

Class struggle: What's best for boys?

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Re:Schools plan calls for boys-only classes, Oct. 21

I wonder how female students will feel knowing that the new director of education for the TDSB is completely focused on the success of boys, and not at all interested in making the safety/success of girls a priority? Not like valued members of society, that's for sure.

Two years after the Falconer Report focused on the vulnerability of girls and young women in public schools, the board still just doesn't get it.

*Leslie Wolfe, Vice President, OSSTF
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While boys-only classes may have some merit, the so-called "trouble with boys" begins long before they enter school. Virtually from birth, we impose on boys a very narrow definition of masculinity – one that teaches them to value noise and action over quiet and focused attention.

The boisterous, sometimes aggressive behaviour that some boys exhibit is not reined in when it is inappropriate; rather, it is excused with that hoary old phrase "boys will be boys." Boys are encouraged to play with noisy machines and superhero toys more often than they are asked to sit down to a quiet activity. Pop culture feeds them a steady diet of male characters that are action-oriented and hyper-masculine.

We allow these influences to permeate their consciousness. We often reinforce them through the language we use and the activities we choose for them. And then we expect them to sit quietly in a classroom and listen.

All boys (and girls) should be given outlets for their energy. Those boys who possess more of it than most may, indeed, require specialized attention. But for the majority, the problems they are facing in school begin with entrenched gender stereotypes that tell them that reading, crafts and attentiveness are the purview of girls. These same stereotypes keep men out of primary school teaching, an issue also noted by the TDSB.

Schools can only do so much. To help boys bridge the education gap, we must all work to change the way they see themselves. We need to encourage them to partake in "non-traditional"

activities that will broaden their horizons and introduce them to new experiences at which they just might excel, given the chance.

Crystal Smith, Oakville

The lonely looking little guy on the front page of Wednesday's paper, surrounded by smiling little girls, should perk up. Statistics show that even if those little girls do better in school, he will be their boss.

Rhonda Roffey, Executive Director, Women's Habitat, Toronto
