



CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
OF BOYS' & GIRLS' LIVES



# The Relational Dimension in Boys' Education

## A Global Inquiry Among Boys' Schools

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## TEACHING BOYS

A Global Study of Effective Practices

*Michael Reichert, Ph.D. & Richard Hawley, Ph.D.*

INTERNATIONAL BOYS' SCHOOLS COALITION

- Auckland Grammar School, New Zealand
- Belmont Hill School, United States
- Brisbane Grammar School, Australia
- Christ Church Grammar School, Australia
- Collegiate School, United States
- Crescent School, Canada
- Dulwich College, England
- Gilman School, United States
- The Haverford School, United States
- Knox Grammar School, Australia
- Lindisfarne College, New Zealand
- McCallie School, United States
- Salisbury School, United States
- Selwyn House School, Canada
- Saint Alban's College, South Africa
- Saint Christopher's School, United States
- Saint John's College, South Africa
- Trinity Grammar School, Australia

# A New Humanism

“We are not individuals who form relationships. We are social animals, deeply interpenetrated with each other, who emerge out of relationships”

David Brooks, *New York Times*, March 8, 2011

# The Learning Relationship

“...trust, the core of relationship, and truth, which is at the core of education, are inseparable.”

Carol Gilligan, 2000

# 2011-12 Research Questions

- How do teachers describe their relationships with boys?
- How do boys themselves describe effective learning relationships?
- How can schools better support this critical dimension of boys' education?

# 2011-12 Research Design

- Qualitative Survey
  - 667 Teachers/657 Students (as of 6/20/11)
  - Grades 5-12
  - 33 Schools (as of 6/20/11)
  - Broader mix of school types
  - Two essential questions
- Relational Teaching Workshops
  - Live “member check”
  - 5 Planned (US/CN; UK; SA; NZ; AU)
- Framework for Professional Development

# 2011-12 Study School Sample

- **Australia**

- Anglican Church Grammar School
- Christ Church Grammar School
- Scots College
- Southport School
- Trinity Grammar School

- **Canada**

- Crescent School
- Neil McNeil HS
- Royal Saint George's College
- Selwyn House School
- Upper Canada College

- **New Zealand**

- Hamilton Boys' High School
- Lindisfarne College
- Palmerston North Boys HS
- Saint Paul's Collegiate School

- **South Africa**

- Hilton College

- Maritzburg College
- Ridge School
- Saint Andrew's College
- Saint Stithian's College
- South African College HS

- **United Kingdom**

- Queen Elizabeth Grammar School
- Rokeby School
- Saint James Independent School

- **United States**

- Allen Stevenson School
- Belmont Hill School
- The Buckley School
- Bridgton Academy
- Chaminade Catholic HS
- Fenn School
- Gilman School
- Saint Alban's School
- Saint Christopher's School
- Washington Jesuit Academy



# Prompts for Successful Relationships

- **Student Task One:** Describe a positive relationship you have had with a teacher. It could be a teacher who inspired you to explore material and ideas you otherwise would not have explored. It may have been a teacher who helped you understand material you felt you were not interested in or not able to master. It may have been a teacher whose manner somehow inspired you to do your best work.
- **Teacher Task One:** Describe a relationship with a boy that resulted in especially gratifying achievement or improvement. The achievement/improvement could be in either his scholastic performance or his behavior.

# Successful Student and Teacher Relational Themes

- Collateral Interest
- Common characteristic
- Reaching Out/Meeting a specific need
- Vulnerability
- Personal Disclosure
- Responding to a personal interest
- Caring Exception
- Accommodating Opposition
- Maintaining Standards

# Distribution of Successful Themes

- Reaching out/meeting a specific need
- Responding to a student's personal interest or talent
- Locating and cultivating a common interest
- Maintaining a standard, demonstrating mastery
- Personal disclosure
- Vulnerability
- Accommodating Opposition

# A Successful Relational Teacher

**Creates a receptive relational classroom *climate* by...**

- *Establishing a clear sense of behavioral expectations*
- *Respectfully addressing each student*
- *Creating a classroom atmosphere students perceive to be “fair” and emotionally safe*

# Successful Relational Teacher (2)

## **Establishes effective *individual student relationships* by...**

- *Greeting and exchanging words with each student every day*
- *Learning, acknowledging, remarking on students' out-of-class interests, achievements and talents*
- *Being available and initiating individual help and counsel*
- *Noting and addressing student behavior changes from day to day*
- *Noting how individual lessons are being received from day to day*
- *Modifying lessons and methods in response to student performance and appraisals*
- *Monitoring and responding to students' incremental progress day to day, week to week*
- *Sharing with students personal experiences relating to one's own learning and growth*
- *Communicating to students how one came to know and love his/her scholastic subject*
- *Acknowledging one's own inspiring teachers and other exemplary figures in one's scholastic life*

# Prompts for Unsuccessful Relationships

- **Student Task 2:** Describe a relationship with a teacher that did not work for you, one in which the teacher's manner or approach to the material made it hard for you to maintain interest or to do your best.
- **Teacher Task 2:** Describe a relationship with a boy you felt you were not able to reach effectively. The boy in question could be one who you feel did not satisfactorily engage in the subject you were teaching or whose classroom behavior was unresponsive to your efforts to instruct him.

# Themes in Students' Accounts of Unsuccessful Relationship

- **Barriers experienced in teachers' relational style**
  - Disrespectful and disparaging treatment
  - Unmotivated to teach
  - Inattentive to students' needs
  - Uninterested in helping/actively discouraging
- **Barriers experienced in teachers' pedagogy**
  - Poor classroom management
  - Uninspiring/Boring lessons
  - Unclear communication
  - Struggling as teachers

# Themes in Teachers' Accounts of Unsuccessful Relationships

- **Barriers experienced in students' lives and abilities**
  - Unsupportive/struggling families
  - Boys who are square pegs/round hole
  - Irresponsible towards work
  - Over-matched academically
  - Wounded/Defensive
- **Barriers experienced more systemically**
  - Masculine performances
  - Peer performances at expense of teacher
  - Conflict between classroom management and reaching student



# Twin Accounts of Rupture

## Students

- Unable to connect
- Unable to learn
- Intimidated into silence
- Heading for trouble
- Devil may care rationalizations

## Teachers

- End of their ropes
- Heading for trouble
- Deal with the devil rationalizations
- Reflections/Regrets

# Themes in Teacher Transformations (1)

*In general, teachers transformed learning relationships by...*

- **Noticing** the student's difficulty in the first place.
- **Determining to address** any barriers (as opposed to merely reporting and grading boys' behavior ).
- **Extending themselves** beyond required classroom protocols in order to better get to know and understand the student ( i.e., attending the student's games or performances or bar mitzvah, arranging individual meetings and help sessions outside of class, initiating contact with parents, other teachers, and guidance or learning specialists).
- Being willing to make **multiple, repeated efforts** to reach the student in order to establish easy communication and trust, even when such efforts involved altering or discarding earlier approaches to establishing the relationship.

# Themes in Teacher Transformations (2)

*When dealing with the most resistant or difficult boys, teachers transformed learning relationships by...*

- Appreciating that some boys have adopted **unfortunate, often unconscious and self-defeating postures** in relation to schools and teacher.
- Realizing that, with such boys, a focus on schoolwork and compliance with school norms and expectations only **elicits stronger resistance and self-defeat**.
- Focusing first on non-scholastic matters, to **build relational capital**, and creating a relational context in which the boy might come to recognize and lay more conscious claim to his own will to succeed.
- **Reflecting on and rising above** their own reactions in order to position themselves more strategically in the relationship.

# Goals for Relational Teaching Workshops

- Live “member check” on survey interpretations
- Opportunity to encourage and explore teachers’ reflections about relational craft
- Professional development for participants
- Mobilizing team for relational teaching at participating schools

# Themes from Relational Teaching Workshop/Philadelphia

- Foregrounding relational dimension
- High hopes
- Climate of blame
- Professional/Personal boundaries

# Plans for Future Relational Teaching Workshops

- Presentation of survey findings
- Presentation of strategies for successful relational craft
- Include boys as well as teachers
- Test “critical friends” model for collegial support
- Elicit model for professional development for schools

# Some Implications

- Successes appear to be **antidotes** to students' complaints.
- Teachers' "transformations" often involve **shift in focus** - from work to relationship.
- A mutual contribution is discernible in failed relationships (rupture); to accomplish transformation, teachers must be able to **reflect on and rise above** their own reactions.
- Teachers operate within an **economy of personal resource** and must make choices.
- Professional development for relational dimension should be **peer-based, safe and ongoing**.
- New perspective: from judgments about students' and teachers' capacities to an **institutional value-based inclination**.

# Contact Information

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