**EDUCATION** 

## Allowing boys to be active key to keeping them in class

Top researcher holding workshops on gender gap

**GRAEME MORTON** 

CALGARY HERALD

Inderstanding what makes boys "tick" in school, or what triggers their involvement in learning, can be a head-scratching challenge for both parents and teachers.

The gender gap in education is a reality; statistics show boys are more likely than girls to drop out of high school. The study of closing that gap is still in its infancy, says a leading Canadian researcher into gender education issues.

"People are just beginning to talk more about the issue of boys' disengagement from school," said Barry MacDonald, a Vancouver-based clinical counsellor, educator and author.

MacDonald will be in Calgary tonight and Friday to hold gender education workshops for parents and teachers at the Calgary Science School.

"We need some common sense on this issue because there are some knee-jerk reactions to it — of people saying classrooms are feminized today and the answer is boys need more male teachers," he says. "But studies

have shown the teacher's gender had no significant impact on achievement."

Boys are attracted to learning scenarios that involve creation and action, according to MacDonald. He says a delicate balance needs to be drawn between concepts of co-operation and competition.

Girls, he adds, tend to value being sensitive and maintaining good relationships while boys tend to value gaining status.

"Boys need to learn to cooperate, but often the avenue to co-operation is through competition. That's why educational activities like debating are so valuable. You clash with ideas, but you do it in a co-operative way."

The charter science school has consistently sported a two-to-one ration of boys to girls, said principal Ron Sweet.

"With boys, you're always looking

for things that are active and hands on.

We try to work activity into every period. There's a chance for them to move around and be working with objects as opposed to listening or reading all the time," said Sweet, who's been an educator for 33 years.

The school has an extensive outdoor education program, which benefits both genders but is universally popular with boys.

When parents ask their boys about their daily school work, they'll often reply: "I'm not having any problems," cautioned MacDonald.

"But we need to understand the social dynamics involved. We often leave them alone if they say that. Boys tend to want to stand on their own, but under the surface, they are just as vulnerable," he said.

"We need to develop ways to hear what's not being said."

More information on the workshops is available by calling the Calgary Science School at 282-2890.

BARRY MACDONALD ON HOW BOYS LEARN DIFFERENTLY

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