

Acknowledgements

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Jon Pickering

Foreword to the *School Effectiveness Series*

A teacher's task is much more ambitious than it used to be and demands a focus on the subtleties of teaching and learning and on the emerging knowledge of school improvement.

This is what this series is about.

Teaching can be a very lonely activity. The time-honoured practice of a single teacher working alone in the classroom is still the norm; yet to operate alone is, in the end, to become isolated and impoverished. This series addresses two issues – the need to focus on practical and useful ideas connected with teaching and learning, and the wish thereby to provide some sort of an antidote to the loneliness of the long-distance teacher who is daily berated by an anxious society.

Teachers flourish when, in key stage teams or departments (or more rarely whole schools), their talk is predominantly about teaching and learning; and where, unconnected with appraisal, they are privileged to observe each other teach, to plan and review their work together and to practise the habit of learning new teaching techniques from each other. But how does this state of affairs arise? Is it to do with the way staffrooms are physically organised so that the walls bear testimony to interesting articles and in the corner there is a dedicated computer tuned to 'conferences' about special educational needs, school improvement, the teaching of English etc., and whether, in consequence, the teacher leaning over the shoulder of the enthusiastic IT colleague sees the promise of interesting practice elsewhere? Has the primary school cracked it when it organises successive staff meetings in different classrooms and invites the 'host' teacher to start the meeting with a 15 minute exposition of their classroom organisation and management? Or is it the same staff sharing, on a rota basis, a slot on successive staff meeting agenda when each in turn reviews a new book they have used with their class? And what of the whole school which now uses 'active' and 'passive' concerts of carefully chosen music as part of their accelerated learning techniques?

It is of course well understood that even excellent teachers feel threatened when first they are observed. The constant observation of the teacher in training seems like that of the learner driver. Once you have passed your test and can drive unaccompanied, you do. You often make lots of mistakes and sometimes get into bad habits. Woe betide, however, the back seat driver who tells you so. In the same way the new teacher quickly loses the habit of observing others and being observed. So how do we get a confident, mutual observation debate going? One school I know found a simple and therefore brilliant solution. The head of the history department asked that a young colleague plan lessons for her to teach. This lesson she then taught, and was observed by the young colleague. There was subsequent discussion, in which the young teacher asked,

'Why did you divert the question and answer session I had planned?'
and was answered by

'Because I could see that I needed to arrest the attention of the group by the window with some "hands-on" role-play etc.'

This lasted an hour and led to a once-a-term repeat discussion which, in the end, was adopted by the whole school. The whole school subsequently changed the pattern of its meetings to consolidate extended debate about teaching and learning. The two

teachers claimed that because one planned and the other taught both were implicated but neither alone was responsible or felt 'got at'.

So there are practices which are both practical and more likely to make teaching a rewarding and successful activity. They can, as it were, increase the likelihood of a teacher surprising the students into understanding or doing something they did not think they could do rather than simply entertaining them or worse still occupying them. There are ways of helping teachers judge the best method of getting student expectation just ahead of self-esteem.

This series focuses on straightforward interventions which individual schools and teachers use to make life more rewarding for themselves and those they teach. Teachers deserve nothing less, for they are the architects of tomorrow's society, and society's ambition for what they achieve increases as each year passes.

Professor Tim Brighouse

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INTRODUCTION

How can schools raise boys' achievement?

This book seeks to help teachers and schools raise boys' achievement by:

- ☛ ***Warning against seeking blueprints based on generalisations about boys.***
- ☛ ***Focusing the search for causes and solutions on teachers working with individual boys in classrooms.***
- ☛ ***Stressing the absolute need to involve boys in any dialogue about their achievement.***
- ☛ ***Looking at examples of good practice in schools to guide planning and implementation of strategies to raise achievement.***
- ☛ ***Suggesting that initiatives to raise boys' achievement will need elements of extra resourcing.***
- ☛ ***Signalling that there is no 'quick fix' answer, but that sustained and systematic work will benefit all students, including underachieving boys.***

Raising boys' achievement is an issue in many schools, largely because there is a widespread perception that boys are underachieving at all ages and at all stages of their schooling. Much of the high-profile debate about boys' underachievement has been highly charged and largely negative. It has essentially focused on the failure of boys in comparison with girls, and has frequently placed the blame for this failure on boys' attitudes to school.

The trouble with boys
The Age 8/5/2004

Boys can be educated!

Classroom, vol. 26, no. 6, 2004, pp. 12-13

**Boys will be boys ... if
you let them**

The Age 6/10/2003

**Boys: getting some
of it right**

The Age 22/10/2004

This book encourages teachers to think positively about boys, and to do so by working with the boys in their schools. It does not provide easy answers or a general template for teachers to use as an easy way to raise boys' achievement. However, it does

support teachers by opening up areas to explore, based on a combination of school-based research and a study of examples of good practice.

Research shows that it is possible to avoid, or reverse, the stereotypes which have led to boys being labelled as unwilling or uninterested learners. It shows that boys do want to learn and do well at school, but they often want to do so in a way which is challenging to the confidence and authority of teachers. Boys want to learn at all ages and in all phases, and the book gives examples of this from a range of schools – mixed and single sex, primary and secondary.

The book provides teachers with a series of research activities which will enable them to identify in detail the causes of the underachievement of the boys they teach. To know how to raise boys' achievement we have to research and identify the causes for their underachievement. This research has to be focused on the boys we teach. If it isn't, the solutions we opt for will be guesses based on generalisations, and will therefore be ineffective. For teachers in co-educational schools the strategies should raise the achievement of all students.

The running theme of the book is the 'uniqueness' of individual schools. Achieving successful strategies with boys depends almost exclusively on the work and personalities of individual teachers and groups of teachers. It is the teachers in their schools who have the knowledge, experience and expertise to decide on the best strategies for their boys.

Therefore, teachers need to look for and understand the causes of any underachievement by talking to underachieving boys in particular and students in general. It is this dialogue which results in effective strategies. Without the dialogue the strategies will be less effective.

External data can provide possible research methods, hints at strategies that have worked in other contexts, theories about learning, issues around gender influences, and suggestions about setting up small or large school-based projects. But teachers need to apply the methods to the context in which they work, in order to address the individual learning needs of the boys they teach and to reflect the uniqueness of their school.

All of the book's activities have been used in schools. They have been used:

- for whole school professional development days to either initiate or maintain developments
- by teachers in departments, year-level groups, pastoral and cross-curricular teams
- by individual teachers in their own classrooms.

The book requires teachers to be persistent and rigorous in approach. Saying 'Done that' will not be enough. It is what we as teachers learn and develop that brings insight into what makes our individual boys successful learners. The work will never be complete, but it will be all the more rewarding for every gain made and every boy realising his true potential.

The book is in three parts.

Part one comprises a long section with six activities which provide readers with opportunities to reflect and work on some of the book's issues and approaches.

Part two is divided into six sections. Each section looks closely at a specific aspect of boys' underachievement. These are *attitudes, peer-group pressure, biological issues, school influence, equal opportunities* and *central government policy*. They are all connected to the underachievement of boys through their potential as identifiable causes of underachievement. Each section describes practical research activities; *Part two* ends with a collection of case studies.

Part three invites readers to reflect on what they have learned anew or have adapted and refined from different parts of the book. They are encouraged to reflect on what they might do next for all students – including boys who are underachieving.

The book concludes with a *References, recommended reading and useful contacts* section.

How to use the book

- ☛ Read the brief introduction at the start of each section to get a feel of the contents and direction of that section.
- ☛ Get an idea of each section from the advanced organiser at the start.
- ☛ Try to do the activities first. Before you can think about possible solutions and the development of strategies, you need to understand the causes of the underachievement of the boys you teach yourself.
- ☛ Use the examples of good practice and research evidence to add an extra dimension to your thoughts.
- ☛ Discuss activities, findings, issues and concerns with colleagues (in your own school and in others).
- ☛ Use your boys (and their parents) to inform your thoughts. They are your most important resource – as potential partners, not just as informants.
- ☛ Look at the 'stimulus' quotations from writers on schools and consider reading their research for further insights.
- ☛ Review your thoughts by using the 'do and don't' summary at the end of parts one and two.

Of course, you can read the book through without doing the activities. This will start you thinking, help you to question and develop your own practice and offer you solutions to consider. Alternatively, you might do some of the activities on a selective basis, choosing those which are more relevant to your context.