

## STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A MORE BOY-FRIENDLY CLASSROOM THAT YOU CAN START TODAY

- When giving boys explanations and directions try to get to the bottom line. Think in terms of bulleted items or lists.
- Break lessons down into a number of different activities, including drama, investigation, research or the use of information communication technology (ICT).
- Assign work that has a *real* purpose and a *real* audience.
- Include elements of challenge or competition, with short-term goals.
- Allow social learning, such as sitting with a partner who can help discuss and reflect on ideas and structured group work.
- Having boys work in pairs rather than larger small groups minimizes competition among boys.
- To promote writing, allow boys to draw pictures of what they want to say. Many boys love to doodle. Use that to your advantage. It can be a pre-writing activity that motivates boys. Draw pictures of vocabulary words. The brain has a limited ability to remember words, but it has an almost unlimited capacity to remember pictures.
- Have a period of reflection/review at the end of lessons.
- When attempting to get boys to shift from one activity to another, consider using a timer. Set the timer and say, "Try to get to a stopping point before the timer goes off." Most boys will compete with the clock because they tend to be highly competitive.
- When a boy is frustrated with high levels of anxiety, try to give him a private place to process – and offer him water to drink. When levels of anxiety increase, cortisol (a stress hormone) is released in the brain. The brain is 75% water. Drinking water allows the cortisol to be diluted, thus lowering the levels of anxiety. The effect of consuming water takes effect in about five minutes. If water is room temperature, a person can wait longer before having to go to the restroom; cold water moves through the body faster.
- Allow boys more physical space. As noted previously, boys move and need space in which to move. To minimize disciplinary problems in the primary grades, allow boys space that comprises twice their body width. When children are forming a big circle on the floor, make the circle bigger. Boys will be on their knees, on their bottom, feet to left and then to the right. Give them the space in which to do that. Masking tape on the floor can be an effective way for boys to identify their personal boundary. In classrooms in which flat-topped desks are used to form groups of four, pull the desks back 6 inches. It will give boys the feeling of more space.
- Use action verbs and very descriptive adjectives when communicating emotions or expectations with boys. If you say to a boy, "When you do that, it really upsets me," most boys won't understand what you mean. But if you say, "When you do that, it makes me feel really angry," he will understand what you mean. Use hard language with boys. "Behave" has little meaning. Be specific and descriptive.
- The retina of the male eye is different from the female. Young girls tend to use bright colors, including pastels, in their drawings. They draw mommies and daddies, babies, puppies, houses, flowers, and sunshine. Boys tend to favor black, brown, gray, and navy blue, with a splash of "blood" thrown in. They draw dragons, daggers, trucks and monsters. This is not pathology and is no cause for concern.

- When praising boys orally, try to do so privately. Group praise can be done with high-fives or a “thumbs-up.” Giving a boy verbal praise in front of his peers may set him up for teasing (“Ahh, teacher’s pet” or “kissing up”).

WHY GENDER MATTERS by Leonard Sax

### CREATING BOY-FRIENDLY WRITING CLASSROOMS

- Get boys excited about writing. Worry about their engagement first; the quality will come later.
- Give them real choice about what to write and how to write about it.
- Show an interest in what subjects your boys are passionate about. These often make great topics for writing.
- Be more accepting of violence in writing (with commonsense limits).
- Celebrate the quirky humor in boys’ writing. (Humor = Voice)
- Give boys specific praise during writing conferences.
- Don’t insist that students revise everything they write.
- Make room for genres that engage boys: fiction, fantasy, sports writing, spoofs/parodies, comics/graphic novels, nonfiction, etc.
- Allow upper-grade students opportunities to draw while composing.
- Messy handwriting is a developmental issue that affects many boys. Don’t take it personally. Allow students to keyboard when possible.
- Talk about the writer’s notebook as a place to collect important “stuff” including odd facts, artifacts, quotes, lyrics, and drawings.
- Show an interest in what writing kids do at home, for fun.
- Be inclusive about what writing you allow kids to read out loud. If only sincere, realistic, emotional pieces get shared, boys will turn off.
- Don’t be surprised if boys view other boys as their main audience.
- Take the long view. Don’t expect great writing right away.

BOY WRITERS: Reclaiming Their Voices by Ralph Fletcher