

Boys will be boys?

by Paul Abra, January 12, 2007
Island Parenting

How often have you heard that line? What does it actually mean?

Well it's a stereotypical response to boys' behaviour. Though it seems true at times it does not solve any problems that may stem from the behaviour that is being observed.

Anyways, I had the opportunity to see a presentation by Barry MacDonald, author of **Boy Smarts: Mentoring Boys for Success at School**. The message was clear that there is a gender gap and we need to work with the schools in addressing the issues and challenges facing the teaching of boys. (Not all boys but a significant number.)

As a former teacher/principal in an all boys school (and a male and father of a boy), a lot of Barry's examples were very real to me and many in the audience. His explanations of boy behaviours are brain-based research. A lot of what he was saying about the brain and boys was not part of my education as a teacher. It explains a lot of the joys and frustrations I had as teacher of boys.

Some of things I gleaned from the talk is that in dealing with many boys their brain structure and transferring of messages from right to left brain (or visa versa) is assisted by movement. How

often have we confronted a boy to have him rock back and forth, not make eye contact and generally be fidgeting? It's not out of disrespect but part of their way to make sense of the world.

Look at boys play. They tend to be aggressive in their play. They may build a tower of blocks but just as likely to knock it down. In the sandbox they become very focussed on their play with the shovel or truck or whatever and not really interacting with others. Boys, in general, need movement and longer transition times. They are not multi-taskers like their female counterparts.

Barry MacDonald's book and talk not only explained these behaviours (and related them to girls also) but gave some concrete ideas on how we as parents and teachers can work with our boys in helping them achieve success.

One of the many examples Barry gave related to boys not being as verbal as girls. In asking a question about a problem the general response maybe a one word answer. Often a good way to get talking with boys (or men) is to participate in an activity (shooting hoops, walking/running the dog, throwing a frisbee, etc.) in which words are spoken intermittently but over time there is a conversation taking place.

Barry's website is www.MentoringBoys.com