



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL™
INYUVESI
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MEN

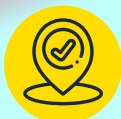
AND MASCULINITIES

IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

EDUCATION



**TUESDAY,
30 JUNE 2026**



**THE SOUTHERN SUN
ELANGENI & MAHARANI HOTEL**



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

Across global contexts, early childhood education remains profoundly gendered. The absence of men in this domain of work is striking. Men's absence is often reduced to questions of individual preference or their disposition towards children and care. Such explanations however are analytically limited. They obscure the deeper structural, cultural and historical conditions that organise early childhood education as a feminised space and regulate who can legitimately inhabit it. When men do enter this space, they encounter a field structured by suspicion, surveillance and the policing of gendered and sexual norms. Their presence provokes questions about how masculinity is both privileged and constrained. In this conference we are interested in how masculinity is constituted, regulated and contested within early childhood education. How are men to be understood in early childhood education? Under what conditions is masculinity made, contested and reconfigured in early childhood settings?

This conference brings together scholars, practitioners and policymakers to engage with these questions in relation to the South African context and beyond. By situating men in early childhood education within broader debates on masculinities, gender and childhood, this conference seeks to advance more critical and theoretically grounded conversations about the future of the field. This conference is grounded in critical, feminist and decolonial traditions that refuse simplistic explanations of gender difference. Instead, the conference opens up the space to contribute to understanding masculinity as relational, contingent and entangled with gender, sexuality, race, class and historical formations. At a time when anti-gender and anti-feminist movements are gaining traction including through the manosphere, the conference confronts the ongoing inequalities that render early childhood education as a no-go area for men.

INSPIRING GREATNESS

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



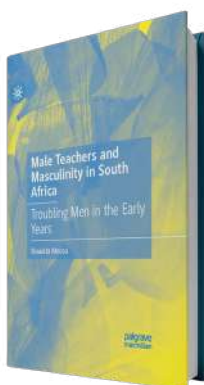
DR KEVIN MCGRATH

Dr Kevin McGrath is a lecturer in education at Australian Catholic University in Sydney, Australia. His research examines student–teacher relationships and gender diversity in the teaching profession, with a focus on workforce composition. His work on male participation in teaching has informed policy discussions in Australia and internationally and has been cited by UNESCO and the OECD. Dr McGrath's background spans primary teaching, public policy, and healthcare. He has served as a Senior Adviser on workplace gender equality for the Australian Federal Government and has led evaluations of programs supporting students affected by complex trauma. His research supports more inclusive and relational education systems. Dr McGrath's 2019 paper *The Plight of the Male Teacher* introduced a widely used framework for understanding gender diversity in the teaching profession. His research has been cited more than 1,000 times and has informed 33 policy documents, produced by 16 policy bodies, across 11 countries, including reports by UNESCO, the OECD, the Australian Government, and the Government of Chile. His research was featured by ABC News Australia in 2025, reaching an audience of approximately 17.7 million people.



MR KWANDA NDODA

Mr Kwanda Ndoda is a development practitioner and systems thinker dedicated to the intersection of early childhood development (ECD), social innovation, and masculinity. Currently leading infrastructure and policy initiatives at the DG Murray Trust, Mr Ndoda bridges government and philanthropy to strengthen systems for children and caregivers. A key contributor to the *State of South Africa's Fathers* reports and a pioneer in documenting male ECD practitioners, he advocates for “responsive caregiving” as the next development frontier. Mr Ndoda's work explores how positive masculinity and shared caregiving can reshape early learning environments and societal outcomes.



BOOK LAUNCH

This book explores how South Africa's histories of colonialism and apartheid, together with cultural and social norms, shape how primary school teachers understand and respond to men's absence and presence in the early years of schooling. It shows that explanations for why men do – or do not – teach young children are not neutral, but are embedded in complex, gendered processes that reflect the country's distinctive socio-political landscape. In doing so, these interpretations often reproduce gendered inequalities that affect male and female teachers as well as the children they teach. Drawing on Southern theories, the book also offers a decolonial framework for researching men and masculinities in the early years, contributing new perspectives to debates about gender, care, and teaching in the Global South.



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