

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

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"Mr. D" Does His Part: The Influence of Men as Childhood Educators

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It is imperative to have men in early childhood education, but why? According to recent research by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (naeyc), early childhood education plays a critical part in young children's gender identity development. When young children do not have relationships with male teachers and caregivers, traditional gender stereotypes become reinforced.

For Darnell Couch, a classroom educator at St. Michael's School and Nursery, the answer for his career choice is simple: "I absolutely love children."

Darnell has spent his 25-year career working in early childhood education, primarily teaching four-year-olds. At 18 years old and the oldest of five children, with lots of babysitting in his background, Darnell started working at a center. He had no idea that what began as a way of making extra money would turn into a career and his passion.



Darnell Couch, classroom educator at St. Michael's School and Nursery



"I pour love into each child and am committed to being there for them," said Darnell. "I give them what I have, and they become a part of my heart."

When asked about gender stereotypes, specifically about the traditional role of women caring for young children, Darnell understands it. Still, he is unaffected because his presence is entirely positive in his experience with staff, children, and their families. According to Darnell, staff and the children's families have collaborated highly throughout his career. "They understand I'm trying to make a difference."

"I'm comfortable with myself," said Darnell. "Many kids don't have a male figure in their lives; I'm willing to do what it takes, and if that means being a role model, that's O.K."

Besides being there emotionally and socially, Darnell is doing all it takes to be the best educator. He recently received his Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and is pursuing his associate degree in education at Delaware Technical Community College.

"We're all unique," said Darnell. "Each child is unique, and I may be unique in my role, but that's how we learn from each other."