

Table of Contents

About the Authors	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
Situational and Generational Poverty	2
Why Should We Care?	2
Red-Flag Behaviors	3
1 The Impact of Generational Poverty on Boys	5
Devin's Story	6
The Need for Early Intervention	14
2 The Physical Development of Boys	17
Motor Skills	17
Spatial Ability	18
Environmental Factors	19
Adolescent Growth	20
Generational Poverty and Boys' Physical Development	22
Supporting the Physical Development of Boys	23
3 The Emotional Development of Boys	25
Brain Physiology and Boys' Emotions	25
Gender Conditioning and Boys' Emotions	26
Anger: The Default Emotion	29
Shame Phobia	30
The Legacy of Abuse	32
Generational Poverty and Boys' Emotional Development	34
Supporting the Emotional Development of Boys	36
4 The Cognitive Development of Boys	39
Brain Physiology and Cognition	39
Delayed Language Acquisition	40
Other Cognitive Differences	43
Relationships and Cognition	43
Physical Activity and Learning	44
Generational Poverty and Boys' Cognitive Development	46
Supporting the Cognitive Development of Boys	48

5	The Social Development of Boys	51
	Patterns of Socialization	51
	Influence of Media on Socialization	54
	Boys Who Don't Fit the Norms	58
	Generational Poverty and Boys' Social Development	59
	Supporting the Social Development of Boys	61
6	The Impact of Drugs, Alcohol, and Early Sexual Activity on Boys	63
	The Failure of Drug Education	63
	Alcohol's Effects on Boys	65
	Early Sexual Activity	66
	The Role of Sports	69
	Dinner Together: A Key Intervention	69
	Generational Poverty and Drugs, Alcohol, and Early Sexual Activity	70
	Protecting Boys from Drugs, Alcohol, and Early Sexual Activity	71
7	The Different Boy: Sensitive, Gay, Gifted, ADHD	73
	Sensitive Boys	73
	Gay Boys	75
	Gifted Boys	79
	ADHD boys	80
	Generational Poverty and Sensitive, Gay, Gifted, and ADHD Boys	82
	Supporting Boys Who Are Sensitive, Gay, Gifted, and ADHD	83
8	Emerging Adulthood	85
	Post-High School Training	87
	Supporting Boys in the Postsecondary Years	90
	Conclusion	92
	Individual Student Interventions	93
	Appendix	97
	Worksheet to Calculate Cost of Dropouts	98
	Personal Resource Assessments	101
	Storybook to Improve Behavior	108
	Future Story	109
	Graduation Plan	110
	References and Resources	111
	Index	137

Introduction

In any discipline, there are three stages of research: classification, correlation, and causation (Goldratt, 1999). We know of certain factors correlated with dropout—for example, the correlation between prison and male dropouts. This book goes a step beyond correlation and begins to examine the myriad causes behind the disengagement that leads to boys' dropping out, and how these causes are exacerbated by poverty.

A study conducted by the National Dropout Prevention Center describes dropping out as a process, not an event (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). Who are the students who go through this process?

- Nationally, about 70 percent of students graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma, but little more than half of African American and Hispanic students earn diplomas with their peers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).*
- Approximately two thousand high schools (about 14 percent of American high schools) produce more than half of the nation's dropouts. In these dropout factories, the number of seniors enrolled is routinely 60 percent or less than the number of freshmen three years earlier. Dropout factories produce 81 percent of all Native American dropouts, 73 percent of all African American dropouts, and 66 percent of all Hispanic dropouts (Balfanz, 2007).
- More than one third of all dropouts occur in the ninth grade (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).
- Approximately 75 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school (Harlow, 2003).

* The dropout statistics reported in this book are conservative numbers. Accuracy of dropout data is nebulous, because there is no standard dropout reporting system from state to state, and current systems in many states are manipulated because of accountability and political pressure. For example, a school district in 2009 of 75,000+ students reported a dropout number of five students. That number was determined by a system that allowed the district to not count as dropouts students who stated that they had moved to another school or were going to be home schooled. Insufficient follow-up of reported reasons contributes to data inaccuracies.

- A male high school graduate with a D average is fourteen times more likely to become incarcerated than a graduate with an A average (Arum & Beattie, 1999).
- A student coming from the highest quartile of family income is about seven times as likely to have completed high school as a student coming from the lowest quartile (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2007).

Many of these dropouts cite a lack of connections to meaning or significant relationships (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Other students drop out because of family pressures. For example, many males whose parents are unskilled immigrants leave school because the expectation is that they will work to help support the family. Compounding the problem for immigrant families are language issues and the sense of not belonging.

Situational and Generational Poverty

The amount of financial resources that the Child Welfare Fund defines as extreme poverty is half that cited by the federal government. By this account, more than 1 in 6—13.3 million—children in the United States are poor. The federal poverty line for a family of four in 2008 was \$21,200. A family of four was *extremely* poor in 2008 if its household income was below \$10,600 a year. There is, however, great variation in poverty rates for children among the states, ranging from a low of 1 in 12 in New Hampshire to a high of almost 3 in 10 in Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Males, especially, suffer in poverty, because poverty around the world tends to be feminized. War, lack of work, crime, and drugs create instability, and often the women are left to care for the children alone.

There is an important distinction to be made between *situational* and *generational* poverty. Situational poverty develops when there is death, divorce, or illness, and the resource base is temporarily reduced. Generational poverty is when the family has been in poverty for two generations or more. Because of the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and the instability of resources, children in generational poverty do not develop in the same ways as children in more stable, knowledgeable environments (Najman et al., 2004; Payne, 2005). When the poverty spans generations, problems are magnified.

Why Should We Care?

Why is there such concern about dropout? In addition to the obvious moral issue of millions of young people not living up to their potential, there is an economic concern: the cost to society is huge.

impoverished environments are expected to meet the requirements. In Finland, which has the highest literacy rate in the world and a very low poverty rate, students begin school at seven years of age (Sax, 2007).

Other Cognitive Differences

Language differences between boys and girls are relatively easy to spot, but other cognitive differences are more subtle. For example, boys tend to be deductive thinkers; girls are more likely to think inductively (Gurian & Henley, 2001). Boys would prefer to be given the generalization or theory, and then look for the examples. Because boys' cognitive strength is in their spatial ability, they tend to be better in mathematical problem solving and reasoning than girls, who are better at computation (Geary, 1996). Boys prefer hands-on learning versus oral and written lessons (Gurian & Henley, 2001; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007).

Boys are also single-task focused, whereas girls tend to be better at multi-tasking (Spence, Booth, & Walters, 2008). Some researchers believe that this difference is connected to the size of the corpus callosum, which is larger in girls compared to boys (Moir & Jessel, 1992). A larger corpus callosum enables greater cross-talk between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, allowing girls to switch hemisphere functions with ease. The size of the passageway explains why boys don't want to let a task go once they have taken it on, a characteristic of boys' cognition that is sometimes interpreted as stubbornness or an unwillingness to follow directions.

Relationships and Cognition

A child's cognitive capacity—the ability to pay attention, learn, and use and interpret information—begins in the context of relationships. In fact, nurturing relationships can change genetic activity! Canadian scientist Michael Meaney has shown that how much a mother rat licks and grooms her newborns during the first twelve hours after birth determines how brain chemicals will respond for the rest of the rat's life. Goleman (2006) writes:

The more nurturing the mother, the more quick-witted, confident and fearless the pup will become; the less nurturing she is, the slower to learn and more overwhelmed by threats the pup will be. . . . The pups born to devoted mothers, who licked and groomed the most, grew up to have denser connections between their brain cells, particularly in the hippocampus, the seat of memory and learning. (p. 253)