Boys + Writing Can = Success

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It is well known that boys lag at all grade levels behind girls in literacy achievement, and although a multitude of books and articles have been written about this phenomenon, the gap continues. The National Assessment for Educational Progress (2012) reported that of the three ages tracked, only nine-year-old boys have made any significant progress since 1971 in narrowing that gap, and that gap is world-wide. Every three years, the Program for International Student Assessment administers assessments in several content areas, including literacy, science and mathematics, to fifteen year-olds in 65 countries. According to the 2012 report, the average score for boys in literacy proficiency was 38 points lower than that for girls, a disparity that has increased from 32 points since 2000. According to Dr. William Brozo, professor of literacy at George Mason University's Graduate School of Education, that means that boys were already a year and a half behind girls in 2000 (White, 2012).

In their 2002 study of boys and literacy, Smith and Wilhelm found that boys actually had rather rich literacy lives outside of school, but this did not translate to "school literacy" (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002). The boys were actually doing quite a bit of reading and/or writing outside of school, but did not feel that this counted as "real" literacy.

Reading and writing go hand-in-hand. To help boys write better, they must also read better. Providing plenty of reading material that is of special interest to boy is crucial. Boys are particularly drawn by graphic novels, nonfiction, and subject material relevant to boys' interests and lives. Using drama in the classroom, as described in Jeffrey Wilhelm's *You Gotta Be the Book* (2008) also engages boys in reading.

Once they are reading, use the following strategies for helping boys be successful writers:

1. Get to know their interests.
2. Provide regular, frequent opportunities for writing.
3. Allow as much choice for boys as possible.
4. Use technology and fun software. One school suggests Comic Life. See "For Boys" below for others and follow the weekly PEG Writing Resource Roundup for more suggestions. According to one student, "The computer makes it easier to get your work done."
5. Tailor writing to boys' learning styles. For example, boys like to write short, specific essays. Allow them to do this, and then work with them on expanding and elaborating.

6. Use role models. See "For Boys" below for suggestions.
7. Use think-alouds and oral rehearsals.
8. Model, model, model.
9. Write WITH boys.
10. Assign writing topics that are relevant and related to real life. Boys tend to enjoy nonfiction more than fiction, and find it harder to connect "school" reading to their lives.
11. Provide stimulus material to give background knowledge about the subject on which they are writing.
12. Use the Six Plus One Writing Traits
13. Model how to use rubrics to support writing.

To support teaches in helping all students become more proficient writers, NC Write provides tools for several of these suggestions. At least 30% of our prepackaged writing prompts are accompanied by stimulus material to give students all the background information they need to write to the assigned prompt. These prompts represent a wide variety of real-world events and topics and, of course, teachers can add their own prompts and stimulus material customized to their classroom content, studies, and events. Relevance is further achieved by having students publish their work. NC Write offers feedback and rubrics on the Six Traits of Writing, and teachers can address the "Plus One" trait by having students publish their essays in some form, whether by printing them out via Word documents, sending them off to various audiences, or creating classroom books. Rubrics for each of the Six Traits of Writing and for textual evidence and content are provided as guides. Modeling the use of these rubrics while writing and then referring to them when interpreting score reports will also help all students improve.

The following sources can provide support.

For Boys:
www.guysread.com created by beloved author John Scieszka (*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, The Stinky Cheese Man*), offers stories to read, book suggestions, bookmarks, author websites, and more for boys in addition to the latest research on boys and reading.
Scieszka also has published a series of books called the *Guys Write* library, in which popular authors for young people write specifically for boys.

http://www.read.gov/exquisite-corpse: Authors play the old game of writing a part of a story and then pass it to the next. After they explore the episodes on the website, try assigning this type of writing groups of students. Scaffold by assigning a sentence at first and building to paragraphs, pages, or even chapters to build writing stamina in a fun, collaborative way.

http://comiclife.com and http://www.toondoo.com/: Students can make their own comic strips, stories and books on these websites.
Http://freerice.com: Students can play games in vocabulary, grammar, literature, famous quotations, and other subjects while donating rice to the World Food Program. It's addictive!

For Teachers – Articles:

Simon Mayo supports drive to get boys writing. The Literacy Trust, n.d. Web. 15 July 2014. http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/media/5722_simon_mayo_supports_drive_to_getboys_writing

"Getting boys to write." *Words for Life*. National Literacy Trust, n.d. Web. 15 July 2014. <http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/getting-boys-write>.

"Me, Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boysâ€™ Literacy Skills." *Ontario Ministry of Education* . Ontario Ministry of Education , n.d. Web. 15 July 2014. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/meread/meread.pdf

"Tackling the Challenge of Boys' Literacy Gap (The Council Chronicle, Sept. 05)." *NCTE Comprehensive News*. National Council of Teachers of English, n.d. Web. 15 July 2014. http://www.ncte.org/magazine/archives/122024

For Teachers – Free Videos:

Raising boys' achievement : Oxford University Press, n.d. Web. 15 July 2014. https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/key-issues/boys-achievement/?region=uk

For Teachers – Books:

Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith have done extensive research on reluctant readers and writers. Much of their research has been devoted to boys. In addition to the sampling of books below, they have written many articles. Wilhelm is also editor of the journal *In the Middle*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English. Some of their books include:

Fredricksen, James E., and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. *So, what's the story?: teaching narrative to understand ourselves, others, and the world*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2012. Print.

Smith, Michael W., and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. *Reading don't fix no Chevys: literacy in the lives of young men*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002. Print.

Smith, Michael W., and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. *Going with the flow: how to engage boys (and girls) in their literacy learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006. Print.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey . *"You Gotta BE the Book": Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*. Second Edition ed. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2008. Print.

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"Program for International Student Assessment (PISA): 2012 Results - Reading Literacy: Gender." *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA): 2012 Results - Reading Literacy: Gender*. National Center for Education Statistics, 2012. Web. 15 July 2014. http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/pisa2012/pisa2012highlights_5c.asp

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White, Mercedes. "Why Boys' Literacy Skills Lag Behind Girls' and How to Bridge the Reading Gap."

Wilhelm, Jeffrey . *"You Gotta BE the Book": Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*. Second Edition ed. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2008. Print.

ABOUT ANN HAYES

Ann Hayes is a Technical Project Manager in the Software Products Division at Measurement Incorporated and leads the development and management of content utilized in MI's online classroom assessment systems. Her projects include the PEG Writing, NC Write, Utah Compose, WPP, and PEG Scholar practice writing websites and MICA, an online classroom assessment tool for reading, math, and science. Ann is a former English Language Arts teacher with National Board Certification who has taught all ages and is also certified in both Special and Academically Gifted Education. She has always had a special interest in formative assessment and is an experienced item writer and content specialist. Currently she is finishing her doctoral dissertation on how English Language Arts teachers use formative assessment in reading.