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Foreword

‘At last’, teachers will say, ‘a book about teaching boys that doesn’t dwell on suicide rates or problematise dominant constructions of masculinity’. In recent years the support available to teachers has been heavily weighted at the theoretical, big picture end. Greg Griffith’s practical emphasis in this publication is definitely needed. And his years of experience in assisting all manner of teachers, in all types of classrooms, shows through in his writing. His tone is respectful of teachers and the boys in their classrooms. He is not pointing out the ‘right’ way to teach or selling a brand new, revolutionary approach; in fact, many ideas will be recognisable as good teaching practice.

What Greg does offer are clear suggestions to improve boys’ learning by paying attention to the basics, the environment and the rules, as well as ongoing issues of discipline, competition and relationships.

And his approach is based firmly on the ordinary teacher in an ordinary (that is, under-resourced) classroom.

Greg’s teacher-based knowledge belongs in staffrooms around the country.

Lets hope that it is the first of many publications of this type, reflecting the recognition that teachers are key players in figuring out the nitty-gritty practice issues of educating future generations of men.

Richard Fletcher



Introduction

There has been much written in recent years about boys in schools. As awareness of the varying success of boys and girls has increased, more research and material have become available. Boys' learning, boys' social interaction, boys' behaviour, boys not being involved in aspects of schooling, boys, boys, boys . . .

The following information has come to light:

- Boys are significantly more 'disengaged' with schooling and are more likely to be at 'risk' of academic achievement – especially in literacy.
- Boys exhibit significantly greater externalising behaviour problems in the classroom and at home.
- Fifty per cent of consultations to paediatricians at tertiary-referral hospitals relate to behaviour problems of boys to girls at a ratio of 9:1.
- Boys constitute 75–85 per cent of grade 1–2 children identified for Reading Recovery intervention.
- Boys have a higher prevalence of auditory processing problems.
- Boys report significantly less positive experiences in schooling in terms of enjoyment of school, curriculum usefulness and teacher responsiveness.
- Boys are more likely to 'drop out' prematurely. In 1994 to 1998 Australian national estimates indicate 30 per cent of boys did not complete their schooling, nor did 20 per cent of girls.
- Boys are subject to more disciplinary actions during school, are more likely to participate in delinquent behaviour, alcohol and substance abuse, and during adolescence are four to five times more likely than girls to suffer from depression and commit suicide.¹

Why is this increasingly happening in recent years? There is evidence of a long-term decline in boys' performance, but no-one seems to have a satisfactory answer for the post-1990 performance difference, where girls have on average done better than boys and have improved on this year by year. Boys' performance has declined relative to



The physical environment

The general factors of the physical environment include the following:

- Layout of classroom, which includes
 - size of group
 - space available
 - furniture
 - carpet – noise and cleanliness
 - desks – mobility and arrangement
- School tone, which includes
 - general climate – firm, clear
 - size of school
 - expectations
 - limits on behaviour
 - tolerance of behaviour
 - acceptance of students
- Classroom tone, which includes
 - acceptance of student but not the behaviour
 - warmth
 - awareness and sensitivity
 - flexibility
- Interpersonal skills and staff morale, which include
 - cooperation
 - trust and honesty
 - emotional maturity
 - sharing of burdens
 - relieving of feelings
 - absence of fear of reprisal

Before students enter the classroom, teachers taking a look at the physical environment could assist their time here. Just as we prepare curriculum content, learning experiences and behaviour management, a small amount of time could be well spent preparing the room. Even before considering the class itself, some future situations may be relieved by a review of distractions in the room, teacher desk location, seating arrangements, and student flow in and out of the room. Many



Rights

We all have rights. Male or female, young or old, migrant, indigenous, ethnic minority or majority. The United Nations as well as many other countries have determined the bill of rights for individuals. Without formally establishing such a document, students in our schools also have rights. Consider the following list:

Possible rights of students

I have the right to be happy and to be treated with understanding

I have the right to be treated with respect and politeness

I have the right to express my opinion on matters of concern to me

I have the right to be safe

I have the right to be helped to learn self-control

I have the right to expect my property to be safe

I have the right to obtain maximum benefit from all classes

I have the right to have a pleasant, clean and well-maintained school and grounds

I have the right to expect the local community to support, respect and have pride in the school

I have the right to not be ignored if others abuse my rights

I have the right to expect that all these rights will be mine so long as I am carrying out my full responsibilities

Bill Rogers¹ has established a more succinct set of rights for students. He states:

It is important to focus on the essential rights from which all others spring. These rights are non-negotiable. They are not merely culturally based or gender based. Everyone has the right:

- To feel safe at school. Students cannot learn well or socialise effectively if they feel unsafe in classrooms or playgrounds. Emotional and physical safety, therefore, are high priorities in student management.
- To learn to the best of their ability with the best of assistance
- To be treated with dignity and respect – even when they are being disciplined.

Further rights are suggested as flowing from these ‘core’ rights. They are:

- Communication – students should be able to expect others to speak kindly and respectfully to them.
- Movement – this should be possible, safe and non-disruptive around the school and classroom.
- Problem-solving – this should be conducted in a fair manner. It should apply to all



Specific classroom techniques

Below is a list of things to consider in your classroom:

- As a technique, conditioning is very important and effective. It includes the following types of behaviour:
 - walking into class in a set way
 - sitting down
 - getting out books
 - starting work
 - being polite
 - showing care towards others
 - showing that you have listened
- Provide a predictable, stable and safe environment – a routine – so that people will know what will happen next.
- Utilise conditioning principles. This includes the following:
 - reward expected behaviour
 - apply predetermined consequences to, or ignore, unacceptable behaviour.
- Establish clear class goals
 - set class-determined goals on walls
 - have class ethos
 - regularly refer and reinforce the above
- Have work fully planned in advance, but be flexible enough to vary the procedure if necessary. Here it is important to:
 - know the material
 - know where you are heading
 - know your students
- Pitch work at a level that is reasonable for your students; expectations must be reasonable.
- Shorten periods of concentration with difficult students; intersperse their work with varied activities. As a rule of thumb, the more disturbed the student, the shorter the attention span.