gender issues are not very popular with journalists, 'Men in ECEC centres' has nevertheless received a great deal of attention in the media. This fact, which seems to be contradictory at first glance, can be explained by the news value theory. Gesterkamp writes about a tendency for dramatisation throughout the sector. But is it that simple, and why is it so?

A short excursus into the media science theory of news value can help understand the way the media work. It may help to understand the perspective journalism takes on the issue and explain what options journalist have to process information in an article in a way that is acceptable to their editors. Knowing these mechanisms should improve the chance of presenting positive news values in our own media relations work in a gender-sensitive way.

News value theory is an approach which serves to describe the functioning of the media to date in an understandable way. It describes how certain features of events lead to information about them

becoming media news. As early as 1934, Warren named “timeliness, closeness, consequence, prominence, drama, oddness, conflict, sex, emotions and progress” as those factors that turn a piece of information into a piece of news. Consequently, journalists will highlight exactly these aspects of information in their articles, in order to convey them in a way expected in the media. If they do not do this, there is less chance that the article will be published. In 1965, Galtung and Ruge named 'unexpectedness' as one news value among 11 other factors. A surprise has “the best chance of becoming news, only, however, if it surprises the audience within the framework of their expectations.” As we shall see, the news values 'drama' and 'sex' complement one another with respect to 'Men in ECEC centres', resulting in a dramatisation of the sex of the male ECEC worker and thus to his stereotyping. The idea of progress, however, relates to a change in social awareness as intended by the model projects and the Coordination Centre, and contributes towards gender-sensitive reporting. The following examples illustrate the different tendencies in reporting.

Alien and superstar

“The fear of being the only man, asserting oneself as an alien against a whole horde of women is the reason why many men do not become ECEC workers.”

Tagesspiegel 4 November 2012

An initial content analysis of the articles published between 2010 and mid-2013 shows that most of the time the reports describe ECEC workers in line with gender stereotypes. The evaluation included selected articles that had been published in regional and national daily newspapers or in weekly magazines. Short press releases that did not deliver any information beyond the description of the percentage of men working in German ECEC centres were not considered.

Looking more closely at the subject, it becomes apparent that the news value of an issue is produced by stereotyping. Usually, the articles do not describe the diverse range of activities of an ECEC worker, but focus, above all, on those aspects that attribute a special role to the male ECEC worker, that allegedly 'corresponds' with his gender. He is there for the boys; he is expected to organise outdoor and science-based activities; he has to be cool; he is expected to play rough and tumble games. This implies that female ECEC workers are in charge of the girls, comfort the children, care for them and do crafts-based activities with them. This idea often goes hand in hand with the devaluation of female ECEC workers. Male ECEC workers are indirectly compared to female ECEC workers and they are expected to 'know certain things better'. On 28 February 2011, the daily newspaper *FAZ* titled an article with the headline “Male ECEC workers. Alone among women”. This clearly confronts men and women, supposedly to draw attention to the topic using this headline and/or to 'catch the attention of' male and female readers. This polarisation goes hand in hand with a devaluation of women and/or properties that are associated with women. ECEC centres, as the report says, are firmly in the hands of women. Men avoid the job because they do not want to be seen as soft, sensitive and unmanly, and because they want better pay. Terms associated with women, such as 'soft' and 'sensitive', are indirectly devalued and set against the 'hard world of a male workers'.

Alone among women, but still a real man

This world view is reflected in reports about men who originally worked as carpenters, electricians, chefs, bricklayers or soldiers and then changed their career to become ECEC workers. As ECEC workers these formerly 'hard working' carpenters and bricklayers are described as the 'kids' buddy' or 'friend and person to be looked up to', they are 'more pragmatic', 'more prepared to take risks', 'silent superstars' or simply 'cool guys'. The profession of ECEC worker is not for 'wimps'. These kinds of statements imply that male ECEC workers are different from their female colleagues: women are not buddies, not to be respected, not friends, they are not pragmatic, not prepared to take risks, not cool, not silent superstars and not hard. Male ECEC workers are "re-claiming their territory"¹ this way in media reports, i.e. claims of superiority that are at risk of being lost in a field of work dominated by females, are re-stated. It is supposed that male career changers contribute the special skills they have gained in the 'male' professional world, which they are expected to bring to their new job. A former chef, for example, who cooks with the children, or former carpenters and electricians who do manual activities with the children ...

In an article published in the daily newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* on 10 May 2011, again (!) with the headline "Alone Among Women" and the introductory sentence, "Excuse me, are you the janitor?", ECEC workers are associated with stereotyped ideas of men in ECEC centres from the very beginning. Through the implied attribution of manual skills, such as woodworking, metalworking or fixing things, they are given special empowerment, able to be of special benefit, justifying why they are working in an ECEC centre. Obviously, an ECEC worker must be described as a man who also plays football and engages in rough-and-tumble with the children, just to make it possible to picture him as an ECEC worker in an ECEC centre. In this example - as so often - male ECEC workers are not described as people who carry out caring activities. By implication, women are often described in reports as having no manual skills and as being unable to play football. At least, there is scepticism about their abilities in this respect. This makes the men, who allegedly compensate for this deficit, even more important. The same article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* quotes an ECEC worker as follows:

"Of course women are also able to play football with the children. But most of them do that because they think it is good for the children and not because they really like it. In this respect, men can respond to children in a totally different way [...]. If I see that they are getting a little rough with one another, I let them do it, because I know what boys are like." (FR, 10 May 2011)

Articles that introduce male ECEC workers as 'surrogate fathers' also 'trade on' the function and/or entitlement of men working in ECEC centres. Such articles deprofessionalise the vocation by making ECEC centres out to be something like a surrogate family. This was the case in an article published in the *SZ* newspaper on 27 August 2010, for example:

"In any case, children obviously enjoy having a man around. Many see Stefan Krausen even as a kind of surrogate father and call him 'dad' sometimes. 'Children need male attachment figures, especially if their father is not at home a lot', says educationalist Sandra Pienta."

¹ Foster describes strategies that (newly) re-establish male claims to domination and power in a society that increasingly aims at equality as "reclaiming their territory". (Foster 2006).

The ECEC worker portrayed here is presented as a “surrogate father” and the children sometimes call him “dad”. If an ECEC worker has a ‘masculinity deficit’ - as posted provocatively in the headline “ECEC workers in ECEC centres: ‘they are not real men’” (SZ, 27 August 2010), he must prove that he actually is ‘a man’ by assuming a father’s role. He must be turned back into a man by assuming his biological function as a man in society in the form of the fatherly role. Imagine it the other way round: a female ECEC worker would assume a ‘motherly role’. People would then say that this is not the task of an ECEC centre or that it is unprofessional. No such construct is needed for a woman: she is ‘woman enough’, if she is an ECEC worker. To stay with the image of the surrogate family, she is rather the ‘nice lady who does handicrafts’ or the ‘kindergarten lady’.

Men are often described as a contact person for ‘the boys’. Supposedly, women are unable to assume this function. Their gender obviously stands in the way. They are only able to play football “if all else fails” (FAZ, 28 February 2011).

This stereotyping of gender roles is counterproductive. It paints a distorted picture of who assumes what tasks in ECEC centres and how they are done. This will certainly not contribute towards the diversity that is sought in ECEC centres.

But what kind of media report can do without stereotypes and prejudices and be gender-sensitive?

Pretend weddings and space shuttles made of cardboard rolls

An examination of examples of gender sensitivity in reporting shows that, on the one hand, gender equality plays an important role, and, on the other hand, that such reports focus on the personality of the educational staff regardless of gender. It becomes clear that the work done is not determined by gender, but by the person’s interests, preferences and skills. A gender-sensitive report will also describe how male ECEC workers or their female colleagues distance themselves explicitly in interviews from the stereotyped assignment of gender roles. The focus is placed on a person’s artistic and social skills and the educational nature of the work. Gender-sensitive reporting also describes how everyday duties of all kinds, e.g. cooking or tidying up, are done equally by male and female ECEC workers. These articles highlight the idea of gender equality. On 27 August 2010, the SZ wrote, for example:

“Stefan has to prepare the meals as much as Sandra, and she also does manual work.”

Male and female ECEC workers are quoted:

“We want to be role models and not convey stereotypes [...]. Something has to change, if you want to feed your family with this salary, regardless of whether you are a man or a woman [...]. Both male and female ECEC workers will have to fight to improve their standing in society and thus their ability to earn money in the future.”

In this example, men and women are described as progressive when they assume educational tasks on an equal basis. In its article from 28 February 2011, the FAZ quotes a female ECEC worker as follows:

“In the ECEC centre men also have to care and we, as women also have to engage in rough-and-tumble [...]. They [the children] choose their attachment figure regardless of gender.”

In an article from 20 November 2011, the *tageszeitung* newspaper describes a male ECEC worker as follows:

“Höper is a beatboxer, for example. That is a way of making music with your mouth which helps children when they are learning to speak. He presents his hobby, makes the sounds of tractors, planes and animals. The ECEC children listen agog. ‘This is a way you can have fun if you are bored’, he says at the end. A child answers: ‘Are you bored?’ Everyone laughs.”

This is an example of how an ECEC worker can contribute to the ECEC centre’s work with his hobby, in this case beatboxing. Even if the situation is described as odd or surprising (news values: ‘oddity’ and ‘unexpectedness’) however, it does not lose sight of the professional background, i.e. playful language learning. On the contrary, the ECEC worker’s method actually seems to be progressive (news value ‘progress’). The educational nature of the work is emphasised.

The newspaper *Wedel-Schulauer-Tageblatt* reported on 11 November 2011:

“They are racing drivers, actors or magicians - ECEC workers in Hamburg ECEC centres contribute their diverse skills to their profession.”

This example also refers to the ECEC worker’s personality. As a skill is inextricably linked to a person, it is this skill that the person may contribute, regardless of their sex. At the same time, it seems surprising that racing drivers, actors and magicians should work in an ECEC centre. On 16 November 2011, the newspaper *Märkische Allgemeine* quoted an ECEC worker who was dissuaded by his friends from taking up a job in the health sector following completion of his community service and theology studies: ‘You are a social person, you are destined to work with children,’ they encouraged him instead. This description places emphasis on social skills and these are presented as relevant to the career choice. The magazine *Menschen*, in its November 2011 issue, describes how an ECEC worker refused to be pushed into traditional role expectations: “Great! A man! Finally, our boys have somebody who can play football with them“, they told him at the beginning. Actually I don’t like football, and I am rubbish at it, the ECEC worker said. His female colleague was quoted as follows:

“It is a stupid prejudice always to make the man responsible for football and rough-and-tumble stuff [...], and, Björn actually has artistic skills. That came in handy, because it is not my forte, she adds. Unlike him, she is able to dedicate herself to board games with the patience of a saint. ‘We complement one another,’ Christina says.”

The personal interests of the ECEC workers described are introduced into everyday professional work without male and female ECEC workers having to comply with any role clichés. What matters is the skills, and that the ECEC workers (regardless of their sex) complement each other in a team.

While stereotypical descriptions of male ECEC workers originally prevailed in media articles, a gradual change now seems to be taking place. There are an increasing number of gender-sensitive reports like the ones as described above, and this can be promoted considerably by a strategic preparation of media relations work. This is shown by a day of action organised jointly by the ESF model projects

and the Coordination Centre, for example. The Berlin model projects and the Coordination Centre used the publication of updated figures on men in ECEC centres at a joint news conference to draw attention to gender-sensitive education. The following is a brief description of the strategic approach applied and the success achieved.

Day of Action

At the end of March 2013, the ESF model projects called all players who were interested in attracting more male ECEC workers to their ECEC centres to participate in a joint day of action. The aim of the media relations work for this day was to present the quantitative and qualitative developments seen in the ESF model projects. This was the reason why those projects were given priority at the news conference dealing with the issue of gender.

It can be concluded as a result that the media relations work promoting this day of action was very successful in drawing attention to an issue that had not been dealt with very much before, i.e. gender-conscious education.

In an article published on 28 March 2013, the *Tagesspiegel* described the ESF model projects' work as follows:

"This is not about more football thanks to more men, but about a gender-conscious education that allows both boys and girls to escape their roles [...]. Even stereotypes in songs, such as the 'lanky boy' and the 'chubby girl' can be easily examined with the children after singing such songs." (Tagesspiegel, 28 March 2013).

The article ends with the call from the Federal Working Group of Parent Initiatives (BAGE e.V.) for a "gender officer for ECEC centres" be established.

The *Berliner Zeitung* reports on an ECEC centre operated by the Protestant District Association:

"They were rehearsing Sleeping Beauty and a boy was playing a male sleeping beauty. In the children's books available, girls don't always wear pretty dresses. The aim was to give girls the opportunity to 'also enjoy supposedly male activities', says Krabel. The ECEC worker shortage provides opportunities for male career changers." (Berliner Zeitung, 3 April 2013).

The last two articles referred to show that the gender aspect of the work can obviously be highlighted when dealing with the media. By describing how girls enjoy supposedly male activities and by referring to male career changers in the next sentence, the report in the *Berliner Zeitung* proposes a kind of 'gender crossing' in two ways. The media selected an example in which girls experience male attachment figures carrying out activities with a 'female' connotation and, at the same time, girls are motivated to test behaviour with the opposite gender

connotation, i.e. that are supposedly male. Furthermore, it is noticeable that while ECEC workers were often described as very important 'role models', above all for boys, at the beginning, a girl is the focus of the article this time. This is progress in reporting. However, the article also criticises girls who wear "pretty dresses" and then praises them because they "enjoy supposedly male activities". This shows how difficult any evaluation of media articles is. The persons described are sometimes criticised and praised at the same time in one article. This is important to bear in mind with respect to the recommendations for action for 'gender-sensitive media relations work' to be introduced later on.

Another way to practise gender-sensitive reporting is to show the diversity of the professional field. *Neues Deutschland* newspaper writes, for example:

"At work Mauksch never knows what's coming next. Whether he is going to be asked to help build a space shuttle out of cardboard rolls or organise a pretend wedding, whether he is expected to wipe noses or dry tears, whether the group will be cooking or playing football [...] and this is not about serving clichés: 'Men are not only responsible for the workbench, rough-and-tumble and football', emphasises Kneuss: 'They are very good at cuddling, singing and comforting kids as well.'" (*Neues Deutschland*, 27 March 2013).

This example illustrates how interesting and varied the everyday work of ECEC workers in ECEC centres is. The interesting sides of everyday life in ECEC centres become very clear by contrasting apparently different aspects. This comparison promotes the news values 'oddness' and 'progress'. 'A space shuttle made of cardboard rolls and a 'pretend wedding' - a space shuttle stands for technical complexity and progress. But made of cardboard rolls? A wedding marks a 'bond for life'. It is a day carefully prepared by couples a long time in advance. But pretend? This conjures up spontaneity and imagination, freedom and variety. And if 'workbench, rough-and-tumble and football' is placed side by side to 'cuddling, singing and comforting' this creates a field of tension between supposedly male and supposedly female assignments. Both aspects remain in a field of tension that is not negative, but which also does not unravel. It seems that the 'attractiveness' of the profession lies in this tension and in the variety of the activities involved.

The examples shown above show how many stumbling blocks, but also opportunities, gender-sensitive media relations work provides. The challenge involved comes from the fact that everyone involved, although they pursue worthy and progressive objectives, are nevertheless on contradictory territory. Anyone who reports about 'Men in ECEC centres' finds themselves on difficult terrain. And this challenge is often completely underestimated by both external critics and those involved. In the following, I introduce considerations of how to deal with this tension and even how to use it in a constructive manner.

Considerations of gender-sensitive media relations work

In the following, some suggestions for the content of media relations work are provided, taking into account everyday life in ECEC centres and the way the media function, as described above. To say it straight off: there is no panacea for media relations work on the issue of 'Men in ECEC centres', but I will give some general information concerning a gender-sensitive approach. The aim is to achieve a situation where all parties involved approach the complex structure of gender stereotypes, gender sensitivity and news values with care, courage and creativity.

General considerations about gender-sensitive media relations work

When carrying out media relations work on the issue of 'Men in ECEC centres', care should be taken to make sure that all texts, photos and illustrations made available to the media are free from discriminating images of female or male gender stereotypes. All generalising statements should be avoided, their possible effect should be taken into consideration and generalising statements should be replaced by more considered conclusions wherever possible. The merits and characteristics of male and female ECEC workers should be presented as having equal value. And the ECEC centre should be described as a place where men are not perceived either as 'tough guys' or as 'wimps', but as members of a mixed team who contributes their diverse range of skills to early childhood education.

The following information may support you when you are writing your own texts or preparing a media event in a gender-sensitive way.

Guiding the media

It is recommended that you prepare the setting in which you want to present the issue of 'Men in ECEC centres' well. We must bear in mind that journalists usually have only one to one-and-a-half hours to attend a media event. The ECEC centres should be aware of the fact that, if such a media event is not carefully planned, the journalists will tend to take over. If that happens, it becomes difficult to control the media event. The same applies when writing your own media texts. These also should be well researched and well written. The time this takes depends on how experienced the writer is.

Telling a gender-sensitive story

As a rule, a media article on 'Men in ECEC centres' will consist of a central narrative, i.e. the story of an individual ECEC worker, plus various information and thematic aspects arranged around this story. The aspects are presented in the order of their frequency:

- the proportion of men in German ECEC centres
- the ESF model projects 'More Men in ECEC centres'
- men changing careers from other jobs to become an ECEC worker
- pay and other conditions in the profession of ECEC worker
- scepticism vis-à-vis men in ECEC centres, current research results and other issues

This structure (a central narrative and various thematic aspects) builds on the example of an individual ECEC worker to report about a universal problem – the shortage of male ECEC workers – and about possible causes and solutions.

Press texts should also have a narrative structure that tells a story. If ECEC providers and ECEC centres want to do a journalists a favour, they should be clear about the content and structure of the story they want to be told, and the *story telling* method is a good approach to this:

“Actually, storytelling is nothing more than simply telling an exciting story and following the classical literary rules: describe the starting situation, introduce the conflict, overcome the conflict, make sure the reader identifies with the ‘hero’ and create a good rising curve of excitement up to the climax of the conflict, to finally resolve the conflict with a decreasing curve.” (Sheehy 2013)

Beginning the story

What is the background to the story? ECEC centres or ECEC providers might describe the background to the story by giving relevant information, for example, the low proportion of men in ECEC centres in Germany, in their region, at their provider, and finally in the individual ECEC centre itself. An analysis of current figures, International Men’s Day, Boy’s Day or other suitable events can be used as a teaser.

Conflict and solution in the story

Recruiting male ECEC workers is a fundamental problem for ECEC centres. There are a great many reasons for this, ranging from deeply-rooted gender stereotypes in society that affect gender policy, to the low status image of the profession in society, and pay issues. However, there is no simple explanation of the relationship between cause and effect. This should be explained to the responsible editors, as it cannot be assumed that better pay would automatically lead to more men taking up the profession of ECEC worker. Nevertheless, adequate pay even in the training phase is one of the important prerequisites for motivating more potential male career changers to choose the profession of ECEC worker.

The pay-related arguments, in particular, run the risk of reproducing gender stereotypes, for example, the idea of the single male bread-winner that is inherent in this criticism, because it implies that men are unable to work in this profession, simply because they cannot feed a family with the money earned. The arguments should rather emphasise the fact that men who choose the profession of ECEC worker under the current circumstances must provide for a family together with their partner. The conventions of storytelling mean we can already sense here how the conflict could be solved and how the story can be linked to news values at the same time. A man who cares about his family income together with his male or female partner is more progressive than the image of a traditional single earner.

In addition, I would like to introduce two further possible approaches here. One approach is to focus on the personality of the ECEC worker and to place the topic politically as an equality issue. Men in ECEC centres contribute to equality in the same way as women in management positions do. Giving

priority to the idea of progress could encourage journalists to deal with the gender-sensitive aspects of the issue more willingly, because as described at the beginning: 'progress' is an important news factor in the world of the media.

Describing the scenario of a generally gender-balanced ECEC centre provides another solution. What makes the facility different from other ECEC centres? Progressive aspects and unique characteristics must be highlighted, and caring and creative activities as well as early childhood education and care in ECEC centres must be afforded more value and appreciation in general.

The article on 'Profession Branding' shows how the problem of disadvantageous conditions in the profession of ECEC worker can be assessed as part of the public relations work and how editorial departments can deal with it.

The hero of the story

Who is the hero in the story about 'Men in ECEC centres'? Of course - it is not the male ECEC worker! - It is the ECEC centre or the ECEC provider making efforts to solve the problem of the shortage of male ECEC workers. If this fact is not communicated, the male ECEC worker will become the hero. In the section on stereotyped reporting I outlined the consequences of this in detail. Of course, he could become a kind of everyday hero, wiping children's noses or changing nappies. But do we always need a hero?

The arc of tension in a story

How can an arc of tension be created in a story? The story of a male ECEC worker in his ECEC centre can provide such an arc of tension, because this approach generates proximity to the reader. It makes the story understandable and interesting, if the ECEC worker is described as a typical figure as he carries out his work. But what possibilities exist to describe the work in an interesting and gender-sensitive manner?

Variations of the story

If we take a closer look at the different educational areas in ECEC centres (e.g. in line with the Berlin educational programme), i.e. work activities of the educational staff, it becomes apparent that the arc of tension in a story usually has a male or female connotation. We have to be aware of this fact and deal with it strategically. The fact is that hardly any educational area has no gender connotation!

In the Berlin educational programme published by the Regional Administration in 2004, the following educational areas are named: body, movement, health; social and cultural environment; communication: languages, writing culture and media; creative arts; music; basic experience in mathematics, science and technology.

A schematic representation would show three possible ways to tell this story about everyday life, each of these options providing different opportunities and bearing different risks.

Areas without specific connotations

Generally, all educational areas can be assigned stereotypes. The easiest way to avoid such stereotypes is to present or describe the male ECEC worker in a setting that is supposed to be free of any such connotations, i.e. when he is making music or playing with the children, for example. This is however not yet a news value. The examples of the ECEC worker Mauksch (space shuttle made of cardboard rolls) and Höper (beatboxer) presented above, show how the news values 'progress' and 'unexpectedness in the framework of expectations' can be introduced. It is true that beatboxing is a music style with a male connotation, but it becomes free of gender connotations by explaining that it helps children to learn language. This view places priority on the aspect of professionalism.

Male areas

These include the following educational areas and/or activities:

- basic experience in mathematics
- basic experience in science and technology
- media as a sub-area of communications
- creative art, transformed into activities such as manual work and building
- rough-and-tumble and sports as activities in the educational area 'body, movement and health'.

In gender-sensitive media relations work, it is recommended with respect to these areas that the male ECEC worker be shown interacting with both boys *and* girls and that a female ECEC worker is also actively involved. If you want to offer stories or photo presentations dealing with areas with male connotations, the arc of tension can be maintained, if a female ECEC worker is also involved in the activity. In contrast, situations and photos that show male ECEC workers playing football, doing scientific experiments or building things with boys promote stereotypes. A balanced situation would be given if girls are also shown taking an active role and male and female motifs are presented taking an active role. If the situation described above were complemented by a female ECEC worker and a girl who are merely spectators, this would however reproduce a stereotype. It is better if they are actively involved.

Female areas

As far as media photos and texts are concerned, the educational area of communication, including language and writing culture, has a female connotation, if reading aloud to children is presented. Reading (picture) stories to children is mostly left to women within the context of everyday tasks. Creative art also has a female connotation, if it is introduced as painting and handicrafts. This is probably the area which is most difficult to communicate. It is an area that needs a change of perception within society, and where most prejudices concerning male ECEC workers and the entire profession are rooted. As described at the beginning, it is an important prerequisite however that men can imagine working in such a facility, if the proportion of male ECEC workers in ECEC centres is to be increased. Clichés about the profession and about how a boy/man should be, are important reasons why this often fails. Again and again journalists, educational staff and experts distance themselves in their statements from the 'nice lady doing handicrafts' image of the profession.

The areas dealing with body-related activities are a particularly sensitive issue. In view of the social stereotype of maleness which does not allow or even excludes a connection between being a man and caring, associations of sexual abuse may arise. This does not, however, mean that this 'body-related' area should not be described positively and as an integral part of the profession. The only way to generate the image of a caring male ECEC worker is not to ignore this sensitive area in media relations work. Caring and helping are important areas of work in early childhood education and care and should be carried out by educational staff regardless of gender. It is especially important here to use all resources and not to ignore this field of activity. When presenting the issue, it is, however, recommendable to focus on how these sensitive areas are dealt with professionally. This should show that a relaxed attitude and attentiveness as well as time for the care work are also important in early childhood education and care. This can also build a conceptual bridge to the idea that the profession of ECEC worker is a profession with a future. The caring professions, in particular, will also be fields of work for men in the future providing stable job security.

As research has shown, men's satisfaction with their life still depends today on having a full-time job. On the other hand, there is a desire for a reasonable work-life balance. Paternity leave is an example of how this can contribute to a change in ECEC centres, when fathers accompany their children during their settling-in phase. Leisure time, loving care and family bonds are given more value if parents look after their child together. Many of the men who are interested in the profession of ECEC worker say that the insights into the profession they gained during the settling-in phase of their own children motivated them to become ECEC workers themselves. Since leisure time and loving care, but also the desire for an adequate work-life-balance are increasing, the profession of ECEC worker is becoming more attractive, as explained in detail in the article on 'Profession branding'. This applies in particular to men with a lot of life experience.

This is the reason why this field of activity should also be dealt with in media relations work.

Different focuses in the story

ECEC centres and/or their providers may concentrate on one of these areas or tell different stories within an area, depending on how their media relations work on the issue of 'Men in ECEC centres' has been developed and depending on the extent to which they want to tell an individual story.

If they tell different stories within an individual area, the overtones are especially important, i.e. the story must mention that there is a 'neither, nor' and a 'as well as'. To be an ECEC worker means a great deal of freedom and creativity as well as responsibility and care. The ECEC worker Mauksch, for example, is responsible for both the 'workbench, rough-and-tumble and football' *and* 'cuddling, singing and comforting'.

Another option is consciously to counter ideas about what an ECEC worker does in an ECEC centre, which means to surprise within the framework of expectations - maybe with a bit of humour. In this respect, the creativity of all parties involved is required.

Conclusion

One and the same report may include both gender-sensitive and stereotyped sections. Thus, we cannot simply say: 'there are good gender-sensitive reports or bad stereotyped ones'. Gender-sensitivity, gender stereotypes and news values have a reciprocal relationship in which the individual variables have a tense relationship with each other and must be balanced.

If we consider this field of tension between stereotypes, gender-sensitivity and news values it seems as if a balance is increasingly being achieved within public discourse. While stereotyped reports clearly prevailed at the beginning of the programme, one can now hear more gender-sensitive tones. This success is down to the model projects.

Gender-sensitive media relations work brings the diversity of personalities, activities and properties of male and female ECEC workers to life and relates to their professionalism at the same time. There is no need to resolve or hide oppositions, on the contrary: these oppositions reflect the entire spectrum of the profession. They do not create stereotypes, as long as they are not associated with the ECEC worker's gender.

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