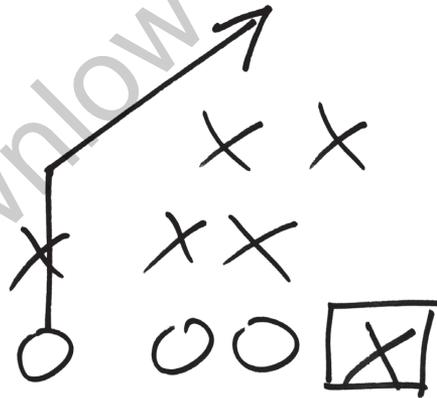


WRITING THE PLAYBOOK

A Practitioner's Guide to
Creating a Boy-Friendly School

Foreword by
Michael Gurian,
Author of *The Minds of
Boys* and *Boys and Girls
Learn Differently!*



Kelley King

Contents

Foreword	vii
<i>Michael Gurian</i>	
Preface	xi
Acknowledgments	xiii
About the Author	xv
1. Making the Call: Is There Really a Boy Crisis?	1
The Final Buzzer	7
2. Getting Your Head in the Game: “Need-to-Knows” About the Male Brain	9
Laying the Groundwork	12
Why Do These Sex Differences Exist?	13
Our Beginnings	14
Does That Mean That Our Abilities Are Fixed?	15
The Male Brain 101	16
Is There Such a Thing as an “Extreme Male Brain”?	27
The Male Adolescent Brain	27
It’s Nature <i>and</i> Nurture!	28
The Final Buzzer	28
3. Chalk Talk: A Game Plan for Moving Your Team Down the Field	31
School Culture and Climate—What’s the Difference?	33

Activities for Your Professional Learning	
Communities.....	35
Got Data?	43
Getting Teacher Buy-In.....	46
SMART Goals.....	49
Developing an Action Plan.....	50
School Improvement and Teacher Growth.....	52
Developing a Yearlong Professional Development Plan.....	53
The Final Buzzer	59
4. Leveling the Playing Field: School Policies and Procedures That Don't Squeeze Boys Out	61
Expectations and the Stereotype Threat	63
Discipline	64
Time, Place, and Manner.....	73
Grades and Homework.....	74
Banning Aggression Themes	77
The Final Buzzer.....	79
5. Touching Base: Relationship Building to Guide Boys on Their Journey.....	81
The Social-Emotional Lives of Boys	84
Forging Positive Relationships With Boys	93
Male Mentoring and Role Models.....	101
The Final Buzzer.....	107
6. The Ground Game: Setting Up Classrooms That Help Boys Succeed	109
Physical Arrangement of the Classroom	111
Classroom Procedures	121
The Final Buzzer	132
7. Hitting It Out of the Park: Game-Winning Instructional Strategies for Boys (and Girls!).....	135
Lecture Strategies	140
Movement Strategies	142
Student Interests Strategies.....	146
Real-World Learning Strategies.....	148
Student Choice Strategies.....	150
Visual-Spatial Strategies	152
Technology Strategies	154
Competition Strategies	156

there are any differences. The brains of boys and girls are the same.” Wow. My (female) brain swirled—where do I even start with this? Can she really believe this? I challenged her to stand up in a ballroom packed with teachers or in a school gymnasium full of parents and make that statement with a straight face. How someone could summarily dismiss decades of research and parent and teacher wisdom in one perfunctory statement was astounding to me. How could anyone logically assume that sex differentiation exists *only from the neck down*?

Oftentimes, this staunch position in favor of “no differences” (even in the face of what we know and experience every day), is fear based. How unfortunate that we should have to ignore the massive body of work documenting gender-based brain differences in the last 20 years. In fact, there are many examples of how failing to recognize differences has cost lives! Consider the field of medicine: prescriptions that work for males, don’t work for females—or are even deadly. Women may have a heart attack and not realize it. Why? Because women have been taught to watch for a man’s symptoms. We cannot continue to ignore (or refuse to acknowledge) that differences exist and deserve consideration in our work with boys and girls.

While this is a conversation about differences, it is *not* a conversation about better or worse. Rather, this is a conversation about brain specializations—some that occur more often in males (but not exclusively in males) and some that occur more often in females (but not exclusively in females). There is a great deal of overlap between the sexes and a lot of variation within each sex (Baron-Cohen, 2002). Thank goodness that, as educators, we have the wisdom to know that nothing is black-and-white, there is no one-size-fits-all to anything, and that we must teach to the learning styles

Just because boys are wired differently than girls does not mean that they need to adjust to fit a largely female-based educational system. The system needs to adapt to reach every student and to capitalize on their strengths and interests.

Mike Keppler, principal, Niwot Elementary School

- Sex differences emerged in response to different survival pressures over the history of man.
- Sex differentiation begins in utero. Testosterone takes center stage in molding the male body and mind.
- Learning about specific sex differences in the brain helps educators identify a number of critical strategies to ensure success, both academically and behaviorally, for boys.
- The brain does not finish its development in adolescence. Young men need to be taught in developmentally appropriate and boy-friendly ways.
- Experience shapes the brain, which means that we are products of both nature and nurture.

One of the best things in the world to be is a boy; it requires no experience, but needs some practice to be a good one.

Charles Dudley Warner

discussion, melding of ideas (eliminating duplicates, etc.), and consensus building around the primary interventions.

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

Step 1: Define three levels of intervention

Classroom: Intervention strategies at the classroom level are strategies directly related to how and what students are taught. These may vary from class to class based on the needs of students and teachers but are all research based and come from an agreed-upon list developed by the entire faculty.

School: These are intervention strategies that relate to the operation of the school or schoolwide activities. They require everyone's buy-in and support. Examples include things like single-sex classes, advisory periods, vertical mentoring, master scheduling, distribution of resources, professional development, all-school events . . . basically, interventions that, when implemented, affect everyone.

Community: These are intervention strategies that connect the school's work to the community/parents. They require an agreement among faculty members. Community-level strategies might include training for parents, newsletter articles, initiatives to involve dads, business partnerships, social action projects, etc.

Step 2: Give each participant nine index cards or sticky notes. Each participant works alone to brainstorm three strategies for each of the three levels of intervention. *Participants should focus on selecting the strategies that they feel have the greatest chance of increasing student success.* Each strategy is written on a separate card/note.

Step 3: The team now works together to share and explain their strategy ideas. Be specific! The team should eliminate duplicates, blend ideas as appropriate, and then write their combined list of strategies on three separate pieces of flip-chart paper labeled *Classroom*, *School*, and *Community*. Post the charts on the wall and make sure everyone understands what is written.

Step 4: Now, *set aside the Classroom strategies page* and just focus for a moment on the School and Community strategies. Give each participant

(Continued)

are low in the pecking order are more often the boys who enter puberty later and who are smaller and less athletic—not fitting the standard definitions of masculinity and more likely to be bullied (Gurian, 2010).

As teachers, this should concern us. Students who have lower social status among peers are under greater stress. Increased stress means a higher level of the stress hormone, cortisol, in the bloodstream.

Elevated cortisol levels interfere with the brain's ability to learn new content and can contribute to behavioral problems, including making it more difficult for boys to sit still (Ruttle et al., 2011). Pecking order is also based on factors that a boy may be able to control, to some degree, such as mannerisms, values, style of dress, and so on—"the norm to conform" with peer group definitions of who and how one is supposed to be in the world.

A high school teacher told me a story that provides an excellent illustration of norming to peer culture. After math tests had been returned to students, one male student, who had scored very well on the test, came up to the teacher's desk and spoke in a hushed tone. "Please don't tell anyone what I got on this test." The teacher realized that this boy did not want his peers to know about his good test grade because it would hurt his social standing. He didn't want his peers to catch him "acting white." His teacher responded, "I'll make you a deal. You keep working hard, and I won't say a word!"

Doing well in school is often considered by boys as being incompatible with masculinity. School is something that girls do and, in their ongoing quest to reach alpha-male status, many boys don't want to draw attention to their academic efforts. In my own household (headed by two educator parents, nonetheless), I experienced this. While my son was supposedly doing his homework one evening, I saw that he kept stopping to text. Finally, I told him "Connor, tell them you are doing homework

Boys are shame-phobic. Do not shame a boy in public. Shame reflects on who the boy is rather than what the boy has done. When you publicly shame a boy, you risk permanently losing his respect (Payne & Slocumb, 2011).

Show interest in the quirky humor, the original perspectives of boys.

Ralph Fletcher, author of *Guy-Write: What Every Guy Writer Needs to Know* and *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices*

Languages at the K–12 American School of Doha in Qatar. Tim has dedicated extensive time to the study of gender-differentiated teaching techniques. He boils down relationship building with boys to some

very important tenets for teachers. I can envision a wonderful faculty discussion about each of these bullet points, in terms of what each of Tim’s points means and what each would look like if it were operationalized in a school or classroom. What else would your school add to this list?

- Be organized and competent.
- Be a man (or woman) of your word. Be demanding and fair.
- Offer consequences, never threats, and stick to them.
- Be ready to play—with boundaries.
- Cry when not crying would be inhuman.
- Be a model of behavior and self-understanding.

WHAT EDUCATORS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

I also make sure that I know the sports scores and all that is happening in their world . . . at least as much as I can. During their break time, I circulate and try to discuss intelligently the latest movies or the best prospects for winning the NBA, NHL, or MLB championships—it always pays off a hundredfold!

Elementary school principal

Our day always starts with Morning Meeting, where students can share news from their life. Boys often share about winning the big game, their dog that threw up in the house, or something silly that a younger sibling did. Being able to laugh about these stories at 8 o’clock each morning helps boys to see our classroom as a welcoming place for them.

Stephanie Van Horn, fifth-grade teacher, Douglass Elementary School

6

The Ground Game

Setting Up Classrooms That Help Boys Succeed

Prohibited from the physical activity they need and criticized for the content of their minds, it is not surprising that some of these boys get off to a bad start, giving up before they have even begun.

Jane Katch, kindergarten teacher and author of *Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violence Play*

Let's face it—teaching boys can be fun. The very things that are maddening about boys—their energy, their out-of-the-box thinking, their sense of humor—are the very things that crack us up and make us love them. No one makes me appreciate the joy of teaching boys more than one particular all-boys high school teacher in Texas. Laughter is commonplace in her classroom, and her energy matches the energy of

suffice. The real prize is simply the fun of playing the game—and that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Student Collaboration

“Pro-social” environments literally enhance neurogenesis (brain cell production). These new cells support learning, memory, and mood regulation (E. Jensen, 2008).

- A desire for social interaction is natural. Don’t suppress it. Incorporate it into the classroom activities.
- Don’t allow random social grouping more than 10–20% of the time. Instead, use more intentional partnering and grouping of students.
- Students should spend about 50% of every school day interacting with one another.
- Simple ways of increasing social interaction include explaining what you heard to a partner, a walk-and-talk review, or playing a partner review game.
- Setting up a buddy system with another class is commonly done at the elementary level. These vertical mentors (older students paired with younger students) are a great way to foster collaboration, build relationships, and capitalize on the power of “pecking order” (see Chapter 5).

Something that I like about school is how you are there with your friends. It makes it much more enjoyable and not as stressful when you study with a friend or can get help from a friend.

Sam, age 15

Get Male Role Models Into Classrooms

For both biological and sociological reasons, boys respond well to respected, older males. Find ways to