



Online School for Boys

Pedagogical Approach – v 1.0

Note: This is version 1.0 of what we expect to be pedagogy fully in “beta” mode through the 2014-2015 school year. Only through doing will we have an understanding of what works best in this new medium for boys’ schools – and begin an understanding of what can be applied back to on-campus classes.

Core Values

Independent boys’ schools have created exceptional on-campus learning environments that focus clearly and purposefully on the developmental needs of boys and their engagement in academic pursuits. Online learning environments created for boys must not eschew the time-tested core of those environments, but instead build upon it within the new medium, understanding that while practice might look different the values that underlie the practice should be the same.

Regardless of the specific mission of independent boys’ schools, three core values emerge as essential to schools and are supported in research: Trust, Purpose, and Character. Each of these values is supported by beliefs that are also common within schools: Honesty, Integrity, Meaning, Engagement, Effort, Connection, Accountability, Self-Efficacy, Structure, Novelty, Activity, Wholeness, Competition, and Humor.

This pedagogy statement aims to set the framework for an online program specifically designed for boys by articulating the core values and tying them to common beliefs, research, and expected practice within the online medium. By no means is this document meant to be exhaustive within any of these categories, but instead the document is meant to articulate the starting point and outline. This document will evolve over time.

Trust

Boys and faculty members must develop deep trust in order for the boys to succeed as well as possible academically. Personal interaction that results in trust between the teacher and the student is a central component of effective education of boys. Thus, the pedagogy should focus clearly on developing trust and give space for relationships to develop.

Supporting Beliefs: Honesty, Connection, Engagement, Effort and Accountability

Research Basis:

- “Whatever particular style of transmission, the fundamental element in the successful transmission of classroom business from teachers to students is the establishment of trust” *RB, TB* (192).
- Many teachers have found success in developing trust through coursework in which “students are given a role in the learning process” *Mining* (80).
- Part of the way that trust is established is by the teacher reacting to the needs of boys and responding directly to them: “[A] central finding of this study is that boys tend to elicit the pedagogy they need” *RB, TB* (xxii).
- “Boys are not likely to be quiet in their reactions to ineffective teaching” *RB, TB* (227). Related, self-reflective activities have shown promise for many educators, *Mining* (37-46).

Online Practice:

- Course creation before school year begins, focus on the individual boy during the school year: Teachers need to find ways to reach the individual boy and motivate him – a practice that will be enhanced if the teacher is not concentrating on lesson design but instead concentrating on connecting with the boy.
- Monitoring and use of data available: The online medium has more pure data available than on campus classes do. Use of data to determine engagement and to focus in on where support and deeper connection is needed will be key. Polling of students is also key, and must be followed-up by demonstrated use of data to inform and change practice.
- Focused and quick communication: Online communication tools can help to foster deep personal connections, a necessary element for establishing trust. Teachers will need to determine which tools are most successful with each boy (and not assume that the same tool will be as effective with all boys). Moreover, teachers must be quick in reply to student needs, establishing boundaries and expectations that are clear, but that also take into account a need for quick feedback.

Purpose

Learning must have purpose. It should be tied to boys' understanding of the world around them, and help push that understanding. Games, competition, activity, and project-based approaches all have a role to play in creating an effective learning environment.

Supporting Beliefs: Meaning, Engagement, Self-Efficacy, Novelty, Activity, Competition, Wholeness, and Humor

Research Basis:

- “In no area of this study was there a stronger concordance between boys and teachers than in their agreement about the power of games to bring energy and interest to the classroom” *RB, TB* (58).
- Effective teaching practice also asks boys “to identify personally with someone under study, to act and feel as that character would, and to produce an account of the experience” *RB, TB* (92), and to use learning as part of a process of self-realization, *RB, TB* (125-130).
- “Many [educators] felt that the vigorous creation of products was especially effective with boys” *RB, TB* (17).

Online Practice:

- Incorporate gaming and game-theory into the online classroom, through approaches as simple as “digital badges” to more complicated role-playing and environment-shaping games.
- Exploit a national or international classroom of boys, as research suggests that an approach that connects boys’ to experiences unfamiliar to their own (geographic diversity, socio-economic diversity, images of masculinity, etc) will be effective.
- A student-centered approach to classrooms that borrows from project based learning pedagogy in which products are created (particularly those that have use), has great resonance with boys.

Character

It is essential to simultaneously develop the character of the boys and engage them in course work. In boys' schools this is often best accomplished through the process of self-realization. Individuality, self-respect, and integrity towards others can be encouraged by the teacher demonstrating his or her own individual spirit through humor and drama.

Supporting Beliefs: Connection, Honesty, Integrity, Effort, Purpose, Accountability, Structure, Self-Efficacy, and Humor

Research Basis:

- “The impact of some of the reported lessons lay in their striking an especially responsive chord in the boys’ personal lives. In many cases, such lessons brought to clear consciousness matters of deep personal importance, clarifying and energizing boys’ awareness of realities and values... Many teachers’ ‘best lessons’ engaged students in taking a considered measure of themselves, including looking at themselves in unfamiliar ways” *RB, TB* (137, 138).
- Connections between students can be a key to success in boys’ classrooms, as educators note effectiveness of shared responsibility in learning, *RB, TB* (96-100).
- “Many of the reporting teachers noted the transitive efficacy of surprising students in some way, perhaps by conducting usual class work in an especially dramatic or unexpected manner... extreme theatricality, pushing limits, taking students temporarily out of their comfort zones, or simply delighting them in unexpected ways were highly endorsed as effective practices for boys” *RB, TB* (171).

Online Practice:

- Engage boys in group work and peer collaborations frequently in order to develop a sense of shared responsibility in the learning process, and trust and honesty between the boys.
- Self-reflection is an inherent advantage of the online medium. Use this advantage to its fullest extent, asking boys to constantly self-reflect on their journey in online education and their work in the content of the course.
- Embrace humor, the “unexpected,” and theatricality. Encourage faculty members to be personal and share their personality, and work with them to be creative within the medium. Online lessons have the advantage of not being tied to a place – i.e., a classroom – use that advantage.

Works Cited

ISBC, *Teaching Boys at the Coal Face: Mining Key Pedagogical Approaches*, 2012
Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley, *Reaching Boys, Teaching Boys*, Jossey-Bass, 2010.