



22 | September 28, 2006 | www.piquenewsmagazine.com

No escaping that boys learn differently

RENOWNED SPEAKER BARRY MACDONALD TO SHARE INSIGHTS ON HOW TO RAISE CARING, SUCCESSFUL BOYS

They turn sticks into weapons, enjoy knocking down their block towers and love to tussle in a good roughhousing session. Yes, boys can often be defined by their rambunctious behaviour. But, said renowned “boy” expert Barry MacDonald, the male of the species is far, far more than just energy and aggression and if parents and teachers want to get the most out of them then an understanding of today’s boys is a must. MacDonald, an author, former teacher and counsellor, will offer some insight into today’s males at a free event Thursday, Oct. 5th at 7 p.m. at Whistler Secondary School. Babysitting is available. “It is really understanding boys that leads us to appreciate them and mentor them and guide them,” said MacDonald who was recently identified as one of the

25 Influential People to Watch by the Vancouver Sun.

“I am going to challenge parents and teachers to look at boys strengths and see a boy not as hyper, but as energetic, and channel the energy, channel the testosterone, so that he can be successful.” MacDonald has gathered together some of his key findings and insights into a book, *Boy Smarts – Mentoring Boys for Success at School*. It offers 100 tips for helping boys find success. But it also offers a glimpse inside the psyche of a boy. One key revelation is to understand that boys show anxiety in unique ways. Many don’t want to make eye contact, they fidget, shift from foot to foot — all behaviours most adults associate with a defensive attitude and even arrogance. By simply recognizing this tense

situations can be diffused.

The tendency of boys to be rambunctious, especially in a school setting, has also caused problems.

“They have these active learning patterns that can be seen as threatening,” said MacDonald, pointing to a trend by parents, educators and others to label boys with behaviour disorders such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyper Activity disorder.

“These boys... have more physical forms of bonding and connecting that are just much more gregarious and they are perceived as aggression.

“We can be too quick to write these boys off as unteachable when what we need to do is focus on how we are responding.”

There is no doubt that boys have more behaviour problems in schools, they are more likely to be implicated in bullying and harassment. They are more frequently absent from school, more likely to be suspended, more likely to be assigned a special education or severe behaviour category, and they are less likely to go to university.

“We can be too quick to write these boys off as unteachable...”

-BARRY MACDONALD

Boys are more likely to drop out of school and sadly, boys are more likely to do serious harm to themselves.

Part of the response to this reality is understanding that boys are growing up in a different culture today, which is demanding and is characterized by intensity, and an in-your-face mentality. It's a global realization and it has prompted the Australian government to undertake a process similar to a Royal Commission to investigate boys in the school system.

British educators are producing a toolbox for teachers to look at how to reach out and be successful with boys.

MacDonald, who does not support segregating genders in the school system, also warns that changes introduced to help boys succeed should not be seen as taking place in response to the great strides made for girls in the education system.

“We have to be careful when we talk about boys and girls in school that we

don't get into binary trap where gains made by girls in school over the last 20-30 years are assumed to equate as losses for the boys,” he said. “This is not about the boys versus the girls.”

MacDonald imagines the boys and girls in a class as forming a continuum from Barbie to Rambo. The Barbie would anticipate the actions of a teacher and be focused on cooperating with the teacher, whereas Rambo would not be following the actions of the teacher closely and may have to be reminded personally of where the class was.

“It is important to begin by understanding that what (the Rambos) are doing is not misbehaviour,” said MacDonald. “It is simply responding with their unique personality.”

That personality is a product of genetics and culture and must be treated with respect.

That doesn't mean giving boys free reign, said MacDonald. On the contrary, “boys do need guidance, especially those boys who are leaning over toward Rambo in their brain design. They need to learn how to communicate.”

Part of that is addressing masculine culture and the “Boy Code” which permeates our society, said MacDonald.

“An easy way to say (the code) is, boys don't cry, boys should be tough and strong, don't show your emotions, don't be a girl,” he said.

“But if you think about those rules — be tough, don't show what is going on inside, and don't be at all sensitive — those rules become the rules for unhappy adult life. I argue that the boy code will become the divorce code.”

Part of breaking down that code is to get fathers and male role models to become more involved in the schools and become more open emotionally with boys. On the school front parents and teachers must become a united front.

“It is much harder to misbehave and go off track when you have a solid team between home and school so the secret for both boys and girls is to have strong home school relationships and to work together for this conspiracy of caring,” said MacDonald.

For more information visit MacDonald's website,

www.MentoringBoys.com.