



The Learning Clinic

Education & Career Development Agency

CORPORATE SERVICES

Staff Development
Training & Orientation
Recruitment & Retention

PERSONAL TUTORING

Over 100 Instructors
English & French
Elementary to Post-Secondary
One-on-One in Own Home

ROBERT KIRWAN

Operating An Independent
Private Practice As An
Education, Training & Staff
Development Consultant
Since January 2006

Member of the
Ontario College of Teachers

Trustee with the
Rainbow District School Board

Bachelor of Arts
Mathematics & Economics

Master of Arts
Education Administration

Professional Educator
Practicing Since 1974

Live Talk Radio Show Host
With Laurentian University's
CKLU 96.7 FM

TO CONTACT

The Learning Clinic
4456 Noel Crescent
Val Therese, ON P3P 1S8
(705) 969-7215

rkirwan@thelearningclinic.ca

www.thelearningclinic.ca



Single-gender Classrooms May Be Just Around The Corner

REFLECTIONS by...

Robert Kirwan OCT, B.A. (Math), M.A. (Education)
Education, Training & Career Development Coach

More than 1700 girls and boys in South Carolina took part in a recent survey conducted by that State's Department of Education. The students were from Grades 2 through 9 in over thirty schools. What is interesting about the survey is that all of the students were receiving their education in single-gender classrooms and the results may surprise you.

No less than 75% of the students agreed that the single-gender approach was helping them in school. They said that being in a classroom of all boys or all girls has increased their confidence, class participation, desire to succeed in school and their report card marks.

State Superintendent of Education, Jim Rex stated, "More and more South Carolina parents are choosing this option whenever and wherever it's made available." Indeed, more than 150 South Carolina public schools are expected to offer the single-gender option to parents in September 2009.

The results of the survey and the tremendous endorsement of both parents and students could be an indication that we may begin to see this option being made available in Ontario as well. It is at least worthy of consideration as a way of perhaps improving the problems inherent in our system today in terms of classroom management and motivation of students.

Marymount Academy is currently the only publicly funded single-gender "school" in the Greater Sudbury Area. The school is operated by the Sudbury District Catholic School Board and offers programs exclusively to girls from Grades 7 through 12. If you were to take a survey at Marymount you would discover an overwhelming support of the single-gender approach from students, teachers and parents alike. Most would cite the same reasons as noted by the South Carolina students for their endorsement.

It is a bit surprising that with all of the efforts being made to improve the quality of education being provided in our Ontario schools the single-gender approach has been largely ignored as a viable option. And yet it makes perfect sense for at least one particular cluster of grade levels, especially since we are witnessing the growing acceptance of another trend in school organization across the province today.

The trend to which I refer is the policy being adopted by many school boards to place Grade 7's and 8's into secondary school settings. This trend is showing no signs of slowing down, and in fact a number of the local secondary schools in the area have already made the move.

This will result in two distinct school organizational models which are more appropriate to the way children learn. Elementary schools will consist of JK – Grade 6 and Secondary schools will include Grade 7 to 12. This new organizational model makes perfect sense in light of the priorities we have in our schools today. It is also in line with the major move across the province to offer more courses in the skilled trade areas to our intermediate grade level students in order to encourage more of them to consider careers in the trades.

Once we have shifted the Grade 7 and 8 students into the high school setting, the next logical move may be to introduce the single-gender approach, especially since it is receiving such positive results in the United States and even right here in Sudbury.

The most appropriate situation would see single-gender classes offered from Grades 7 through 10. These are the most volatile years for adolescents when hormones have a tendency to get in the way of learning and when curriculum content begins to become more and more important.

By organizing the students into single-gender classes, we would remove one of the major distractions which has become such a barrier to learning. There would be no more “game-playing” and “posturing” in class. Students could get right down to the business of learning the all-important curriculum in Grades 7 to 10. It is during these four critical years that students must be allowed every opportunity to discover their academic strengths and passions. This is the time for them to lay the foundations for Grades 11 and 12 as they prepare to make the transition from secondary school to university or college. Once they get into Grades 11 and 12 students can once again be placed in mixed-gender classes. By this time they will have established their goals and objectives and will be able to focus on what they must do to get ready for life after high school.

Elementary schools, which are often smaller in size, would present much more of a challenge when it comes to offering single-gender classes. There just may not be enough students in each grade to allow for a suitable split of the boys and girls, but the need for single-gender classes is not as great at the elementary school level. Up until the end of Grade 6 it doesn't make much difference whether you have boys and girls together in classes. Moreover, the focus is more on the development of learning skills and attitudes up until the end of Grade 6. In Grade 7 the priorities begin to shift towards curriculum content as students use their “learning skills” to acquire new knowledge in a number of different areas.

Within the next couple of years it is quite likely that we will see one or two local secondary schools offer the single-gender classes as an option for Grades 7 to 10. Predictably, the interest among parents and students will likely be tremendous and registrations for these classes may go through the roof. Once school board administrators realize the level of support from the public for this organizational model we may see other schools naturally follow the lead.

The move towards single-gender classes would be very easy to implement. For example, if you have four Grade nine classes at a secondary school now, with approximately half of each class consisting of boys and the other half girls, then you will end up with two Grade nine classes of girls and two Grade nine classes of boys. The curriculum will be the same. The expectations will be the same. The exams will be the same. The only difference will be that two of the classes will be able to deal with the curriculum from a female perspective, while the other classes will deal with the curriculum from a male perspective. There will be “no games”. There will be no “pressure” to impress the opposite sex. Those games and pressures will be left for the interaction of students in between classes and after school where they belong. Classroom management will improve; participation levels will improve; self-confidence among students will improve; and all students will have an opportunity to succeed without fear of intimidation from the opposite sex.

SPECIAL NOTICE:

For a video clip on this topic, go to the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN4uF-3O4z4&feature=channel>