

Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

Understanding Boys

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Whereas good relationships are important to girls, success is more important to boys

Hopefully, society is well past the "politically correct" theory (an oxymoron in a democratic society) that the ONLY difference between a male and a female is in socialization---that aside from reproductive organs, there is no difference between the sexes neurologically, psychologically, or emotionally.

A boy measures everything he does or says by a **single yardstick**: "*Does this make me look weak?*" If it does, he isn't going to do it. That's part of the reason that videogames have such a powerful hold on boys. The action is constant; boys can calibrate just how hard the challenges will be; and when they lose, **the defeat is private.**

With this in mind, it's important to remember that PUBLIC competition improves performance, but NOT LEARNING. Some students will practice for hours spurred on by the competitive spirit in music competition, athletics, or speech contests. These students are motivated to compete. Competition can be fun, as witnessed by the hours that young people invest in such activities. However, competition is devastating for the youngster--especially the boy--WHO NEVER FINDS HIMSELF IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE. **Rather than compete, that student drops out by giving up.**

As an elementary school principal and the elementary committee chair for one of the regions of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), I recommended that the entry age to kindergarten be raised, not lowered. I had seen first hand how so **many young boys were not cognitively developed enough to handle some of the "sitting still" academic challenges facing them.**

More recently, at my presentations I receive an increasing number of kindergarten teachers who each year continue to tell me that their current crop of young boys is the worst they have ever had. For a number of reasons, these young boys are simply **not socialized enough before thrusting academics at them.**

More and more young boys will become "at-risk" as early as kindergarten because the feeling associated with weakness in the academic skills negatively impinges on their self-talk and self-esteem. I repeat a recurrent theme in my presentations: **"People do good when they feel good--not when they feel bad."**

Boys would rather drop out by losing interest and misbehaving than show that they can't perform. **Weakness does not motivate them to want to participate.** It takes a masterful teacher and parent to encourage them to persevere.

The three principles to practice of (1) *communicating in positive language*, (2) *reducing coercion by prompting choice-response thinking*, and (3) *sharing how to act reflectively--rather than reflexively--*can be of significant assistance when dealing with young boys. See the teaching model at www.marvinmarshall.com.

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