



# Male Educators' Perspectives on Best Practices for Enhancing the Teaching and Learning of Boys in Single-Sex Classrooms

Douglas Gosse



*Overall, Canadian boys have greater literacy problems than girls. Boys also voice more disengagement with school, account for most suspensions, drop out of school, and commit suicide at significantly greater rates. Minority boys are particularly at risk. The results of this study arise from four weeks of*

*data collection in an inner city school, grades 7-8, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Most of the students are of African, Caribbean, and South Asian immigrant backgrounds, where English is not the primary language at home, and whose families live below the poverty line. Methods include semi-structured interviews, observations, document analysis, and an in-depth literature review on boys and learning within single-sex and co-educational settings, and thematic analysis. I sought the perspectives of the principal, and two teachers of grades 7 and 8, all boys' classes, to determine effective teaching and learning approaches and strategies within these demographics. Results indicate that these minority boys display: enhanced engagement, participation, and sense of belonging; fewer office referrals and better attendance; a challenging of hegemonic masculine traits, such as homophobia and professed boredom with school subjects often dismissed as 'gay', 'sissy', or 'girly', including language arts and, especially, music; greater opportunities for positive peer and male adult role modeling. These benefits are contingent on a shared vision between the principal and key homeroom teachers, joint development of a positive school and classroom ethos, high expectations, and overt commitment to differentiation.*

**Keywords:** single-sex schooling, minority boys, differentiation, teacher expectations, ethos



## Introduction

Overall, Canadian boys have greater literacy problems than girls (Pan Canadian Assessment Program, 2009; The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011). Boys also account for most suspensions (Zheng, December 2009), voice more disengagement with school (Statistics Canada, 2008a), and drop out of school in far greater numbers (Bowlby, 2007). While young men and women are equally likely to attend vocational college, young Canadian men are substantially less likely to attend university, and to graduate once admitted (Card, Payne, & Sechel, 2011; Frenette & Zeman, 2007). Furthermore, Canadian male youth are more often victims of assault, and commit suicide in significantly higher numbers than their female peers (Statistics Canada, 2008b, 2010).

Toronto, Ontario, is the biggest city in Canada with over 2.6 million residents, and about 6 million in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Approximately half the population of Toronto was born outside of Canada, making it one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. With approximately 600 schools, 15 000 teachers, and 250 000 students, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the 4th largest school board in North America. In 2009, the TDSB established a Boys' Education Steering Committee (BES) to explore social and educational trends regarding boys. In 2012, the Boys' Education Steering Committee (BES) became the Gender Education Committee (BEC), and addresses the socio-emotional and academic needs of diverse girls and boys.

The intent of this report is to complement the TDSB director's 'Vision of Hope' —Dr. Christopher Spence (2010) calls for narrowing the gender gap, increasing boys' achievement, and the promotion of safe and caring schools. Furthermore, the public, and educators, are looking for ways to better educate boys, and prepare them for the future. Therefore, these research findings may be useful to educators, administrators, parents-guardians, and pupils, who are exploring single-sex options for boys.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

During April-May, 2011, I spent approximately four weeks in an inner city school within the TDSB. For anonymity, I use pseudonyms for the name of the school, its principal, and the teachers who participated. I conducted interviews with the principal and several teachers. I observed them for several days each in their classroom, on duty, before and after school, and during intra- and extra-curricular activities, from sports and music to a Young Men's Club. Additionally, I attended a "Stand Up: Young Men's Conference" for two years consecutively, during May 2011 and again in May 2012. I also returned to the school in mid-May 2012, and met with all participants herein described. I showed them this account, and asked questions for clarity and precision.

### School Description

The Edward Blake Academy in downtown, inner city Toronto, Ontario, Canada, has grades K-8, with a school focus on student responsibility and academic success. The building is newer, but the demolished school of the same name and site, has a long history. The majority of students are from lower-income and immigrant families; about half of families earn less than \$18,000 annually. Many are of African, Caribbean (often referred to as 'the Islands' in Toronto), South Asian (e.g., Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh) background, and Asian background, with a smaller Caucasian populace, but a myriad of ethnicities exist. There is a significant Muslim population. There are approximately 200 pupils in grades 7-8, spread amongst 6 classrooms, 3 classrooms per grade level, with one classroom per grade allotted for single-sex boys' classes, one for all girls, and one co-educational.

### Participant Description

For this report, I focus on the principal, and two male teachers of grades 7 and 8 in the boys' classes. The principal, Mr. Morgan Grey, is a fit, energetic, middle-aged man of Caribbean ancestry, who taught for several years, before assuming a principalship. His mother tongue is English. He was raised in Ontario by immigrant parents who did not hold a university education themselves, but who encouraged their son in this regard. Mr. Grey finished an undergraduate degree in the humanities. He then worked for several years at a detention centre for young offenders, mostly boys. He decided to enrol in a teacher preparation program, and later became a specialist in both special education and physical education. He is currently earning a master's degree in education, and keeps abreast of academic literature on diversity and educational leadership. He is married to a woman, and they have two adolescent children.

The grade 7 teacher, Mr. Arturo Morales, is also a fit middle-aged man, who immigrated to Canada as a young teenager, from South America. He speaks fluent Spanish and English, too, the later with a slight accent. Subsequent to coming to Canada, he completed high school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and then earned an undergraduate music degree. Before completing his teacher

preparation program in Toronto approximately 15 years ago, he was a musician for years. He has been teaching ever since, mostly in inner city schools, and has been in a single-sex boys' classroom at the Edward Blake Academy for the past two years. He is married to a woman who works in the communications field. They have two school-age children.

The grade 8 teacher, Mr. Matteo Rossi, is an athletic middle-aged man whose mother and paternal grandparents were born in Europe. He has a sister who was a teacher, but is now a school principal overseas. His mother tongue is English, but he speaks Italian at the intermediate level. He is married to a woman teacher, and they have one young child. Mr. Rossi went to an all boys' Roman Catholic school, and completed an undergraduate double major in biology and cultural anthropology. Afterwards, he worked at an after school program, where he engaged the pupils in both physical education and the arts. Upon completion of his teacher preparation program, he supply taught, and took long-term occasional positions. He completed extra courses in Special Education, and then taught children with learning disabilities. Subsequently, he taught elementary school for several years. For six years, he has been employed at the Edward Blake Academy, first teaching primary, and for the past two years, like his colleague, Mr. Morales, single-sex classes for boys.

## **Interpretation of Data**

My observation notes and the interviews I conducted with the principal and the two grade 7-8 teachers amount to several hundred pages. I use thematic coding to make sense of the data. I am influenced by an extensive literature review I conducted not only of boys and schooling in the TDSB, but also single-sex and co-educational schooling for boys provincially, nationally, and internationally. In particular, I am influenced by international research and endeavours to improve boys' learning and social trajectories from Australia, England, and the United States; the "Recommended International Resources" sections at the end may be consulted for these, along with "Recommended Canadian Resources" and "Other References".

## **The Ethos or Climate of Single-Sex Education for Boys**

### **The Principal's Vision**

#### **A. Background**

The ethos or climate of school are particularly important in improving boys' engagement and achievement, as demonstrated in Great Britain (Office for Standards in Education, July 2003). The ethos or climate includes the values, character and culture particular to a given school. Students can be proactive and engaged, or passive and alienated, and this is largely a result of the environment in which they develop and function (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In school, the principal has a key role in creating an environment conducive to student growth and development, taking into account the students' home lives, ethnic communities, and neighbourhoods.

At the Edward Blake Academy, the overriding vision is to enhance the engagement and achievement of all pupils. Within this, the school community is trying to address the needs of struggling boys. Indeed, the principal promotes a climate, and a vision, of shared commitment and en-

thusiasm, not only amongst teachers, but also amidst the boys themselves, in single-sex classrooms:

Mr. Grey [the principal] has a philosophy that filters through the whole school...which is great, because you know we're a big part of their [pupils'] lives.... it's not just the curriculum...it's about the connections we make with them, the students...and find ways to engage them. – Mr. Morales

I think he's [Principal Grey] a visionary and he's really promoting the differentiated instruction at different levels, not just with the single-sex classes, but at different levels throughout the school. –Mr. Rossi

The principal, then, along with teachers, are agents of belonging, and this is no easy task.

The TDSB has been proactive in addressing problems facing diverse male pupils, producing reports, such as, *Equally prepared for life? How male and female students perform in Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Schools (Organizational Development/Research and Information Services (TDSB), 2009)*, and *How male and female students perform in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Schools (Sinay, 2009)*. Mead (2006) contends that poor Black and Hispanic boys in the United States are greatest at risk in reading. In the TDSB, some students from the English-speaking Caribbean, Central and South America/Mexico, and Eastern Africa, as well as some speaking Portuguese, Spanish, and Somali, appear to be disproportionately at risk for underachievement in school (Brown, Fall 2006), although it should be noted these factors are not causative.

Being himself cognizant of research on boys' lower achievement, and disengagement, in the TDSB and beyond, Mr. Rossi says: “[Mr. Grey]...being quite the visionary, thought that we could try this here...and he approached me and I was all for it...I believe we should try some different things.”

Mr. Grey, as principal and curriculum leader, points out the need for further desegregation of the data: “[A]nd so you know, there is much data that indicates [some] boys of colour are not doing very well socially and emotionally...but that they are also not doing very well academically.”

In sum, undertaking the initiative of single-sex education within a school requires: (i) the acknowledgement and awareness of current data, and (ii) a willingness to further desegregate the data, to include factors such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, disability, geographical location, and language and culture. To lead to fruition in programming, the principal must show vision and commitment, and be able to engage teachers who share this willingness to work towards common goals—in the case of the Edward Blake Academy, improving the engagement and achievement of boys at risk, many of whom are visible minorities, and from lower socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds, where English is not the primary language at home.

## B. Community Engagement

In order to select pupils for the single-gender classes, the principal involved both teachers and parents-guardians from the onset:

First year selection was basically just teachers' input. Who do you think would benefit from an all boys', and all girls' class? But it was a mixture...we wanted to have a balance of strong and weak kids, of kids in between. Then we told the parents, “Your kid's been selected. Do you agree or disagree?” The majority all agreed and, as a matter of fact, we have tons that

wanted to get into the all girls' class...and then the second year ... we still selected based on our meetings at the end of the year, and if parents had special requests that they wanted, then we tried to honour them. – Principal Grey

For a vision that will alter school culture to be implemented, decisions cannot be unilateral. Therefore, the principal's involvement of the teaching staff and parents-guardians from the onset was essential for long-term sustainability.

Both prejudice (discriminatory beliefs) and discrimination (the acts of carrying out prejudices) are core to the problematic social engineering of our school system. French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's notions of linguistic and cultural capital show how social inequalities are perpetuated. Linguistic capital (how pupils' speak, their vocabulary, verbal tones and speech patterns) and cultural capital (pupils' tastes in clothing, music, pop culture, plus their modes of social networking, reading practices, and study habits, for instance) are primarily referenced with regard to middle-class Canadian society. Linking cultural capital to poverty and poor achievement, Cahis (2005) says:

More often than not, the poor achievers come from families where one or two parents have to work several jobs simply to put food on the table. Reading and studying with a child is simply not an option for these parents, and many kids are forced to live without present parental role models or guardians. In Toronto, like all big western cities, poverty and the lack of decent social housing force immigrant families to live in ghetto-like conditions where hundreds of other poor families struggle to survive.

The linguistic and cultural capital of sub-groups who deviate from middle-class norms is often invalidated, thereby contributing to disenfranchisement in school, and beyond, for those pupils and their families. For instance, certain pupils may speak English but with semantics and a phonology that differ from standardized North American English. Consequently, due to social prejudice and discrimination, their particular form of English may be treated as inferior. Pupils' linguistic and cultural capital may not correspond to subject specific expectations, and modes of communicating. In social studies class, for example, exposure to travel may enhance the learning of middle-class and above pupils, whereas pupils from lower socio-economic conditions generally do not have the same travel opportunities, as at the Edward Blake Academy. Collectively, linguistic and cultural capital form social capital, prerequisites for success in higher education, but poverty inhibits the acquisition of this social capital. Additionally, stereotypes, and negative self-fulfilling expectations, may hinder pupils from realizing their full potential. Therefore, the next section deals with the core school ethos, or climate, of high expectations.

## High Expectations

Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable.— Plato, *Laws* 808.

Every genuine boy is a rebel and an anarchist. If he were allowed to develop according to his own instincts, his own inclinations, society would undergo such a radical transformation as to make the adult revolutionary cower and cringe.—Henry Miller, *Books in My Life* [Vol. 1], 1969, p. 82.

It is ingrained in Western culture that boys are energetic and may be disruptive. Paesano (2010a), herself an experienced and accomplished teacher of all boys' classes, advises that teaching boys requires: learning to appreciate and maximize upon the abundant energy; having an endless supply of patience, and; altering ideas of acceptable noise levels.

In Ontario, a larger percentage of female students (53%) indicate that a parent, guardian or other adult at home "very often" encourages them to try their best at school, compared to 47% of boys; 85% of females and 79% of males said a parent or guardian expected them to continue their education after high school (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011, p. 12). Low-income and minority students may encounter less opportunity to learn, inadequate instruction and support, and lower expectations from their schools and teachers (Dragnea & Erling, January 2008). The adage that 'boys will be boys' can result in problematic lower educational and social expectations contributing to negative self-fulfilling prophecies, particularly for poor and minority boys—our expectations can, and do, become realities (Gosse, 2005b, 2012):

Starting in primary school, when I yearn for more active learning, play, and levity, I am punished. Especially if I am not White. And/Or from a low social class. And English isn't my native tongue.

I have a much greater chance of being segregated in a remedial reading class, or behaviour difficulties class. Especially if I am not White. And/Or from a low social class.

If I act 'effeminate' or display so-called feminine traits such as caring, compassion, and gentleness, I risk being punished. These are human traits.

I am expected to be competitive with members of my sex and only to confide in a female mate. Therefore, I am permitted few if any intimate friends of either sex.

When I report assault or abuse, whether sexual, physical, or verbal, there are few if any social services available to me, other than to treat me as a potential criminal. Especially if I am not White. And/Or from a low social class. And English isn't my native tongue.

I have less chance of attending university than many women – at least many of the White, middle-class ones. Especially if I am not White. And/Or from a low social class.

As a teacher, daycare worker, father, or youth club volunteer, I am vulnerable to suspicions of being a pedophile.

Even though I am more likely to be the chief breadwinner in my family, I am often seen as an exploiter and privileged.

My health is not good. I am more likely to die of prostate cancer than a woman of breast cancer, and have higher incidences of lung cancer, heart disease, and suicide.

I am more likely to be an alcoholic, drug addict, be in a car accident, commit suicide, end up on the streets, and injured or killed in the workplace.

When I marry, I have only one respectable choice—work full-time. If I stray from full-time work, I am viewed as a parasite.

I can never truly attain manhood. It is impossible. This undying stress is with me every moment of every day.

I created the above list to show constraints facing many males in education and broader society, via study of an educational novel, *Jackytar* (Gosse, 2005a). With its reader companion, *Breaking Silences & Exploring Masculinities: A Critical Supplement to the Novel Jackytar* (Gosse, 2008), teenage boys, and their teachers and families, can explore: father son relationships; the different journeys from boyhood to manhood; how boys and young men negotiate masculinity, gender, and identity in their communities; how males may come to embrace ‘integrity’ as a core belief system, and means of interaction; how homophobia and misogyny have historically been part of being ‘masculine’ and; how gender, race, and social class expectations can inhibit growth and navigation in today’s society, or conversely, be edifying and nurturing.

Boys’ identities are complex and intertwined. Booth, Elliott-Johns, & Bruce (2008) contend that

the problems of gender difference are connected to a range of factors situated in the society in which the boys live, the complex interactions of the variables in their lives, the nature of the individual, the culture of the peer group, the relationship of home and schooling, the philosophy of the school, the availability of resources, the strategies the teacher incorporates in the classroom program, and the changing nature of literacy (p. 12).

With widespread fears and contempt for males evident in our social institutions from education to law, and in popular culture (see Gosse, 2011a; Kay, 2011; Nathanson & Young, 2001, 2006), like Connell (1996), and many others, I assert that there are multiple types of masculinities, and ways of being male, beyond the hegemonic, stereotypical, and derivative. I further propose that many of these types and ways of being male may be subordinate and subjugated, including in relation to girls and women, as well as boys and men.

In addition to biological and evolutionary research on gender, we can also examine the ‘active (de)construction’ of gender, e.g., how males and females explicitly and implicitly encourage boys and girls, and each other, to behave in certain ways, such as boys being encouraged to engage in outdoor, active activities when young, rather than reading inside. Correspondingly, I share Connell’s conviction that ‘divisions of labour’ and ‘patterns of emotion’ should be examined, and core to any endeavour to educate boys. Divisions of labour might include asking: How are jobs typically allotted in Canada? Which jobs result in the most injuries and fatalities? Which occupations are mostly male or female dominated? How are these trends changing? ‘Patterns of emotion’ could incorporate examining historical ways that men express emotion: the male code of ‘actions vs. words’; interactions between males and between males and females, and differences and similarities therein; the roles of heterosexism and homophobia in society; and tenets and costs of the insidious ‘boy code’—society expects boys to act stoic, to repress emotions mistakenly seen as feminine, such as being caring or compassionate—and to attain autonomy at all costs (Pollack, 1998, pp. 23-25). The new curriculum of our schools should be cognizant of these gendered, racialized, and class dependent expectations.

Furthermore, in a school context, students for whom teachers have higher expectations may receive more praise, detailed feedback, eye contact, and individual attention (Tauber, 2009). Teachers may also make prejudicial decisions based on gender and race. In a recent Canadian study, intermediate teachers generally described boys as immature, messy and more disruptive than their female peers (Riley, 2009). As boys journey throughout primary and elementary school and into the intermediate grades, whilst undergoing lower expectations and denial of scant resources, such beliefs may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Boys tend to be praised less, and punished more often than girls, and receive far more suspensions. Boys are far more likely than girls to receive a diagnosis of ADHD, too. Many long-time teachers, and parents-guardians, believe that boys tend to be more active by nature, while some academics contend that gender is a social construction. In all probability, gender may be a bit of both.

It has also become de rigueur in our culture for boys to believe that it is “cool to be a fool” (C. M. Spence, 2008); in other words, our pop culture is full of negative images for boys. Portrayals of boys and men, from television to movies and sports, tend to be brutish, buffoon, and often aggressive, especially in sexual, predatory ways. For Black, Hispanic, and Aboriginal boys, these negative portrayals may be even more exacerbated. Furthermore, when together in classrooms, boys and girls may enact gender stereotypes in order to impress one another, and gain acceptance and popularity, i.e., some boys may try to look ‘cool’ by not being studious, or by acting foolish or disengaged, whereas some girls may act ‘ditzy’, and downplay their intelligence and motivation.

At the Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, 100% of the pupils in grades 3-5 scored advanced or proficient on the 2009 New York State Math Exam. Nearly 90% of them scored advanced or proficient on the 2009 state-wide English Language Arts (ELA) Exam. Most of the pupils are African American, and from low-income families, who historically tend to face numerous barriers to academic success (Kleinfeld, 2009; Mead, 2006), from low literacy levels, to high dropout rates from high school, and meagre university attendance. However, at Excellence Boys Charter School, high expectations are the norm, and pupils are encouraged to play hard, to work hard, and to be role models for one another (Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant, 2012):

At the same time, students expect excellence from one another. This means that it is “cool” for boys to be smart, curious scholars who show excitement for school and enthusiasm for learning. Free from social pressures and stereotypes, students at Excellence Boys help each other succeed and feel safe taking responsible academic and personal risks. There are no limits to life’s possibilities for our students.

Furthermore, in studies of literacy, male students tend not to identify with a female fictional protagonist, whereas girls identify with a male or female protagonist (Elliott-Johns & Booth, 2009). This suggests that gender norms of the “strong”, “autonomous” and “stoic” male may be even more entrenched for boys. In other words, there may be fewer acceptable options for boys to enact their identities, and qualities or behaviours associated with what is commonly considered feminine, can result in social ostracization. These highly policed behaviours for boys may include showing compassion, sensitivity, a fondness for the arts, or even being industrious and studious. In order for our boys to be better able to function and evolve as full human beings, this harmful ‘boy code’ needs to be addressed, in single-sex and co-educational settings. We need to move from it is “cool to be a fool” to it is “cool to be in school.”

Single-sex classrooms may allow boys to drop this “cool pose” often adopted in co-educational classrooms (Cox, 2006). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) states:

As students enter adolescence, they are making what some researchers assert is the most challenging transition of their lives. To send them on that transition equipped with self-knowledge of what they are good at, what they enjoy, how to learn something that is challenging for them, and conditions under which they can do their best work, is to provide the best possible support for their success in school and beyond . . . Differentiated instruction is effective instruction that is responsive to students’ readiness, interests and learning preferences.

Since teenage boys and girls undergo so many physical, emotional, and social changes, Principal Grey believes that being in a single-sex classroom may afford them freedoms that otherwise might be mitigated. Teachers at the Edward Blake Academy share this view:

We can create a classroom where students feel more comfortable to be themselves, and not have that added distraction . . . [in a co-educational classroom] they may have girls in the class who they feel intimidated by, or have a crush on, or for whatever reason . . . so basically, we’re trying to make them [boys] feel more comfortable in participation. - Mr. Rossi

[Being in a single-sex classroom] it’s a lot more open, I find, than the giggling, and the uncomfortable things that happen when you have 12 or 13 year olds [together]... they’re in an awkward age... I think for the girls, just as much as the boys. In a way, they won’t feel comfortable speaking about issues. - Mr. Morales

This belief is shared by Paesano (2010a):

They [boys in a single-sex classroom] can let go of some of the gender stereotypes that surround them and influence their behaviour and attitude - such as needing to be in charge, to appear disinterested in school, to joke around and not take anything seriously, to not show intelligence, and to not like reading and writing.

Therefore, single-sex classrooms may contribute to a safer, less threatening, and more focused and respectful learning environment, vital to student achievement, and core to differentiation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Expecting all boys to try their best, and providing positive role models in a caring school ethos, where learning and diversity are valued, is foundational for success.

## **Role Models for Boys**

In Harper’s (2012, p. 15) study of young Black men who achieved higher education in the United States, participants were asked what differentiated them from their Black male peers. Most believed that their Black male peers had the same potential, but “had not encountered people or culturally relevant experiences that motivated them to be engaged, strive for success, and persist . . .” There are several primary ways that male role models contribute to boys’ education at the Edward Blake

Academy, and in which role models may be conceptualized, including: diversity among teachers, key homeroom teachers, boys as peer role models, the Young men's Club, and the Conferences.

### **Diversity Among Teachers**

In Canada, the total of full-time and part-time teachers stands at 108,267 male and 267,788 female (Elementary-Secondary Education Project, 2008). Nationally, there is also a majority of female school principals and administrators of elementary and secondary education at 53%, or 15,335 females and 13,680 males (Statistics Canada, 2006). However, being a male teacher does not guarantee that one may best respond to the needs of diverse boys, whether in Australia, Canada, or elsewhere (Gosse & Facchinetti, 2011). Correspondingly, being a teacher of colour does not guarantee that one may best respond to the needs of students of colour (Villegas & Davis, 2007).

Yet, being male and/or a person of colour, may allow a teacher to better appreciate similar social and cultural experiences as some of their pupils. Harper (2012, p. 10) reports, "Many participants [Black males who achieved higher education in the United States] felt teachers, especially White women, were incapable of engaging meaningfully with more than one or a few Black male students at a time..." Still, the educational workforce underrepresents Canada's gender and racial diversity, and the number of teachers of colour is falling (J. Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). In the United States, where approximately 90% of the teacher workforce is White, dialogue concerning the deficit of teachers of colour has been occurring for some time (Hammer, 2010; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, October 2004).

Therefore, having male teachers teach the boys, may serve to disrupt the idea that teachers can only be White, middle class women, like most teachers and educational administrators. Principal Grey expresses similar concern regarding the lack of equitable representation:

If you only see that one type of person in that profession, then you might not think that you can do that profession...we are really trying to close the achievement gap. - Principal Grey

Students may come to realize that educated and caring people, such as their teachers, can also be male, immigrant, former English Language Learners (ELL), or minorities, like many of the pupils themselves. Also, contrary to popular belief, some male teachers report a less authoritarian, and more humorous, playful teaching and classroom management style, compared to that of some of their female colleagues (Gosse, 2011a). In an all boys' class, Paesano (2010b) highlights that teachers should incorporate humour and laughter into the classroom daily. Male educators, as role models, may then further show pupils that being kind, nurturing, studious, hard working, creative, and expressive, are worthy qualities to which the boys may aspire, as they grow to become active, contributing Canadian citizens. Thereby, male teachers may break traditional, hegemonic male stereotypes, and serve as positive role models.

Principal Grey practices what he preaches. He has a strong mentorship with a number of the boys, including some that have long left his school. In one anecdote, he says:

There was this one boy in grade seven a number of years ago. He was so disengaged in school. He wasn't trying very hard. He couldn't get along with his teachers. He was in with the wrong crowd. I had him follow me around for two weeks straight—to all my meetings, as I go in and out of classes, the extracurricular activities. We discussed at length some of his problems

and how he could overcome them. At the end of the two weeks, he was a transformed boy. A different person. He still checks in with me about once a week. He either calls or drops by. Now he's finishing his high school credits, and applied for college. He's a changed person. – Principal Grey

Indeed, a study by the Training and Development Agency for Schools of the Department for Education (2008) in London, England, found that male primary school teachers have acted as fundamental role models to one in two men (48 per cent). Furthermore, 35 per cent of men felt that having a male primary teacher challenged them to work harder at school, and 22 per cent believed that male primary teachers helped build their confidence while they were young. The men surveyed reported that they were more likely to approach male teachers with issues of bullying (50 per cent), problems at home (29 per cent), and questions about puberty (24 per cent). This suggests that many male teachers can, and do, bring positive qualities to the education workforce.

### **Homeroom Teachers Are Key**

Perceived caring is related to student motivation (Wentzel, 1997). Rather than rotary, a key homeroom teacher teaches the majority of the subjects, allowing him to maintain consistent expectations with the boys, to act as a positive role model, to establish regular routines, and, especially, to uphold a caring environment, as endorsed by the principal:

I think also there's a disconnect between . . . when you go from all of a sudden geography to art, to media, to whatever [with a different teacher] . . . and I think that the most important thing is that one caring adult that you're with the majority of the time. – Principal Grey

Also, some boys may not have a male role model at home, and it may not be until intermediate school that they encounter a regular male teacher. Therefore, the role of the homeroom teacher is pivotal.

Differentiation is evident at the classroom level when appropriate challenges are available for all students (Policy and implementation, 2004). Knowing students well via the homeroom teacher model is conducive to differentiation. Mr. Rossi says:

The sense of community is really important. And try to have fun. So, for example, I try to greet my boys at the door as often as I can. You know, when they come in from French, I literally stand at the door and say, "Good morning" to them on a one to one basis. Just, "Good morning. How are you?" and when they leave, I say, "Have a good day." Yesterday, for example, we had the DPA [daily physical activity] at the end of the day . . . I had some kids that played soccer...kids that were playing basketball . . . so I made a point of going to them, and saying, "Have a good weekend. We'll see you Tuesday". I really try to promote that sense of community, you know, to have fun. I make sure that with regards to the lessons that you plan, you're going to have some fun with that. To try to do diverse [things] and to try to peek their interest in things that they like . . . so you are going to get a group of boys that like sports, another group that like cars, and maybe like action adventure [all within the same classroom], so try

to cater to their interests. – Mr. Rossi

When students are encouraged to take ownership for their learning, in an environment in which they feel cared for, supported, and socially connected to teachers and peers (Urdan, 2006), whilst supplied with meaningful and appropriately challenging work, they are likely to become more motivated, too. Knowing the strength and weaknesses of the boys, and willingness to take them under your wing as a homeroom teacher, can have transformative properties regarding motivation. Mr. Morales says:

There were two kids that were on the verge of dropping out of music. I was going to put them in another class because they were falling asleep the whole time. They were fooling around and it wasn't any fun for me. It wasn't any fun for the band. And then I invited them over for lunch a few times [in the classroom] and showed them the notes. They were different kids. They just sat with me. They go, they're like, "Oh, this is actually fun!" – Mr. Morales

Similarly, Mr. Rossi offers advice for a teacher contemplating a placement in an all-boys' class, "Be creative, respectful, and have fun."

Being a homeroom teacher and role model, then, implies getting to know the students, while striving to create a personal rapport, in a climate that is cheerful and affirming. Paesano (2010b) echoes that building a community where all feel welcome and validated, regardless of past experiences, academic level, socio-economic status, religion, or race, and being available for help and assistance, are effective strategies for teaching boys.

### **Boys as Peer Role Models**

Being in a single-sex classroom, some are concerned that hegemonic male stereotypes may persist, or even be enhanced. However, Mr. Rossi says, "we have students who could function well in both classes [single-sex or co-educational] . . . but who possibly have skills that would be used as a mode."

Likewise, while Mr. Morales acknowledges the 'gangsta' persona, and its mass pop cultural appeal to many boys, in his grade 7 class, the quieter and 'nerdier' boys can achieve respect and status, thereby positively influencing other boys:

Take for example, perseverance. They [the hard working boys] become a declaration to the rest of the class. If you're building something, it's not always the person that you think is the coolest, that is actually doing really well...they have a certain admiration for each other in that respect. Playing an instrument is the same thing. – Mr. Morales

Paesano (2010a) similarly says,

They can learn to rely more on each other as peers, give each other assistance, actively listen and add on to what each other says, and to show that they can care about the people around them. They can work to create a true community of learners.

Teacher responsiveness, school responsiveness, and a supportive social environment are predictors of students' motivations and academic competence (Marchant, 2001). Every morning, Mr. Morales

arrives at school early, and tutors a group of boys in music, and during breaks throughout the day, as well. Not only does this demonstrate dedication and strong teacher responsiveness, but a supportive environment is built and daily re-affirmed, as well. Mr. Morales reports an additional benefit—the boys gain admiration from other boys in the class due to their commitment and growing ease with musical instruments.

Likewise, at the Excellence boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant (2012), boys are taught that it is ‘cool’ to be smart, to persevere, and to be positive role models for each other.

## **The Young Men’s Club**

The Young Men’s Club presents an opportunity for boys in grade 7 and 8 to get together on Fridays with Principal Grey, and a couple of teacher volunteers. The boys are free to talk about whatever they want, and may receive guidance from each other, and their adult mentors. As Principal Grey says, “informal talking is curriculum itself.” The pupils and mentors may talk about relationships with girls or boys, life in general, or even about their mom, dad, and siblings. Sometimes they have excursions. Sometimes they just hang out and play basketball. At the first meeting of the school year, the teenager boys worked on an art project, where they drew self-portraits. They were given chart paper, pencils, markers, and crayons, and then made pictures in different quadrants, to represent the following categories:

They drew pictures to represent their connectedness to friends and family, and also how they envisioned what success might look like in the future, for them. For ‘mottos’ for instance, some said words to the effect of “Live every day to the fullest” or “Always try your best.” The club then engaged in a discussion of the different categories. The idea was to get the boys to express themselves, to gain comfort with one another, and to indulge in the arts. In addition, the exercise developed the boys’ metacognition, their overt knowledge of self, and critical reflection on their relationships with each other, their family, and their goals. This activity is in keeping with theories to promote self-worth, positive relationships, and metacognition—knowing about knowing.

At the club meeting I observed, about a dozen boys had gathered. There are normally about 15 attendees, and some of the most popular boys in school had joined. To show the boys’ commitment, Principal Grey says, “...if they don’t come it is because they are on a school trip, or something to do with the school.”

Principal Grey adds: “Last year, it became a popular thing with some of the popular kids . . . the boys this year wanted to be a part of it because they were in grade 6 . . . coming into our school. So they have been asking me about it since the beginning of the year. I really didn’t get a chance to start it until late December.” This demonstrates the growing popularity of the Young Men’s Club, the positive influence of peers, and the students’ desire for mentorship, sense of community, and sense of belonging. The only condition for joining is that the boys have to return a permission form signed by their parents-guardians, and to let their parents-guardians know where they are going to be over lunch.

Perhaps because I was present, initially we had introductions, with each person taking a turn saying his name, and one or two things about himself, such as what grade he was in, and what his favourite subject, or sport was. Then Principal Grey asked them to discuss strengths and weaknesses they had experienced that week. One confided he had better behaviour in class, but that he still

wanted to concentrate more next week. Another said he had successfully completed all his homework, but that he wanted to help out more at home with chores, and so on. Discussion accompanied responses.

Afterwards, a guest speaker arrived, a former semi-pro hockey player. This was the first time they had had an external guest speaker. He shared his life story, his ups and downs, how he attained a university education, and culminated in becoming a successful business consultant. To counteract the popular but erroneous notion that boys, particularly Black boys, should invest their time in sports rather than school, he cautioned them about the astronomical odds of ever making it in the big sports leagues, and also how short-lived many of the sports careers were, including his own, due to injury. He advised them to instead focus on school, and then post-secondary education or, specifically, not to play sports to the detriment of their education.

Two boys were designated to serve soda and pizza slices, one at a time, to their peers. All were well mannered throughout the session, using polite tones of voice, taking turns in an orderly fashion, and saying 'please' and 'thank you.' Over the meal, supplied by the regular sponsorship of the guest speaker, the boys had a question and answer period with him. They gained valuable insights into life's journey—the joys but also hard work, injuries, adaptability, perseverance, and complexities of 'making it' in business, all the while juggling work, family, and a social life.

Towards the end, the club members were planning a trip to a new, modern and spacious home in Ajax, Ontario, not far from Toronto, to show the boys what they might aspire to. Many of the boys live in downtown apartments, and have never had the opportunity to see spacious and well-appointed houses, such as these.

### **Young Men's Conference**

The "Stand Up: Young Men's Conference" for two consecutive years, has been held in May 2011 and 2012 at George Brown College in downtown Toronto. Co-organized by a dedicated team of TDSB educators, including Gary Crossdale, Ainsworth Morgan, and Elizabeth Schaeffer, approximately two hundred and seventy boys gathered, mostly Black and Asian boys, but some Caucasian, too. "Redefining the Colour of Success" was an official theme of the 2012 conference, and present in advertisements for the event, and on commemorative mugs for the presenters.

Indeed, while it should be recognized that boys are not engaged and achieving in school in a uniform manner, the following has validity (Younger and Warrington, 2005a):

There are typical patterns of behaviour to which many boys conform... although boys are not an undifferentiated group, there are broad similarities within sub-groups which allow us to make valid generalisation (p. 9).

An advertisement for the 2012 conference stated that in the TDSB, approximately 40% of students born in the English-speaking Caribbean, and 45% of students born in East Africa, achieve or exceed the provincial standard in English, mathematics, and science in grades 7 and 8. Young men from these backgrounds represent one of the largest groups of students at risk of failing the grade 10 literacy test, and graduating from high school. They can sometimes feel powerless to navigate the barriers to their success.

In keeping with a proactive approach, and a spirit of adult male mentorship, Principal Grey says of the conference:

I think there are quite a lot of dads that are not necessarily in the scene in a way that might be productive...or they might be in the scene sometimes...when you're at the age of 12, 13, 14 ... that is, when you're looking for direction on what it is to become a young man...So, then, we decided we were going to make it [the TDSB Stand Up-Young Men's Conference] a grade 7 and 8 event for boys ...to address these issues that are happening with young men of colour.  
– Principal Grey

The participants come from seven of Toronto's downtown public schools, and many are of a lower socio-economic background, and immigrant families. These eager boys have the opportunity to engage with successful men of colour from a variety of professions, including business, sports, entertainment, medicine, politics, the restaurant business, and so on. During lunch, the boys were also able to select a free book of their choice. The boys also donned conference t-shirts, on which were written in bold letters, "Empowered. Responsible. Successful."

The presenters shared their personal stories of perseverance and success, and discussed their strategies for overcoming barriers. The hope is that the student participants will leave the day with a feeling of empowerment, responsibility and with a desire to be successful. Principal Grey explains:

So those 50 men [presenters], basically take groups of kids, and tell them a little about themselves—a little bit about their life story, what they do now, and the obstacles that they faced. They give the kids a little bit of advice, and tell them to believe in the things that they are doing, to have goals and things of that nature. So we think that sometimes, those messages, coming from somebody else, as opposed to the teacher, or just a parent, can be helpful, particularly if that person—and this is more for the Black boys, looks like them. – Principal Grey

A major focus throughout the conference is on sustaining education. Presenters, some of whom used to be professional athletes themselves, downplayed the likelihood that many of the boys would move on to professional sports leagues—the chances are astronomical. Multiple presenters cautioned the boys that education is the path to success. They advised the boys to focus on school, to ask questions, and to choose their friends wisely, rather than succumbing to negative peer pressure. In 2011, one speaker told the audience during a plenary session, "There are more Black cardiologists in the USA than MBA players."

A major theme was that of developing communication, relational, and networking skills. Repeatedly, the boys were informed that they needed good reading, writing and overall verbal-linguistic and mathematics skills, to succeed in many fields. During one session, the boys were asked where they thought they'd be in 10 years. The boys ran the gamut in their responses. One said he'd like to become a filmmaker, another a reporter, while another joked, "Living in my mom's basement." The latter comment generated discussion. Admittedly trying to be funny, the boy was nonetheless cautioned to focus on school, to try his best at academics, while keeping his sense of humour.

In a session with presenters who are currently high school students themselves, the older teenagers asked the boys to look around, and to form relationships that would elevate them. The boys were told to build routines, and not to procrastinate, They were advised to never be embarrassed to ask questions to teachers, or others, when they didn't understand, and to seek out extra help. In 2011, Canadian spoken word artist Dwayne Morgan presented at the conference. In 2012, in keeping with peer-mentorship, grade 10 teenager from Regent Park, Mustfa Ahmed, also performed spoken

word; a form of poetry that uses alliterated prose or verse, and occasionally metered verse, to express social commentary. Ahmed said, “It’s nice to have male role models because I haven’t really had that in my life” (cited in Skinner, 2012).

On May 2, 2012, Michael Lutrell “Pinball” Clemons, was the concluding plenary speaker of the day. Standing 5 ft 6 in (167 cm) tall, Clemons, now a Canadian citizen, was told from an early age that he did not have what it took to make it in football. He also came from the projects in Florida, and said, “There was a lack of hope in my community.” Nevertheless, he went on to earn a university degree, and to become a renowned football player, coach, and contributor to children’s organizations, such as the Children’s Miracle Network. Clemons ignited the boys’ enthusiasm, sending the message that education is the number one determinant in quality of “your life, health, wealth, freedom, and family” (cited in Frauts, 2012).

His address, like that of other presenters, acknowledged the insidious roles that racism, poverty, and lack of opportunity can play. However, he also stressed optimism, hope, high expectations, and the conviction that the boys could succeed with belief in themselves and support from each other, and their mentors, whom they should actively seek out. In sum, as one of the boys said, “...the thing I take away from this is, that if they can do it, why can’t I?” Another boy is quoted as saying: “[The mentors] taught me to have a good work ethic, to never be late and to always study and be ready for whatever’s coming next” (cited in Skinner, 2012).

Establishing meaningful relationships with university-educated adults who possess social capital, figures significantly in the success of young Black males to attain higher education in the United States (Harper, 2012). In order to sustain the conference, and the longevity and quality of the mentor-protégé relationship, a proposal is underway with conference planners and TDSB external partners. The idea is that adult mentors will engage youth in life-skills, academic, and career planning on a regular basis. For instance, adult mentors may bring the boys to work, and some of the boys may eventually volunteer or intern in their workplace.

## **Approaches and Strategies**

In a single sex setting, Principal Grey perceives that, “there are less office referrals for sure from them... the attendances are better in that [single-sex] class.” These desirable outcomes arise in part due to the high expectations and shared vision, as outlined above, but also due to concerted efforts to vary the approaches and strategies for engaging the boys, and enhancing their overall classroom, school, and broader socio-educational experiences.

During my fieldwork—observing, taking notes, and conducting interviews, I was able to engage in multiple contexts, not only with Principal Grey, and teachers Rossi and Morales, but also with pupils, and other teachers, whom I encountered in the hallways, on the playground, at events, and during breaks. My overall synthesis of these interactions, has led to several key themes. The community at Edward Blake Academy has been able to proactively and successfully engage diverse boys. Indeed, a structured academic program in a learner-centred environment can provide hope for students at academic risk, and other students who are likely to be lost to the academic educational system (Alfassi, 2004). While high expectations and appropriate role models are key to creating a single-sex environment conducive to teaching and learning, these efforts cannot stand alone, and must be coupled with high-yield teaching and learning strategies and approaches, as follows.

## A. Intra- and Extra-curricular Activities

Children's involvement with extracurricular activities has long been correlated with positive outcomes, such as increased academic achievement, pro-social behaviours, and lowered drop-out rates (Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2008). At all ages in Canada, more girls than boys are involved in non-sport activities, such as music and performing arts, clubs, and community groups (O'Regan, 2011). Research in Australia indicates that some parents-guardians prefer their sons to play sport, rather than engaging in a broad range of activities. However, extra-curricular activities are linked to leadership opportunities, awards and formal recognition, problem solving, communication skills, team values, individual and group responsibility, and development of a sense of community (Freeman, 2004, pp. 8 & 48). We need to provide boys with ways of engaging in extra-curricular activities beyond sports, as a normal part of their school experience, and development. The costs and logistics of doing this far outweigh the costs of many boys continuing to feel disengaged, dropping out of school, and unable to pursue post-secondary, or university education.

### 1. Field Trips

Fields trip, like participations in other extracurricular activities, provide opportunities for students to enhance their social capital, that they many might not otherwise experience in their families and communities. Principal Grey was able to allot \$500 extra to the budget of teachers of single-sex classes, to be used as discretionary funds. The teachers often used these funds towards field trips, and tried to minimize the costs to families.

Mr. Morales says, "I do field trips. I like to go to places where I think that an experience that many kids normally would not have." He took the boys cross-country skiing, since the costs of downhill were prohibitive, and the boys "...loved it!"

Mr. Morales organizes an annual end-of-year barbeque at his own house, and arranges transportation for many of the boys, thereby showing his caring and compassion. He also took them to see a Toronto Male Leafs game. The grade 6 boys' single-sex teacher serves in the Army Reserves, and was key in organizing a trip to Base Borden for the boys in grade 6-8.

Mr. Rossi took the grade 8 boys on a hiking trip to the Scarborough Bluffs and Rouge River. They also went to the Science Centre, where they participated in a morning seminar on "forces and machine" to compliment their science unit, and then they were free to explore other exhibits in the afternoon. At the Art Gallery of Ontario, they explored the Maharaja's dynasty from India.

Mr. Rossi says: "They're [the boys] very comfortable telling me, 'Oh I'm not crazy about doing basketball for gym,' or, 'Oh, I'm not crazy about that field trip that you have planned.'" Mr. Rossi and his class, along with the grade 8 single-sex girls' class, and their teacher, co-organized an excursion to High Park in June, too. They went hiking, played 'Capture the flag', and also played soccer and football. The teachers meet in August and discuss who will do which activities, as they short and long range plan.

In 2010-2011, Mr. Rossi took the grade 8 boys to the Young Men's conference. In 2011-2012, he is now teaching grade 7 instead, with Mr. Morales following his boys as the grade 8 homeroom teacher. Therefore, in 2011-2012, Mr. Morales accompanied the boys to the Young Men's Conference.

### 2. Health and Fitness

In Ontario, the percentage of students indicating that they do the following “every day or almost every day” when they are not at school is as follows (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011, pp. 11, 24): 23% of girls and 12% of boys read by themselves; 5% of girls and 36% of boys play video games daily, with 4% of girls and 23% of boys spending 3 or more hours playing video games daily; 17% of girls and 27% of boys work at a paid job and; 23% of girls and 38% of boys participate in sports or other physical activities. Therefore, it is not surprising that coaching, and the fitness room, attract many of the boys at the Edward Blake Academy.

#### a. Coaching

Mr. Morales coaches the boys’ soccer team, too, and assists with the volleyball team. Mr. Rossi is equally active in coaching. In September, he and a colleague have the children participate in the Terry Fox National School Run Day, to raise money for cancer research. He coaches boys’ basketball in the winter (with the same colleague), skiing, and jogging during lunch hour, and track and field in the spring, the latter two being co-educational. Often, I observed Mr. Rossi coaching track and field on a little used, one way street outside the school, during lunch hour.

One of the teachers revealed that it can be challenging to have some of the boys’ parents attend some of the sporting tournaments. Some parents were quite educated in their countries of origin, but have barriers acquiring certification and upgrading in Ontario. Some work part-time, and tend to their young children. Others work full-time, but multiple jobs, often low paying, in the service industry, for instance.

#### b. The Fitness Room

Every morning, a group of several boys gather in what is called the Fitness Room. Principal Grey created what he calls, the “F.I.T. program: Fitness, Integrity, and Team.” He created this program to “...try and engage kids more into school...to try and get them here earlier...it’s what we do to get them more focused...and kids of that age don’t necessarily have access to weight lifting.” A colleague who teaches primarily boys, as is typical in a behavioural class, also supervises and mentors here.

He bought much of the equipment from his own pocket, getting deals on Craigslist, and also via donations, once word got out “...and people wanted to donate things.” Some of the students have been part of the “F.I.T. program” since grade 7, and are now in high school, but still return to use the room.

Every morning, Principal Grey arrives at the Edward Blake Academy at 6h30, and opens the ‘fit room’ at 7h00, along with the teacher of the behavioural class. The room is open until 8h15. All pupils are welcome in the morning, but there are primarily boys, with only one girl. However, the room is open during lunch hour for the teachers who run a fit club for the girls. Every morning of late, the principal and vice-principal run a fitness program for the boys called ‘Insanity’, which consists of bursts of maximum-intensity exercises with short periods of rest.

The fitness room attracts a variety of boys, including those who are ‘at risk’, meaning they were on a modified program in elementary school, are achieving below the provincial average, lacking motivation and experiencing problems with attendance, or in danger of eventually dropping out of school. Principal Grey says, “...sometimes it will be the more at risk kids, and when they came in, and you know, saw that the principal’s working out, and he’s teaching us different things, that’s kind

of like a link to, “Oh this guy’s pretty cool! He’s just not like your typical principal.””

## The Arts

In Ontario, the percentage of students indicating that they participate in art, music, dance, or drama activities “everyday or almost every day” stands at 22% of females and only 13% of males (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011, p. 24). However, the successful Excellence Boys Charter school provides an extensive extra-curricular program that consists of rich offerings in athletics and the arts (Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant, 2012). Likewise, the acknowledgement that arts are important to boys’ education is echoed at the William Blake Academy.

### A. Music and Artwork

In keeping with the vision and leadership of the principal in supporting single-sex education, and the rapport a teacher can establish with his class, Mr. Morales teaches his own class band, and acknowledges that, “the principal was really good and kind to allow that.” He says: “the whole class plays instruments.” In fact, Mr. Morales, having an undergraduate degree in music, and having worked for many years as a musician, is adept and dedicated in instilling a love of music into the boys in his class.

All the boys in his class are members of the “Boys’ Band.” As of June 2012, Mr. Morales has now taught all the boys for two years at the Edward Blake Academy, and some of them for 3 years, since some were his pupils at his previous school. Again, this reflects the idea of the key, homeroom teacher model who can be consistent with expectations, and progressively build rapport with the boys over time. Mr. Morales teaches the boys how to play the clarinet, saxophone, trombone, baritone, pheromone, tuba, trumpet, or steelpan—the latter in the role of flute. The Boys Band performs at school concerts, and also at an alliance of community groups and social agencies, that is active in their community. As mentioned in the section on “Boys as Peer Role Models”, the boys gain admiration, and respect, for those peers who persevere, and hone their music skills, several of whom come regularly for extra help.

In keeping with the focus on music, Mr. Rossi says, “We had a Samba group come to the school to try and get them interested in playing drums . . . so some of them are taking that up, and they do that here once a week.”

In the Young Men’s Club, as stated, the boys also employ the arts as a means of self-discovery and dialogue, such as during the first meeting, when they all sketched self-portraits. The walls of the classrooms, and the bulletin boards both inside and outside, also contain drawings that accompany the boys’ original works of prose or poetry.

### B. Language Arts

#### 1. Focus on Oral, Reading and Writing Skills

At the Young Men’s Conference, presenters told the boys over and over to work on improving their language arts—reading, writing, and speaking, in particular. All presenters that I observed told the boys that reading was core to success. One of the groups of presenters, composed of 4 high school

students who were ‘at risk’ in intermediate school—that is, showing lower marks than the provincial average, were on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in elementary school, had poor attendance, or showed lack of motivation—but had since found their path, extolled the virtues of working hard, and reading. Said one:

You know what? The kids in my school who achieve the best marks, you know what they’re doing during the first half hour of lunch? They’re either reading, or asking the teachers for help, or doing homework! They’re not playing basketball out in the yard... and they’re getting A+.

When asked who their role models were, another high school presenter said, “Malcolm X. I read his biography and it changed my life.” This shows the transformative power of literature and storytelling. A role model is not necessarily in person, but may be in a book.

During another session, there were 10 adult male presenters, and 23 boys, along with their teachers. Collaboratively, with the boys’ feedback, they decided to each take a group of two or so boys, and engage in a half hour face-to-face meeting. Afterwards, they re-assembled for a whole group discussion. One of the adult presenters had become a successful business analyst in a major Canadian corporation. The business analyst sat with two of the 13-year-old boys and shared his educational journey, with all the ups and downs. At one point, he confided that he was terrified of public speaking when he was their age, but that he practiced over and over. Now, he has presented thousands of times in front of people. The message that perseverance was desired, along with strong communication skills, rang loud and clear.

Furthermore, it is significant to reiterate, that some contend that boys may be less intimidated in single-sex settings. In the classroom, Mr. Rossi says, “I see more participation. I see less reluctance. Even if they know that they’re [the boys] not very strong in a subject.”

## 2. Public Display of Poetry and Prose

Outside of the boys’ grade 8 classroom, during my first week or so, I noticed remarkable poems posted on the bulletin board. As a former intermediate English teacher, I was struck by the sophisticated imagery, the artful usage of symbol and metaphor, and the heartfelt yet subtle interplay of mood and atmosphere. The boys had written about their own identities, many addressing intersections of religion, race, family and peer relationships, and showing insightful self and social awareness. I spoke to Mr. Rossi about them. He said: “Every single one was a three minus or a four [the provincial average is 3, with 4 being above the usual grade level]. I gave out more fours for that assignment than any other assignment.” Afterwards, Mr. Rossi mentioned my compliments to the boys, which I capped, and the boys applauded each other.

Indeed, we must challenge the myth of the emotionally defective male (Lander & Nahon, 2008), for given the chance, boys can be deeply reflexive and expressive, including in artistic forms, such as poetry. Being in an all male environment may afford boys the added comfort to share their emotions, thoughts, and histories in multiple ways, including poetically, whereas in a co-educational setting, certain boys may balk.

## 3. Drama

During a grade 8 Health class, I witnessed boys engaging in drama, for which the theme was an exploration of relationships. Mr. Rossi called the boys to the carpeted area to the far right hand corner of the room. He reminded the presenters who had prepared scripts, not to turn their backs to the audience, so their voices would carry.

In the first scenario, a boy wanted to go with two special friends, i.e., girlfriends, on a date to a movie. Mr. Rossi, leading the discussion, asked them to be open and honest, and reassured them that there was no right or wrong answer. They discussed music videos, where often several young women surround rappers and hip-hop artists, as decoration. They discussed this pop cultural phenomenon and related it to a male 'coolness factor' that creates gender stereotypes. Three boys role-played the scenario. One played the boy, and two other boys played the girls. Part of the scenario involved the two 'girls' speaking to each other about liking the same boy, as well as the boy being upfront to each girl about his true feelings. This was performed in a respectful manner, and the audience had mature reactions, and subsequent teacher guided dialogue.

In a second scenario, two boys role-played a situation where they were good friends who liked the same girl, and were at odds. The class discussed resentment in such situations, and fears of opening up. They discussed how many people would do anything to avoid confronting the person in those types of situations. They also role-played the two boys discussing the conflict, and trying to reach an amenable solution, followed by more guided discussion.

Pertaining to both scenarios, the boys freely discussed how sometimes they don't know how to react when girls use "waterworks" [cry], or do the "puppy dog part". With whole group discussion, the boys determined that facing up to the challenge in conflicts, even when afraid, and talking with the other person(s), required courage. They also concluded that trying to maintain dialogue, even when emotions run high, can be conducive to conflict resolution.

#### 4. Mass Media Critique

In Mr. Morales' class, they use a wide range of topics and resources to engage students:

"I want them to be hooked on reading. That's one of the basics to start out. With regards to other material that is going to connect them, or engage them, I'm thinking the news, anything that has to do with sport, because there are stories there that we can talk about. There are stories that we can read about. There's all the disasters that have been happening—national disasters, we did a whole thing on the tsunami in Japan. So there's geography involved in that. There's a bit of science involved in that, and there's just the general interest...huge stories that are engaging for the students to find out about...the other thing is that literacy could be part of a documentary that we watch."

The cross-disciplinary approach displays a consciousness of differentiation, and also of topics that may boys can relate to: sports and the news, including natural disasters, and in a way that integrates geography and science. Some critique the focus on narrative fiction in language arts programs, noting that many boys tend to favour non-fiction (Booth, 2002). Similarly, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) recommends providing a balance between fiction and non-fiction.

On several occasions, I observed similar phenomena in Mr. Rossi's class, where they use daily newspapers for discussion, and reader response oral and written activities, from debate to reflective

writing. Likewise, I saw libraries in the classrooms, which had multicultural literature, both fiction and non-fiction, a number of which were about or from the boys' countries of origin, in addition to some mystery series, (auto)biographies, and graphic novels. There was also a selection of scientific and geographic periodicals that I observed several of the boys reading in the classroom, and in the school library. In fact, Mr. Morales says that he is "conscientious . . . about getting books that are reflective of the community that we serve."

Interestingly, I observed as the grade 7 class began to watch the movie, *Juno* (2007). Mr. Morales told the boys that it was written by a woman—Diablo Cody, and from the viewpoint of a pregnant girl, so it was important to see their perspectives. He also noted that the actress, Ellen Page, was from Nova Scotia. Here is a snippet of the dialogue that took place at the beginning of the film, while the class waited, as two of the boys adjusted the television and DVD player:

A boy asks, "What's abortion?"

Boy responds, "When they kill the baby."

New boy, "When they put a needle in the stomach."

This controversial film has been hailed as a pro-choice film, but also one that reflects contemporary popular cultural images of the irrelevancy of [young] fathers. Mr. Morales said he'd like to return to that discussion once the boys had seen some of the film.

Subsequently, the boys had several themes to verbally discuss, and also respond to in journal and essay form. For instance, the boys explored whether *Juno* was a stereotypical girl. They critiqued her relationship with her father, and his advice to "...find a person who loves you for who you are". Therefore, they were able to study male and female gender roles, experiences, relationships, and stereotypes, and to make personal connections.

Mr. Morales and Mr. Rossi also advocate for the 4MAT system—a variation of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Gosse, 2010-2011; Schoenfeldt & Salsbury, 2009)—for asking higher and lower-order questions, and which can also help in planning appropriate expectations for lessons. The teachers had both posted 4MAT charts on their walls (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 15), and the boys seemed well used to this strategy, and able to apply it independently during seat and group work. In addition, Mr. Morales indicates noteworthy improvements of students in language arts, "This [referring to his records of English Language Arts assessments] is the beginning of the year, and you see that the scores if you look at this now...you'll see the difference."

In sum, the arts—from sketching and drawing to drama and the language arts, may be used in single-sex classrooms to critique restrictive gender roles, and to enhance intrapersonal, interpersonal, communication, and artistic skills. Students should be encouraged to develop their artistic ability, and to take pride in their achievements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998).

## **The Ethos of the Boy-Friendly Classroom and School**

### **A. Competition**

The view that many boys are more competitive, and tend to thrive with competition, is widespread. In the United Kingdom, evidence suggest that boys respond to lessons containing a clear structure, a variety of activities, and an element of fun and competition (Office for Standards in Education,

July 2003, p. 4). “Boys thrive on team competition and relish a battle against a buddy”, says Leonard Sax, director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (cited in Boesveld, 2009). Mr. Rossi shares this view, “It’s definitely more competitive... and I can tell you, that I don’t see much of that component with the rotary co-ed [classes]...” Indeed, I found two areas in particular in which the boys relished in friendly competition—marks, and sports and play.

### 1. Marks

Boys spend approximately 17 hours per week playing video games. As mentioned, only 5% of girls and 36% of boys play video games daily, with 4% of girls and 23% of boys spending 3 or more hours playing video games daily, too (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011, p. 11). These video games entail competition with one’s self, other people, or characters (Blair & Sanford, 2003). Therefore, the penchant of many boys for a competitive spirit can be embraced in a single-sex classroom.

They want to do well. They LOVE when they get a great mark on a math test or if I return a writing assignment, they’ve gotten a 3 or a 3+ or a 4. They like to be able to say in a joking way say, “Oh, I did better than you, or whatever.” - Mr. Rossi

This friendly competition for better marks is equally present in the all boys grade 7 classroom:

They compare who got the better mark...they trash talk each other out about it but [laughter]... I find that to be healthy ...and they push each other in a way, right, because one of them wanted to beat the other one so badly, that he would come in the morning and get extra help. - Mr. Morales

Likewise, Mr. Morales sees “a big push for chess in the class”. I observed several boys playing chess during recess and lunch hour. The boys also stage chess tournaments where they use a point system. Within a pyramid structure, the winners progressively compete with each other. This simultaneously helps their mathematical and logical thinking skills. Additionally, Mr. Morales encourages them to consult books or manuals on playing chess, which they also discuss. This simultaneously improves their skills in language arts.

### 2. Sports and Play

During my time at the Edward Blake Academy, the intermediate boys held their Physical Education classes outside, since the weather was good. They tended to play either basketball or soccer, and were adept as setting up teams and self-regulating.

This self-regulation and penchant for setting up competitive, team sports, carried over into the playground, whether before or after school hours, or during recess and lunch hour.

Most of the intermediate girls clustered in small groups of 3-6, talking and scarcely moving. Some clustered around the school entrance, several groups near the school walls, and others in groups peripheral to the playground equipment. Just a few boys also clustered and chatted, like the vast majority of girls. Several girls played hopscotch, but these were among the most physically active.

However, the vast majority of boys either played soccer in a large group of about twenty, at

the far end of the playground in a grassy area, or played around the three basketball hoops, numbering several dozen in total. Approximately four girls engaged in basketball regularly, compared to several dozen boys, and their participation was sporadic.

Therefore, overall, boys are able to compete with marks, chess, and via the various sports in which they are engaged during Health and Physical Education, on school teams, or on the playground. It must be noted that when disputes arose, on occasion, pupils conferred with their teacher, but they generally settled disputes themselves. Also, in the friendly competitive spirit of the boys' playing, they normally lost track of scores, and no one seemed to mind.

## (B). Communicative Learning

Development of boys' oral communication skills, and social skills, go hand in hand in a single-sex or co-educational environment, but in a single-sex environment, as stated, the boys may feel freer. Along with important direct instruction by the teacher (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2008), in a boys' class, there are also possibilities for cooperative learning strategies (see Think Literacy, 2003). In this section, communicative learning runs the gamut of icebreakers, mixed-groupings, acceptance of gender variation, and the regulation of homework.

### 1. Icebreakers

Icebreakers are a common cooperative learning structure (Kagan & Kagan, 1997). Furthermore, Mr. Morales advocates for icebreakers at the beginning of the year. For instance, they use a 'interpreter' game, where a reporter interviews an alien, and pretends to interpret the alien's answers, which is very popular with the boys. The boys also enjoy, Zip Zap, Zop—the boys stand in a circle. Someone begins by pointing to another person in the circle and saying "ZIP!" That person then points to yet another person and says, "ZAP!" That person points to another person and says "ZOP!" This continues, but the words must be said in order: ZIP, ZAP, ZOP. If someone makes a mistake and says a word out of order, that person is out of the game.

### 2. Mixed-Groupings

Seemingly unmotivated students can become willing participants in academic tasks if the tasks are tailored to their interests, or if students are given the opportunity to fulfill social needs by working with friends on the task (Urdan, 2006). Morales experiments with heterogeneous groupings, in which students have varied levels of competency.

They all have different experiences and they bring different things to the class. So how does that mix? Coming to the class at first, I was putting them in different groups, and trying different combinations. –Mr. Morales

In the United States, as in Canada, with current foci on literacy and numeracy (Toppo, 2007), fuelled by standardized testing, science and social studies may sometimes be neglected. Many boys may be partial to these subjects and may therefore be deprived. However, I observed science class during which the boys were guided by Mr. Morales, who gave them a choice of building model as or high buildings, after instruction on strength, stability, form and function, triangular structures, etc. The

majority of the boys worked collaboratively in groups, and cut their own wood, too. I observed not only the application of mathematics and science skills, but also interpersonal and verbal-linguistic skills, in keeping with the Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. This in-class project reaches the highest level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy—creating.

Mr. Rossi notes the importance of direct instruction, and also group work:

I try to give the class a three part lesson. More teacher-directed in the intro part, and then of course, they do the hands on and the sharing, and the exploration part...and then the consolidation would be an assignment, or whatever it is we take up. I try to do a little bit of both [direct and indirect instruction]... so a lot of teachers do a lot of group work as well.

Teachers' focus on direct, targeted instruction and clear, precise strategies, has led to improvements in boys' literacy in a widespread Ontario study, too, where "... boys' writing improved during activities that were highly motivating and grounded in the real world, coupled with direct instruction about the writing form and supported with the use of visuals such as anchor charts, word walls, and graphic organizers." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 49).

Furthermore, Mr. Rossi attempts to alter the pace throughout the day. One typical afternoon, for instance, the boys had French class first with a specialist teacher, followed by three periods with Mr. Rossi. They proceeded with carrying on with their math work, with groups at each corner of the room, two groups in the middle, and one to the side; the boys were mostly on task, and speaking in normal voices. They not told to be quiet, which is significant, since the culture of many schools may be categorized as oppressive, in the onus on quietness. Mr. Rossi helped pupils who came to his desk, and he also circulated, lending a hand and providing feedback, as needed. After the scenarios on relationships that were role-played in pairs, and then discussed in the whole group, the boys had Daily Physical Activity, or DPA, as they called it. The boys quickly lined up, and Mr. Rossi led them outside, where they played basketball and soccer, until the end of the day.

### 3. Acceptance of Gender Variation

The ways in which gender is enacted can vary widely among populations of boys, and there can be plenty of overlap between many boys and girls, too, in their various behaviours. For boys, homophobia is a common way of policing traditional gender expectations and norms. However, breaking the insidious Boy Code in a single-sex classroom, can result in an increased level of comfort where ordinarily taboo topics, such as homosexuality, may be better addressed:

The children are a lot more comfortable talking about them in an all boys' class...for example, we had a conversation about homophobia...and we had a conversation about sex...the kids that normally don't feel comfortable talking about these issues had a bit of a voice...Out of the two years with this class, there has not been a single incident in the class where one boy has taunted another with regards to how they express themselves that way [gender variance or homophobia]. - Mr. Morales

Likewise, regarding whether the grade 8 single-sex class boys were ever teased, or disrespected, for being 'effeminate', 'sissy', or 'gay', Mr. Rossi says:

The group [pupils from the TDSB Triangle Program] came in to talk about [homophobia] . . . and we know it exists out there...and we know that it does happen . . . and whether it's because they know that it would upset me...that I'm going to talk to them for about, you know, half an hour about the inappropriateness of all of that . . . so for whatever reason, they're not doing it in here...there's been zero taunting with regards to that topic in this class. The boys are very inclusive. – Mr. Rossi

The Triangle Program is Canada's only high school program for LGBTQ youth ("Mission Statement of the Triangle Program," 2012), and forms one third of the Oasis Alternative Secondary School: there is also an Arts and Social Change Program, where teachers deliver an arts and social justice curriculum, and the Oasis Skateboard Factory, where courses are offered with a skateboard and street art focus, and students earn credits by operating a socially responsible entrepreneurial business.

In the grade 7 class, Mr. Morales arranged for a TDSB school social worker to visit and talk to the class about the experiences of LGBTQ students. Mr. Morales has a longstanding relationship with this social worker:

He's been coming to my class and, well, all the other classes for maybe for three years now. It's REALLY good because he's very open and really breaks the stereotypes for the kids . . . he brings along another student who's in his twenties... the way he carries himself, you would never be able to say that this guy- on the street, that he's gay . . . because for them, gay means somebody who's going to come on to you . . . somebody who is feminine, and all the connotations are sexual, so . . . [we have] a conversation about, you know, who are gays, and who are lesbians, and . . . it could be a teacher, could be a doctor, could be anybody—students, you know—and they have families... they [gays and lesbians] are members of society. – Mr. Morales

The boys learn that LGBTQ people vary along a spectrum of what is considered 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Discussion of the common but erroneous conflation of homosexuality with pedophilia, and making connections to membership in communities of which the pupils are part, heightens awareness and acceptance of diversity, and also reflects a sense of belonging to a salad bowl society, particularly evident in Toronto.

Therefore, the rigid conformity to gender norms, by which homophobia is a instrument, that prevails in many co-educational schools across North America may be lessened in a single-sex classroom, when the collective ethos is one of exploration and acceptance of diversity.

#### 4. Homework

In Ontario, 67% of girls often or always complete their mathematics homework, compared to 56% of boys (The Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011, p. 10). According to a Statistics Canada report by Frenette and Zeman, (2007), 8.5% of boys spend no time on homework, compared to only 2.5% of girls. Similarly, only 30.3% of boys spend at least 4 hours per week on homework, compared with 41.2% of girls. In a Quebec study, among families with two parents, 46% of boys in secondary school spend less than 1 hour per night on homework, compared to 34% of girls (Bouchard, St-Amant, & Gagnon, 2000).

Homework should be meaningful, and some improvements as compared to co-educational

classes, are evident, as related by Mr. Rossi, "...probably a little better." Mr. Rossi makes regular phone calls home: "...I phone home right away...the phone call home tends to be the best one." He calls home when he sees a pattern of homework not being completed more than once per week. Additionally, he is proactive in conducting face-to-face parent-guardian-teacher interviews: "...and I use of course, the parent-teacher interview time to talk a little about the importance of homework. I pull out their folders, and let the parents see what has been completed, and what hasn't been completed." This is usually during yearly scheduled times, normally corresponding to report card release, throughout the school semesters.

Some teachers find it a good practice to make two positive update phone calls home, for every call addressing a problem. When asked about his approach for monitoring homework, Mr. Morales says that writing notes to parents-guardians in the pupils' agendas is "... not that useful. I find that phoning them helps." For some pupils and parents-guardians, phoning home as a means of conferencing, is a weekly routine, while for others, Mr. Morales, says, "I never call because there's no issues whatsoever."

Significantly, Mr. Morales confides that he tries to get "...the parents involved, especially the fathers. They come here. We sit down. We talk and then the parents see what's happening with their son in the class, right?"

Sometimes the pupils may have told his parents-guardians that he had no pencils, or that there wasn't any homework, and face-to-face conferencing, with the boy present, has proven effective. Mr. Morales is astute in getting the fathers involved, for homework still remains associated with mothers, and thereby, he is fostering better school-home communication, and also breaking the gendered boy code.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, as an option, some boys do benefit from single-sex education. The social capital of boys may be enhanced via creative applications of the arts, along with appreciation of their own multiple identities. There may be fewer referrals to office and better attendance. Dropping the 'cool pose' and subverting the boy code—many elements of which are antithetical to school success, is another major outcome. Mr. Rossi summarizes:

I've seen some really positive changes in most of the boys . . . I would say 95% of the class for sure, that the level of distraction . . . not having the girls component in here . . . has allowed them to be more comfortable . . . So I see more participation. I see less reluctance. - Mr. Rossi

This ethos of collective respect, and exploration of diversity, is also reflected in the acceptance of transgressions of rigid gender norms by the boys, and the apparent reduction of homophobia, which is rare in Canadian schools.

Furthermore, certain organized activities and events, from the Young Men's Club, F.I.T. Program and Fitness Room, to the Young Men's Conference, and end-of-year barbeque at their homeroom teacher's home, create a more inclusive environment, boosted sense of belonging, while providing the teenage boys with positive male role models. The principal and homeroom are dedicated to coaching sports, such as volleyball, and track and field. Equally, they create rich outdoor

excursions to places most of the boys might never otherwise visited, such as the scientific and cultural trips to museums and centers. The education team aims for positive life experiences, both in and out of the classroom.

Indeed, when asked about the effects of the single-sex classes in his school, Principal Grey says:

I think it's significant. I really think that it kind of changed the culture of the school. I think it's given a little bit more focus and really made the learning environment a little bit different. And I think you know, overall as a principal, I'm always trying to get a positive school culture and climate. – Principal Grey

This telling comment underscores the crucial role of the principal in creating group vision, and carrying out a mission—at the Edward Blake Academy, this vision is to enhance the engagement and achievement of all pupils, including struggling boys.

At the Edward Blake Academy, as with other single-sex classes and schools in Canada, and internationally, there is likely a Pygmalion Effect—higher expectations, enhanced sense of community, and joint purpose, may encourage the teachers, families, and pupils, to strive for, and attain, better engagement and achievement (see Campbell et al., 1977-2012; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968); It is equally important to note that high expectations should work in tandem with positive role modelling, and high-yield teaching and learning strategies for differentiation, and addressing the boy code. A principal who is visionary, hand-on, a strong communicator, and supportive, is important to the success of the program.

Environment, ethos, or climate, are too often neglected when educators contemplate effective ways of differentiating teaching and learning. We are quick to examine content—what we teach, the process—how we teach, and the product—what we accept as evidence of learning (Tomlinson, 2009), but the environment, climate, or ethos—the socio-emotional atmosphere and support we foster, seems to fall by the wayside, in too many cases. However, developing respectful relationships among students, and between students and adults, is core to an environment conducive to learning, and differentiation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

There can be much empowerment in a single-sex classroom, and school setting, in which: (i) consistent high expectations are linked to attentiveness in class, homework completion, attendance, and an increased striving for progress and achievement; (ii) extracurricular activities, from sports to the arts, augment students intellectual, interpersonal and communication skills, crucial for self-development and leadership in the 21st century, and; (iii) elements of the damaging 'boy code' can be broken down, so that it becomes cool to play a musical instrument or participate in drama, to display expertise and leadership in the construction of a model bridge or building, and to engage in friendly competition for higher grades. Ultimately, education should not be cookie cutter—one size does not fit all. There is much to be lauded at the Edward Blake Academy, particularly the creativity and drive of educators who toil to improve the social and educational trajectories of all their students. Canadian boys of all races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, geographical locations, and languages and cultures, merit scrutiny, approval, and approaches and strategies that maximize their full potential in the 21st century.

### Appendix: Evidence of Success in Single-Sex Classes for Boys

Key Themes	Sample Anecdotal Evidence	Strategies and Approaches	Academic, Artistic and Professional Sources
Homework and accountability	<p>“...probably a little better...” – Mr. Rossi</p> <p>“...I phone home right away...the phone call home tends to be the best one. [when incomplete more than once per week] – Mr. Rossi</p> <p>“...I find that phoning them [parents-guardians] helps.” –Mr. Morales</p> <p>“...and I use of course, the parent-teacher interview time to talk a little about the importance of homework. I pull out their folders, and let the parents see what has been completed, and what hasn’t been completed.” – Mr. Rossi</p>	<p>Make regular phone calls home. For every phone call home about problems, call two extra parents-guardians to tell them how well their children are improving, or progressing.</p> <p>Conduct face-to-face parent-teacher interviews.</p> <p>Provide additional tutoring before, after, or during school hours.</p> <p>Use anecdotal records to chart students’ homework completion and patterns.</p>	<p>Assignments are often graded for neatness and organization over content, which disfavours boys (Tyre, 2008).</p> <p>Parent-guardian school engagement results in children attaining higher grade point averages, better scores on standardized tests, better attendance, improved behaviour, and better social skills (Sinay, Zheng, &amp; Priesley, November 2009).</p> <p>Setting unapologetically high expectations for each boy scholar in both academics and behaviour is core to their success and character development (Excellence Boys Charter School of Bedford-Stuyvesant, 2012).</p>
Fewer referrals to office and better attendance	<p>“...there are less office referrals for sure from them... the attendances are better in that [single-sex] class.” –Principal Grey</p> <p>“I’ve seen some really positive changes in most of the boys ... I would say 95% of the class for sure...” –Mr. Rossi</p>	<p>Enhance the ethos or climate in explicit ways.</p> <p>Praise the boys for progress and achievement.</p> <p>Try not to make negative gendered assumptions about boys, such as, “Boys are more unruly than girls.”</p>	<p>A better school climate must proactively build on addressing the roles of homophobia and shaming in boys schooling and lives (Neu &amp; Weinfeld, 2007).</p> <p>Boys may be treated more harshly for the same offences as girls, including bullying (Lingard, Martino, Mills, &amp;</p>

		<p>Approve boys publicly, and via displays of students' work, such as essays and poetry on bulletin boards inside and outside the classroom.</p> <p>Embrace being a key homeroom teacher for most subjects for continuity and consistency, rather than having rotary overkill.</p>	<p>Bahr, 2002). The view that boys are 'more naughty' may result in a negative self-fulfilling prophesy.</p> <p>Homework inciting the boys to read all kinds of texts, along with a 'reading buddy' scheme whereby older boys read to younger boys, and teacher directed discussions and modeling of responses to texts, may contribute to improvements in literacy, but also concentration, behaviour, and attendance (Younger &amp; Warrington, 2005a).</p>
<p>Students as peer role models</p>	<p>"...we have students who could function well in both classes [single-sex or co-educational]...but who possibly have skills that would be used as a model..." Mr. Rossi</p> <p>"Malcolm X. I read his biography and it changed my life." –High school student presenter at Young Men's Conference, in response to a question about who his role models were.</p>	<p>Assign students heterogeneous group work, so stronger students may help those who are less confident, or have different skills—experiment with various groupings, and roles, e.g., materials organizer, time keeper, task minder, etc. Do not exceed 4 members in a group.</p> <p>Supply and recommend non-fiction and fiction, for literature has the power to transform lives. Boys may identify more with male protagonists.</p>	<p>Lesson using cooperative learning and cooperative discipline strategies (Albert, 1996; Schwartz &amp; Pollishuke, 2005; Think Literacy, 2003) can result in higher engagement, investment, and achievement, as pupils take on responsible and leadership roles.</p> <p>Bildungsromans, or educational novels of one's journeys through life, such as Jackytar (Gosse, 2005a), and Breaking silences &amp; exploring masculinities, A critical supplement to the novel Jackytar (Gosse, 2008), may</p>

		<p>Establish a peer reading program, whereby older boys read to younger boys, and vice versa.</p>	<p>transform and inspire young men, and be used as a tool to probe the boy code. Likewise, non-fiction, such as biographies, or auto-biographies, may also inspire boys, who find in them positive male role models.</p> <p>A reading program, involving positive male role models (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004), from firefighters to stay-at-home dads, or a buddy scheme of older students to younger boys (Younger &amp; Warrington, 2005b), can show variance of gender norms, and engage boys in purposeful literacy activities.</p>
<p>Broaching taboo or intimate topics regarding sexuality and identity</p>	<p>“...they are a lot more comfortable being with each other ... I guess the connection with me and what I allow to happen in the class... the fact that we can talk about let’s say things that are more intimate ...we had a conversation about sex...” -Mr. Morales</p> <p>“...the children are a lot more comfortable talking about them in an all boys’ class...for example, we had a conversation about homophobia...”</p>	<p>Engage the class in discussions/debates. Teach the boys how to lead a discussion or debate in small groups, and whole groups.</p> <p>Invite guest speakers, such as graduates from the TDSB Triangle Program, or equity or social workers, to talk about diversity and human rights and dignity. Optimally, discussions of diversity should permeate the curriculum, not just on special days or</p>	<p>Storytelling and fiction have the power to transform lives, and can help us rethink prejudicial beliefs, such as homophobia or racism (Gosse, 2005c).</p> <p>Digital media can also work towards this same goal.</p> <p>Novel study, writing circles, storytelling, auto-biography, and digital technology can be used to broach what are often taboo topics for some,</p>

	<p>the kids that normally don't feel comfortable talking about these issues had a bit of a voice..." –Mr. Rossi</p> <p>...it could be a teacher, could be a doctor, could be anybody—students you know, and they have families, ... they are members of society." –Mr. Morales</p>	<p>sessions, but these can nonetheless vary the pace, and ignite curiosity.</p>	<p>such as being LGBTQ, and coming out (Queer Curriculum Ideas, 2012).</p>
<p>Breaking the 'boy code'</p>	<p>Mature and engaged discussion surrounding relationships in grade 7 health class.</p> <p>Comfort level with levity, playfulness, boys' energy, behaviours, and noise levels.</p> <p>"...you know, whether it is someone with a disability, whether it is a gender thing, or someone's choice of partner... if you're a good teacher and you can build community in your classroom, I think the essential thing to teach boys in particular is</p>	<p>Employ drama techniques, e.g., role-play, improvisation, tableau, and mime.</p> <p>Incorporate humour and laughter into the classroom daily.</p> <p>Apply Bonzo's (2002) 10 [positive] male archetypes to curricula to reconceptualize masculine identities with pupils:</p> <p>Pilgrim: the archetype of male wanderlust.</p> <p>Patriarch: the masculine form of care, nobility, and self-sacrifice.</p>	<p>Both male (Brozo, 2002) and female gender stereotypes can be analyzed.</p> <p>Being patient, playful, embracing and maximizing boys' energy, and altering notions of acceptable noise levels and behaviours (Gosse, 2011b; Paesano, 2010a), are important qualities for a teacher to embrace when teaching boys.</p> <p>Should not presume 'patriarchy' or 'male power'—make connections to race, class, sexual orientation,</p>

<p>empathy...if you can teach that [empathy] in the community of your classroom, you're going to break down those so-called stereotypes of masculinity..." — Principal Grey</p>	<p>King: trustworthy and wise, he engenders excellence in others, generosity, dignity and exposure.          Warrior: brave, edifying, and honourable and should contrast with greed, selfishness, and lack of humanitarian spirit,          Magician: evokes amazement through intuition and cleverness.          Wildman: lustiness, unpredictability and independence. This is a primal archetype.          Healer: mystical, spiritual, and bringer of wholeness to people and societies that are incomplete and suffering.          Prophet: a spiritual figure who battles falsehoods, and speaks for a cause          Trickster: irreverent, funny, and satirical, he is impish and pokes fun at pomposity, ostentation, and self-righteousness.          Lover: he is caring, giving, and intimate, full of primal energy, passion, and appetite for human hungers, such as food, well-being, reproduction, creativity, and meaning.</p>	<p>disability, etc. (Gosse, 2012). Critique male sacrificial and subordinate masculinities.</p> <p>We all drift in and out of sites of privilege, and lack or power (Gosse, 2005a, 2008); this may be achieved via critique of gender roles and male archetypes in action movies, and other media (Gosse, 2011c)</p> <p>In single-sex settings, girls may develop higher self-concept in math and science, and boys in English (Sullivan, 2009)</p>
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<p>Heightened kinaesthetic activities</p>	<p>In the playground, the vast majority of the boys played basketball or soccer in teams, and engaged in friendly competition, before and after school, and during recess and lunch hour.</p> <p>Boys have been taught teamwork in Health and Physical Education</p> <p>Boys have become largely self-regulating</p>	<p>Optimize opportunities for Daily Physical Activity (DPA).</p> <p>Include a mixture of direct instruction, and mixed-group work.</p> <p>Coach or share in coaching sports (co-coach), which also builds spirit and enhances school ethos or climate, and student-teacher rapport.</p>	<p>Many boys crave kinaesthetic movement and active learning (Spence, 2010). My observations during recess and playground time bear this out.</p> <p>Some contend that gender differences account for boys' penchant for activity (Weil, 2008). Gender constructivists contest this.</p> <p>Self-regulation, self-efficacy, self-determination, and strong self-esteem, are directly linked to positive ties forged with teachers (Nichols, 2006)</p>
<p>Enhanced interest, motivation, and competition in academics</p>	<p>Differentiated pacing and input-output of teachers—boys seemed interested and focused.</p> <p>“They want to do well. They LOVE when they get a great mark on a math test or if I return a writing assignment, they’ve gotten a 3 or a 3+ or a 4. They like to be able to say in a joking way say, “Oh, I did better than you, or whatever.”—Mr. Rossi</p> <p>“This [referring to his records of English Language Arts assessments] is the beginning of the year, and you see that</p>	<p>Differentiate tasks, and the pace of lessons, e.g., vary teacher led instruction with ‘turn to your partner and share’ (TYPS), student written response, pairs of 2, small group work, and alone work.</p> <p>Use concept maps on walls, white board, or chalkboard. These can be class generated, or small group generated.</p> <p>Embrace the competition in class for marks, rather than treating it as abnormal or unhealthy, e.g., keep anecdotal records of student</p>	<p>Boys tend to respond well to teachers who set clear limits and high expectations, direct work strongly, show enthusiasm for their subjects, use humour and reward good work (Office for Standards in Education, July 2003).</p> <p>Concept maps may be used for sorting, sequencing, comparing, etc. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003)</p> <p>Monitoring for fatigue and boredom (Kronowitz, 2008), and switching the types of in-class structures, can</p>

	<p>the scores if you look at this now...you'll see the difference." –Mr. Morales</p>	<p>effort, progress and achievement, and give overt verbal and written praise. Also, display student work, read sample work aloud. Do not use sarcasm or put-downs.</p>	<p>be effective in keeping boys focused and motivated.</p>
<p>Enhanced sense of community and belonging</p>	<p>"Sometimes it will be the more at risk kids [who go to the fitness room mornings], and when they came in, and you know, saw that the principal's working out, and he's teaching us different things, that's kind of like a link to, "Oh this guy's pretty cool! He's just not like your typical principal." – Principal Grey</p> <p>"...if they don't come [to the Young men's Club] it is because they are on a school trip or something to do with the school."</p> <p>The enthusiasm, cheering, attentive-ness, and camaraderie evident at the Young Men's Conference among the boys, educators, and presenters.</p> <p>"Potential. That's all I see. Potential. You know I don't give up on them, right." – Mr. Morales</p>	<p>Create or contribute to a "F.I.T. program: Fitness, Integrity, and Team" in school as a role model or mentor.</p> <p>Create or contribute to a Young Men's Club, or a similar program for boys.</p> <p>Enhance leadership opportunities, such as the Young men's Conference, which can be on a school level. Teenage boys may also peer mentor and tutor, showing by example that achievement and effort are linked, and that positive relationships are vital to success.</p> <p>Acknowledge all the positive male role models in school and society. Emphasize the accomplishments and progress of boys.</p> <p>Couple high expectations with differentiated approaches and strategies for teaching and learning, as outlined herein.</p>	<p>Raising Cain exploring the inner lives of America's boys (Thompson, 2006) shows concerned adults how they can help boys cultivate emotional awareness, giving them the support to navigate the social pressures of youth. Too often, boys' interests, games, and modes of expression are pathologized in school, or seen as inferior.</p> <p>Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study (Harper, 2012), shows how young Black men in the United States get into university, pay for university, transition to university, become engaged, and respond to racism. Parental high expectations, mentors, an influential teacher, and opportunities to travel or establish meaningful relationships with university-educated adults who possess social</p>

		<p>capital, all figure significantly in their success.</p> <p>Care should be taken not to pathologize boys and men. 'WiseGuyz', run by the Calgary Sexual Health Centre (Biel-ski, 2012), 'Boys2Men' in the TDSB (Toronto District School Board, 2012), and 'Rock and Water' in Australia (Ykema &amp; The Gadaku Institute, 2000) and the Netherlands, all have transformative potential, and can crack the 'Cool Pose' and 'Boy Code'.</p>
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Douglas Gosse is professor at the Northern Canadian Centre for Research in Education & the Arts (NORCCREA) at Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, Canada. He can be reached at [douglasg@nipissingu.ca](mailto:douglasg@nipissingu.ca).

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