

OPENING THREE DOORS TO BETTER SCHOOLING FOR BOYS

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The purpose of this presentation is to examine the promise of three variables that bear on the process of teaching boys—and perhaps on the process of teaching all children—in the hopes of changing current practices in a positive direction.

That such change is urgently needed may not seem obvious to those of you in this room who work in humane, purposeful, well-resourced boys' schools. Those of us who have enjoyed that good fortune have experienced only a little, if any, of the current failure of the larger educational complex to engage boys in mastering the kinds of learning essential to productive working and civic lives. Only a tiny percentage of Canadian and American school-age boys are enrolled in boys' schools, and a lopsided minority of boys world-wide are enrolled in boys' schools. But while boys enrolled in schools like yours cannot be said to be part of the contemporary problem—what some argue has become an educational crisis—your schools may point the way to the solution to the larger problem.

It is essential at the outset to outline the nature and the severity of the existing scholastic climate for boys. Stated simply, boys are not thriving in the American educational complex, nor are they in the developed world generally. According to the United States Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) boys now trail girls in all school subjects. Boys have in the last two decades lost their former tested superiority in math and science, while the gap between girls' and boys' verbal achievement has widened.

Some of you are familiar with the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) findings. PISA is an organization that has tested and tracked the scholastic progress of children in 60 countries worldwide since 2000, publishing their comparative findings every three years. Since the inception of the program, the United States, once thought to be a developed country, has never ranked in the top twenty countries for overall scholastic performance, and in the most recent rankings (2012), the U.S. ranked 36th overall. In no scholastic area did the U.S. rank higher than 17th. That hardly encouraging picture, at least from an American standpoint, is actually darker, if you parse the results by gender. Examined that way, you could make a case that American girls are doing arguable pretty well by international standards, American boys are doing worryingly badly.

But as we know, what tests measure-- cognition, problem-solving and literacy-- while essential components of learning, do not tell the whole story of personal adequacy and viability. They are not the only predictors of life quality and

effectiveness. But by other measures, American boys and young men may be in even greater peril.

Thomas Mortensen, a Senior Scholar at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, may be the leading demographer of gender trends in the American educational complex. Looked at nationally, the picture for boys is not good. Over the past two decades the number of boys who fail to finish secondary school—high school—has fluctuated between one in four and one in five, this occurring in an era in which a standard American high school diploma is no assurance of sustainable employment above the poverty line.

The ratio of males to females entering four-year colleges has declined so dramatically since the millennium that if the trend continues at the same rate, there will be virtually no males in American Colleges and Universities by the year 2040. That of course will not happen, but that is how dramatically boys' under-enrollment is trending. The news is similarly discouraging with respect to the numbers of males finishing college once they are enrolled. Fewer men and more women are also entering professional schools, including those traditionally favored by males. While this demographic trend is by all means a positive development for women, and one that should be celebrated, the trend is far more than a mere correction of a former gender imbalance.

If we return for a moment to a reconsideration of those millions of American high school age boys who will not complete high school, we see that the prospect is worse than even unemployment and underemployment. As many of you know, an ascending issue in the current American political agenda is how to address the human wastage represented by two and a half million people being in American prisons and jails—97% of them male, a vast majority of them African American and Latino: in all, the largest number of people ever incarcerated by any country.

In addition to incarceration and imprisonment, Mortensen suggests that undereducated males are least likely to form stable domestic partnerships, become responsible parents, or contribute to civic life. They are four times more likely than females to take their own lives and far more likely than that to take someone else's life.

Without question the undereducated, underemployed population of American males has already become a major—and mounting-- national expense when, in the kind of world we want, those same males could be a productive natural resource.

The fact of the matter is that the general trajectory for emerging young men is a serious concern. The picture has darkened to the extent that the social critic Hanna Rosin titled her 2012 study of American gender trends, *The End of Men*. She was not being playful or lighthearted in her chosen title. The book was positively reviewed by serious scholars and critics who found her central thesis persuasive: that

emerging young men were less fit and less willing than women to do contemporary work.

It has been increasingly difficult to ignore such findings, especially for the likes of you and me, who in the context of our several schools are working toward outcomes opposite to those we see emerging in the broader culture.

Appropriately concerned, my research partner Michael Reichert, whom many of you know, set about determining how boys might do better. Michael, incidentally, is both a clinical psychologist and a cofounder of the Center for The Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives, a gathering of schools of various types the faculty and students of which have made themselves available for continuing research.

Together Mike and I determined in 2008 to review the current findings on the viability of contemporary boys and to design a research project that might bring into high relief the way boys succeed in school. We began with a very basic premise: that *some* boys in some schools—in fact, some boys in most schools—thrive. Moreover, some boys of every type—boys from economically poor families, boys who are ethnically or racially marginalized—thrive in the existing complex. When boys succeed, we wanted to find out the factors that bore on that success, so that they might be brought to bear on, and perhaps improve, the teaching of boys generally. We were concerned with specific teaching practices, with how teachers

conveyed the lessons they felt were most effective with boys and how boys themselves perceived the lessons that worked best for them.

The First Door: Lessons That Work for Boys

So with the help of the International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) we lined up 18 schools in six countries—The United States, Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand—and arranged to have those schools' faculties and boys narrate an especially effective lesson. By "lesson" we meant a discrete unit of instruction. In a foreign language, such a lesson might be the introduction of a new verb tense; in physics it might be the concept of mechanical advantage or the principal of acceleration; in math, the geometry of tangents; in English, the study of a single book or story; in physical education or athletics, the development of a specific skill or the design of an offensive or defensive strategy.

We worked with the project coordinators in the selected schools to coach the teachers and boys who participated to take care to write *objectively* about the lesson they chose; that is, to convey what was actually said and done in the course of the lesson, as opposed to judging it and praising it subjectively. In this I think we largely succeeded. Of the thousands of narratives that were submitted, most of them contained what we had asked. Better still, they revealed clear patterns. In other

words, both boys and teachers reported the same features in the lessons they regarded as successful. And thus Mike and I were able to identify eight distinct features of successful practice, which were discussed and illustrated with selected examples in a book summarizing our findings, REACHING BOYS/TEACHING BOYS (Jossey Bass, 2010). The features of successful lessons documented by both teachers and boys were:

1. Lessons in which products of various kinds were created.
2. Lessons that were constructed as games
3. Lessons that included a good deal of physical movement
4. Lessons in which boys were required to assume roles, present consequential material to their classmates
5. Lessons, whether in science or social studies, that proposed open, not yet resolved problems to be solved
6. Lessons that involved elements of both team work and competition
7. Lessons that addressed aspects of boy's personal realization, such as what it means to be a man, what it means to be honorable, etc.
8. Lessons that contained an element of novelty, drama, or surprise.

Responses to this study have so far been very encouraging, including from teachers and administrators in coed schools. At the very least a consideration of boy-specific features of successful teaching invites teachers to reconsider, perhaps affirm,

perhaps adjust current practice. To the extent this happens, a very important First Door is opened to more effectively engaging boys in scholastic challenges.

In addition to specific classroom practices recounted in our teaching study, there were three general findings that interested us, one of which was something of a surprise.

The first of these general findings was a common element in the various successful lessons. We called this element Transitivity. By this we meant that successful lessons were often driven by a factor *unrelated* to the subject under study, but which was *transitive to*—helped to cause—the desired result. Among these transitive features were the incorporation of active physical movement into an otherwise cerebral process: a beginning Spanish class being made to stand and form a circle about which a ball is passed to the person next to translate the next vocabulary word. Other teachers found devising an engaging game was transitive to desirable outcomes ranging from a better understanding of the elements under study to better, more retentive examination preparation. Teachers who managed to surprise and amuse students found that those gestures, besides being enjoyable in themselves, were transitive to increased retention and mastery of material.

The second important general finding was that when teachers were willing to review and reconsider their methods, boys tended *to elicit the kinds of instruction they need*. In both our initial study of effective teaching and our follow-up study of

effective teacher-student relationships, teachers recounted that their most successful lessons were created in response to negative student responses to past practice. In an effort to overcome student disengagement, inattention, or even obstructive diversions on students' parts (as opposed to banishing, punishing, or assigning bad grades to unresponsive students), a number of teachers described a kind of mutual reinforcement process in which changes in practice—materials chosen, manner of delivery, time allotted to interactivity and group work—stimulated better student behavior and performance in class, which in turn stimulated the teacher to maintain and improve the more successful practice. Where required school protocols or teachers' allegiance to prior approaches prohibit such pedagogical improvisations, boys will not be seen to elicit more effective teaching; they will be seen as difficult, resistant, and school averse.

The third general finding of our teaching study was, I believe, the most important one, and it surprised us: the centrality of *relationship* in boys' willingness to engage in scholastic business, in their ability to overcome their standing resistance to a given school subject and to *try*. The relational finding surprised us because we were not looking for it and hadn't asked about it. In our concern that the descriptions of effective lessons would not become clouded by subjective assessments, we asked both teachers and boys to refrain from personal attributions of any kind. We went so far as to ask that the lesson narratives include no personal names, adding that if individual names were mentioned, we would delete them from any published findings.

The faculty who participated in the study followed our prompts to the letter. No student names were mentioned, and not a single boy was described or singled out for comment. The boys, by contrast, were frequently unable to describe their favored lessons without describing, praising—and naming—their teachers. At first Mike and I suspected that this disregard for our prompts on the part of the boys was due to some lack of clarity in the narrative instructions, but on review, we could not have been clearer: *narrate as objectively as you can a lesson. Do not mention individuals. Do not name names.* Then it occurred to us that the off-task material the boys provided was important information. The more closely we reviewed the boys' narratives the clearer it became that for them the issue was not what kind of material or what kind of delivery would make them willing to engage and to try, but *for whom* would they do those things. For these boys *relationship* took precedence over course content and pedagogy.

The Second Door: Boys in Relationship

This realization stimulated us to design a second larger study, one which would clarify the kinds of relationships boys and their teachers found to be most effective. This study would be larger, soliciting relational narratives from boys and teachers in thirty five schools in the U.S., Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and

New Zealand. In addition to including more schools, we also increased the variety of schools surveyed, ranging from well-resourced college preparatory schools, to state schools serving racially and economically marginalized students, to schools with missions to boys with special scholastic needs. We surveyed large schools, small, intimate schools, public schools, private schools, urban and rural schools.

Because we felt relationships might be harder to convey clearly in written narratives, we built interviews and live focus groups with teachers and students into the second study.

We asked teachers and boys two things: to describe an especially effective relationship and to describe one that failed.

As in the previous study, the accounts of both successful and unsuccessful relationships fell into clear patterns. With very few exceptions both boys and teachers reported the same factors at work in successful relationships; but boys and teachers experienced bad relationships differently.

When relationships succeeded, the teachers, in the boys' opinion

--Demonstrated an attractive mastery of the subject taught and maintained fair, admirable standards in class.

--Made an effort to know, understand and value individual students' interests.
circumstances, and talents beyond anything to do with classroom business

--Shared common interests

--Shared common characteristics

--Were willing to disclose aspects of their personal lives

--Were able to accommodate—not personalize—a measure of opposition

--Were able to admit vulnerability

In addition to these particular common factors, there were some unexpected general features to the reported successful relationships. Perhaps the most striking of these was that a vast majority—more than 90%--of the positive relationships reported by teachers initially presented themselves as a *problem* with a particular boy: prior learning deficits, hopelessly poor preparation, inattention, passivity, obstructive behavior. Establishing effective relationship required improvising on the teacher's part, reconsidering or even abandoning past practices.

A second general characteristic of positive relationship building is that the process unfolded over *an extended period of time*. Only in the movies, apparently, are there single cathartic conversions in which the right thing is said or done and the problematic student thereafter sees the light. The achievement of positive, mutually regardful relationships in our study were formed over weeks, months, sometimes multiple school terms or multiple school years.

And without question the most promising of these general findings, given the dire condition of many boys' scholastic standing in the developed world, was that in addition to being personally satisfying to both boy and teacher, positive relationships were powerfully *transformative* in boys' personal and scholastic behavior. Engaged in relationship, boys failing to meet academic challenges not only met them, but excelled. Boys who were inattentive and even flamboyantly obstructive in class became respectful, positive contributors to class business.

The accounts of negative, failed relationships also told an instructive story. Whereas there was a strong congruence in what boys and teachers thought contributed to positive relationships, boys and teachers saw failed relationships differently.

Boys attributed bad relationships to perceived teacher shortcomings. They did not restrain themselves from derisive *ad hominem* accusations. Boys attributed negative relationships to teachers who were ill-prepared for class, were unclear in their presentations, were personally disrespectful, showed little personal enthusiasm,

were inattentive to their difficulties or to difficulties experienced by other students, were inconsistent in their grading or disciplinary responses, who were unable to maintain classroom discipline and thus establish an emotionally comfortable classroom atmosphere. In thousands of student narratives and dozens of personal interviews, not a single boy blamed himself for a negative relationship with a teacher.

In recounting their failed relationships, teachers did not blame themselves either. Doubtless because of their relative maturity and professional commitments, they tended not to vilify boys with whom they failed to relate, but instead attributed failure to intractable conditions beyond their control. Those conditions included prior learning deficits, psychological problems of the boy or his family, insufficient nurture and support at home, adverse cultural conditions, such as being racially or economically marginalized.

These explanations of relational failure were often heartfelt and no doubt in some instances valid, but however objectively warranted, they signaled the end of the teacher's trying to establish relationship and to work to improve the student's situation.

In light of those teachers' frustrations, perhaps the most instructive finding in our relational study was that teachers reporting positive relationships succeeded with the very types of boys other teachers found unreachable due to external causes.

Stepping back to consider the structural features of successful relationships, it was clear that in every instance in which either boy or teacher reported an effective relationship, the teacher assumed the role of *relationship manager*. This is a fundamental point. In not one of the thousands of narratives we read and heard did a student initiate the relationship. Once established, student-teacher relationships are experienced as a gratifyingly mutual exchanges, but the teacher's and student's obligations to relationship are not mutual. As relationship managers teachers

1. Initiate the relationship
2. Monitor its progress
3. Take initiative in repairing relational breakdowns

The teacher's role as relational manager was made clear to us in the course of a day spent working with boys and teachers at a boys' day school in Windsor, England. The morning of that day was spent with senior boys in the school who shared their experiences of positive and negative relationships with their teachers. That afternoon faculty representatives from about a dozen British schools were to meet with us to discuss their relational experience. Over the course of the morning, the boys were so expressive and personable that we decided to keep them on for the afternoon session so that the faculty members could hear the boys' stories first hand.

In one particularly instructive exchange a boy repeated a story he had told that morning about failing a French course in his ninth grade year. He recounted how he had from the outset felt uncertain that he could master a foreign language, an impression confirmed as he did poorly on initial tests and homework assessments. He felt in addition that his teacher was cold and perhaps even hostile in assessing his admittedly poor work. A kind of mutual antagonism mounted to the point the boy stopped trying altogether and accepted his failing marks and what he felt were his teacher's unpleasant rebukes until the end of term when he failed the course outright. When he finished his account, one of the visiting teachers—a teacher of French—asked him a question: Didn't he, the boy, feel he had a responsibility to have improved the relationship by perhaps trying harder, being less sullen and unresponsive in class. The boy considered the question thoughtfully and said, "I can see now that I was a difficult student to teach. I knew my work was poor and in the end I was handing in pure garbage. I didn't know how to fix that. I was thirteen."

The teacher's role as relationship manager is not parental, although it is nurturing. Nor is it a friendship, though it may proceed in a friendly manner. Parent-child and friend-friend relationships are essential to personal development and emotional well-being, but they are essentially different from productive teacher-student relationships. Parent-child and friend-friend relationships are *dyadic*—I-Thou—relationships. Teacher-student relationships are *triadic*—I-Thou-It, where the It is a subject, competence, or behavior to be learned.

The crucial point in understanding the triadic nature of the teacher-student relationship is that without the relational connection between the I and Thou (Teacher and Student), the It is less likely to be engaged in fully and mastered—no matter how able and otherwise knowledgeable the teacher. As seasoned clinical counselors have long maintained, a therapist does not make headway with a client by immediately addressing “the problem.” Effective therapists first establish a comfortable, emotionally safe mutuality—a relationship—before necessary reflection and behavioral change can occur. And as in psychotherapy, relationship is not a mere value added, occasionally pleasing element in the teaching process; relationship is the very *medium* through which successful instruction occurs.

Understanding the triadic structure of the student-teacher relationship also clarifies appropriate boundaries in teacher-student relations. It was instructive to Michael and me to have been conducting this relational research just as heightened concern about pedophilia and other inappropriate adult-child contact was coming into high relief around the world. And since establishing warm, receptive relationships with students almost always involves getting to know students in ways and in contexts beyond the classroom instructional setting, there might be understandable resistance to softening boundaries between students’ and teachers’ worlds. But if teachers and school administrators understand and embrace the triadic structure of effective relationships, then it is clear that the *It* in the *I-Thou-It* triad determines the kind and extent of closeness appropriate between any given teacher and student:

closeness motivated by advancing the student to personal development and scholastic mastery.

Looked at objectively, there is no danger in properly motivated relationship-building on the part of dedicated teachers; the relationship serves the desired scholastic outcome. Pedophilia plays no part in the motivation of the vast majority of practicing teachers. The danger, we have come to understand, is that the power of relationship-building—including reaching out to resistant or troubled students with needed warmth and close attention—can be exploited by emotionally needy adults, including pedophiles. The pedophilic “grooming” of victims is *parasitic* on healthy relational process. The pedophile is not grooming his or her mark for any scholastic or developmental *It*, but rather to satisfy unmet emotional needs. At this historical moment we are right to be concerned about appropriate boundaries between teachers and students—but not to the extent that positive, transformative relationships are impeded by excessive restrictions as to how, where, and when teachers and students are permitted to interact.

As I stressed at the outset of these remarks, the failure and underperformance of too many school age boys has reached crisis proportions. To my mind no single factor shows more promise of addressing and reversing boys’ underachievement than a systematic emphasis on relationship building. Relationship is conducive to learning for all students, but it is especially so where it is most critically needed: for students who are struggling, whose past experiences in a subject or in school generally have

broken confidence. Consider for a moment this basic question: when do students—when does anyone—try to master something they believe they are bad at, unlikely to master? The more relevant question, especially for children, is *for whom* will I try?

With each successive school year students are more likely to bring some measure of standing resistance to school obligations, especially if their prior experience has not been satisfying, if they have failed to master foundational skills, if they are fearful of the subject or teacher, if they are fearful of being shamed or exposed as incompetent. Our international study showed persuasively that this kind of standing resistance dissolves when teachers extend the relational gestures I discussed earlier.

When students are engaged in productive relationship with their teachers, we found that they did not merely perform better, but that students who were failing ceased to fail, students who were obstructive and resistant became engaged and contributed positively to class business. Already able students exceeded themselves. In other words relational teaching is *transformative*. It is what I believe an ailing educational complex is looking for.

Better still, effective relational teaching is *learnable* and *replicable*. The teachers who reported and demonstrated successful relational practice did not always have it. They learned it. They improvised. They were willing to abandon past assumptions

and approaches Moreover, the *same* successful relational practices were reported by men and women, beginning teachers and veteran teachers, teachers in all disciplines, teachers in schools ranging from elite college preparatory schools to schools with remedial missions, teachers from schools in six different countries.

In sum, relational teaching is a replicable, developable skill, not a personal gift that some empathic people have and others don't.

The Third Door: Coming to Know Boys As They Are

So if the first door to more effective teaching of boys is understanding the kinds of lessons to which they best respond, and if the second door is understanding the kinds of relationships with teachers in which boys open up to scholastic engagement, the third door is a deeper, more nuanced appreciation of the boy one discovers once he has been relationally engaged.

On the first day of class in any given school year, a teacher “knows” at least two things about each boy seated before him or her: his approximate age and that he is assumed to have the capacity to engage in the program of instruction designed for

him at his grade level. Within a week or two a teacher will lock into place a few other defining features of each boy, including his face and general appearance, his personal manner in class, and, based on the boy's contributions and graded work, his aptitude in the subject taught. Unfortunately, many boys in school are known only to this extent, which is insufficient to reliably engage them in their school challenges.

A boy defined by his status as, say, a B- student of high school geometry is, from his own, perspective not known at all. The boy himself does not define himself or identify himself primarily as a geometer or by his performance in any particular class. He more likely identifies himself by his place in his family and neighborhood, by his perceived status among his friends, as a passionate devotee of certain bands and professional teams, as perhaps a precociously good hockey player or string player or skate boarder. He identifies himself by his strengths and by his problems. To begin to know those things and to interact with him about them is the beginning of relationship. And relationship is the best medium of inspiration and instruction. Relationship is that Second Door discussed above.

What teachers find when they succeed in establishing a working relationship with a boy is not merely something *in addition to* that initial impression of Boy at Grade Level With Potential to Achieve Grade Level Competence. In relationship a teacher is able to recognize that casting a boy in that mold obstructs the very possibility of

knowing him as he really is—that is, of knowing what a complex, interesting, and valuable boy he really is.

This distinction between “institutionally” or “professionally” knowing students and actually knowing them is crucial. The failure of the former to yield the latter lies at the heart of the discouraging failure of so many students to realize themselves and to thrive in school.

We have come reflexively to accept our institutional and professional assessments of children as reliable and true, not because those assessments are the best measures of children, but because they are easiest to compile and record. In consequence of locking into place this institutional convenience, we lose touch with our most reliable means of helping children to develop and to thrive.

How has such a fundamental misstep happened? I believe it happened in consequence of an uncritical acceptance of basic assumptions about child development, including the assumption that, from birth, all children pass through a series of chartable mental and physical stages. We have assumed that, properly nurtured and schooled, children will, as they progress through the known stages, seize opportunities to learn, develop competencies, and advance productively into the prevailing social order. In this view children grow “up” from unformed potential into capable beings society can use. We are urged to understand that there are variances in this progression and that there can be problematic arrests and

blockages in the forward progress, but there is nonetheless a relatively uniform path forward in which child nurture and schooling must play their respective parts.

That, at any rate, is the dominant view.

I would like to propose another view. It is a view advanced by a number of great writers and thinkers not often thought about in connection with educational practice: for example, the analytic psychologist Carl Jung, the novelist Hermann Hesse, and the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. These thinkers see childhood very differently from what has become the dominant view, and I invite you to take their perspective seriously.

According to this rival view, we have a kind of wholeness, a completeness, from the moment we are conceived. This wholeness is not so much shaped or developed in the course of childhood; it unfurls into its full realization. We may have what used to be called a destiny. Seen this way, we do not grow *up* as a kind of blob acquiring more and more definition as we go; rather, we, in all of our uniqueness, grow *down* into a world that either welcomes us or resists us. If there is acceptance, a welcoming fit of who we are into the world we enter, we realize ourselves, we succeed. If we are unwelcome, misunderstood, forced to fit where we were not made to fit, then we are alienated, unhappy, perhaps outlaws, perhaps chronically ill, and we appear to fail.

The British romantic poet William Wordsworth dedicated what may be his greatest poem, “Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” to this notion of “growing down” into the world from a prior completeness:

Our birth [he wrote] is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The soul that rises with us, our life's star,

Hath elsewhere for its setting,

Not in entire forgetfulness,

Not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come...

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Shades of the prison house begin to close

Upon the growing boy

But he beholds the light and whence it flows.

He sees it in his joy...

From a scholastic standpoint, it is worth pausing to consider those lines of Wordsworth heralding the newborn's brilliant entry into the world—

Not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come--

And how that glory is lost:

Shades of the prison house begin to close

Upon the growing boy...

For centuries, sad to say, the shades of the prison house have been required schooling. The notion of schooling as soul deadening is so deeply embedded in western culture that as early as the sixteenth century [1599]Shakespeare was able to represent school-aversion as one of the eternal, if grim, stages in the male life cycle. As the character Jacques describes that stage in the famous “All the world’s a stage” soliloquy in *As You Like It*: “...the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face creeping to school.”

Why is the “shining morning face” of the schoolboy “whining” as he “creeps” to school? What is the nature of the “prison house” closing in around the growing boy? We almost do not have to ask. The explanation, clearly, is that the spark or genius or essence of the boy is going to be negated, or at least unacknowledged, by scholastic requirements. Yet we school people eternally hope otherwise. We want school to be better than that. And moreover, I would maintain, sometimes we do make it better than that. Sometimes we succeed, even succeed brilliantly. Moreover, I have seen proof in the accounts both boys and their teachers reported in those narratives of relationship already discussed.

Relationships succeed when boys feel not merely acknowledged but acknowledged as they very particularly are. Very particularly, every boy is situated along a trajectory of what he might ultimately be at his most fully realized. Boys do not progress to or arrive at their full realization by standard, predictable stages—not by age 12 or 16 or 18, not by grade 6 or 10 or 12, although schools grade, stratify, and promote students on those bases. As most seasoned teachers know, some boys who are ungrammatical and imprecise in their verbal expression in the 10th grade are not incapable of developing those abilities; they simply *haven't arrived yet*. The underperforming Winston Churchill, a very marginal English student at the Harrow School in England was nevertheless on a trajectory to become one of the most eloquent orators and writers of his age. Tenth graders— including several of my acquaintance!--who appear to be absolutely blind to the kinds of spatial relations necessary to master geometry do so masterfully and with pleasure as seniors. Big, rangy boys who are not physically coordinated enough to make their high school teams will, as undergraduates or even later, come into their own as competitive athletes.

Gifted relational teachers recognize that what presents itself as a student's scholastic deficit is often as not a personal not-yet. Even more often, gifted relational teachers are able to recognize that passivity, under-performance, or obstructive behavior are often poses assumed or masks worn to shield a boy from circumstances that threaten to shame or embarrass him. In the absence of a caring, attentive relationship, a teacher will not recognize the part early or late arrival of a

scholastic competence plays in a student's performance. In the absence of relationship, teachers are apt to see a difficult boy's poses and masks as personal affronts.

In his book *The Soul's Code*, the Jungian writer James Hillman offers example after example of boys and girls, men and women, who even as children embodied what would be their destinies, charting how they grew down into the working world, not up into it. He traces the lives of cultural icons like the entertainers Josephine Baker and Judy Garland and the writer Thomas Wolfe whose gifts could not be accounted for exclusively by their bearers' early nurture or schooling, gifts that seemed to arrive whole and fully formed, whether surprisingly early or surprisingly late.

Hillman offers an alternative way to understand so-called child development. In discussing the childhood of the Spanish bull-fighting sensation Manolete, for example, he demonstrates that what may look like shortcomings and inadequacies may actually represent a child's inner reckoning with what lies in store for him when he is fully realized. Manolete may have been such a child.

Manolete was the popular nickname of Manuel Rodriguez Sanchez (1917-1947), the most acclaimed bull-fighter of his day, a figure so beloved in Spain that when he died in the ring at age thirty, having been fatally gored by the bull that had been his fifth kill of the afternoon, three days of national mourning were declared. It is hard to summon up a contemporary figure held in the same kind of public regard—perhaps

some combination of the late President John Kennedy, the basketball superstar Michael Jordan, and The Beatles. Because of his celebrity much has been written about Manolete, including accounts of his childhood. Undersized as a boy and, biographers have written, something of a “mama’s boy” who would run crying to his mother when distressed, some analysts have concluded that Manolete’s bull fighting *machismo* was a psychological compensation for feeling—for being—weak and helpless. This would represent the “growing up” understanding of child development: a frightened, undersized boy adopts a compensatory defense mechanism to counter his perceived inadequacies.

Hillman proposes a different explanation. If it was Manolete’s destiny to stand before thousand pound charging bulls in the ring, and if as a little boy he had a deep, subconscious sense of this, then the most natural thing in the world would be to run crying to his mother from time to time. This would not be a vulnerability, but a premonition. The size, strength and skill Manolete would need to realize himself as a bull fighting master had not yet arrived, but they were coming.

Teachers and other mentors who succeed in building relationships with their charges are in a position to know them at a deeper level than the physical and behavioral evidence they present, by age-level or grade-level expectations. Relational teachers know students instead by the distinctive qualities each child brings to the relationship. Teachers entering those relationships may also be fortified by an awareness that the realized person that child will become may not

look or behave much like the tentative, perhaps problematic child summoned to report after class.

From the standpoint of the boys participating in our international relational study, nothing was more affirming to them than teachers who seemed to *know* that they could do better than they themselves believed possible at the time. Although at present far from standard practice, more teachers might do well to hold out, if not certainty, a respectful *hope* that the ordinary, indifferent, and even unpromising child seated before him might be destined for better, even great, things. When the boys in our study sensed that expectation on their teacher's part, they paid attention, they reconsidered, they changed course.

Engaging boys positively in scholastic business is what is needed if we are going to reverse the present decline in their performance and future prospects. That decline represents not only a colossal loss of what could be a social and economic resource; it is unnecessary. There is a promising pathway ahead, and the means to proceed are available to every committed teacher.

I would urge those teachers to open the three doors discussed in this presentation. The first is a fresh consideration of the kinds of lessons and delivery to which boys best respond. The second is to reconsider the role of relationship in student engagement and mastery, to understand that a positive relationship is not mere

value-added to standard instruction, but the very medium through which instruction occurs. Realizing this will stimulate teachers to a very basic mental reset when addressing their students' scholastic and behavioral concerns. Confronted by a boy's non-performance, underperformance, or problematic behavior, teachers will address the *relationship* first, because that will establish the emotional platform on which the problem can be safely shared and solved.

The third door opens to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the boy with whom the teacher is attempting to relate. This requires a willingness to see past and perhaps to suspend altogether the metrics that have defined the boy's scholastic status to date and, to the extent possible, to get to know who he is, what he cares about, what frightens him, and what inspires him: to confirm that, in the larger scheme of things—your scheme of things and his scheme of things—he is important. And though he could not possibly know it yet, he may be on the way to something very fine.