

Chapter XVIII

Using Video Games to Improve Literacy Levels of Males

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the differences in the educational needs of males, the origins of video games, and the issue of the decline in literacy achievement levels of male students worldwide. It promotes the idea that a new literacy which includes computer technology and visual literacy has changed the scope of literacy and that males have succeeded at developing the new literacy skills. The chapter is intended to inform educators of the literacy skills involved in video games, make connections with video game literacy and traditional literacy, and to encourage teachers to integrate video games into their curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) females scored thirteen (13) points higher on average in reading than male students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). Gurian (2001) also cites statistics indicating that boys:

- Earn seventy percent (70%) of D's and F's and fewer than half of the A's,
- Account for two-thirds of learning disability diagnoses,
- Represent ninety percent (90%) of discipline referrals,

- Dominate such brain-related learning disorders as ADD/ADHD, with millions now medicated in schools,
- Make up eighty percent (80%) of the high school dropouts, and
- Make up fewer than forty percent (40%) of college students.

The current educational system around the world is failing to meet the educational needs of males. In the United States, Black males are three (3) times more likely than white students to be labeled as mentally disturbed (www.BET.com, 2005). Males are more often classified as being mentally retarded, having learning disabilities, and having attention deficit disorders.

Girls performed better than boys academically in the thirty-five (35) countries who participated in a three (3) year study of knowledge and skills of males and females. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studied males and females in industrialized countries including the United States, Canada, European countries, Australia, and Japan. The results show that reading and writing skills brought the male scores down the most. (Gurian & Stevens, 2004) The dismal educational achievement of males continues in the high school dropout rates and graduation rates of males.

The difference in graduation rates for males and females widen within minority groups. There is an eleven percent (11%) difference in graduation rates of African-American males and females, nine percent (9%) fewer Hispanic males graduate than Hispanic females, five percent (5%) fewer white males graduate as compared with white females, and three percent (3%) fewer Asian males graduate from high school than Asian females (Greene & Winters, 2006). During the past decade, the graduation rate for Black women improved while the rate for Black males slipped. Fifty-six percent (56%) of Black women graduate from high school compared with forty-three percent (43%) of Black males (NAEP, 2005). The differences in high school graduation rates of males and females lead to differences in college attendance rates. Women earn an average of fifty-seven percent (57%) of all BA's and fifty-eight percent of master's degrees in the United States (Conlin, 2005). The United States Department of Education predicts that if the current trend continues that by 2020, there will be 156 women for every 100 men earning college degrees. The college attendance rates for African-American males are even lower with only thirty-seven percent (37%) of Black males being enrolled in college (NAEP, 2005). The college graduation rate of Black males is lower than any other group.

The research clearly shows that males are getting lost in the educational system. One of the

problems could be that the current curriculum is designed for all students to learn the same things at the same time in the same ways. It does not examine the cultural expectations of or for the males and does not consider the differences in the males' brains, learning styles, or developmental levels. With the use of the current curriculum, the unrealistic expectations of teachers for males in the classroom, inappropriate teaching and presentation styles, and the restrictions on student movement in the classrooms, it becomes easy to understand why males appear to be angry, aggressive, and frustrated.

In order to relieve the frustrations of males and to reverse the current educational trends of males, it is important for educators to consider all types of instruction. All students should be taught utilizing the knowledge of cultural gender differences as well as gender differences in brains and interests. Cultural expectations and gender differences are difficult to quantitatively study but have been extensively researched by literary and developmental experts such as Leonie Rowan (2002), Elaine Millard (1997), and many others. Research on the brain has vastly expanded with new medical technologies available to scan and learn more about the brain. Neurologists are finding that there are major differences in the characteristics of males' brains and females' brains. Evidence supporting brain differences in males and females is referenced by Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens (2004) showing that:

- “boys brains have more cortical areas dedicated to spatial- mechanical functioning, males use, on average, half the brain space that females use for verbal-emotive functioning. The cortical trend toward special-mechanical functioning makes many boys want to move objects through space, like balls, model airplanes, or just their arms and legs. Most boys, although not all of them, will experience words and feels differently than girls do. (Blum, 1997; Moir & Janssen, 1989).

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