

Men's Confraternity (WA) Inc.

Teachers who yell are good for boys: expert

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NEW YORK - Boys need to be yelled at by their teachers every once in a while, teachers from across North America heard at a major education conference.

Dr. Leonard Sax, a family physician and psychologist from Maryland and a leading advocate for boys' education, said boys often respond well to a confrontational classroom style.

"Where did we get this notion that a teacher should never yell at a fourth-grade boy?" he asked during a session at the conference for about 5,000 educators from independent schools.

"We have to come around again to a recognition that maybe in certain cases you need to raise your voice. It doesn't work with girls, but with boys, you raise your voice and you energize them."

Dr. Sax is the founder of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE).

He said boys are missing out because the confrontational teaching approach has largely been abandoned in elementary schools where the profession is dominated by women who are opting to treat students the way they would prefer to be treated themselves, ignoring the fact that boys are programmed to thrive under confrontation.

His talk at the National Association of Independent Schools conference highlighted how boys and girls are hard-wired to respond in completely different ways to specific situations and teaching methods.

As an example, he pointed to the male response to stress, the decades-old "fight or flight" principle, which shows an increased heart rate, increased blood flow to the brain and a boost in alertness that collectively triggers a desire to fight or run away.

However, the female response to stress is completely different, and prompts instead a decreased heart rate and blood flow to the brain, dizziness, nausea -- all of it triggering a desire to hug and be hugged, he said.

"Most boys will experience confrontation as arousing and exciting -- they enjoy it. Girls, however, experience nausea and dizziness; they are not that interested in being under fire," said Dr. Sax.

He said these differences help explain why boys prefer education in a classroom setting that is louder, competitive and more rule-governed than that preferred by girls. Boys often respond well in a more formal, almost militaristic climate, where teachers call students by their last names; girls typically do not do well in that kind of setting, and would actually do better in a setting where both they and their teacher are allies, talking to each other on a first-name basis, rather than adversaries.

His comments struck a chord with Stephen Clement, headmaster of the prestigious all-boys Browning School in New York, who said he had an "ah-ha" moment when Dr. Sax described the type of teacher who can make boys thrive.

"I remember walking past the classroom of this teacher who shouted; he was loud and I was terrified," he recalled. "He was by far the best teacher I ever had in my life."

Dr. Sax also told the story of one classroom teacher he knows who felt terrible because she finally lost her composure and came down hard on a clever boy in her class who repeatedly ignored his work assignments. She shouted at him that she knew he could do more and better, that she expected him to do better.

"She lost it," said Dr. Sax. "The next day, that boy brought in his papers. Every day after that, he brought in his homework."

A couple of weeks later, the boy's parents called the teacher up to say they didn't know what she had done, but they wanted to thank her for transforming their son's attitude towards school.

"It needs to be custom-tailored to the boy. When you have a boy who's not working, where is it written that you cannot get in a boy's face?" said Dr. Sax.

"I can tell you that the classroom management problems would be solved in many schools if you were loud and confrontational with some of the boys."

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