Some Quick Statistics
85% of students diagnosed with ADD/ADHD are male.
90% of students identified as Learning Disabled are male.
Boys in all industrialized countries score poorer on measures of literacy achievement than girls.
Boys are three times (3x) more likely to be retained.
57% of US college students are female.
65% of high school dropouts are male.

Some Assertions:
• The things boys generally like to read are not sanctioned in schools.
• Boys are generally less concerned with reading to please the teacher.
• Just finding more books that are interesting will not help if boys don’t see themselves as readers.
• The differences AMONG boy readers (SES, ethnicity, background, family) are often greater than the differences BETWEEN boy and girl readers.
• In general, boys spend less time reading (especially fiction) than girls.
• Girls find the text within themselves (personal connections), where boys find themselves within the text (projected into the stories).
• Boys see mothers (females) read more frequently than they see fathers (males) read.
• Most elementary school teachers are female (around 90%) and may not relate to boy readers as well as girl readers.
• Boys see themselves as less capable readers than girls.
• Boys need more books with positive (cool) role models.

3 Perspectives on Boy Reading Problems
1. “Poor Boys” – victims of single homes, female dominated schools, abandoned by male role models, gangs
2. “Failing Schools Failing Boys” – schools fail boys on measurable outcomes (test scores) but fail girls as well
3. “Boys will be Boys” – many male readers understand boys that don’t read, get outside its nice, sports over books
Why Some Classrooms Are Not Effective for Boy Readers / Writers
Discourage certain reading materials (comics, catalogs, graphic novels)
Provide insufficient support for choosing reading materials
Reading is seen as a sedentary, solitary activity
Limited selections of reading material that are interesting for boys
Boys are not sure of the purpose for reading in these classrooms
Reading is seen as a non-social activity
Strong disconnect between inside and outside school literacies

Strategies for Engaging Boy Readers
Areas for Consideration
1. Providing Opportunities to Read
2. Developing a Community of Boy Readers
3. Supporting Boys’ Sense of Self as Reader
4. Providing Effective Literacy Instruction
5. Supporting Boys As Writers
6. Developing Home-School Connections

Providing Opportunities to Read
• **Access** to Reading Materials
• **Time** to Read (at home, in school, in between)
• **Choice** in What to Read as Much as Possible
• **Support** in Selecting Appropriate Materials
• **Response** to What has Been Read

Texts For Boys Should Be (Wilhelm & Smith)
**Storied** – narrative focus on plot not drama
**High Interest** – “entry point” books
**Visual** – graphic novels, magazines
**Purposeful** – “exportable knowledge,” info to use
**Familiar** – can identify with main characters
**Engaging** – sustains engagement over time – series
**Multi-Perspective** – more than one point of view
**Edgy** – controversial, about contemporary issues
**Humorous** – sense of mischief, slapstick
**Brief** – engaging across books, not just one book

Selecting Books
By Genre, Topic, Authors, Settings …
Book Reviews
Peer Recommendations
Bestseller Lists for boys (guysread.com)
Supportive Browsing
On-Line Support / Reviews / Librarians
A Well Stocked “Boy-Friendly” Library

Humor – “Fart” books
Action Fiction
Non-Fiction – the grosser the better
Series Books – Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Wimpy Kid
Graphic Novels – Bone, Rockjaw
Magazines – Catalogs – sports, gaming, hobbies, etc
“cards”
On-Line access
CD and videos related to literacy activities

Developing a Community of Boy Readers

**Controlled**
- Only teacher makes decisions
- Only teacher knows what will happen next
- All students doing same thing at same time
- Teacher as arbiter of meaning and correctness
- Predetermined Curriculum
- Learners are Passive

**Structured**
- Predictable, consistent procedures
- Posted schedule
- Shared responsibility
- Instruction and experiences based on needs and interests of students
- Meaning is negotiated in classroom discussions
- Responsive Curriculum
- Learners are Active

Physical Dimensions

- Structured for Interaction
- Structured for Class Discussions
- Comfortable Places to Read
- Access to Reading Materials
- An Extensive Classroom Library

Building Community Strategies

- Shift from controlled to structured environments
- Shoebox autobiographies
- Interview Classmates Project
- Interest Inventories / Yellow Pages Project
- Inviting Male Readers to Class
- Boy Book Racks / Book Talks
- Reading Buddies
- Children’s Choice Awards Projects
Developing a Sense of Self as a Reader

How Boys See Reading
Reading is what girls do.
Reading is for sissies.
Reading is something you do for the future, not for the present.
Reading = School work.
It’s hard to find books boys like.
You read to please the teacher.
Reading won’t help you get a job.
Reading takes too long.
Once a poor reader, always a poor reader

Images of Readers
Images of readers in children’s books:
Often support stereotypical portrayals of boy and girl readers.
Focus on reading as decoding and oral fluency, not comprehension
Portray reading as something very difficult to do
Make readers look like nerds

Seeing Oneself as a Reader
Provide access to male reader role models (invited guests, parents, other teachers, on-line).
Look for books with positive male archetypes.
Provide reading buddies with younger classes.
Sharing reader response notebooks with older students.
Share your own passion for reading and discuss why it is still “cool” to be a reader.
Discuss how boy readers are portrayed in books, and how men are portrayed in commercials and advertisements.
Create a “Rights of the Boy Reader” chart

Providing Effective Literacy Instruction
Uncover the “secrets” of successful reading
Explicit instruction in relevant reading strategies
Teacher demonstrations of reading through think alouds
Bring more visual arts into response activities
Discussions should not be done in whole class settings exclusively (turn-pair-share, small groups, paired reading)
Be careful of how much comes after reading (dioramas)
Provide more book talks
Word games – scrabble, boggle, etc.
Provide books on CD and other online resources
Literature Study Groups
Why Literature Study Groups?
More choice in what is being read
Books of high interest at appropriate levels
Small group social interactions
Have some control over discussions and the topics in the discussion
Chance to argue and debate ideas
Multimodal presentations
Opportunities for self-evaluation

Supporting Boys as Writers
Some Assertions
• What boys choose to write about can be problematic and not sanctioned in classrooms (potty humor, violence, gangs).
• Girls seem to write more for the teacher, where boys write for themselves and one another.
• What elementary teachers read aloud rarely supports the kinds of writing boys like to do.
• In general, personal narrative dominates classroom writing. Boys tend to prefer action and informational writing.

Some Suggestions
• Define varied and authentic audiences for boys to write for, not just the teacher.
• Allow boys a framework of choice to work within.
• Have explicit discussions about appropriate topics for writing and negotiate these decisions with boys.
• Include multiple ways of telling stories (illustrations, video, cartooning, collage) along with written text.
• Allow more “boy-friendly” genres into the writing workshop.
• Focus less on conventions and handwriting at first; allow publishing on computers
• Let writing be more social (work in teams, discussing topics, illustration tables, author’s chair).
• Provide opportunities for talk to support writing.

Creating Home-School Connections
Home to School Connections
Family reading nights
Parent (especially male) volunteers in classrooms as readers
Library visits (obtain library cards)
Books at home programs
Other suggestions ?????
The Concept of Flow (Wilhelm & Smith)
1. Competence and Control / Manageable Challenge
2. Appropriate Levels of Difficulty
3. Clear and Immediate Feedback
4. Enjoyment of Losing Oneself in an Immediate Experience
5. Central Importance of Learning as a Social Event

Where Do We Go From Here?
• Develop self-efficacy in boy readers – sense of agency, willingness to address challenges
• Schools need to align closer to boys notions of literacy (de-feminize)
• Develop interpersonal relationships with other readers (Join the Literacy Club)
• Critique of negative male role models
• Make learning (literacy) activities more social and active (reading detectives)
• Develop positive relationships with teachers
• We have to find ways to make reading cool!

Website: www.frankserafini.com
E-Mail: frank@frankserafini.com