

Summary

The Education Gender Gap: Why are boys not making the grade?

Forum Friday, May 19, 2006

Presented by: The Research Bureau and the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy

Presenter: Sandra Stotsky, Ed.D., Education Consultant

Respondents: J. Michael Steele, Principal, The Nativity School of Worcester
John Bassett, Ph.D., President, Clark University

Moderator: Paul Reville, President, Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy

Part I - Presentation

Sandra Stotsky opened the forum with her remarks about *The Reality of the Gender Gap: Implications for Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Preparation*. Her presentation was derived from the following outline:

- I. Is there a crisis in boy's education?
 - A. NAEP Reading and Writing score gaps are increasing over time: 16-point difference by 2002. NAEP plans to explore gender differences for 2009 NAEP, if funded.
 - B. Differential in high school graduation rates is increasing. Now 72% to 65% according to latest Greene/Winters study.
 - C. College admission rates are approaching 60-65% female in some states.
 - D. Differences cross class and race lines.
 - E. Four times as many boys as girls take attention-deficit medication.
 - F. Twice as many boys in remedial education and fill remedial reading classes. They represent over 70% of students labeled as learning disabled and 80% of those sent to programs for the emotionally disturbed.
 - G. Dyslexia is typically a male phenomenon and underserved if not exacerbated by Whole Language approaches.
- II. What do we know about gender differences from neurobiology?
 - A. Anatomical differences in brain at birth
 - B. Better spatial relationships in boys; better verbal skills in girls
 - C. Boys mature later than girls
- III. Possible cultural and home influences on boys' achievement
 - A. Excessive playing of computer games, media watching
 - B. Emphasis on physical activity
 - C. Increasingly absent male model or father figure
 - D. Reading perceived as a female activity
- IV. Possible educational influences
 - A. Mainly female teachers in early grades, increasingly so in high school except in voc/tech high schools
 - B. Reading/literature curriculum geared to female interests and concerns

- C. Dominant approaches to literary study of less appeal to boys (e.g., Reader Response)
 - D. Dominant pedagogy for reading of less benefit to boys (e.g., Whole language)
 - E. History curriculum oriented to socio-cultural topics—of less interest to boys than political and military history and individual achievements
 - F. Testing approaches stress reading and writing skills, even in math today
- V. What has educational research suggested?
- A. Consistent differences in reading interests over the century
 - B. Special education kids need more structured approaches in early grades
 - C. School libraries carry many fewer books of appeal to boys. A recent study in Canada showed two-thirds of school libraries in Canada had not a single book in stacks of interest to boys. http://www.ldac-taac.ca/Research/boys_reading-e.asp
 - D. Few if any boys' books have been published in the past 30 years
 - E. School librarians/teachers discourage boys from reading the kinds of books that do appeal to them.
- VI. Curriculum implications if gender differences are not “socially constructed” but wired in?
- A. Boys need more physical activity as part of instructional time
 - B. Boys need good reading materials that appeal to their interests
 - C. Boys benefit from competitive activities such as debates, spelling bees
 - D. Boys need choices for writing that appeal to them (not just experience stories)
 - E. Boys need some single-sex activities (e.g., literature circles)
 - F. Boys need more male teachers and fewer student-led small groups in which the teacher's help is not available
- VII. Implications for Educator Preparation or Professional Development
- A. Reading courses should address gender differences in reading interests, neurobiological development, remediation, pedagogical approaches
 - B. Licensure tests for elementary, special education, and early childhood teachers should address these differences. Only MA licensure tests for reading do.
 - C. Professional development for administrators should address these differences

Part II - Response

J. Michael Steele then made the following points:

- I. Teachers often expect less of boys.
- II. The crisis is not solely with boys' education but with education in general.
- III. Black and Latino males often do not see college as an option.
- IV. Role models do not have to be male.
- V. It is important for instructors to teach beyond the standards.

Part III - Response

John Bassett then touched on three main points and provided some recommendations for solving this problem. His three main points included:

- I. Some of the problems the education field is seeing today with boys' education have been around for awhile.
 - a. Teachers often pay more attention to females, particularly when male students are acting out.
 - b. The average quality of teachers is declining.
- II. The diversity of students raises questions about traditional education systems
 - a. For example, Latino boys often grow up in a culture that is “anti-school.”

III. The bar for achievement needs to be raised with family support.

Bassett then noted six items that needed to happen next to ameliorate the problems at hand. They included:

- I. Commit to recruiting the best and the brightest students for the teaching profession.
- II. Educate teachers and principals about the learning differences of males and females.
- III. Continue to launch various pilot schools.
- IV. Stress that families and schools must work together to help children raise student achievement.
- V. Continue to conduct research based on facts that Sandra Stotsky presented.
- VI. Focus on adapting curricula and pedagogy to meet the needs of males and females.

Part IV – Recommendations

At the conclusion of all the speakers' remarks, moderator Paul Reville of the Rennie Center asked each member of the panel to give one recommendation that he or she felt should command the most urgent attention. The responses were as follows:

- I. Sandra Stotsky noted that attention needs to be directed at revamping the reading curriculum.
- II. J. Michael Steele said that schools need to hold parents accountable.
- III. John Bassett charged higher education with changing teacher training.

Part V – Question and Answer Session

Selected References for Sandra Stotsky's Outline

Mark Bauerlein and Sandra Stotsky. (January 25, 2005). "Why Johnny Won't Read." Op-Ed, *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A33956-2005Jan24.html>.

Boys Project: Website for information on gender issues. <http://www.boysproject.net>

Community Collaboration to Close the Gender Achievement Gap: The Success Story of Douglass Elementary School, Boulder Valley School District, Colorado. Principal: Kelley King, 303-499 4884 (www.douglasselementary.com/cov.pdf)

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2004). "Proposed Study on Gender Differences." Approved by the National Assessment Governing Board in August 2004 as Part of the Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress. For recent studies or reports on gender and literacy, see the many references listed at the end of this attachment.

Leonard Sax. (Friday, March 31, 2006). "What's happening to boys? Young women these days are driven -- but guys lack direction." Op-Ed. *Washington Post*, A19.

Leonard Sax. (2005). *Why gender matters: What parents and teachers need to know about the emerging science of sex differences*. NY: Doubleday. Expanded softcover edition by Random House (2006).

Laura Sokol. (Winter 2002). "Help Wanted: Boys' Reading." *Interaction* (quarterly magazine of the Canadian Child Care Federation), 14 (4), 12-13. See references at end.

Sandra Stotsky. (February 2006). "Whose Literacy Is Declining? New Frontiers for Classroom Research." Op-Ed, *Valley Patriot*, 3 (2), <http://www.tommyduggan.com/VP020806stotsky.html>

Sandra Stotsky. (1999). *Losing Our Language*. NY: Free Press. Reprinted as a paperback by Encounter Books in 2002. See pp.61-93 for findings on the ways in which gender is addressed in the leading elementary instructional reading textbooks in the mid-1990s.