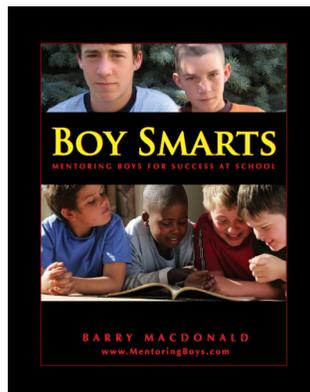


Education

Boys need more understanding, Canadian principals told

James McLeod, St. John's, NL



Understanding men must start when they are boys, and educators who forget there are differences between boys and girls do so at their peril, a conference was told Friday.

That's the message Barry MacDonald delivered to hundreds of school principals gathered at the Delta Hotel in St. John's during the Canadian Association of Principals' conference.

"We need to find new and creative ways to meet the varied needs of boys, especially in areas of assessment," MacDonald said. "We cannot assume that all boys who struggle with reading comprehension have a visual learning style, but I wonder to what degree many of them do?"

MacDonald, an author, professional speaker, life coach and counsellor, said there is a biological basis for teaching boys and girls differently. He talked about the corpus callosum, the nerve "highway" that connects the emotional and logical hemispheres of the brain.

"Boys, on average, have anywhere from 20 per cent smaller corpus callosums to 50 per cent smaller corpus callosums," he said.

"The information travelling back and forth

between different hemispheres is different."

However, MacDonald stressed that cultural forces are every bit as important as biological ones, and even though they're not hard wired from birth, they're every bit as real.

MacDonald focuses on boys because he said there has been a lot more work done on bringing girls out of their shells. Less effort has gone to understanding why boys are the way they are, he said.

Let's not buy into the boy crisis message...

"Let's not buy into this boy crisis message. Instead, let's acknowledge that all boys are capable of learning and being successful in school," he said. "It's our job to figure out how to meet them where they're at."

Tanya Whitney, a principal from Saint John, N.B., said the lecture really opened her eyes.

"I wouldn't even enter into the conversation (about teaching different genders differently). I think a lot of people wouldn't enter into it because we thought it was sexist to talk about that," she said. "We weren't being clinical, we weren't talking

about the differences in physiology and chemistry."

She said she was eager to take the information back to her school. She wanted to make the classroom more conducive to learning for both genders.

"I'm going to talk to my teachers more about this," she said. "We look at boys and see they're active, and we try to fit them into a non-active setting over and over."



Barry MacDonald speaks to delegates at the Canadian Association of Principals Friday morning in St. John's. MacDonald told the principals' conference that educators need to think about boys and girls differently in terms of how they learn.