

Single-sex schools help boys to enjoy arts, says study

Absence of girls removes pressure to conform to masculine stereotype, claims US researcher

Rachel Williams

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Cast of *The History Boys* movie based on Alan Bennett's play. New research says single-sex schools help boys to express their emotions. Photograph: FoxSearch/Everett /Rex Features

Boys' schools are the perfect place to teach young men to express their emotions and are more likely to get involved in activities such as art, dance and music, according to research released today.

Far from the traditional image of a culture of aggressive masculinity in which students either sink or swim, the absence of girls gives boys the chance to develop without pressure to conform to a stereotype, the US study says.

Boys at single sex schools were said to be more likely to get involved in cultural and artistic activities that helped develop their emotional expressiveness, rather than feeling they had to conform to the "boy code" of hiding their emotions to be a "real man".

The report, presented at a conference of the International Boys' Schools Coalition in London attended by the heads of private and state schools, goes against received wisdom that boys do better when taught alongside girls.

The headmaster of Eton, Tony Little, warned that boys were being failed by the British education system because it had become too focused on girls. He criticised teachers for failing to recognise that boys are actually more emotional than girls, despite the fact that girls "turn on the waterworks".

The research argued that boys often perform badly in mixed schools because they become demoralised when their female counterparts do better earlier in verbal skills and reading, because the left side of the brain develops faster in girls. They also felt they had to be "cool" rather than studious.

But in single sex schools teachers are able to tailor lessons to boys' learning style, letting them move around the classroom and getting them to compete in teams to prevent boredom, wrote the study's author, education expert Abigail James, of the University of Virginia.

Teachers could encourage boys to enjoy reading and writing with specifically "boy-focused" approaches such as themes and characters that appeal to them. Boys in boys' schools "loved" to pen verse because they enjoyed the "inherent structure in poems", James said. Because, the researchers say, boys generally have better spatial skills, more acute vision, learn best through touch, are more impulsive and more physically active, they need to be given "hands-on" lessons where they are allowed to walk around, with this natural impulse not seen as disruptive. "Boys in mixed schools view classical music as feminine and prefer the modern genre in which violence and sexism are major themes," James wrote.

Single sex education also made it less likely that boys would feel they had to conform to a stereotype gained from the media by girls that men should be "masterful and in charge" in relationships. "In the present sexualised atmosphere prevalent in mixed schools, boys feel coerced into acting like men before they understand themselves well enough to know what that means," the report said.

PRESS CUTTING

Evening Standard
19 January

Eton head says UK education is failing boys



Tim Ross

British system of education is failing to give boys the help they need and has become too focused on girls, the headmaster of Eton warned today.

Tony Little said GCSEs favour girls far more than boys and few teachers understand that boys are “more emotional” than girls, despite girls being able to “turn on the waterworks”.

Boys require a much more physical and active style of learning but too often schools believe the same lessons will serve both sexes equally well, he said.

Mr Little, whose school has been boys only for nearly 600 years, and other leading heads are launching a campaign to highlight the need for a new approach to educating boys.

The International Boys' Schools Coalition conference, at the Guildhall today, heard that boys and girls need alternative styles of teaching which could be in single sex schools or single sex classrooms within co-educational schools.

Speaking to the Standard, Mr Little, who is hosting the conference with **City of London School** headmaster **David Levin**, said society was reluctant to acknowledge that the education system is failing boys.

“As a nation, we do not support and nurture boys, especially teenage boys, at all well,” he said. “It is foolish to assume that boys can always be helped in the same way as girls. We feel our education system needs to face up to that fact.”

GCSE exams became much more verbal than the old O-levels, he said, thereby favouring girls over boys. The unwillingness to engage with the problem stems from the fact that men dominated opportunities in society in the past.

“It's assumed that opening up opportunity means giving a better deal to girls and women. I don't decry that in the slightest — we have moved hugely forward,” he said.

“But there's a point at which that agenda has been at the expense of recognising what's happening in boys and education.”

Mr Levin suggested the idea of boys-only schools attracted a lot of “baggage” typified by the bullying in Tom Brown's Schooldays.

The novel fuelled the idea that boys in boys' schools “do nasty things to each other and nasty things to women”, Mr Levin said

PRESS CUTTING

Telegraph.co.uk
19 January 2010 (pg1 of 2)

Boys failed by education system says Eton headmaster

Boys are being failed by the British education system because it has become too focused on girls, the headmaster of Eton has warned.

By Laura Roberts

Tony Little said that the different sexes required different teaching methods to bring out students' potential and that GCSEs favour girls more than boys.

He also blamed teachers for failing to realise that boys are "more emotional" than girls, despite the fact that girls "turn on the waterworks".

Mr Little, who co-hosted the International Boys' Schools Coalition Conference at the Guildhall with **David Levin**, headmaster of **City of London School**, said: "As a nation, we do not support and nurture boys, especially teenage boys, at all well.

"It is foolish to assume that boys can always be helped in the same way as girls. We feel our education system needs to face up to that fact."

Boys, he believes, require a more physical and active style of learning. He said that an increased verbal element of GCSEs favoured girls over boys and that educational techniques had become skewed because of the male-dominated society of the past.

"It's assumed that opening up opportunity means giving a better deal to girls and women. I don't decry that in the slightest — we have moved hugely forward," he said.

"But there's a point at which that agenda has been at the expense of recognising what's happening in boys and education."

Eton, the school attended by David Cameron, has been boys-only for nearly 600 years.

Mr Little's claims were supported by research submitted at the conference which claimed that boys and girls benefited from different teaching techniques which could be administered either in single-sex environments or at mixed schools.

It also said that boys were more likely to be labelled "disruptive or rebellious" in mixed classrooms where the presence of girls might encourage them to try and be "cool" rather than studious. This situation affected the learning experience of both girls and boys, it stated.

Meanwhile it concluded that arts, music, creative writing and design and technology was more likely to "flourish" in all-boys schools.

For the last 20 years girls have outperformed boys at GCSE and A Level with some education experts complaining that coursework is more suited to female pupils.

PRESS CUTTING

Telegraph.co.uk
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Traditionally, boys fall behind after just two years of compulsory schooling and girls stretch their lead at the age of 11, 16, 18 and even degree level.

However, last year boys outperformed girls for the first time in more than a decade in mathematics GCSE after coursework was abolished two years ago and ministers have proposed similar plans for other subjects.