

Celebrate differences

Richmond News
January 18, 2008
Tracy Sherlock

News flash – boys and girls are different. Of course we all know that, but those of us raised in the '70s were led to believe girls and boys were just the same and anyone who said otherwise was sexist. This is the danger in political correctness – it can go too far. Statistics show that today's boys are paying for the pendulum swing that favours girls in classrooms.

In Richmond, of the 54 secondary school students referred to counselling for first time drug offences during the first four months of the program, 36 were boys, 18 girls.

The fact girls consistently outperform boys on the reading and writing components of standardized tests in both Grade 4 and Grade 7 has been identified as an area of "concern and curiosity" by the Richmond school district.

Development rates could explain the Grade 4 discrepancies "...but one would expect them to lessen by Grade 7 and disappear by graduation. However, they persist," according to the superintendent's report on student achievement.

Barry MacDonald, an educator, registered clinical counsellor and author of *Boy Smarts*, said during a presentation in Richmond that boys are more likely to drop out, be suspended or be expelled from school. Boys have more behaviour problems and are more likely to be labelled with a learning disorder.

More serious consequences also exist. Boys aged 15 to 24 are three times more likely to die an accidental death than girls. More boys are charged with crimes and boys are at higher risk for substance abuse and suicide.

Society and schools having swung too far to the feminine side cause these boy problems. Male strengths need to be celebrated and cultivated as much as female strengths.

...if boys must spend hours colouring to develop their fine motor skills, shouldn't girls be spending just as many hours developing their large motor skills?

Classrooms are geared towards girls -- they stress taking turns, being quiet and sitting for long periods. The work is also easier for the typical girl. I cannot tell you how many colouring assignments my son has brought home and spent hours struggling to complete. This continued through Grade 6. Colouring may help him with fine motor skills, but to him it is just meaningless hoop jumping, as MacDonald says many boys consider school in its entirety.

To be fair, if boys must spend hours colouring to develop their fine motor skills, shouldn't girls be spending just as many hours developing their large motor skills: climbing trees, building towers and knocking them down and the like? After all, we are constantly hearing today about obese kids; maybe all of this feminization of the classroom has contributed to that.

Getting active -- throwing a ball or taking a walk -- gets male brains working. "Movement helps boys to stimulate their brains. It allows boys to process information and to make sense of stressful situations. Boredom is a stressful state of mind for many boys," MacDonald's book says.

Boys need action and adventure. They need to build things to learn about them. They need competition, they need to be able to take risks and they need to be able to make mistakes.

One male friend recently lamented to me about how sports day is no longer competitive in schools. He essentially said that sports day was the one day in the whole school year that he could be successful, and now his two sons would not even experience that. He said if achievement in athletics was no longer recognized, then academic achievement shouldn't be either. He has a point. Why are high grades worth celebrating, but running fast or climbing high are not?

Males, on average, tend to be superior at math and spatial reasoning, which is why they enjoy computer games with lights and buttons. They often have better hand-eye coordination than girls, but can struggle terribly with fine motor skills.

There's no doubt about it -- girls and boys are different. The time has come to recognize and even celebrate those differences in classrooms and elsewhere. Tomorrow's men and women will thank us for it.

Why are high grades worth celebrating, but running fast or climbing high are not?