

Foreword

For many years now there has been persistent concern that, in nearly all Western countries, boys are faltering in school. On average, girls outshine boys by almost every metric of achievement and school connectedness. The relative success of girls in nearly all realms of formal education, is still a work in progress and with many barriers still to be overcome, is one of the most profound social revolutions of our era. But a concern remains that too many boys are leaving our schools ill-prepared to enter full participation in the modern economy and to do their part in creating a just and equitable world. Why this is so and what can be done about it are questions not easily answered, and the debate is often intemperate and misplaced. But surely all of us aspire to a world where all young people—boys and girls—can optimize their learning and potential, and reap the full benefit of schooling. This newly updated and expanded book by Abigail Norfleet James, a leading world expert on gendered education, helps us to reach that goal.

The first edition of *Teaching the Male Brain: How Boys Think, Feel, and Learn in School* came out in 2007, the product of many years of harvesting the research literature on gendered education and reflection on a long, varied teaching career. Since its publication, Abigail Norfleet James has had occasion to test, refine, and build upon this important and well-respected work. She has visited 13 countries, 21 states, and hundreds of schools around the world, doing workshops and consultations and speaking to thousands of educators. She has written a companion volume, *Teaching the Female Brain*, and a book on parenting boys. It's hard to think of another expert in the field of boys' education as passionately committed to the well-being of children and to boys' success in the classroom.

For this new edition of *Teaching the Male Brain*, Abigail Norfleet James considerably updates the research since 2007, revisits and tweaks her main arguments, adds new thoughts and direction for pedagogy, and includes a significant chapter on teaching boys in co-educational settings. She is again that very rare educational expert: a scholar steeped in the research literature and a committed and gifted classroom teacher. And this new version of *Teaching the Male Brain* is again a masterful work, combining

research from many disciplines, especially the most recent neuroscience, with advice for teaching honed during a lifetime of working with boys in schools. It is this ability to bring research and practice together—to make possible a dialogue between them—that marks off her approach from that of many other writers. She is careful and sure-footed in canvassing the research on the physical, sensory, socioemotional, and cognitive differences between girls and boys—or more accurately between the female brain and the male brain—and mines the significance of these differences for appropriate pedagogical response. She applies wise and considered judgment, following up on the implications of research that seems compelling and productive for the practice of teaching boys. Always critical of stereotypes or simplifications, she paints a nuanced picture of the interplay of “nature” and “nurture.” The proof, as they say, is in the pudding: The bulk of the book provides teachers with a plethora of strategies, lessons, and resources for teaching boys. Throughout the book, she engages in a high-level professional discussion with teachers, and there is a spirit of respect for how teachers think and go about the business of developing curriculum and honing their pedagogical craft.

Not surprisingly, much of this warranting of good practice is drawn from the author’s own experience in boys’ schools and from some of the remarkable teaching she has witnessed, and fostered, in boys’ schools around the world. The author is appreciative of the special expertise that can flourish in boys’ schools, and of the ways in which single-gender education, with intentional teaching and school leadership, can be transformational for boys as well as girls. Anyone who has observed brilliant teaching in boys’ schools or the powerful ways in which these schools can connect boys to learning will know what this means. At the same time, if honest with themselves, those in co-ed schools would admit that they struggle with the performance of many boys in their classrooms and that they need a more positive, sensitive, and comprehensive way to reach them and help them succeed. The truth is that co-ed schools can and should benefit from the knowledge of expert teachers of boys—and from exactly the expertise and advice on offer in *Teaching the Male Brain*.

All teachers who care about the well-being and success of boys, along with all educators interested in building bridges between research and practice in gendered education, will find *Teaching the Male Brain* a stimulating, insightful, and hugely important resource.

—Bradley Adams

*Former Executive Director of the
International Boys’ Schools Coalition
Toronto, Canada*