

BOY 'O' BOY - An evening discussion with visiting speaker Kim Payne

The Parent Education Committee and a few other parents were fortunate enough to sit down with Kim Payne on Thursday night August 28th after his all day workshop on the Social Inclusion Approach. As many of us there that have male children, the topic of teaching and parenting boys quickly became the main topic of discussion. Kim gave us a great deal of information and I would like to highlight some of it for you.

1. Kim describes the need for boys to have "wiggle room". Their day needs flexibility; significantly more craft and will oriented work. It is important to create opportunities for physical movement. The activities need to give boys a chance to gain mastery over their quality of movement. They don't always need to be using their physical self at high speeds. He gave the example of a good warrior that needs to be able to stand perfectly still and then burst out at sudden speed at just the right moment. The children need to experience expansion and contraction, stillness and all encompassing exertion. The children that don't have sufficient opportunities for a variety of movement can often be labeled moderately hyperactive.
2. Think about purpose filled construction activities for the first grader. They need to have a chance to be "mucking about" at a creek with some wood, ropes and stones available to construct structures and there is lots of room for free exploration. Then by third grade they can start building tree forts (outside of the school) where the Dad's could be included
3. Kim spoke to the academic pressure which can really hit boys hard. Cognitively, boys are behind girls in the early years, boys should really start school later. The emphasis on high stakes testing is causing stress for many boys. Boys are slower to process cumulative information. They need to be given a longer processing time. Here is an example of how Kim deals with this: when he asks a question in his class the girls generally have their hands up with an answer, the boys do not. He calls on the girls to repeat the question "in their own words". While this is going on, the boys have time to process the information thus allowing them to come up with the answer as well as the girls. If this is not addressed the boys get habituated to not even trying to answer.
4. It is helpful for boys to have everything verbal, explicit and then be asked to paraphrase what has just been said. Structure is important for them to do their best. It has been found in a study that boys will score higher on an exam or test if there are lines for him to write on, as opposed to a blank page.
5. Explicit social structure is also reassuring for boys. Boys need to know whose in charge, what the rules are and what will happen if they don't follow the rules. Kim emphasized that our community, both parents and teachers, should commit to a "manners blitz". This was my favorite part of the evening. Kim says that manners come very naturally to boys. Insist on manners. Insist that food is passed and doors are opened. Say "Pardon me" not "What?" Absolutely insist on manners. With a simple finger circle movement and saying "try a do-over" you can help them repeat a comment the correct way. Let them know chivalry is not dead. An example is the 1, 2, 3, pointer greetings (as in basketball) Challenge them to always go for the 3 pointer. 1 pointer = good morning, 2 pointer = good morning Debora, 3 pointer = good morning Debora, how are you? Make it a game and show them how to score it!

6. It is good for boys to have tracking clubs to receive some "bush wisdom". Try to make a connection with those local naturalists that are willing to work with students. Create opportunities for local expeditions and outings. Kim mentioned how Jack Petrash of the Washington Waldorf School has had great success in creating a "Waldad's" group, which would have different activities once a month.
7. Kim also noted some books that are helpful resources for parents and teachers. "Magical Places" by David Sobel, "Raising Boys" and "Manhood" by Steven Biddulph and "Native American Stalking Games".

Submitted By Ingrid Kennedy