

BOYS LEARN DIFFERENTLY THAN GIRLS

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Why do boys have more difficulty focusing at school than girls? Having been an educator for over forty years I have seen educational trends and fads come and go. Some important features that have been replaced in the school district where I work are the elimination of technical subjects from the curriculum and the removal of recess.

I have been an administrator in middle and high schools as well as in alternative schools (catering for students who cannot be served any longer by the public schools they were expelled from). I have also been a guidance counselor in elementary and high schools. It is obvious to me that boys learn differently from girls. Education used to cater more for boys' needs when I was going through school, and sadly, this was to the detriment of girls' needs. Now the pendulum has swung too far the other way. What is up with education officials who appear to have forgotten some very rudimentary factors about human development and about the sources of intelligence?

Why were technical courses removed from our middle and high schools? Practical courses such as carpentry, engineering, sewing, cooking, auto mechanics and so on have been replaced by even more academic courses. The 'No Child left Behind' laws demand it. Schools are almost forced to 'teach to the State Achievement Tests'. Officials always come from the academic stream and seem to believe that there is only one source of intelligence...academic. I see a similarity between Education Department officials and judges in our courts. Many of them have been too many years out of the 'real world' and sometimes make crazy decisions. Some choices made by Department of Education officials fail to cater for our boys' needs in today's society.

What happened to the next major source of intelligence...the hands? It seems that officialdom wants to squeeze our children through a sausage machine that will turn them out all looking the same. They seem to have forgotten the 'bell-shaped curve of intelligence' (academic IQ) and believe that every child can achieve at the same rate. We all know this is not true, but that is how the system seems to operate.

Boys tend to learn better when they are challenged not only to think critically and logically but also by being provided with hands-on experience. I ran an alternative school in New Zealand where every student worked in a job one day a week and volunteered in a charitable organization one morning a week. They had to find these unpaid jobs themselves and were given grades for their effort and performance. Boys and girls benefited from these activities. Not only did they do better in their studies the rest of the week, they learned some very important life skills like how to become responsible. Apart from teaching them

regular academic subjects we taught them interview skills, work expectations, relating to others in the workplace and so on. Girls did well, but the boys thrived.

Teaching has attracted more females than males in the last twenty years and this is good as far as nurturing is concerned. I believe now that boys' needs are being largely overlooked. Many of them do not have their father living at home and there is often no other significant male in their life until they reach high school where there are more male teachers. No way is this a reflection on the ability or dedication of female teachers and administrators. It's a fact of life.

Schools often wonder why so many boys misbehave. Apart from the odd case of poor parenting, it is often because boys are not catered for in our educational system or district. Instinctively, boys need space. I guess it's a carry-over from the 'man as hunter' era. Boys need time to release their energy, and sitting still for seven hours a day does not serve their need to expend pent up energy. Parents can be powerful instruments in requiring a change in how boys are educated. Research is available on-line and could be sent to education officials as evidence of a needed transformation. While many boys still do well in the existing system, too many boys could do so much better, and this would lead to a better school climate, happier boys and schools would see behavioral improvement.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.