**Misreading Boys**

**Empowering boys through reading and writing**

**Interactive Training Modules**

Boy-friendly Reading and Writing

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The Village Teacher

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**Self-training modules**

* Swimming in a sea of spoken words
* "I've read that book before"
* Reading between the lines
* "How do I know what I think until I've heard what I say?
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* "I don't want fifty pages about the next five minutes of your life"
* His learning brain
* Body smart - picture smart
* Boy and books
* Boys and words
* Drawing words
* Writing pictures
* Gender and cultural bias in the classroom
* The writing conference
* Bony bum boys
* Walk and talk - communicating with boys
* Winning ways with wayward boys

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**Getting boys to read**

I have to admit that I really like teaching boys. It is so exciting to see boys come alive in a classroom when the lesson is structured for them.

Boys may give up on school if they cannot find ways to be successful. Boys can read and write well if they are encouraged, given reading material they are interested in and which is at their reading level.

The area of literacy, getting boys to read and improving their writing skills is one of the major obstacles boys have to success at school.

To get me reading you will need to be sure that I can see that it is appealing, attractive, significant and fun. Get me absorbed in a topic, then move me on to higher level reading.

If everyone else is reading and writing, I am more inclined to read and write as well.

Create a separate reading space for me. I don't like reading if I am sitting in the same space as when I do other boring work.

Never stop reading aloud to me. While you're at it, bring other older males into my life and get them to read books that they love. I need to see that men enjoy reading.

Let me use my body comfortably while reading. Sometimes I might prefer to walk and read and at other times I will just slouch in a chair or lay upon the floor.

Reading is a physical thing for me to do.

There is a conflict between boyishness and adult perceptions of good literature. This conflict has led to the phenomenon of Renegade readers.

Renegade readers like to spend their free time hanging out. Part of their interest is in reading such things as comics, magazines, horror novels and a random assortment of non-fiction books which interest them.

They get hold of this reading material from any place except school. The considerations they use when choosing what to read include the genre, the author, appeal of the title, the blurb on the back cover and what their friends thought of it.

They are often passionate readers. Renegade readers are the tragedy and the hope of reading reluctance among boys. They are reluctant to read anything recommended by the school.

**Two kinds of books**

To build a culture of reading around boys we need to recognize the difference between:

Books for reading to reluctant boys, and books for reading by reluctant boys

The difference is significant in developing a connection between boys and books.

When reading is someone else's job, the difficulty and the length do not deter a reluctant reader.

The length doesn't matter, as long as it is a great story.

It is difficult to persuade boys to read books which focus on emotional experience. But when an adult reads, both the adult and the boy can explore the emotional experience of the characters together.

A boy will find it easier to read challenging works when he has heard more sophisticated sentence structures read to him and been introduced to a wider vocabulary by being read to from appropriate books.

The idea of reading aloud to an adult or a teenager seems foreign to us. Until the late 1800's this was the norm. Shakespeare never intended his works to be read in classrooms. He wanted them to be experienced in the theatre. Reading aloud has a rich heritage and deserves a place in all of our lives.

There is a chance of discovering that 'special book' which will open a boy up to reading for fun and purpose; a book that will set op a path of lifelong reading.

Visual literacy refers to the many ways that communication occurs through image rather than text. It is reading without words. Visual literacy is an extension of literacy, not a replacement for it. A boy will see more in pictures if the pictures relate to things that he has read about.

There is something about the comfortable familiarity of the characters that appeals to boys. Many serial books are plot focused. Many great writers have admitted that they were avid readers of serial books when young. When a boy choses a book, he is more concerned that it should be fun than whether is has literary merit.

It is a mistake to dismiss comics as unworthy and unsuitable reading matter for boys. Research supports that reading comics does not replace other kinds of reading. Boys who read comics are often readers of other types of books. Comic book readers often go on to read other fantasy novels. E.g. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings.

The internet will not kill reading. It should be seen as a fabulous communication tool which will make the ability to read and willingness to read even more essential for boys in the future.

**Getting Boys to Write**

How can I get you to write & read?

My interest in writing comes from having stories read aloud to me. I want to be able to retell or act out those stories. I need a starter. Mind mapping my ideas works well for me. If I talk about it first my ideas get sorted and are easier to work with.

Pictures and oral explanation assist me in sorting out characters, the scene, the plot and the sequence of events. Sometimes I prefer to create a comic or a storyboard.

Teach me some structures and rules of good writing. I have preferred topics – ones that have action, violence or are gross.

**What I find hard with English**

My difficulty is the writing. I'm a good speaker, not a writer.

Teach me how to prioritise my thinking. I'm all over the place when it comes to planning an essay.

Let me write to someone interesting, not just a teacher with a red pen.

Don't give me a writing task straight after lunch. I am still puffing.

I struggle with long writing exercises. Break it down to bite-size pieces.

Does it need to be written? Can I do a poster, bullet points or a mind map instead?

Is the audience that pile of dog-eared books on your desk - or is the audience someone real?

Writing to a real person will give a boy a purpose for his writing. It is a different matter writing to inform someone rather than satisfying the red marking pen of your teacher.

Time to think and, above all, time to discuss are vital precursors to boys' writing. This reflective process is possibly the most important element missing from a boys writing process. Build in time for boys to listen to each others ideas and to think about their approach before they put pen to paper.

Writing mind maps or noting points on an index card may help a boy shuffle and arrange his thoughts. Post-it notes with a single idea on each page is a great way for boys to be tactile in their sorting of ideas.

We do too much writing in school! We even use it as a means to control sometimes, and some schools still use writing as punishment.

Less writing, but better quality, would suit everyone best - particularly boys.

Bullet points are a great example of what a boy understands without him having to structure that knowledge into structured text.

Mind maps and concept maps are fantastically boy-friendly, nonlinear and without a lot of words.

Many boys do not posses the skills needed to order and structure their writing. Be wary of using time-weary writing frames that bore boys and detract from the purpose of the writing assignment.

Produce writing frames and guides live, there and then in the classroom, in the context of the work being tackled, by that group. Make it a live and lively experience.

Boy-friendly chunks work well from the age of five onwards. Even 16 year old find coursework too much to handle without breaking assignments into manageable sections.

Oral feedback is best - backed up with written feedback of quality. For boys, it is all about the genuine interest of another human being, not the marks or grades.

Submarine grades, below C level, signal failure to many boys. Often they will give up.

Does our school have a culture that enables boys to take pride in anything?

Does peer group pressure put a stop to achievement for large groups of our boys?

Boys need to have their interest aroused to put pen to paper.

Give the writing a purpose other than as a set assignment to be assessed by a teacher with a red pen.

**Two Page Plan –** Boy-friendly Reading and Writing

*What tips have you learned in this session that you would try to engage boys in reading and writing?*

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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