

ARE BOYS FALLING BEHIND?

SCHOOL LEADERS CONSIDER GENDER GAP IN ACHIEVEMENT



VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA
MARKETWIRE - MAY 21, 2008

Barry MacDonald, author of ***Boy Smarts***, and BC educator identified as one of Twenty-five British Columbians to Watch by The Vancouver Sun, was keynote speaker at the Canadian Association of Principals' Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland on May 16th.

MacDonald challenged school principals from every Canadian province and territory school leaders to think beyond the simplistic rhetoric such as *boys will be boys* solutions and to adapt their responses to gender gaps in achievement to their school communities in thoughtful ways.

His message about helping boys' school achievement struck just the right chord with school leaders, including Dr. Avis Glaze, Ontario's Education Commissioner and Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education. Dr. Glaze, a woman of influence, has served as Ontario's Secretariat for Literacy and Numeracy and received The Order of Ontario; she is widely known

for her innovative professional development initiatives aimed toward improving achievement for all students.

POPULAR ONTARIO SCHOOL LEADER GIVES MACDONALD TWO THUMBS UP...

Dr. Glaze remarked: "As I travel throughout Canada and the world, I become increasingly aware that boys are falling behind girls in academic achievement.

I commend Barry MacDonald for stimulating focused inquiry and dialogue about the varied learning needs of boys who struggle at school.

Barry MacDonald's compelling presentation is one of the best I have ever seen. His keynote address at the 2008 National Principals' Conference was balanced, insightful and presented with perspicacity.

He offers a framework and an array of

strategies that will indeed make a tremendous difference in the lives of boys struggling at school.

Barry is an outstanding speaker who wisely knows the place of attunement and humour, and indeed should be heard by every educator and parent.

This gender gap requires the urgent attention of school leaders.”

MacDonald argues that dated traditional approaches to learning can actually push struggling boys out the school door - if not physically then metaphorically.

He also talked to administrators about the sometimes destructive spin-offs of the culture of masculinity in Canada, where the leading cause of injury among women is assault by a husband or boyfriend - higher than the number of car accidents, stranger rapes and muggings combined.

MacDonald asserted: “We need to courageously envision schooling that helps boys achieve their potential, but we also need to envision community that manages male aggression respectfully while taking a stand against harassment and violence.”

MacDonald urged caution on ways in which we use the results of standardized tests, as he believes that assessments should ideally be authentic since students themselves are not standardized; however, he did express concern about the recent British Columbia FSA results which indicate a sizable group of Grade 7 boys are not meeting minimal expectations in reading comprehension.

He recommended that his audience consider how they might help these boys - and other non-traditional learners - read better; in MacDonald’s view, active inquiry that is visually engaging is essential for students who think more in pictures than in words.

He also alerted principals to their power to tip the scale for boys from risk to resilience and on to long-term success.

In a country where teachers rarely mount the podium to challenge the status quo, MacDonald is refreshingly authentic and astute. Let’s hope that his ideas inspire inquiry that leads to action so that boys - and girls too - who struggle at school may become more fully engaged and successful learners in our Canadian schools.

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