

Men: College Makes a Difference!

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Eighty percent of job losses in the last two years were among men prompting University of Michigan economist Mark Perry to coin the term mancession! Unemployment rates climbed to 10.5% for males and 8.0% for females between January 2006 and May 2009. Did college education make a difference?

The Journal's February of 2010 article continued, "Steady increases among women with college degrees over the past two decades apparently have paid off during the recession, with government statistics showing they fared better than men over the past year, and for the first time surpassed the number of men holding payroll jobs."

"There are very high returns to education in the marketplace right now," said Casey B. Mulligan, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago.

Construction and manufacturing jobs were decimated during the current downturn. It was reported in the Wall Street Journal forecasting survey that "about a quarter of the 8.4 million jobs eliminated since the recession began won't be coming back and will ultimately need to be replaced by other types of work in growing industries."

Many of these jobs were in the construction and manufacturing sector which usually requires less education than the growing sectors of government, education and health. Men that have been more accustomed to landing good paying jobs using their brawn instead of their brain are going to have to adapt to a new economy that is demanding higher education.

Women were earning about 166 associates degrees and 135 bachelors degrees for every 100 degrees earned by men in 2007. In the African American community it is even more pronounced with Black women earning 219 associates degrees and 192 bachelors degrees for every one earned by black men.

With the economy permanently shifting to favor people with higher education we must ask two questions, both equally important: 1) how can we encourage all students to see the value of education beyond high school, and 2) how can we spark more males to attend college without negatively impacting female attendance at college?

It Starts in Kindergarten!

First, educators already know there are learning differences between males and females. Generally, men are more physical learners and need movement, action and involvement.

In a national GEAR-UP conference presentation, representatives from The Citadel, a once all-male school who has admitted females in recent years, said that boys need more physical involvement in the learning process. They reported that it is more difficult for boys to sit for hours and listen to lectures and take notes than for the female students.

Visual and physical participation is important. Boys are particularly susceptible to boredom brought on by traditional teaching approaches. Michelle Ventimiglia, Director of a Los Angeles pre-school, says: "Our schools simply aren't made for boys. I see this every September when my students go into elementary school. My boys do great here, but when they go on to elementary school all of a sudden some of them become 'behavior problems' or 'bad kids.' How can a six year-old be 'bad?'"

"Children need physically connected activities, particularly boys. They learn best by doing. Too often teachers find it easier to simply give them worksheets instead. And now, with so much time being devoted to testing and preparing for testing, teachers' repertoires are even more limited, which is bad for children, particularly boys."

Glenn Sach reports, "Boys have fallen seriously behind girls at all K-12 levels. By high school the typical boy is a year and a half behind the typical girl in reading and writing. Girls get better grades than boys and boys are far more likely than girls to drop out of school or to be disciplined, suspended, held back, or expelled. Boys are four times as likely to receive a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder as girls, and the vast majority of learning-disabled students are boys."

Richard Whitmire (2010) argues that the basic problem is an increased emphasis on verbal skills in our society. Verbal skills are often taught in sedate ways that bore boys. "The world has gotten more verbal," he writes. "Boys haven't" The result - boys get frustrated, act out and learn to dislike school. By fifth grade, a child at the bottom of the class only reads about 60,000 words a year in and out of school, compared to a child in the middle of the class who reads about 800,000 words a year.

The challenge facing educators in the K-12 level is how to find ways to engage physically active males who struggle in a large classroom setting. How can we teach to the head, heart and hand so that all the students will stay engaged?

Where do boys get vision?

Second, is the question of vision and foresight for future planning. Do boys lack vision and foresight more than girls?

A boy's "don't sweat it" attitude could make graduating from high school and going to college an after thought. "We'll see what happens", "live for the moment", "don't worry, it'll all work out" could be thoughts that cloud a young man's vision of the future.

Suzette Murray, college student housing manager in Provo, Utah reported that women's college rooms are generally leased by June or July for the fall semester but the men traditionally put off leasing their rooms to the last week in August or the first week of school. It seems that in some cases men just don't plan as much as women.

Girls also use that sense of planning to achieve excellence in academics. "Women are more likely to graduate from college in large part because of their superior academic performance while in college," says Claudia Buchmann, a sociologist at Ohio State University. She cites a longitudinal study that found that girls did better academically than boys in both 8th grade and in high school.

The Ohio State sociologist found that "the male disadvantage in earning a college degree is largest for those that grew up in households with a low-educated or absent father."

"But the findings showed that women from families with a low-educated or absent father had the biggest increase in college enrollment and graduation."

Perhaps boys lose some of their foresight and educational vision without a father present to encourage them to get good grades and go to college. Mom telling her child to study and go to college apparently does not have the same impact on her boy as much as on her girl.

It is always difficult and dangerous to generalize but the data is clear that men are attending and graduating less from college than women. Finding ways to help young men think ahead, form future vision and set goals, including attendance at college, should be part of the education landscape today.

Actions for Educators

1) Define 'college'.

It is important that everyone know that trades and technical colleges offer great opportunities and a hands-on education. However, care needs to be taken to avoid stereotypes or imply that only men should go to trade schools and women to four-year universities. Regardless of gender, discussion in the K-12 classroom should center around the fact that many careers in this new economy can be obtained through a technical degree.

The Ogden-Weber Chamber of Commerce reports that "the number of jobs requiring a four-year degree has remained relatively constant at around 20% but the number of jobs requiring some post-secondary education has increased dramatically. Some estimates are that these jobs make up at least 60% of the workforce."

The message should be clear - education beyond high school is crucial and both boys and girls are welcome!

2) Make the college-going discussion action oriented!

Use Bloom's Taxonomy to get all students, boys and girls, to discuss, explore, decide that college is part of their future. Bloom introduced the concept of head, hand, heart (cognitive, psycho-motor, affective) learning into the classrooms in 1954. The taxonomy is still true today!

Think about a kindergarten class. Boys and girls are listening to stories at story time (cognitive), cutting, pasting, printing art projects (psycho-motor) and bringing items for sharing time (affective). Now apply that same principle to college-going discussions!

Education: Catch the Dream!, a company specializing in products that gets students to say “yes” to college, found that by developing visual, auditory and tactile products for students, parents, teachers and counselors discussions about college become more lively, more meaningful, and more decisive.

Interviewing hundreds of first-generation students (young men and young women) from around the country and putting some of their stories on DVD, Education: Catch the Dream! developed a college-commitment program that allows students to see and hear others in their situation commit to college.

The program provides “Dream Cards” and “Action Cards” that help the students physically discuss college dreams, obstacles, resources and goals. An Education Dream Catcher (traditional dream catchers with a graduation tassel used as the middle feather) is a tangible symbol given to students as a reminder of the importance of a college education.

3) Involve more people in the college-going discussion and have the discussion frequently!

Finally, college-going conversations need to take place often and through different communication channels. The message has to be clear and communicated in fun and different ways. Parents, teachers and counselors must continually be sending the college-going message. There are resources that can help.

GEAR-UP and TRiO, Avid, PIRC - all programs designed to get students and parents to talk, plan and take action for a college-going experience. These programs are equal opportunity programs - young men can increase their vision and tools to plan for college.

Education: Catch the Dream! found parents who are predominantly Spanish speakers, need encouragement to talk about college. La Plática De Prosperidad (The Prosperity Conversation), is one response and is a Spanish-speaking DVD narrated by a Latino father with other Latino parents discussing how they are encouraging their sons and daughters to go to college.

Additionally, there are fun and quick 'clips' on the KnowHow2Go website <http://knowhow2go.org/> encouraging students to take tougher classes so the doors to college

open up. Education: Catch the Dream! has developed a “series of collegemercials” that provide a counselor or teacher action-oriented opportunities to have a college conversation. “The Crash” for example, is a fun hard hitting demolition derby metaphor, especially engaging for boys, that invites the students to avoid the economic crashes of not having a college education.

The resources are there - now it's time to get creative! And be creative often, over and over sending a message of 'yes' to college!

Club Heights Elementary in Ogden, Utah has different colleges 'sponsor' their classrooms. Banners representing colleges from around the country adorn the entry way of each room. Information about each college, including the fight songs and cheers, are shared in the classroom and school assemblies. This author arrived one day just as the buses were leaving and his college Alma Mater's fight song was ringing from the animated 1st grade students on the bus!

In addition to learning college school fight songs, the 6th graders and their parents are invited to an “Education: Catch the Dream!” open house where parent and child discuss dreams, obstacles and resources together. They set action steps and leave with a tangible symbol of their commitment to go to college.

They discuss two-year and four-year options without stereotyping. Groups are divided for English and Spanish speaking parents so that open dialog could occur in native languages. Fathers or male role models are invited to be involved if possible. The message: Higher education is for **everyone**, including boys.

College is not a zero-sum game. The mancession is solved by getting more boys to college, not by reducing the number of girls in higher education. Does it matter if boys are struggling in schools? Of course it does: our future depends on making the best use of human capital, whether it belongs to girls or boys. Whatever it is called, the United States must change paradigms to increase the number of students attending education beyond high school. Period.

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www.educationcatchthedream.com

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