



Barry MacDonald Helping Boys Succeed in School

He's a registered clinical counselor, workshop facilitator on gender-friendly teaching and Langley's program coordinator for students at risk. In each role, Barry MacDonald is helping others realize their potential.

A Statistics Canada report published in 2004 confirmed many educators' suspicions. The gap in educational achievement between males and females is continuing to widen. In general, boys are less likely to be interested in school, have higher dropout rates and are less likely to enroll in post-secondary education.

Barry MacDonald is one educator who is concerned about these statistics and is working to reverse the trend. He first became interested in gender-based educational strategies in the late 1990s, and since then he has offered workshops locally and internationally to help parents, teachers and administrators identify and implement more effective ways of supporting boys' academic and personal growth.

"Gender is a politically loaded issue, and we can see the pendulum swinging to the point where some are calling for single-sex classrooms," he says. "I encourage people to look at the big picture and to see gender as one level of complexity that we need to understand as educators."

MacDonald is keenly interested in the cultural and biological factors that shape boys and their behaviour. "Our culture has definitely created a 'boy code', one that celebrates disinterest and operates as a straitjacket in telling boys what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. Scientific research also shows us that physiological differences in the way boys and girls process information contributes to learning differences between the sexes."



Barry MacDonald—
an educational consultant and
district program coordinator
for students at risk.

These differences are often intensified by the very nature of our schools, with their small classrooms and limited curricular opportunities for the intense physical activity that can be very important for boys. MacDonald also believes that many of us misinterpret boys' behaviour, misreading their physical "rough and tumble" as aggression.

How can we support boys in their learning? MacDonald stresses that there is no single answer for "gender-friendly teaching." In his workshops, he encourages participants to look at boys' behaviour in their classrooms and communities and then seek ways to allow boys to excel – whether it's encouraging more movement within the class or serving as a mentor to show boys that courage and empathy are sources of strength. This summer, he's sharing his expertise at a two-day Summer Institute workshop that offers educators practical advice on raising boys' achievement through teaching strategies and discipline techniques. (More information can be found

at www.mentoringboys.com, which also includes an extensive list of resources and links.)

In addition to his work as a consultant, MacDonald is the Langley School District's Program Coordinator for Students at Risk. "The focus is on activating students' resiliency and strengths to overcome adversity," he says. MacDonald has helped facilitate various projects to engage youth at risk, including two youth-produced documentaries on dropping out of school and drug use. He also meets with teachers and administrators to explore best practices around issues such as discipline and suspensions. "Suspending a student for inappropriate behaviour is often seen as a reward by the student. As educators, we need to support these students in school and establish meaningful relationships with them so that they don't drop out, they drop in."

MacDonald's career has centered on reaching out to others to help them realize their potential as students, parents,

teachers or administrators. "It is very rewarding to be able to help people open up their thinking so that they can find the courage to discover their own solution to the issues they are facing in the classroom or at home. The best part of my job is uncovering gifts and mobilizing possibilities." ☺

"Professional educators provide learning experiences in which students understand and develop their own role and responsibility in the learning process and as life-long learners."

Standard 7.3, Standards for the Education and Competence of Professional Educators in British Columbia.



Let us know if there's an educator you'd like to see profiled in an upcoming issue of *Connected*.

Please e-mail us at: connected@bcct.ca

