

# Taking Boys Seriously Principles

Boys as Relational Learners



## TAKING BOYS SERIOUSLY: BOYS AS RELATIONAL LEARNERS

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# Taking Boys Seriously Principles

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## RECOGNISE THE PRIMACY OF RELATIONSHIP

Recognising that boys are not a homogeneous group, the educator intentionally develops a relationship that places each boy at the centre of their learning with an emphasis on positive working alliances and high educational expectations.

## RECOGNISE THE PRIMACY OF RELATIONSHIP:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

The nature of the educator/boy relationship is a primary factor in a boy's motivation, attitudes and aspirations towards education and learning.

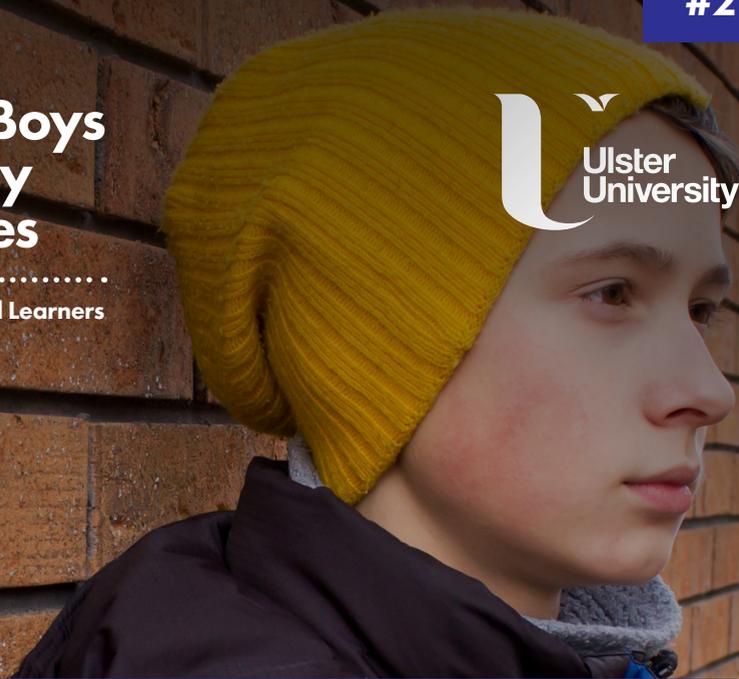
### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- A renewed sense of belonging to education.
- Increased confidence about their knowledge and learning.
- Educators showing an interest in them and their lives.
- Feeling more comfortable seeking personal and educational support.
- Perceiving learning as being essential for their future opportunities.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## DEMONSTRATE DIGNITY AND RESPECT

The educator displays an attitude of acceptance and affirmation, communicating to boys that they are inherently valuable and worthwhile as unique individuals irrespective of their academic ability. The educator avoids belittling, labelling, shaming, and stereotyping.

## DEMONSTRATE DIGNITY AND RESPECT:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys thrive, flourish, and enjoy learning more when they perceive that they are treated with dignity and respect.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Increased self-worth.
- Feeling valued in the learning environment.
- Enhanced awareness of the importance of the role of the educator in their learning journey.
- Improved relationships with educators.
- An appreciation and a feeling of mutual respect with educators.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## UTILISE A 'STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH' TO LEARNING

The educator adopts an approach that acknowledges the strengths that exist within each boy as opposed to focusing on deficits. Educators actively and intentionally tap into underdeveloped creativity, energy, and resources so that each boy can maximise their potential.

## UTILISE A 'STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH' TO LEARNING:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys consistently report feeling a disconnect from adults and decision-making processes. They also feel they are often portrayed negatively within the media and wider society. This can impact negatively on the beliefs and attitudes boys hold about themselves. Using a strengths-based approach, educators can be proactive in affirming boys and the strengths that exist within individuals, families, schools, peer groups and communities.

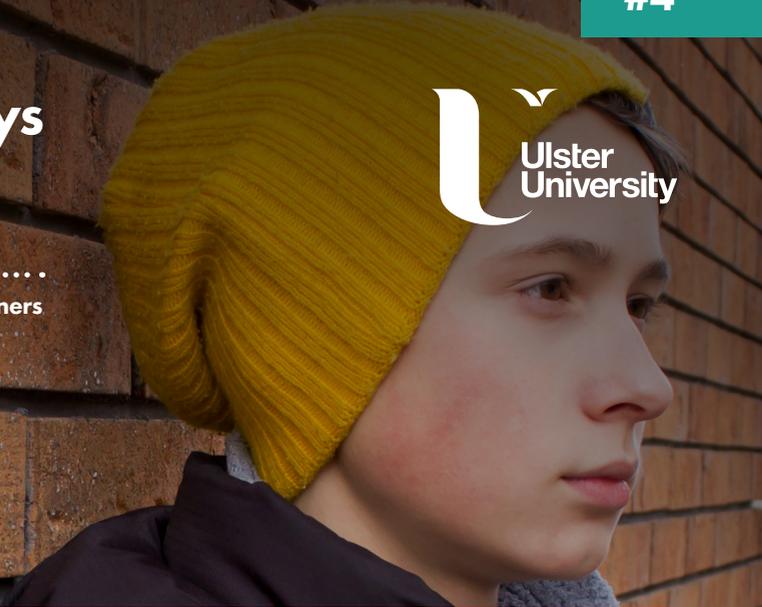
### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- An appreciation of their abilities and potential beyond academic success.
- Increased self-determination, resilience, and independence.
- Increased awareness and willingness to tap into broader support networks, including families, communities, and youth services.
- Being active as opposed to passive towards setting specific and realistic personal and educational goals.
- Increased self-efficacy and feeling more empowered and optimistic about shaping their future.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## CHALLENGE AND AFFIRM MASCULINE IDENTITIES

Educators demonstrate an appreciation of the internal and conflicting pressures that boys can experience in the construction of their masculine identities. Educators challenge narrow and potentially harmful gender stereotypes and intentionally communicate and affirm positive masculinities.

## CHALLENGE AND AFFIRM MASCULINE IDENTITIES:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys benefit a lot from a variety of opportunities to critically reflect on what it means to be male. Learning about different types and representations of men and masculinities can enable them to understand the positive and negative ways in which masculinity can impact themselves and others.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Increased awareness of historical, social, and cultural attitudes in relation to stereotypes and human behaviour.
- A deeper understanding of why boys, and men, may be reluctant to show certain feelings and emotions or actively seek support.
- Being comfortable discussing sensitive and controversial issues not typically addressed in school.
- Increased awareness of how traditional notions of men and masculinity can negatively impact societal, community and family attitudes to education and learning.
- Learning new skills and discovering alternative ways to manage conflict and better understand expressions of male violence.

### How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Educators demonstrate an awareness of the multiple and complex pressures, particularly on boys from areas of social and economic disadvantage. As boys navigate the turbulence of physical, emotional, and cognitive development that occurs during adolescence, they will benefit from being understood, good accessible pastoral care, encouragement, and support to cope better with stress and anxieties.

## PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys can be reluctant to discuss and share feelings and emotions as they can perceive this as a sign of personal weaknesses. Boys who are struggling with their mental health benefit from discussing and exploring their real-life experiences and concerns. Educators who intentionally promote and encourage positive mental and emotional health will help increase boys' well-being, mental toughness, tenacity, resilience, and confidence.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Increased understanding of factors impacting upon their mental and emotional health.
- More self-awareness regarding the source of their own stress triggers, fears, and anxieties.
- Being more knowledgeable in identifying and availing of educational support and mental health services.
- An increase in confidence, self-esteem, and self-image.
- Being more resilient and articulating emotional competency

### How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## IDENTIFY BLOCKS TO BOYS LEARNING

Educators should, as early as possible, actively identify and tackle blocks to learning. Boys often report feeling overwhelmed once they perceive that they have fallen behind their peers and believe they are unable to catch up, which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Boys respond well to tailored practical solutions that will help them to overcome barriers to their learning.

## IDENTIFY BLOCKS TO BOYS LEARNING:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Establishing stronger collaborative links between primary and post-primary schools, parents, local community groups, and informal educators can help identify blocks and resolve attitudes to boys learning. This will improve a boy's confidence, increase their active participation, and keep them more interested, motivated, and engaged in the learning environment. As a result, their motivation and engagement improve.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Greater awareness that educational support exists beyond the formal learning environment.
- Being less easily distracted and a reduction in disruptive behaviour in the learning environment.
- Connecting more with subjects and being more actively engaged in their learning.
- Improved attendance and increased self-discipline in setting and completing tasks and meeting deadlines.
- Finding learning more relevant, fun, and feeling safe and happy in school.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## CONNECT BOYS LEARNING TO CONTEXT

Educators seek to understand the complex social and economic context of each boy. Enabling boys to locate their learning within their everyday life experiences helps them value and better appreciate not only their own community backgrounds but also broadens the contextual relevance of learning and the transformative nature of education.

## CONNECT BOYS LEARNING TO CONTEXT:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys report difficulty in connecting aspects of their learning to the reality of their everyday lives. Connecting to real-life experiences helps boys deepen their understanding of themselves, their communities and beyond. Offering a contextual lens enables boys to understand how systematic inequality can impact their life chances. Understanding these broader social and economic disadvantages can help improve their desire to learn and transcend both their expectations of themselves and the life opportunities afforded to them through education.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Making clearer connections between their learning and everyday lives.
- Expressing a shift in their attitudes towards education and a belief that they can succeed.
- A stronger desire to set more concrete educational goals.
- Awareness of the limitations of certain community traditions and cultural norms.
- Relating their life experiences within a broader socio-economic context.

### How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?

# Taking Boys Seriously Principles

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#8



Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH BOYS

Boys are not a homogeneous group. They are all different. At the heart of meaningful engagement is recognition of the need to find ways for boys to reflect, think, talk, and explore issues that are important to them. This involves questioning and frequently seeking feedback, consideration of other viewpoints, and encouraging inclusion and diversity.

#8

## ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH BOYS:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Engaging meaningfully with boys is challenging. Boys need to be seen as individuals and thrive when their individuality and difference is recognised and responded to. When educators engage meaningfully with boys, there is a recognition that learning is a two-way process; boys learn from each other, educators learn from boys, and boys learn from educators. This process requires the educator to use active listening skills, to allow themselves to be vulnerable in the relationship and to strike a balance between supporting boys learning and challenging harmful thoughts, feelings and behaviours. When the educator demonstrates curiosity, being interested, knowledgeable and animated by their own subject, engagement becomes deeper.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Increased confidence in expressing and questioning their thoughts and beliefs.
- Less inclination to lose concentration or engage in disruptive behaviour.
- More evidence of depth in their learning.
- Valuing the educator as knowledgeable and inspiring.
- A deeper understanding of diverse values, beliefs, and life experiences.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

# Taking Boys Seriously Principles

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## ENABLE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Boys learn in a range of different ways. Equally, different educators have a variety of approaches to facilitating learning. Informal education methodologies have been highly successful at re-engaging boys who have completely disengaged from school-based education.

## ENABLE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Learning environments should be non-threatening, respectful, non-judgemental, supportive, free from distraction and enjoyable. Informal education methodologies include small group work, working with peers, using conversation, setting small bite-sized tasks, frequent rewards, affirming feedback, and finding the unique abilities within every boy. The combination of creativity and movement with reflection can be exciting and appealing to boys and can help lay a solid foundation for more challenging work around attitudes and behaviour. This methodology can also be a fun and valuable tool for harnessing boys' natural energy and helping them to enjoy their learning.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- Less boredom in the learning environment.
- Enjoying learning and having more fun.
- Improved relationships with peers and with educators.
- Discovering new social and life skills.
- Discovering more creative solutions to educational and life challenges.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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Educators adopting this 'Taking Boys Seriously' principle in practice should:

## VALUE THE VOICE OF BOYS

This principle recognises and intentionally promotes the right of boys to fully participate in their own educational journey. Boys learn more when they are consulted, listened to, and their thoughts, concerns and ideas are considered and valued within the learning environment.

## VALUE THE VOICE OF BOYS:

### Key research findings demonstrate:

Boys have much to contribute when their thoughts, ideas and opinions are sought in a skilful, honest, and meaningful way. When boys are encouraged and facilitated to actively contribute, they feel more affiliation to the environment and a greater sense of ownership and belonging. Boys reported appreciating educators who were more conversational, encouraged debate and discussion, and listened to, heard and acted upon their views.

### Indicators of success - Boys report:

- The educator demonstrated strong active listening skills.
- The educator treated them more like young adults than boys.
- Feeling more confident talking in front of others.
- Being respected when sharing their thoughts, concerns, and opinions.
- Feeling motivated, valued, and empowered.

**How will you intentionally use this principle in your practice?**

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### Research Sponsor

**Professor Brian Murphy**  
Dean of Academic Business Development  
Ulster University  
[ulster.ac.uk/tbs](http://ulster.ac.uk/tbs)

### Contact Details

**Susan Morgan**  
Research Lead  
[sm.morgan@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:sm.morgan@ulster.ac.uk)

School of Applied Social & Policy Sciences BC-07-107  
Ulster University  
Belfast  
York Street  
BT15 1ED

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