




Boys and Girls Learn Differently: A Guide for Teachers and Parents

 **Research Roundup** » Volume 23, Number 3, Spring 2007

Michael Gurian and Patricia Henley, with Terry Trueman. **Boys and Girls Learn Differently: A Guide for Teachers and Parents**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002. 345 pages. Available from: Wiley. \$14.95. www.wiley.com

In *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*, Michael Gurian and his two fellow authors, both educators with years of experience in public schools, first present information on brain-based research and then provide a “practical blueprint” intended to help teachers develop effective classrooms. Their suggestions are gleaned from the actual experiences of teachers with whom they have worked and, in the view of the authors, do not call for “major upheavals in teaching practices.”

While any discussion of brain-based research necessarily incorporates scientific jargon, Gurian, Henley, and Trueman do not get bogged down in it. Instead, they keep this discussion brief, then move on to a chapter focused on how such brain-based differences affect boys and girls. For example, boys, whose brains are described as more spatial in nature “tend to use up more space when they learn, especially at younger ages.” If put at a table together, a young boy often spreads his things into a girl’s space—thus potentially sending a message to both girls and female teachers that the boy is impolite or even out of control. In addition, boys often need more movement to “not only stimulate their brains but also [to] manage and relieve impulsive behavior.”

The “practical blueprint” section of the book is presented in four chapters, each focusing on classrooms serving different age levels (preschool and kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school). Many of the practices require only small changes in teacher behavior. For example, one teacher:

found her first graders transition better from task to task, and thus require less punishment or reprimand, if she gives them forewarning. About three minutes prior to the transition, she announces to the class that they have a few minutes to finish up as well as what they will be doing next. Without this preparation time, her boys especially are not ready to move on, and she wastes time getting into discipline situations with them.

Teachers also discussed approaches they found to be ineffective. These included “time out” sessions a student was required to serve at recess because it “ended up quite often creating problems later in the day” as the student—often a boy who needed physical activity to discharge energy—became disruptive or unfocused.

A strong plus for the book is a writing style that is clear, incorporates examples that both explain concepts and make the content interesting, and is grounded in the real-life world of classrooms. It would be a useful resource in jump-starting teacher discussion about ways to improve instruction for both boys and girls. A companion book, *The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Action Guide for Teachers* (2003), builds on *Boys and Girls Learn Differently* and presents additional instructional techniques compatible with its findings.