

The Well-Educated Boy

Last June I attended the annual conference of the IBSC (International Boys' Schools Coalition) in Philadelphia. Such gatherings are a wonderful opportunity to hear about the latest research on boys and how we can improve boys' learning.

The theme of the Philadelphia conference, held at Haverford School, was *Inventions in Teaching*. The programme over the four days featured excellent keynote addresses and hands-on workshops. However, it was one of those workshops that really stood out in my mind. The presenter was Dr. Timothy Hawkes, the Headmaster of the King's School in Sydney. Dr. Hawkes is a close colleague of mine and a fellow Trustee of the IBSC. His workshop, entitled *The Well-Educated Boy*, explored many of the characteristics of boys and how we might recognise a boy who is well-educated.

Dr. Hawkes began his presentation by posing three questions.

1. What is a boy like when no one is watching?
2. Do boys deserve the references we write for them?
3. What sort of electronic footprint do boys leave?

Without sounding too alarmist, Dr. Hawkes suggested that "within the dark corners of our schools, a moral blindness can grow". Left to their own devices and without appropriate adult guidance, boys often develop their own set of values and codes. In the Australian context that is familiar to Dr. Hawkes, boys can reach a position where bullying is seen as justice; smoking is seen as freedom; shoplifting is seen as a game; littering is seen as acceptable; drinking is seen as being adult. We might agree with some or all of his assertions. We might even come up with our own list, one that is more applicable to a Hong Kong boy. I would suggest, however, that these are typical attitudes of teenage boys across the globe, with relatively minor modifications that reflect cultural differences.

But do we teach boys the following life skills?

- a. How to live in a community.
- b. How to communicate well.
- c. How to know yourself and what you believe in.

These are difficult life skills to acquire and boys need schools and families to help.

During the course of his secondary education, a well-educated boy must develop the deep thinking skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. A boy will not be well-educated if he has only acquired factual content, no matter how extensive or comprehensive such content might be. Once again, 100% is not good enough!

At the King's School a boy is considered to be well-educated if he has a love of learning; respects ability; can be creative; is able to manage change; is reflective; has developed a faith base; to name but a few attributes. The King's School evaluates their boys in terms of such qualities by means of a simple survey.

What is clearly apparent is that a well-educated boy needs literally hours and hours of guidance and training if he is to acquire these essential life skills. These skills do not come naturally. It is the responsibility of teachers, parents, relatives and other adults with whom a boy comes into contact to provide such assistance.

Boys need direction and help. While the advice of friends plays its part, we cannot hope that boys will become well-educated via Facebook accounts!

J.R. Kennard