

I Can Learn From You

Relational Teaching with Primary and Junior Boys



Boys as Global Citizens
International Boys' School Conference

Saint George's School
Vancouver, British Columbia, CN
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Grounded Research on Boys' Education

- Teaching Practices Study (2008-10)
18 schools, 1,000 teachers, 1,500 students
- Relational Teaching Study (2011-13)
36 schools, 1,200 teachers, 1,400 students
- Action/Reflection (2014-Present)
4 schools with relational commitment

Relational Dimension



“Boys experience their teachers before they experience the lessons they teach.”

Reichert & Hawley, *Reaching Boys, Teaching Boys*

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Testing the Framework with Primary/Junior Boys

- Exploratory study of boys, teachers and parents from 9/15 – 6/16
- 4 school teams:
 - Christina Seix Academy, West Trenton, NJ, US
 - Crescent School, Toronto, ON, CN
 - Saint Christopher's, Richmond, VA, US
 - Scotch College, Melbourne, VIC, AU
- Outcomes: school manuals, IBSC-commissioned White Paper, scholarly contributions

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Research Methods

Project Goals

- Map relational teaching (RT) themes
- Identify parental roles in RT
- Describe relational breakdowns between younger boys-teachers

Data Sources

- Online survey with teachers and parents
- Interviews with teachers
- Focus groups with primary and junior boys as well as with parents

School Teams

- 2-5 teachers or administrators
- Research support from university researchers
- Conducted data collection and analysis

Methods (2)

Research Sample

Teacher Interviews (N=38)

Parent Focus Groups (N=33)

Online Parent Survey (N=55)

Boys' Focus Groups (N=88)

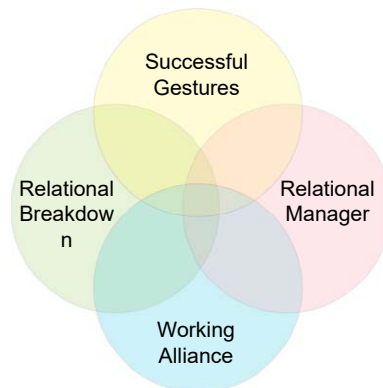
Data Analysis

Open-coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

Thematic Analysis (Creswell, 2001).

Relational Teaching with Primary Boys

Does the relational teaching framework hold for primary/junior boys?



Working Alliance

- *“Through us working together with different strategies in the classroom I gained his trust so that he sees me more as help and not the enemy.” (1st Grade Teacher)*
- *“My teacher...helps a lot of kids because some of the kids in our class sometimes don't get the questions...(so) some of the kids would go on the floor and he would teach the kids how to do it.” (Primary boy)*

Relationship Manager

- *“We will always appreciate that frank, direct, grown-up way that the teacher handled our son. She treated him with a serious and honest tone and he responded with maturity.”* (Parent of Primary boy)
- *“This teacher takes a different line with each child in the class dependent on that child's abilities, behavioral needs and emotional maturity.”* (Parent of Primary boy)

Successful Gestures

Meeting particular student needs

- *“This person helps me learn in a positive way, because she understands me and she talks to me and cares about your life and not just learning.”* (4th grade boy)

Revealing some degree of personal vulnerability

- *“I guess he gave a bit of himself, I gave a bit of myself, we opened up and I think having that was what really developed the relationship...”* (Primary Teacher)

Relational Breakdown

- *“They get so mad and sometimes they get annoyed. I don’t like it when they yell.”* (Primary boy)
- *“He had a very hard time with directions and, when that happened, there was anger, and digging his heels in, and refusing to do work.”* (Primary Teacher)
- *“My son has mentioned times when the whole class is punished for something one child has done.”* (Parent of primary boy)

Developmental Nuances

Primary Boys

- *“She gives us extra time to play.”* (1st grade boy)
- *“She’s nice.”* (Kindergarten boy)
- *“She gives us candy sometimes.”* (3rd grade boy)

Junior Boys

- *“She helped us with different strategies to help us learn.”* (4th grade boy)
- *“He worked with us well and he knew how boys were...he taught in a way that made things funny but we also learned well so I think he was a great teacher.”* (5th grade boy)

Testing the Framework in Diverse Contexts

Preliminary Insights

- Engaging parents mediated by home life or class factors (e.g., access to technology: mobile, email, instant messaging, social media, online school portal)
- Boys described “relational breakdowns” in similar ways to other schools (e.g. “I don’t think she likes me.”)
- Teachers did not necessarily penalize boys as harshly as teachers at other schools in the study (e.g. positive-rehabilitative discipline approach)
- Relational breakdown were sometimes attributed to boys themselves referencing stereotypes of low-income families of color

Relational Breakdowns are common



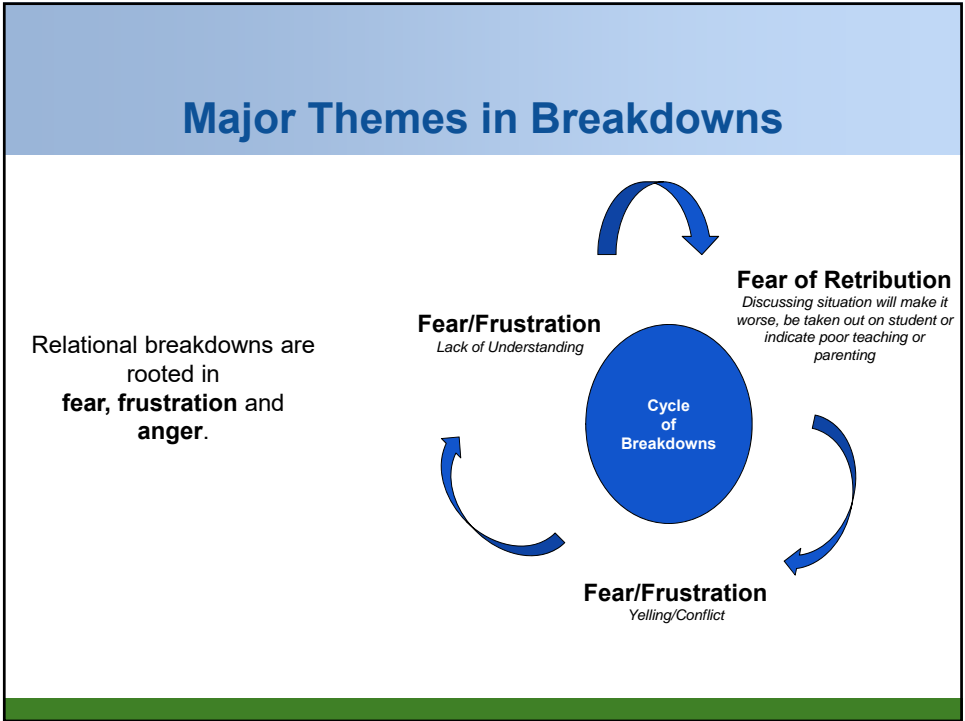
“The parents I love the most are the ones I never have to talk to.”

Breakdowns are ..

- often unfair/ subjective/ emotional
- often based on things that have happened in the past.
- relatively easy to fix in lower school.

The teacher as the professional is the relationship manager or mentor. They need to initiate steps to repair the breakdown.





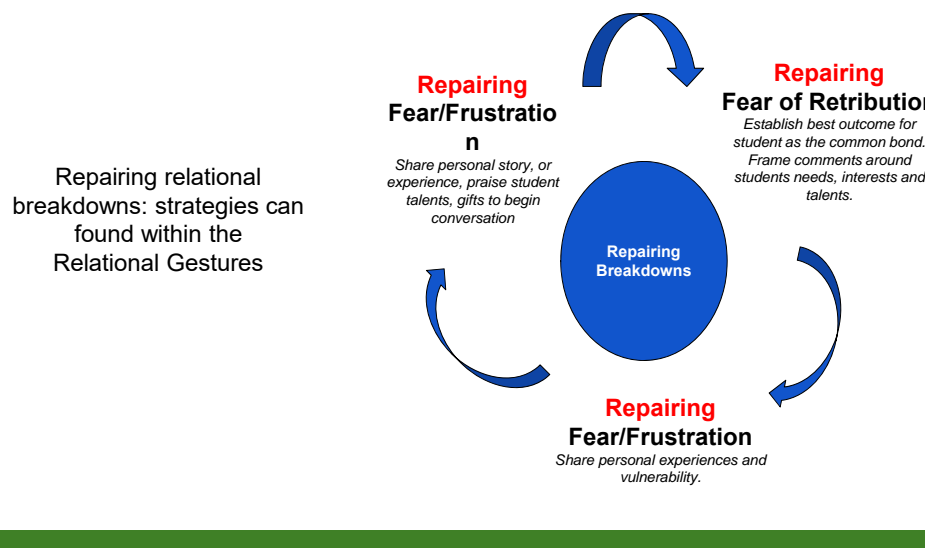
Breakdown from Student Perspective

<u>What Boys Are Feeling</u>	<u>Situations</u>
Lack of Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher does not know (“get”) me • Concern that parents and teachers will be in conflict • Concern that I will not be “heard” if I speak up • Unclear of how to make teachers/parents happy
Lack of Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class punished for actions of a few • Student’s can’t/won’t/not asked to tell their side of the story • Nobody wants to be a teacher’s pet/teachers should not have them • Students do not understand why they are punished
Fear of Teacher/Parent Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get so mad they yell • “She yelled at me. She embarrassed me”

Breakdown from Teacher Perspective

<u>What Teachers Are Feeling</u>	<u>Situations</u>
Negative Student Attitude/Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceive lack of student effort ● Students don't ask for help... just shut down ● Exude levels of anxiety and anger towards teacher ● Child's personality may not give back to you
Single Parent Families/Parents Who Disagree/Complex Home Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One parent has dominant personality ● One parent is receptive and one is not ● Parents blame school for lack of learning/student connection
Lack of Parental Support.Connection/ESL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Important Message Lost in translation/language and culture ● Different culture value different things

Repairing Relational Breakdowns: Return to the Gestures



Parents' View of Their Relationship with Teachers

- **Double bind:** need both to advocate for sons and partner with teachers
- **Willingness** (relief!) to leave education to the teachers, provided teacher “sees” boy.
- **Judgment** required when son overwhelmed in breakdown with teacher.
- Key role of ongoing and reciprocal **communication** between teacher and parent.

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Breakdown from Parent Perspective

<u>What Parents Are Feeling</u>	<u>Situations</u>
Doesn't like/ "get" my child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not feel like the teacher took the time to get to know their child
Lack of Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Bucket" their child as being unmotivated or lazy
Fear of Retribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I say something, teacher will take it out on my child • You don't want to upset teachers or offend them, because in the end, it's coming back on your child • My child's marks may be affected • Teacher will think I am a poor parent
Teachers Are Not Qualified/Lack of Faith in Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent teacher expectations/presence

Teacher connects with my son

- *"I don't need the world's best teacher, I just need someone who 'gets' my son."*
- *"I think that it is important for boys to feel like their teacher 'gets' them personally and has their back. To know there is an adult who is willing to stand up for them."*
- *"When he has a teacher that he connects with he is just so much more open to learning"*
- *"I also think recognizing that they see what you see in your son."*

(Parent comments focus groups)



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Parental Caution

"You just don't want to upset them, you don't want to offend them, because in the end, it's coming back on your child."

"You don't want to put your teacher offside"

(Parent comment focus group)



"We asked the employees for more feedback, but after reprimanding those who spoke up, none was forthcoming."

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Parental Stress and Relief

- “When things go well it gives me the confidence that I can seriously just be a mom. Because trying to be a mom and a teacher, they get sick of hearing it always.”
- “It’s not just affecting the children, it’s affecting us too, the whole family.”
- “It’s just like a weight has been lifted.”
- “That’s why you get that, you’re praying to God that you get the right teacher next year.”

(Parent comment focus group)

Teachers deal with people, not things; families not clients.

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Initial Conclusions

- Schools, before asking more of teachers, must make an institutional commitment to the primacy of relationship in their curricula.
 - Orientation for all (teachers and parents) to relational teaching model
 - Structure (time) for teachers’ professional growth
- Teachers must understand boys’ relational needs and all that they imply.
 - Inviting boys’ relational voices
 - Commitment to relationship manager role
 - Understanding of relational breakdowns with primary/junior boys
 - Opportunities for peer collaboration and relational reflection
- Parents must be oriented to their role in the relational dynamic.
 - Guide to forging and maintaining partnerships with teacher