



International Boys' Schools Coalition Locating Significance in the Lives of Boys Questions & Answers

What is the project about?

Locating Significance in the Lives of the Boys is a school-based research project commissioned by the International Boys' Schools Coalition. Up to fifteen IBSC schools world-wide will be involved. It follows in the path of the successful *Teaching Boys: A Global Study of Effective Practice*, published by the IBSC in 2009.

For more almost two decades boys have been the subject of widespread concern, focused on their academic achievement and psychological wellbeing. While well-intended, this focus may have the unfortunate effect of diminishing the natural strengths of boys and the *experiences* and *psychological attributes* that can propel them toward accomplishment. The next plateau of discussion shifts emphasis from what's "wrong" with boys to what is ripe with possibility. Most important, this new lens of investigation promises to reveal how boys construct **significance** in their lives. "Significance" implies value beyond the immediacy of the moment; these are experiences that develop boys' minds through the power of insight, inspiration, and meaningful changes in their subjective perspectives of the world.

As proposed in this project, rendering a model of how and where boys locate significance in their lives is essential to understanding how they value themselves and their various efforts, as a foundation of identity, purpose and accomplishment. Grasping these streams of significance may allow educators, mentors, and others concerned about boys to optimize the chances that they will discover significance in their lives. Some specific themes for exploration are discussed below; more will emerge as the research journey proceeds.

Keys to Motivation: Boys' motivation is proportional to the degree of **congruity** in their lives – whether or not the way they lead their lives reflects their most significant ideals. Closing the gap between boys' idealized selves and the realities of their daily life is the spark that ignites motivation. This proximity predicts a boy's attunement to his sense of purpose – a sensibility that makes boys smarter, stronger, and more *able* than they might otherwise feel themselves to be. Until congruity is achieved, life's requirements often feel like an encumbrance, leading to the perennial problem of getting boys to accept responsibility for themselves.

Meaning of Empathy: The spirit of empathy binds boys to a life of compassion and civility. These pillars of capability are not easily constructed in a world that bombards boys with images of power and success divorced from significance. We should foster empathy in boys' lives, including their ability to communicate with others. When we talk about the communication challenges of boys, the important reward for communicating is not more friends or greater popularity; it is an opportunity for significance. Have we learned to hear the language of empathy used by boys? To whom do they feel responsible and why?

Purposeful Work: Many boys are adversely affected by an education that goes on for many years beyond the point at which they are eager to assume greater self-definition. An education that sufficiently prepares one to enter the market of desirable jobs requires boys to remain relatively passive for years beyond the point at which they are ready and willing to have a "purpose" to the world around them. Boys sense the significance of work as adolescence approaches. Work is a primary pathway to significance because it bestows a tangible sense of worth, service, and craft. How can schools foster this process? To what extent do boys believe in their own destiny? What types of "work" do boys find most transcendent?

School Culture: The developmental timelines of childhood and adolescent neurodevelopment have changed, including a notable schism between timeframes for cognitive and emotional development. Cognitive development is now protracted. Despite this protraction, the emotional needs of boys arrive on a schedule similar to what they have been for centuries. Should we be concerned that the concurrent pools of reason and emotion may be filling at different rates for a great many boys, and how can our schools respond?

Who does the research?

Dr. Adam Cox is the author of two books, *Boys of Few Words: Raising Our Sons to Communicate and Connect* and *No Mind Left Behind: Understanding and Fostering Executive Control*. He was a keynote presenter at the 14th annual IBSC conference in Boston, and at IBSC regional conferences in North America. In addition to his clinical practice and writing as a psychologist, Dr. Cox has presented at many IBSC schools, most recently in Australia.

Why has the IBSC undertaken this project?

We believe that this project will break new ground in understanding how boys feel and express a sense of significance and meaning in their lives. The idea for this project emerged in 2008 during Dr. Cox's meetings with boys in Australian IBSC schools. For example, students at Brighton Grammar School revealed how focused and engaged boys can become when questions of *destiny* and *purpose* are posed to them. The resulting communications from parents reinforce how strongly the topic resonates with them as well. IBSC schools are fertile ground for such an extended study. *Locating Significance in the Lives of Boys* will enrich and deepen this global discussion, and demonstrate that boys' schools are centers of expertise and innovation in boys' education.

What's involved in the research?

Up to fifteen IBSC schools representing the geographical and school-type diversity of the IBSC will be selected. The project will involve boys at all school levels. State or public boys' schools in the IBSC will be also represented. The project will involve a series of two-day school visits to conduct qualitative interviews with groups of boys of various ages. Inquiry will be shaped to fit the developmental level of specific cohorts of boys. These structured interviews will be designed according to established guidelines for qualitative inquiry. Opportunity for interviews and discussion with teachers and for a parent presentation and forum will also be coordinated.

The research visits will be conducted over two years. Between October, 2009 and April, 2010, IBSC project schools in North America and the United Kingdom will be involved. A preliminary report will be presented and discussed at the 17th Annual IBSC conference in Philadelphia. In the second year of the project, beginning as early as September, 2010, Dr. Cox will visit Project Schools in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The final report will be published by the IBSC in mid-2011.

What must a project school do?

Each project School will appoint a project coordinator, who will liaise with Dr. Cox and the Executive Director to plan the two-day research schedule, and serve as the school facilitator during Dr. Cox's visit. This will involve identifying and scheduling groups of boys for participation in focus groups and follow-up discussions. The project coordinator will also organize meetings and discussion with teachers and parents. The success of the research visit depends on this careful planning and facilitation, which will commence soon after selection is confirmed.

How does participation benefit my school?

Participation in such a global research project is in itself uplifting and exciting, as well as a service to the wider IBSC community. While comments of boys, teachers and parents will be anonymous in the report, project schools will be fully acknowledged and thanked. Participation is a clear signal of a project school's vital and confident mission as a school for boys. Experience also shows that this kind of participation can stimulate professional conversation among teachers, and strengthen or refresh the organizational and strategic focus of the school.

How are schools selected?

Interested schools are asked to apply as a project school according to the announced deadlines. All geographical regions of the IBSC will be represented. The project will involve boys at all school levels, and state as well as independent schools will be included. The selection process will consider the need for a balanced sampling of schools, and other scheduling requirements.

Is there a financial cost to my school?

There is a participation fee of \$2000 U.S. for each project school. The bulk of research and travel expenses and all publication costs will be met by the IBSC. A school may request financial support to meet the participation fee, and should do so at the time of application.

Whom should I contact for more information?

Please contact Brad Adams, Executive Director of the IBSC, at adams@theibsc.org.