



SCHOOL LEADERS MUST ADAPT TEACHING FOR BOYS WHO STRUGGLE

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School leaders must adapt their response to boys who struggle academically in order to close the gender gap in education, says a long-time Surrey educator. Barry MacDonald, an author and professional speaker, noted that test results show the academic gap between boys and girls, especially in reading, has been growing over the past couple of decades.

“This trend has been emerging over the last 15, 20 years and especially in British Columbia we’ve noticed that there’s been an increase in boys not meeting expectations in Grade 7 in reading comprehension,” he said.

Schoolboys in Central America may be no different. MacDonald was poised for a trip to Belize to help teachers there curb the tide of boys quitting school as early as Grade 7.

MacDonald argues that dated traditional approaches to learning can

push struggling boys to drop out of school or disengage from academics.

To support his theories, he points in part to brain research that shows boys are more visual whereas girls are more verbal. Complicating matters is the maddening pace of technology.

MacDonald said teaching styles, aimed at engaging young minds used to the intensity and stimulation of video games and other electronic media, aren’t evolving quickly enough to hold the attention of all students.

BLAMING VIDEO GAMES IS JUST TOO SIMPLISTIC

“Many teachers tell me they struggle when they know boys are spending so much time on video games and computers and they wonder how they can compete with that,” he said.

But he doesn’t blame video games and other diversions for all the distraction.

“We’re becoming a much more visual society with the internet, with this kind of electronic media, and our children are just reflecting the changes in our world,” he said.

On the contrary, he believes educators can adapt the appeal of video games to the classroom.

“If video games are so attractive, if kids are going to spend months on end to get to the highest level in a particular game, what are the design elements in that that we can learn from and replicate in our schools?” he asked.

MacDonald is the author of *Boy Smarts*, a book that offers tips on how to channel rambunctious male energy and rebellion into effective learning methods. He recently made a keynote address at the Canadian National Principals’ Conference in St. John’s, Newfoundland.

Despite the challenges, he noted many educators have recognized the cultural shift and are making strides in making their lessons more creative and relevant to their students.

“Teachers are doing a good job at taking this information and adapting and powering up to the new cultural reality,” he said.



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