

Children Approach Life With Differing Needs: Tap into Talents to Keep Spark for Learning Alive

Aurora Banner, November 06, 2008

Boys and girls approach life with different needs, abilities and goals, said author and educator Barry MacDonald, who is dedicated to helping parents meet the challenges of raising boys for success at school and life.

“The most important thing we can do is to not make assumptions about who boys are,” he says.

Even before boys are born, there is a greater likelihood that boys will be more active in the womb and once born will more likely have increased difficulties self-soothing, he explained.

Girls also tend to develop speech before boys, which can prove a challenge for some boys later in the classroom.

Many boys have strong tendencies to be attracted to all things visual, such as video games. MacDonald discourages parents from banning video gaming, and to learn about gaming so that healthy limits can be placed. He also says that gaming can provide a platform to talk about hard cultural realities, like violence toward women.

“How children spend their free time can tell a lot about what kind of learner your child is.” For example, his son prefers to quietly play in his bedroom for hours drawings battleships. His bedroom carpet

becomes the ocean floor with dozens of drawings scattered strategically in a epic war. MacDonald says play like this can indicate that a child is a visual learner.

MacDonald advocates that parents approach their child’s teacher when difficulties persist and tune into learning styles. After identifying his son as a visual learner, the teacher encouraged Michael to draw his stories, audio tape them and then transcribe them, which engaged him in writing more, often a difficulty for many boys.

Parents shouldn’t always assume a teacher knows best, but should work with the teacher to tap into the talents of their son to keep the spark for learning alive.

MacDonald points out that many parents feel it is a challenge to keep the attention of their son while having a conversation or giving instructions.

“It is essential that parents become actively engaged when speaking with their son, as many boys are attracted to movement,” he says. “I recently saw a coach have his team side-step while he was instructing them, it helped the boys concentrate and stay focussed on what the coach was saying.”

Bottom line: Every child, girl or boy, has a different way of being smart.