

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ACTION RESEARCH REPORT – 2004/2005

The Gender Achievement Gap

THE GENDER ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Old Yale Road Elementary and Kirkbride Elementary

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CONTEXT:

Old Yale Road Elementary and Kirkbride Elementary are medium-sized, urban schools with over 400 students each. Old Yale is also an inner-city school. Our communities are ethnically diverse with an ESL enrollment of approximately 21% at Old Yale and 43% at Kirkbride. There is an emphasis on guided reading and both schools sport high student involvement in extra-curricular programs. Old Yale Road is involved in several district programs that support early literacy including the Inner-City Early Literacy Project, Kindergarten Phonemic Awareness, Soar to Success, Ready Set Learn and Read, Write, Roar. Kirkbride is also involved in these literacy programs and has begun to use the new RAD36 program as well.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

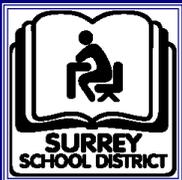
Is there a gender-based gap in achievement at Old Yale Road and/or Kirkbride Elementary, and if so, where does it occur?

Secondary Questions:

- *What might teachers do to narrow the gap by increasing achievement of the lower?*
- *What other interventions might be used to aid parents and/or community partners to narrow the gap?*

ACTION:

A variety of data was used to find answers to our questions. Data was collected in the areas of “Super Student Slips”, “Behaviour Communication Slips”, Foundation Skills Assessment (Ministry FSA), Student Evaluation Survey, Report Card Grades, Counselling Service and Child-Care Worker Service. We felt it was important to gain data from multiple sources to ensure we had a clear picture of differences between genders with respect to conduct and achievement at the school level. Although our work was primarily focused on our respective Grade 7 classes, we included data from other grades to help encourage collaboration in this area. During February, we were welcomed by a few teachers into their classes during a lesson to make formal observations. The observations we sought included the types of interaction (positive, neutral, or negative) with students (gender-stratified). Data from these observations has been included with the respective teacher’s permission. Our collaborative teams were fully supportive of this project. We are thankful for the professional learning opportunities we gained by being able to observe other teachers in action, and by working closely with them to procure information about their students, and about possible strategies to accommodate the achievement gap.



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HOW DID IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

This action research provided significant information in two areas. The first area involved the realization by our staffs that a problem does exist and that it warrants investigation. At both Kirkbride and Old Yale Road, one of the schools' goals is to improve student literacy. As a result of this study, the staff at Kirkbride have decided to concentrate on increasing literacy rates in boys. One strategy that is being implemented is to increase the number of "boy" books in the library.

The second area is in staff collaboration. Exploring the existence of a gender gap with other teachers has started a dialogue on a specific problematic area of student performance. This has provided the staff at both schools with a platform to continue to effectively work together in order to eliminate the achievement gap between boys and girls.

KEY FINDINGS:

We did not have to look very long to find notable gaps in achievement levels between boys and girls in nearly all areas. Although boys out-perform girls in Numeracy (on the Ministry FSA exams), girls are demonstrating superiority in all other curriculum areas.

Ministry FSA Data

2003/2004 Data	Old Yale Road	Kirkbride	
Grade 4 Reading	Gap of 22%	Gap of 18%	
Grade 4 Writing	Gap of 15%	Gap of 32%	
Grade 4 Numeracy	Gap of 12%	Gap of 4%	(** Boys higher)
Grade 7 Reading	Gap of 26%	Gap of 26%	
Grade 7 Writing	Gap of 14%	Gap of 14%	
Grade 7 Numeracy	Gap of 4%	Gap of 4%	(** Boys higher)

Kirkbride Elementary's results closely match those of Old Yale Road in FSA scores.

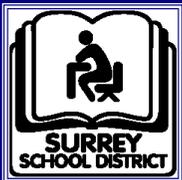
2004/2005 Data

Our Behaviour data shows us that:

Our Grade 3-7 Boys account for 89.5% of Behaviour Communication Slips

Our Grade 3-7 Girls account for 10.5% of Behaviour Communication Slips

Intermediate girls accounted for 20% more of the Super Student Slips than did the boys. The Super Student gap was non-existent for Primary students



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Child Care Worker and Counselling Caseload

There are nearly three times as many males than females on the CCW caseload.

Counselling Detail	Monitoring / Ongoing	Self-Referrals
Girls	22	10
Boys	33	3

Anecdotally, the counsellors report that boys tend to self-report less for a variety of reasons. At the same time, most of the caseload is male. This is, in part, because teachers tend to refer males more often than females for reasons often (but not always) connected to misbehaviour.

Report Card Grades (First Term, 2004/2005)

Report Card grades were assessed for grades between A and C+ (inclusive). This year's class is comprised of 16 boys and 10 girls. The data below is measured as the difference between Boys and Girls achieving a C+ or better according to each particular subject area. So, in terms of letter grades, 31.2% more girls achieved a C+ or better in Language Arts than boys.

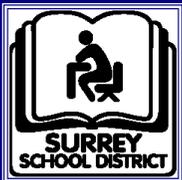
Subject	Old Yale Road Grade 7, Div 2.	Kirkbride Grade 6/7, Div 2.
Language Arts	31.2% Gap	36.0% Gap
Math	1.2% Gap	6.0% Gap
Science	7.4% Gap	6.0% Gap
Social Studies	5.0% Gap	5.0% Gap
Personal Planning	24.9% Gap	17.0% Gap
French	24.9% Gap	20.0% Gap
Fine Arts	EVEN	EVEN

Next year, it would be worthwhile to investigate the Report Card letter grade gap school-wide as opposed to a single class in a single grade.

INTERPRETATION:

The data clearly shows a gap between males and females in achievement. Although most of our data is specific to our particular grade or even class, the data is triangulated through behaviour connections (both positive and negative). Although it may appear as though there is a correlation between behaviour and academics, that was not the focus of our research and there is no proof from what we've done to discern whether it is causal or coincidental.

At the same time, what we have shown is a significant gap in Language Arts, Personal Planning and French. Data shows that this gap clearly exists at the District and Provincial levels. The data collected from the teachers we observed did not demonstrate any sort of favouritism or differential treatment based upon gender. Although some individuals received more attention than others (both positively and negatively), the attention given to the genders was generally balanced. We place some recommendations for teaching strategies near the end of this report.



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Boys clearly account for the majority of behaviour infractions, an astounding 79% gap, and we believe it may be interesting to observe, with lunch hour supervisors, student behaviour and what is chosen to be “written up”, versus what is not. We are left questioning if the boys simply choose to engage in rough play more often or if their activity is perceived to be “inappropriate” more often than the activities of their female counterparts.

OUR FUTURE DIRECTION:

The focus of this project was to determine the existence of a gap. We plan to continue this project next year with the focus on creating change. It is the Language Arts gap that we believe has the greatest potential for a positive transformation. Through collaboration and dialogue this past year, we are confident that the staff at both schools have the necessary foundations to effectively implement any strategies discussed and develop new ones when and where necessary.

LESSONS LEARNED IN LEADERSHIP:

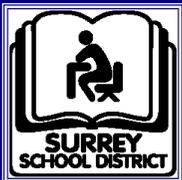
There were several lessons learned about leadership during this study. Leadership has several ups and downs. The data provided disappointing information. It is disheartening to see an academic division such as we experienced. That said, it was gratifying to see the intrigue and desire for change in this area. Several staff members were very willing to engage in this professional growth. It has sparked interesting discussions and led us to the point where we may now begin to share “things that work”.

Methods to engage began small and worked larger. There had been some informal dialogue with teachers about the topic, we broached our principals and both of us brought our project to the staff meetings near the beginning of the year. Teachers are busy. We had to keep it manageable and be very wise about our demands. Excitement is contagious. Others wanted to become involved and we are confident that we have provided for succession in this area.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS:

We all know that discussion is a big and necessary step in addressing any issue in education; however, discussion only goes so far. Without action, any momentum gained toward achieving this goal will come to an abrupt stop. The next step would be to both solicit and provide teachers for/with effective strategies that they can learn in hands-on workshops. They could then take these back to their classrooms and effectively integrate them into their current teaching practice. One such expert in this area is Barry MacDonald who runs the “Mentoring Boys” workshops. Barry’s workshops can be found at his website, (<http://www.mentoringboys.com>)

With the achievement gaps being more prevalent in reading and writing, there needs to be a focus here. Providing schools with more information on boy-oriented literacy resources would significantly increase the ability of teachers to raise boys’ achievement levels in reading and writing. These resources should include lists of approved boy books and lesson aids/novel studies to go along with them that are focused on the learning styles and areas of interest of boys. We would recommend looking at a review team directly related to finding books that are engaging to boys and ensuring they make the approved list. Libraries in the Surrey School District may benefit boys by having a “Boy’s Section” where certain novels are highlighted.



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There is still a need for further study of the achievement gap with a focus on strategies that can reduce or eliminate it. Exploring the effectiveness of specific strategies was beyond the scope of this research study; however, throughout this past school year, a couple of adjustments were made for the study of two novels, Where the Red Fern Grows, and Gentle Ben. First, the two novels chosen were boy-oriented in content, involving the protagonist as a young boy in the wilderness, using his survival skills and creating a bond of unconditional love with his animal. Second, the methods of reading the novel varied and included small group reading and discussion.

In Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's, Literacy in the Lives of Young Men, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm (2002), found that working with others provides boys with intrinsic motivation. These adjustments did show improvement in the achievement in the boys; however, a gap still existed which means that further study is necessary. This massive study as well as our local study will provide a solid foundation from which to begin an aggressive move to narrow the gap without harming female achievement.