

# **The realities of being “The Man”: managing the tensions and dilemmas of ‘male presence’ in early years settings**

*National Men in Early Years Conference*

City College Southampton

**Dr. Simon Brownhill**



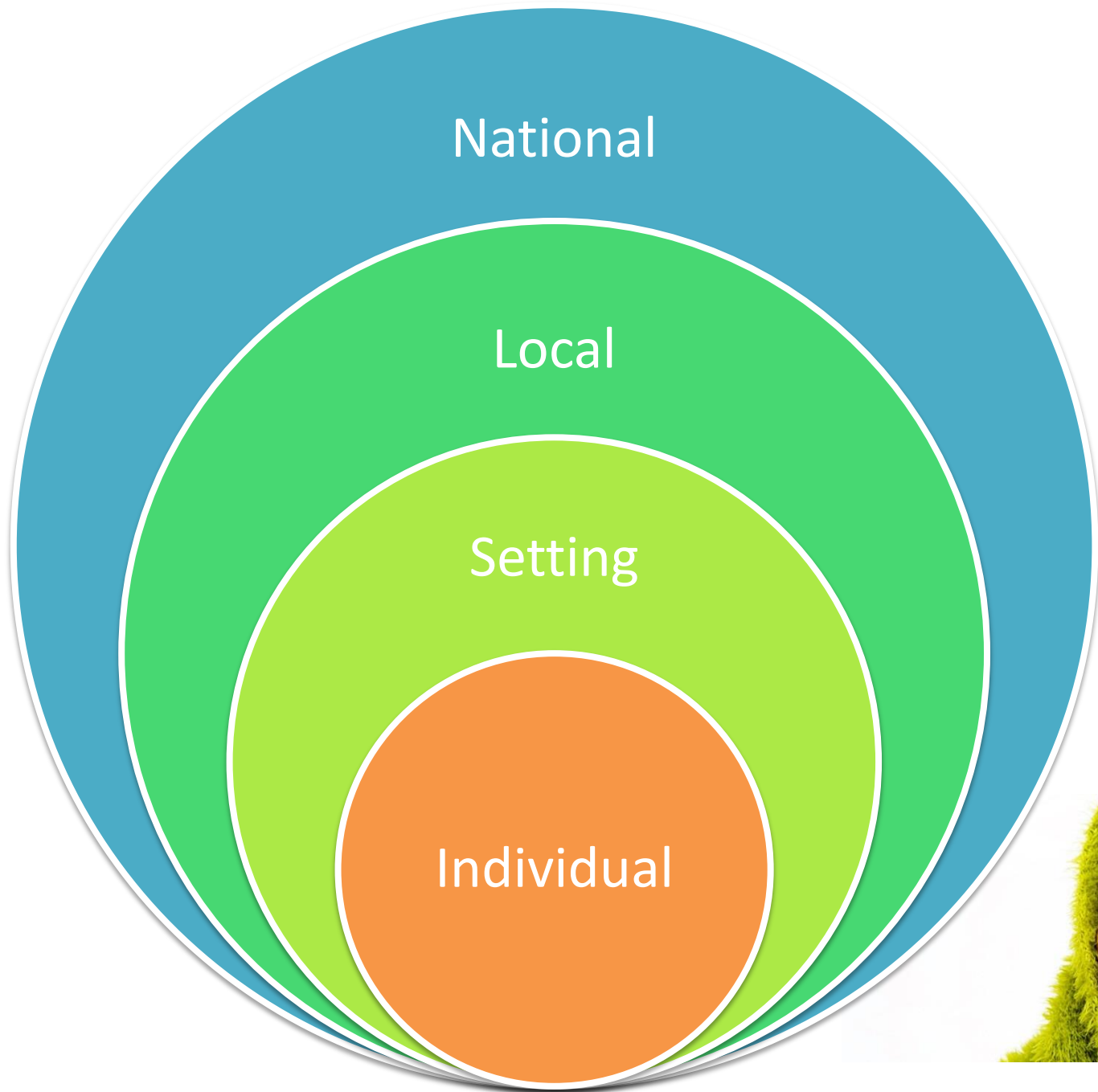








- It is a **privilege** to work with young children
- It is a very **satisfying** and **rewarding** job
- You directly **impact** on the lives of 'the future'
- There is the possibility that you will be **remembered!**
- The **memories** will live with you for years
- The EY is an **incredible profession** to work in



# Individual level

- *‘Well why do you want to do that?’* (Interview J, nursery nurse, private day nursery)
- The perceived/actual challenge to one’s **masculinity** (Connell, 1995)
- Being a **‘rarity’** in a female dominated environment
- **Status** and **financial** gain/loss (Baker, 2012)
- *‘It’s hard work!’* (‘Ben’, focus group, KS co-ord)



# Setting level

Colleagues	Senior Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘Staff would say to me “Could you get something <b>heavy</b> down off the top shelf?” and “You’ll be doing the <b>football team</b> then!” ...and suddenly you’re sort of pigeon holed...’ (‘Ben’, FGI)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘A <b>gender balance</b> WAS important. However, our last two male appointees were <b>disappointing</b> and now it is simply the best person for the job.’ (50-year-old male principal from Decile 4 school, (Cushman, 2006))</li></ul>





# Local level

- **Men drives** (The Fatherhood Institution, 2015)
- *Change my child's nappy? NO WAY!* Recognising **cultural, religious** or **social** considerations (Francis, 2012)
- Community pressures to employ **male role models** for those children living in sole-parent (female) families (Cushman, 2006)
- **Gay, paedophiles** or **managers in the making** (Cameron *et al.* 1999)





# National level

1

‘Restor[ing]...the **gender balance and diversity** reflected in the wider society’  
(Montecinos and Nielsen, 1997: 47)

2

Counteract the **feminisation of practices** in the early years and primary schooling (Skelton, 2003)



3

‘Rais[ing] **academic motivation, behaviour, engagement and attainment levels** of boys’  
(Brownhill, 2015: 19)





# Activity break

- *Please have an unused piece of paper to hand! You also need to close your eyes!*
- Please follow my instructions **BUT PLEASE DO NOT OPEN YOUR EYES!**
- *Ready...?*
- **DO NOT OPEN YOUR EYES!**
- **Now...open your eyes!**





# Suggestions

- You have to have a “**strong character** and **self-belief** to succeed in childcare as a man” (Francis, 2012)
- Establish **professional links** with other men in the profession – think *Men’s groups, online communities, conferences, FE/HE institutions*
- Be **true to yourself** – remember you are there for the children
- Promote a ‘**team approach**’ to EY practices





# Suggestions

- Resist ‘buying into’ assertions about the benefits of your presence
- Be **sensitive** to local beliefs and practices
- Appreciate that it will **take time** for attitudes and practices to change (slowly but surely...)
- Remain mindful of the fact that it is **not** ‘always about the money’
- *Be the very **best** that you can be!*



'I don't know of any other job that is so stimulating, varied, rewarding and exhausting! When I die I want my tombstone to read:

***Here lies – he taught  
ninety children to read and write as a  
Reception teacher***

That, for me, is my greatest achievement. I miss being called 'Mr. B'. I still have my planning and assessment records – they are too precious to throw away.'




Dear Camyon  
I dms0  
sorry that  
I smaced  
you in the  
privets.





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# Select publications

- **Brownhill, S.** (2014) 'Build me a male role model!' A critical exploration of the perceived qualities/characteristics of men in the early years (0–8) in England. *Gender and Education*, 26(3), 246-261.
- **Brownhill, S.** (2015a) *The 'brave' man in the early years: the ambiguities of being a role model*. Saarbrücken, Germany: LAMBERT Academic Publishing.
- **Brownhill, S.** (2015b) The 'brave' man in the early years (0-8): defining the 'role model'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(3), 370-379.
- **Brownhill, S.** and Oates, R. (2014) Who do you want me to be? An exploration of female and male perceptions of 'imposed' gender roles in the early years. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Arts*, 1(1), 1-17.
- **Brownhill, S.**, Warin, J. and Wernersson, I. (eds.) (2015) *Men, Masculinities and Teaching in Early Childhood Education: International perspectives on gender and care*. London: Routledge.
- McCormack, O. and **Brownhill, S.** (2014) 'Moving away from the caring': exploring the views of in-service and pre-service male teachers about the concept of the male teacher as a role model at an early childhood and post-primary level. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education and Review*, 2(4), 82-96.

