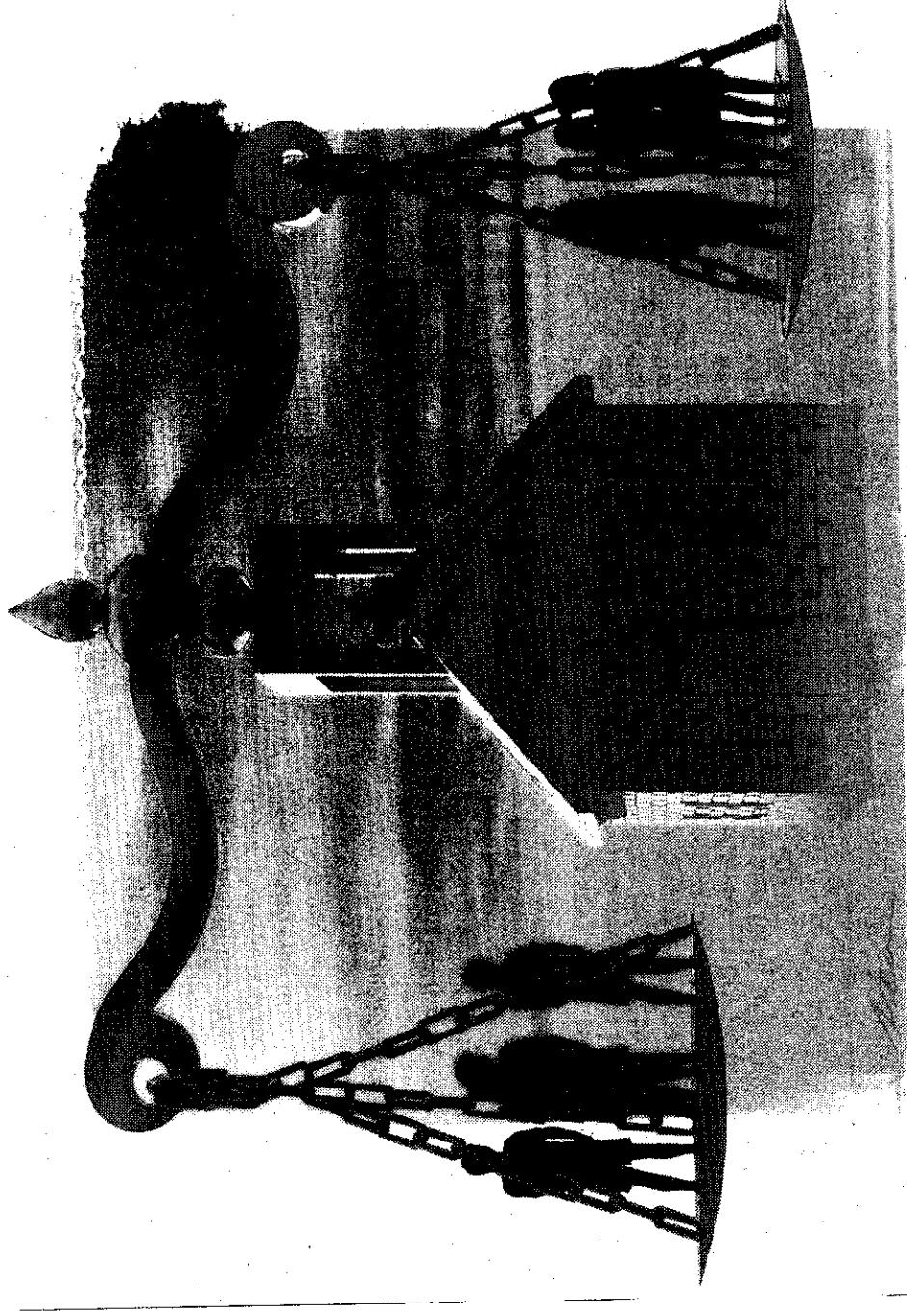


Conversation

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A balanced education



RICK NEASE / McClatchy-Tribune

Must we medicate and segregate simply to educate our boys?

Recent reports have raised some alarming facts about boys in America.

They are approximately three times as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder) as girls. They are diagnosed with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders at a rate nearly twice that of girls. And they are twice as likely as girls to be suspended from school and three times as likely to be expelled.

Behavior-calming medications and same-sex classrooms are Band-Aids on these problems. Instead, our society needs to rethink how we approach classroom



Sally Butzin

My View

instruction for both boys and girls. What's needed is a modern mix of old-school methods with new-school technologies and techniques.

Back in the day, over-active and distracted kids were labeled "immature," not disordered. Or better yet, we just called them "children going through a natural process called childhood." Nobody expected little children (especially little boys) to sit quietly at a desk for hours at a time pushing a pencil around. Kindergarten literally meant "children's garden," where kids could play and explore in a safe and nurturing place. As they moved along in the elementary grades, there was something called recess and free time to break up the academic lessons. Singing and movement were part of the daily routine, with

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IN LEON COUNTY

■ The Imagine School at Evening Rose will be a Project CHILD school. To learn more, call 877-5187 or go to <http://imagineschoolsleon.com>.

finger paints and modeling clay thrown in along with the three R's.

But something has happened in the last few decades to transform the sanctity of childhood. Our fast-paced society and modern schooling

practices have created what child psychologist David Elkind called "The Hurried Child" in his 1981 book. During the 1990s, the pressure to perform well on tests began accelerating downward from high school to include younger and younger children. And the 2000s have ratcheted up the pressure even more with the infamous No Child Left Behind Act, sometimes jokingly referred to as Normal Childhood Left Behind.

Long lists of skills to be mastered and benchmarks to be met have eliminated time to play and explore. Recess and field trips have gone missing. It's not uncommon for first-graders to have hours of homework and long lists of spelling words to memorize.

And when children

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don't respond well to this pressure and inappropriate classroom instruction, one remedy has been to diagnose them as disordered and prescribe powerful drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall. It is estimated that 80 percent of the 2 million American children diagnosed as having ADHD are taking stimulant drugs, and the number is growing.

Another recent response has been to separate boys from girls by creating same-sex classrooms. However, a recent report, "Where the girls are: The facts about gender equity in education" (American Association of University Women), debunks the myth that boys are falling even further behind the girls in school. The report states that the achievement gap "is not specific to boys; rather it is a crisis for African-American, Hispanic, and

low-income children."

So what can be done to assure that children of the 21st century receive the rigorous education needed to compete in the global economy without jeopardizing their health and well-being? The answer lies in returning to sound educational practices from the past

(allowing children to move around and have fun) while employing modern technology and brain-based research. Boys (and girls) need to move!

Our organization has been working with elementary schools for the past 15 years through an approach called Project CHILD (Changing How Instruction for Learning is Delivered) to demonstrate that schools can have child-friendly classrooms without sacrificing rigorous academic standards. Project CHILD students in grades K-5 move about the classroom working at a variety of learning stations that include computers, games and creative projects. Our research shows that

CHILD students have higher test scores than their peers in traditional classrooms. And we have countless stories from parents of struggling little boys who have begun to thrive in school after having taken them off the drugs and getting them into developmentally appropriate CHILD classrooms.

A growing network of tuition-free, open-enrollment public charter schools now offers parents a choice for Project CHILD if their regular elementary school does not have this option. Project CHILD schools will be opening for the 2008 school year throughout Florida, in Leon County as well as Broward, Manatee, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas and St. Lucie counties.

Additional charters are opening in 2009. Soon, more boys and girls can experience success in joyful classrooms that celebrate and honor the special nature of childhood. For enrollment information, go to www.ifschools.org or www.imagineschools.com.