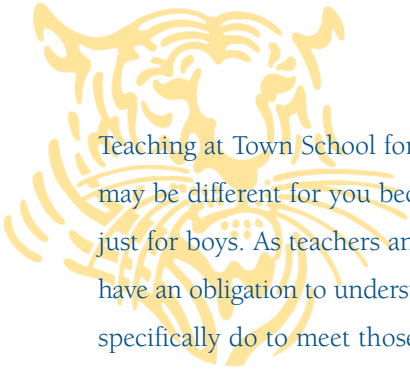


an open  
letter



To the Faculty of Town School for Boys  
from Headmaster Brewster Ely

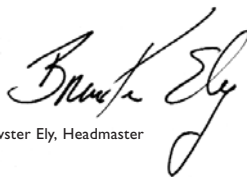


Teaching at Town School for Boys and to this school's philosophy may be different for you because this is an academic community just for boys. As teachers and as mentors in a boys' school, we have an obligation to understand how boys learn best and what we specifically do to meet those needs. When I address prospective parents, I tell them that a reason to enroll their son in this school is that we differentiate our teaching as much as possible to meet boys' learning needs.

As a product of both all-boys' elementary and secondary schools and as a former president of the International Boys' Schools Coalition, I have long wanted to write the definitive dissertation on best practices for boys. I know anecdotally that in this school our faculty excels at teaching boys; our graduates confirm this time and again, both in their words and in who they become. In spite of the hundreds of conversations that take place at Town School, we had never formally articulated our "best practices" until the 2006-07 school year. With thanks to the teachers and staff for the many hours they dedicated to this topic during faculty led workshops, here is a summary of their work. I am hopeful that you will see these words as guiding principles for the first day you enter your new classroom and beyond.

Much of what our faculty articulated also applies, in varying degrees, to all-girls' schools and to coeducational schools. In other words, good teaching produces good learning, but there are techniques which help to meet the specific needs of boys. The faculty scrutinized published researchers on how boys learn and develop, agreeing and at times disagreeing with the experts. They examined one another's classroom practices, finding striking consistencies to what boys need across grade levels. In the end, our faculty and staff agreed that in a boys' school all professional development is enhanced by viewing it through the lens of best practices for boys.

Inside is the overview of our teachers' best practices. During the course of study, the faculty identified scores of techniques, but thirteen points falling under the categories of mind, body and spirit were identified as most important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brewster Ely". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'E'.

Brewster Ely, Headmaster

**“At Town School, learning is prized, love of school  
is essential, and boyhood is celebrated.”**

# mind

## **Consistency**

Boys need a safe environment with clear expectations, boundaries, consequences, and an established routine and structure. Boys need predictability of adult behavior and expectations to provide a calming and supportive learning environment.

## **Appreciation**

A boy who is genuinely appreciated feels more valued, which in turn fosters growth.

## **Connections**

Boys thrive when teachers cultivate intellectual and emotional connections in an open, safe and genuine environment.

## **Social Cues**

Boys need to develop an awareness of self in relation to others.

# body

## **Movement**

Boys need to move frequently in order to maintain focus.

## **Manipulatives**

Boys need tactile learning that enables them to process information by “doing”.

## **Transitions**

A variety of activities within a lesson support a boy’s ability to remain attentive.

## **Personal Space**

Boys need teachers who understand and manage the physicality of boys.

# spirit

## **Humor**

A sense of humor, including an understanding of a boy’s sense of fun, enhances receptivity to learning.

## **Individuality**

Boys need freedom and encouragement to express who they are as opposed to societal expectations of who they should be.

## **Sensitivity**

Boys need an environment which encourages, promotes and values expression of emotions and awareness of the emotional needs of others.

## **Competitive Spirit**

Boys need teachers who channel competition positively to inspire motivation, collaboration and good sportsmanship.

## **Structure**

Teachers need to establish appropriate and understandable limits.

## Some Thoughts from Published Experts on Boys

During the summer of 2006, Town's faculty researched published experts, including John Badalament, Howard Gardner, Daniel Goleman, Michael Gurian, Richard Hawley, Martha Kaufeldt, David Perkins, William Pollack, Ron Richart, Leonard Sax, David Sousa, Marilee Sprenger and Michael Thompson, as they examined best practices for boys. Several of these authors are paraphrased below.

Appreciate the high activity levels of boys. – *Thompson*

Boys' work space tends to be more spread out and less organized than that of girls. Provide boys with a variety of places and ways to work, including sitting on the floor, desks, bean bags, or in the hallway with a clipboard. – *Kaufeldt*

Parents and educators need to create a climate that communicates a moral code in which cruelty is neither tolerated nor ignored. – *Thompson*

Teachers need to start exploring the reasons behind boys' misconduct rather than resorting to punishment. – *Pollack*

"Modeling isn't one way of influencing people. It is the only way." – *Albert Einstein*

Teachers need to search for quality literature that captures boys' interests and imagination. – *Town School Faculty*

The brain reorganizes itself, makes new connections, creates and prunes neurons based on activity, inactivity, stress, and outside substances such as nutrition, drugs and alcohol. – *Sousa*

Exercise is the number one creator of change in the brain. – *Sousa*

Eliminating recess should be a last resort. – *Town School Faculty*

Boys develop language skills at a different tempo than girls do. – *Pollack*

Music is one of the strongest tools that all teachers have in regards to brain friendly learning, particularly for boys. Music aids memory, provides time for the brain to rest, aids in the creation of a positive learning environment, and provides cues for transition. – *Sousa*

Assessment of intelligence must be done using multiple approaches and cannot be done with paper and pencil alone. – *Gardner*

Kinesthetic learners may also learn by small actions such as coloring, doodling or fidgeting that may be unrelated to the task at hand. – *Sprenger*

We have to teach boys that there are many ways to become a man: that there are many ways to be brave, to be a good father, to be loving and strong and successful. We need to celebrate the natural creativity and risk taking of boys, their energy, their boldness. – *Thompson*

TOWN SCHOOL FOR BOYS

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