

Strategies for Success: How Understanding Boys' Development and Learning Styles Can Help Them Achieve

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Introduction: What on Earth Is He Thinking?



Discussion

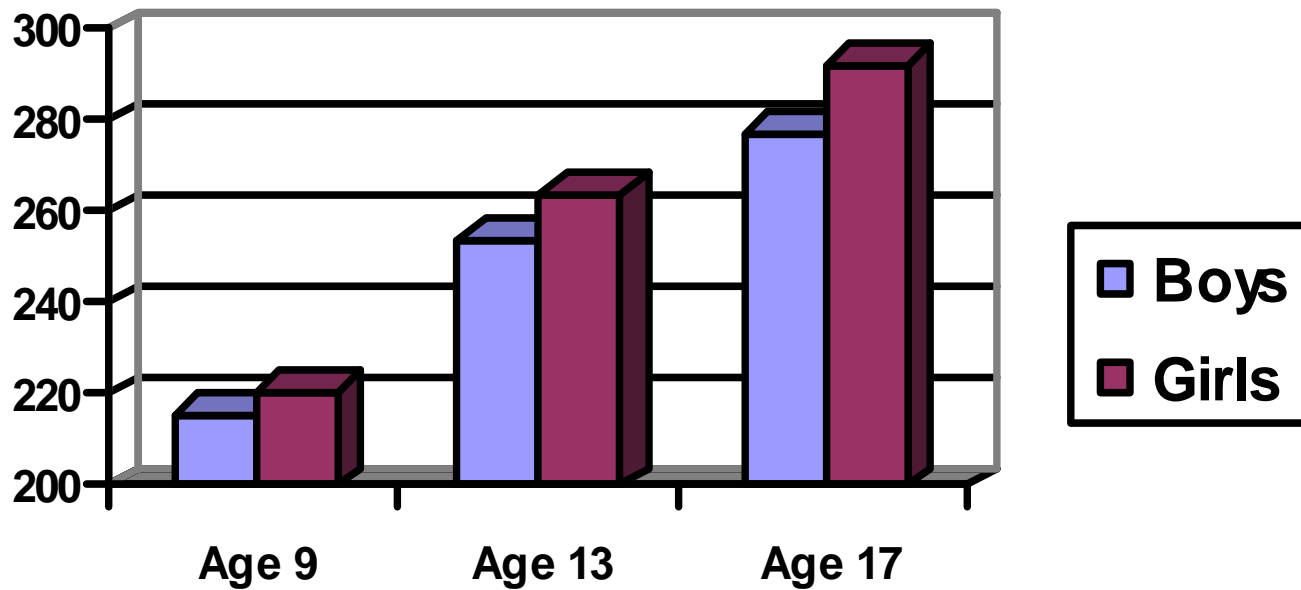
- What gender differences have you observed in your classroom?
- What difficulties have you encountered in teaching boys?



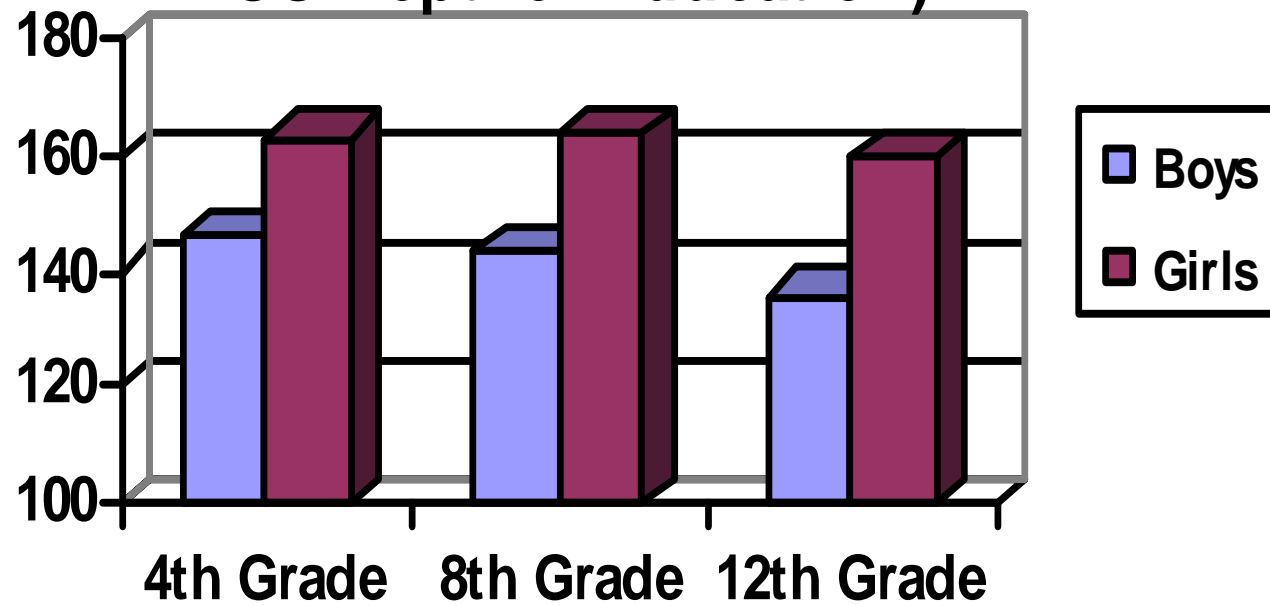
The Problem: The Literacy Gap

- Boys lag behind girls on both national reading and writing assessments, and the gap grows between fourth and twelfth grade.
- The gap between boys and girls is even greater for Hispanic and African-American boys.
- Reading and writing gaps also cut across class lines, as can be seen from the percentage of students with college-graduate parents scoring “below basic” on reading and writing assessments.
- The gap is also present in international assessments of literacy proficiency.

**Average Reading Scale Scores on Nat'l
Assessment of Educational Progress, 2004
(Source: US Dept. of Education)**



**2002 National Writing Assessment,
Average Score by Gender (Source:
US Dept. of Education)**

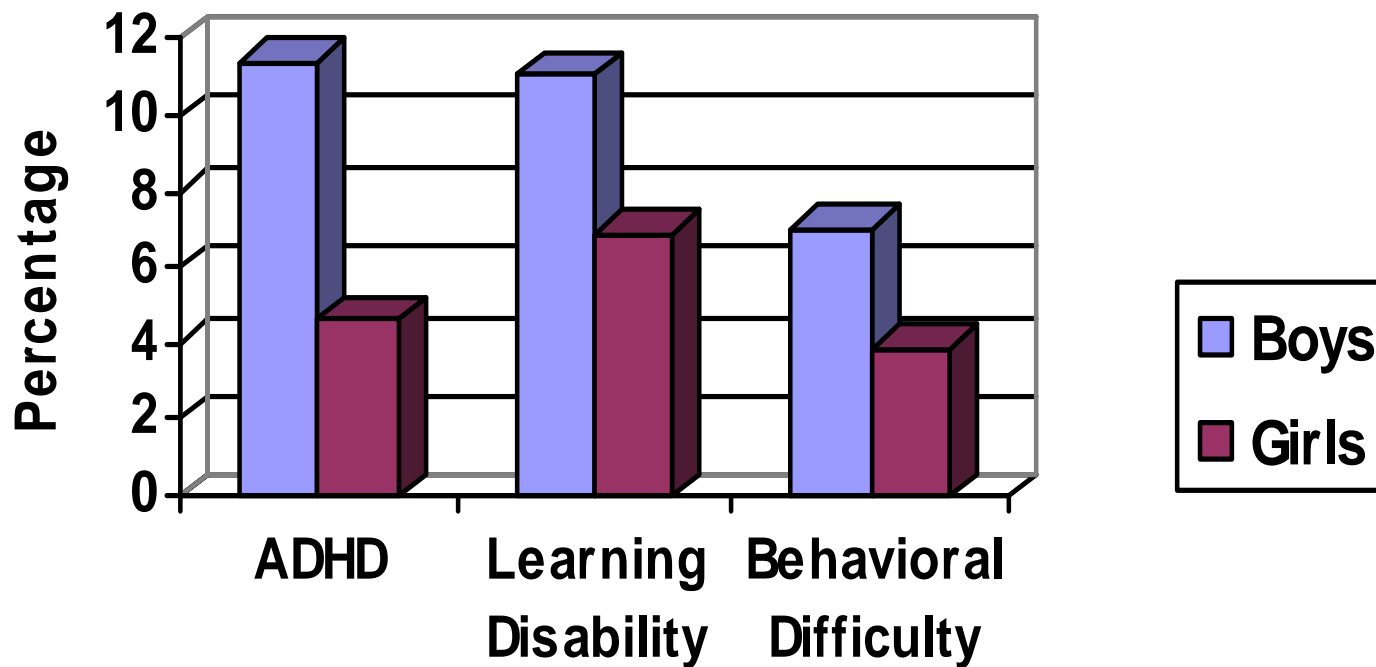


The Problem (Continued): Boys in Crisis

- Lack of motivation in school—boys are less likely to participate in most activities, more likely to describe studies as, “meaningless.”
- Boys comprise the majority of permanent drop-outs.
- Boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD or learning disorders.



**Percentage of Children, age 5-17 with ADHD,
Learning Disability, or Behavioral Difficulties, By
Gender**



The Problem (Continued): Boys in Crisis

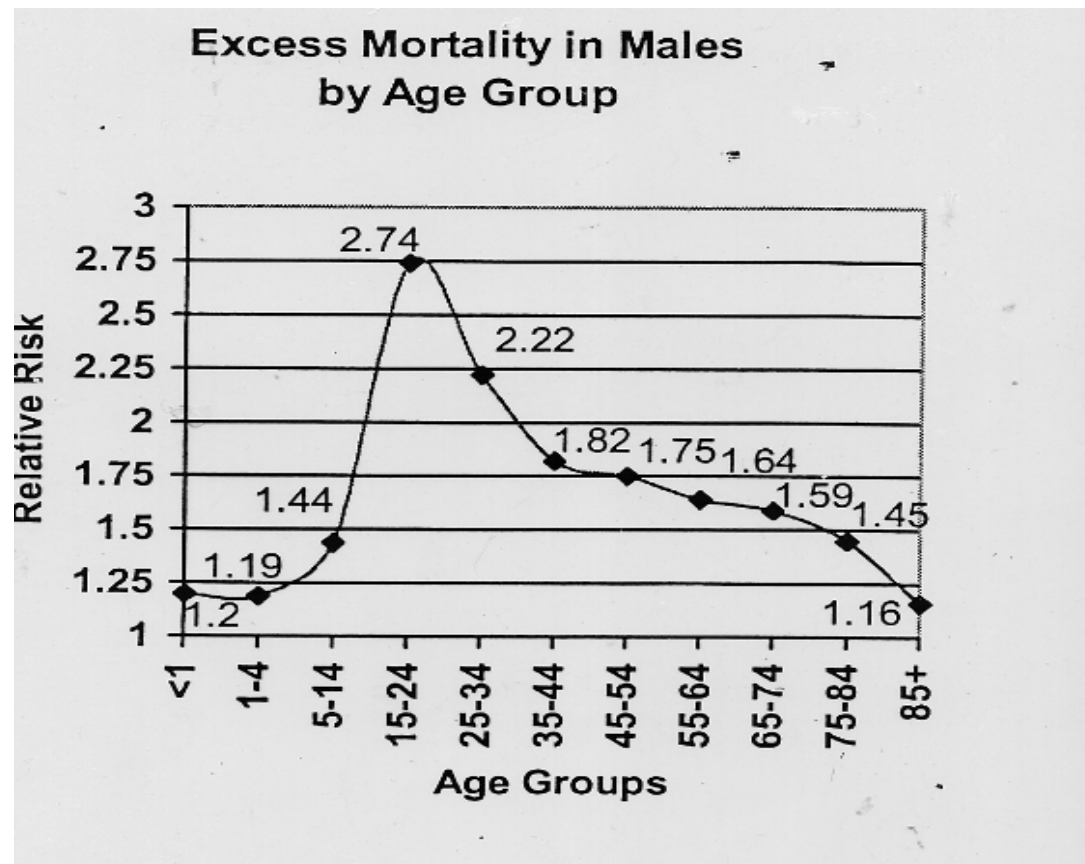
- Boys commit suicide at a rate five times that of girls.
- Boys are more likely to be involved in high-risk behaviors (drugs, alcohol, etc.) or unsafe situations (victim of crime or bullying).
- Boys enter college in lower numbers and are more likely to leave without completing their degree.

Excess Mortality

in

Males by Age

(Graphics © Men's Health Network 2000)



The Problem (Continued): Boys in Crisis

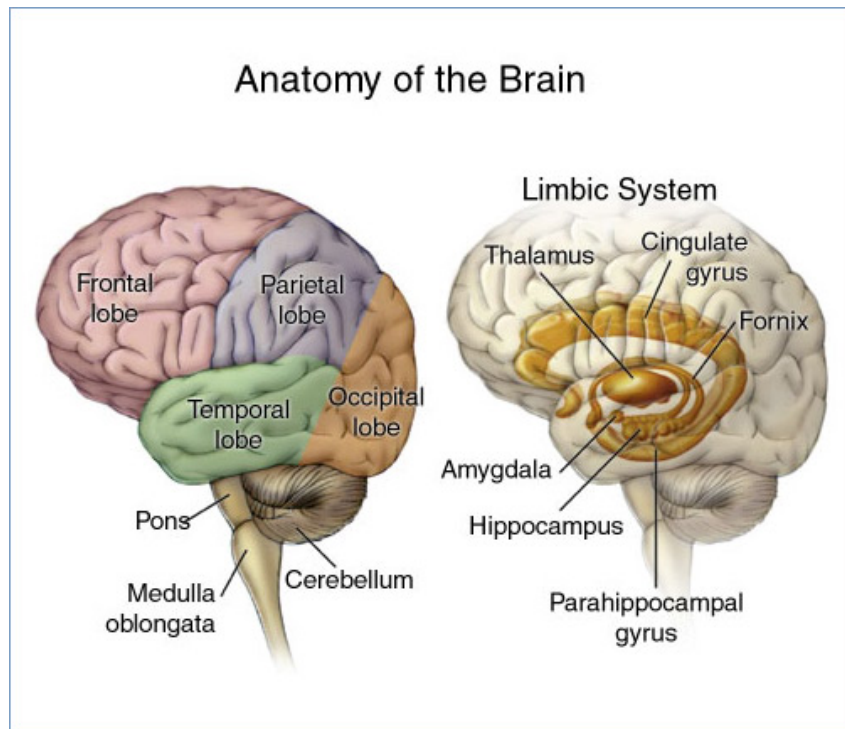
- School Bullying: Are schools safe places for boys?
- Bullies (in school and out of school) know exactly where you are and when you'll be there.
- Negative attitudes towards academic achievement in boys exist in certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups.
- These attitudes may be expressed in hostility, ridicule, derision, and even outright violence.
- How do you watch your books and watch your back?

Demographics of Homicide in the United States

- Over the course of a lifetime, an **African- American male has a 1 in 30 chance of being murdered.**
- African-American females have a 1 in 132 rate,
- White males have a 1 in 179 rate, and
- White females have a 1 in 495 rate.
- Homicide ranks 13th in the U.S. as a leading cause of death overall. However, for African American men of all ages, it ranks 5th, and is the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 15-24.

(source: Department of Justice)

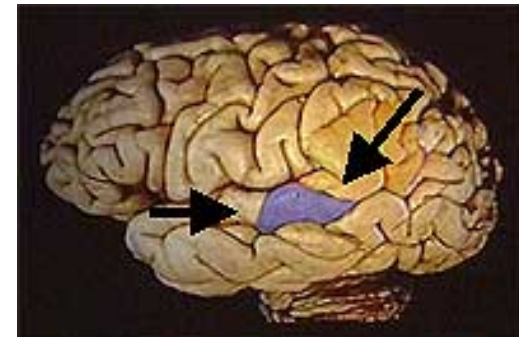
The Boy Brain



Male brain structure, function, and development differ from the female brain. The result? Different ways of thinking, responding, and growing.

Boys' Brains Vs. Girls' Brains: Language & Communication

Differences between the male and female brain's language and communication centers, such as Broca's Area (top picture) and Wernicke's Area (bottom picture) contribute to female ability in these skills.



Brain Differences Continued:

Aggression, Spatial Reasoning, And More



- A number of factors, from higher testosterone levels to a larger amygdala may contribute to higher levels of male aggression and the male “fight or flight” response.
- The tendency to do better at spatial reasoning exercises is usually attributed boys’ tendency to use the right hemisphere to work on abstract problems.
- Brain differences can impact such varying factors as sex drive, memory, and light or tactile sensitivity.

Developmental Differences: Infancy & Toddlerhood



Activity levels, play preferences, and language development can all differ between boys and girls from before birth through the toddler years.

Developmental Differences: Preschool to the Elementary Years



Language, communication, and social interaction take center stage, and innate learning differences and abilities begin to assert themselves.

Developmental Differences: Adolescence and Beyond



A time of rapid growth, risk taking, and the struggle to define one's self. As everyone knows, a difficult time, developmentally speaking.

Keys to Understanding: Boys' Development



- Putting it in Context: How boys and girls may respond differently to a situation.
- Physiological Differences
 - Anatomy and development of the brain
- Developmental Differences
 - Infant to Toddler, activity and language
 - Preschool to Elementary School, language, communication, and social interaction
 - Adolescence, risk taking and rapid growth
- Understanding the boy who feels “left behind” in the classroom.

For Our Boys—Moving from Concern to Action



The Strategies



This is not a list of rules that need to be followed exactly in order to create successful students. Rather, the idea is that with flexibility in teaching styles and methods, an educator can work with these tips and suggestions to find what may be most successful with his or her students.

The Strategies

- Using clearly defined limits and expectations.
 - Boys have a need for structure, and can become frustrated with “vague” assignments.
 - Strategies for creating sense of structure, pace, direction; helping students learn to break down lessons.
 - Creating targets and rewards.
- The importance of active learning opportunities and movement.
 - Examples of applying active learning (role playing, debates, in research, etc.).
 - Incorporating active learning techniques.

The Strategies (Continued)



- **Making connections.**
 - **How to help boys see the relevance of their schoolwork, and connecting lessons to real world examples.**
- Challenges and competition as a learning tool.
- Incorporating social learning.
- Peer support as a learning method.

The Strategies (Continued)

- How to utilize feedback and negotiation.
- Encouraging reading & making it more boy-friendly.
 - Understanding and making use of boy-friendly reading material.
 - Literature assignments that encourage careful reading while appealing to boys' interests.
 - Creating encouragement of reading in the school and community.
- Strengthening writing and critical thinking skills (no matter what the subject).

The Strategies (Continued)

- Employing cross-curricular efforts to improve literacy skills.
- The importance of a safe and supportive teaching/learning environment.
- Challenging gender stereotypes, and encouraging boys to stretch their horizons.
- The value of mentoring and role models.
- Building self-esteem and motivation; encouraging character development.

The Strategies (Continued)

- Creating a working partnership for success with parents.
 - Developing good communication.
 - The importance of the father's role.
- Utilizing resources outside of the school.
- Group Exercise/Discussion: Exploring strategies already discussed and brainstorming about different ways to put them into practice in your own classroom.

Discussion/Exercise

What strategies, exercises, activities, etc. do you think might work well in your classroom?



Learning Styles and Gender

- There are several different kinds of intelligence.
- Audile: Learns best by hearing and discussing
- Visile: Learns best by seeing
- Tactile: Learns best by touch
- Active versus passive learning methods: do you sit and discuss or learn by doing?
- There is great individual variation even within a gender, but boys usually tend to do better in active learning formats emphasizing visual and tactile formats: see, touch and feel while doing.

The Boy-Friendly Classroom:

Understanding Boys' Learning Styles & Needs



- Approach lessons with structure and reinforcement. (Avoid vagueness.)
- Make it relevant.
- Look for opportunities to incorporate active learning, challenges, competition, and social learning.
- Use negotiation, rewards, recognition, and positive feedback to motivate.
- Be aware of boys' needs for movement and space in learning.

Make Use of Mentors

- Encourage positive role models.
- Look for mentoring opportunities in the community (college students, programs, etc.)
- Consider mentorship possibilities between older and younger students.
- Don't underestimate the importance of male mentors and role models.



Ready, Set, Read!



- Be aware of boys' different reading preferences.
- Look for the interest “gateways” to get boys into reading.
- Use themes and interests to broaden their reading experience.
- Introduce reward or recognition programs, boys' “book week”, etc. to encourage boys to read.

Ready, Set, Read!

- Make sure reading materials are available at home and in school.
- Above all, read to boys (and encourage them to read to you).
- Think of assignments that will have boys reading closely while appealing to their interests.

Promoting Literacy Skills

- Frame lessons through writing.
- Use pre-writing exercises that help break down the process.
- Encourage writing in the home and classroom.
- Keep a balanced focus between technical proficiency, reading for meaning, and other uses.



Staying Active and Involved

- Foster good communication between home and school.
- Get involved in your child's school. (Schools should look for activities and assignments that get parents participating.)
- Don't underestimate the importance of Dads.



Conclusion

- It's not about favoring boys over girls (or vice versa), or about generalizing student abilities.
- Rather, the key is finding new ways to reach students (with a little extra knowledge and strategy).



Conclusion Continued

- Concluding thoughts on gender development, learning styles, and helping boys do better (without ignoring the needs of girls).
- Question and Answer Session.

