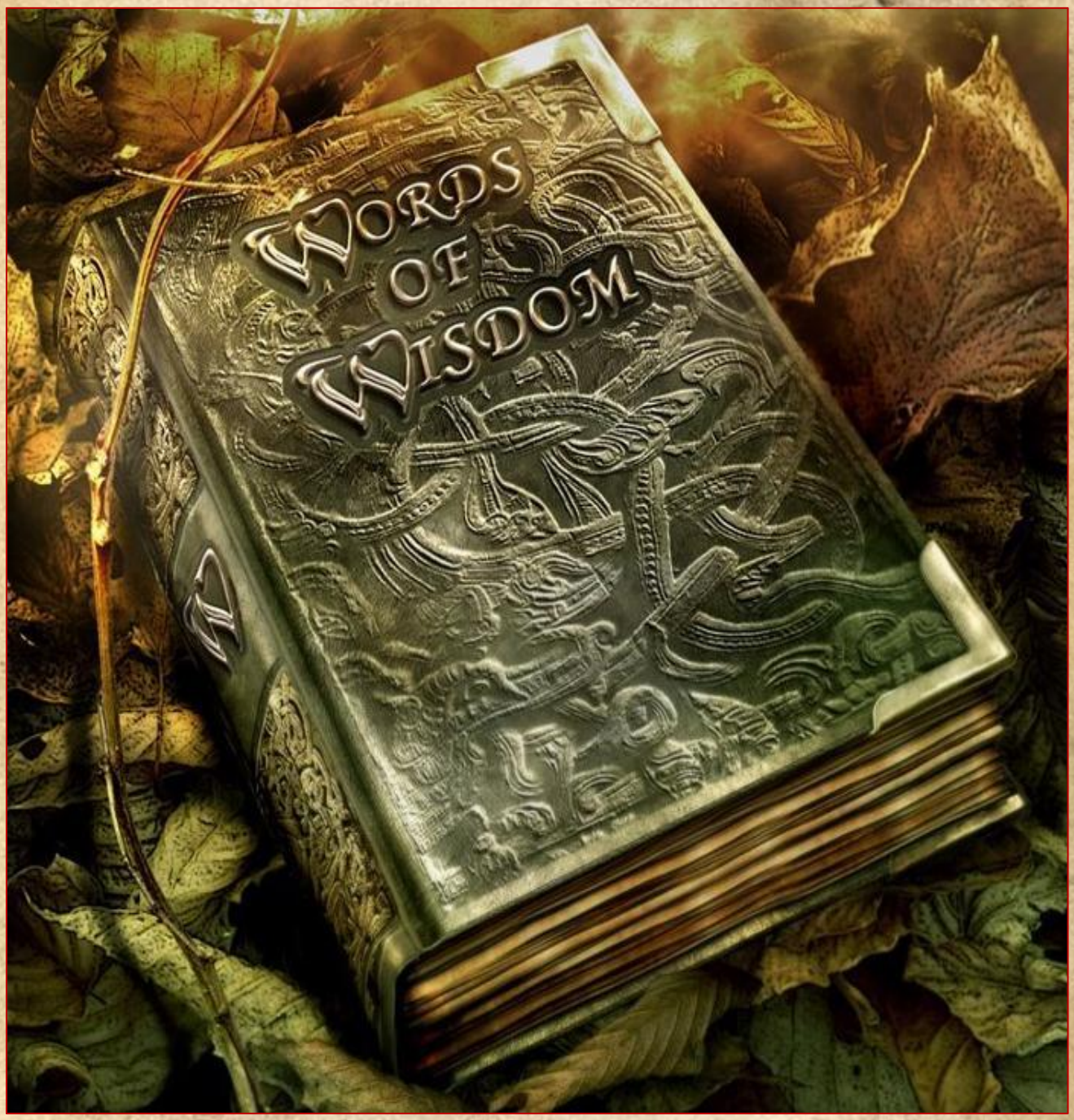

How Gender Impacts Learning

With Laura Brown

Part of the Life Skills For Kids Program

By Margaret Ashley

Empowerment Education
The Natural Learning Centre
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Empowerment Education

Teaching Kids Life Skills Ensuring Success In School & Out

Produced By
Margaret Ashley

How To Teach Kids Skills We Were Never Taught… But Should Have Been!

Empowering Adults To Empower The Next Generation.

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The Natural Learning Centre
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- Innovators
- Strong Communicators
- Collaborators
- Win/Win Negotiators
- Confident
- Globally Aware
- Critically Engaged
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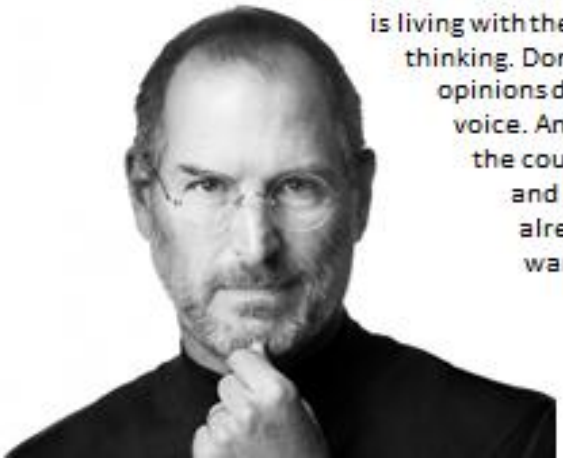


"Your time is limited; so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."

- Steve Jobs
(Stanford University Commencement 2005)

Message From Margaret

Children are gifts we are entrusted for a time to care for, nurture and provide for on all levels. It is a responsibility that most of us have never been trained to do. To ensure a child receives the best "education" we can is one of the most time intensive and expensive processes we encounter in raising our children.

Every child is a unique BEING unto themselves, with an inner genius waiting to be discovered. Each child has unique strengths, talents, skills, interests, understandings, passions, creativity and learning preferences that make it virtually impossible to design a system that meets every child's needs.

Our society is undergoing a shift in terms of their beliefs and consciousness. Families are choosing to redefine their world and that of their children in a new way, a way that works for the child, the family as a whole and incorporates the core values, beliefs, interests, culture and dynamics of the family unit. These families are choosing to enhance what is available to them through conventional methods and take responsibility for augmenting the areas they feel are not addressed but essential to a child's overall development.

How individuals view the education process is also being redefined and expanded to encompass the child as a whole, their body, mind and spirit. While our school system does the best it can to provide a basic foundation of learning, the world is evolving at such a pace that teachers and schools are hard pressed to meet the needs of each student.

As a parent, I recognized this long before my daughter was old enough to be enrolled in the school system. The challenge was I had no idea how to address what I felt was lacking. I couldn't even put into words what that was. I just knew that in the end I wanted her to be able to life a happy, inspired life of purpose.

Thirteen years ago, I was just your average parent who had been conditioned to think "school" was how you got an "education". Yet each time I thought of putting my daughter into the accepted system, something in me questioned whether I was doing what was right for her.

I just knew I wanted so much more for her than the usual "education"… I wanted her to have opportunities, skill sets and resources that schools couldn't provide due to budgets, time, and other restrictions. So I started exploring options, asking questions, seeking resources and techniques that I felt would work for my child.

I have found that many educators and parents are searching for the same thing I was. They want to keep up with the latest strategies and scientific advances so they can help the children they are entrusted with to learn in ways that work for them while empowering and preparing those children to lead productive and inspired lives, pursuing their dreams.

They are hindered by two key factors, time to do the research about what's new out there and budget restrictions.

As a single parent and having been chair of numerous organizations with limited resources and professional development budgets, I understand all too well these hindering factors.

It is my intention with the Natural Learning Centre to offer the latest in information, scientific research, tools and strategies FREE to those who wish to empower children for success.

This is only possible through the creation of a collaborative and transformational community of caring individuals, educators, experts, corporations and communities working together. A community dedicated to providing children with the Life Skills that will enable them to become happy, successful, empowered heroes in their own lives today and unify them as life-long caring stewards of their communities. These will be the individuals who inspire others tomorrow.

It's a crazy big dream. A dream we are passionate about making a reality. It is my hope you will join us in our mission to empower children worldwide.

We invite you to partner with us to empower the children within your circle of influence.

To find out how to bring the FREE Life Skills program to your schools, community groups and corporations please go to our website at www.theNaturalLearningCentre.com

The Natural Learning Centre

Founded in 2005, the Natural Learning Centre, is a non-profit corporation created to empower individuals within communities of the world to invest in future generations. Our programs serve the children of the world. Our international coalition of caring volunteers and experts provide vision, inspiration, the finest resources and specific strategies needed to empower our heroes of tomorrow.

Our Mission

The Natural Learning Centre's mission is to empower children with life skills that will enable them to become happy, successful, empowered heroes in their own lives today and unify them as life-long caring stewards of their communities tomorrow.

To this end, the Centre partners with experts to provide connection, exceptional resources, products and services designed to empower all.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to create a transformational community that is passionate about empowering children. This community shares awareness of ideas, information and tools designed to help guide students to discover their life purpose, and become the successful, self-confident, inspired, creative and fulfilled individuals they were meant to be.

Our Goals & Objectives:

1.) Give FREE program access to 1,000,000 children and adults;

2.) Build a global transformational community piece by piece and link by link;

3.) Partner with companies and communities worldwide;

4.) Empower every individual to make a difference with the children in their worlds.

Resources & Services

The following are prerequisites for all resources and services offered through the Centre:

1. Information offered is current and aligned with our overall purpose and mission;
2. Empowers educators, parents, community leaders and students with relevant life skills;
3. Material is easy to use, understand, enjoyable and experiential;
4. All learning styles are honored;
5. Provides access to the latest information and scientific research that will aid empowerment & effective learning with ease for success in school and out.

What People Are Saying...

This was an amazing interview. I love Bryan's energy! As a retired elementary educator, I would like to be able to use this to help kids in an after school program. Again, thank you!

- Linda T. Kuzyk

Dr. Weissman is able to communicate a knowledge of Life and Love in ways that we can all identify with. Our children come to us with the "knowing" already there. Raising them up in the environment of The LifeLine Technique can only be the foundation to a life of their dreams. Right on. Dr. D! Give us more! - Mary Marin

I listened to your interview last night. You are a WONDERFUL voice - your points too seldom shared - and uniquely nourishing for outside the box Life Skills activists like me. Still have me smiling this am. What a great gift! So happy you persevered and found your calling to inspire others. Grateful for your Presence this day! – Marlaine Cover

What a great interview and tools I learned today.

Thank you

- Anela Seed

So interesting to know about this technique. Hope will have the opportunity to learn, apply it and benefit children with it.

– Lucia C. Puga Flores

I have just read Anat Baniel's book Kid's Beyond Limits. It is truly inspirational and is helping me with my work as an educational psychologist and parent coach. Thank you so much for this and the message of the power of movement. It would be great for this message to be more out there in schools! - Linda Mallory

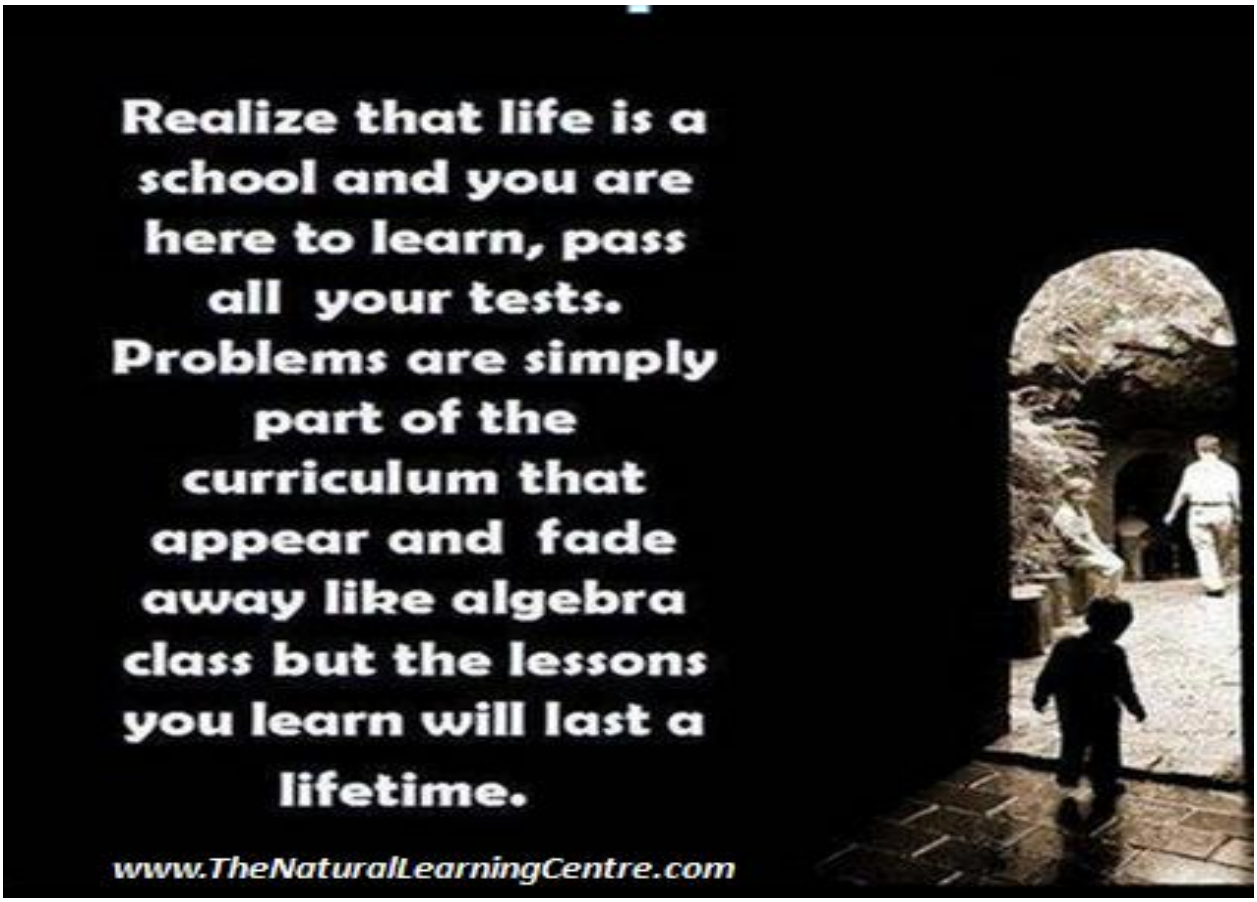
What People Are Saying...

REALLY enjoyed this interview! Wanted it to last another hour or more! Thanks so much, Dean, for sharing with us! I know it was just a smidgen of what you could have shared! Looking forward to talking more and learning more! Love the 'non-judgmental' approach to relationships! What freedom! Thank you so much!

- Lori Westfall Uphoff

I love Wendy Hart. She is kind and patient and is teaching me to be more kind and patient with myself. Thank you for having her Margaret.

- Jen Steele



How Gender Impacts Learning

With Laura Brown

Margaret: I'm honored to have Laura Brown joining us today. Laura is the creator is Lotus Life Work, which provides cutting edge neuroscience-based interactive programs and products regarding gender-based learning. She guides individuals in understanding the differences between how boys and girls learn, interact, communicate, filter information, and process the world around them.

Imagine how knowing that could help you care for and teach children more effectively in supporting their development and education. What I'm most excited about that we're going to talk to Laura on is the major differences between boys and girls in terms of brain development based on their gender and how that impacts their learning, communication, and perception of the world and themselves in it.

Laura, welcome to our interview.

Laura: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to talk about this topic.

Margaret: Laura, to give us a bit of background, what led you to focus your work on gender differences and was there a pivotal point of transformation for you that led you down this life path?

Laura: Yes, there definitely was a pivotal point. I come from the corporate world, and I was very successful in my career while I watched some of my female peers stumble and fall and not move up the ladder as fast as I did. I was always happy to help others and give advice, but I was never really able to explain to them why I knew what I knew about being successful working with men.

Over time, I became a consultant. I went off on my own and started a few companies. A few years ago, I happened to be watching a talk show, and there was a woman on the show talking about her book called *The Female Brain*, and she was explaining these gender differences. She was applying most of them to personal relationships, romantic relationships, and that was the focus of the talk show.

But in my head, I immediately started to translate what she was sharing, about how our brains are wired, and the differences that impact us in business. So, I started my company focused on helping people in corporate America understand these differences so that they could be more successful in their careers and that companies could be more successful in building their culture with an understanding of gender differences.

Over time, people started asking me, "Well, how does that apply to kids?" Of course, if you study the neuroscience to talk about adults, you have to start by studying the neuroscience as it relates to children.

So, I did have that information in my arsenal. I just wasn't teaching it, and that's what I started to do in the past six months is also expand my practice into including this area of child development because if we can teach kids this at a young age and parents and educators understand these differences, then the children are growing up with a completely different set of role models and they're being treated in a way that's much more effective for their own learning and development.

Margaret: Now, the neuroscience of gender differences points out some pretty amazing things that the majority of us aren't aware that heavily influence how boys and girls perceive the world around them and communicate and learn. What are the three main things that you think educators and parents should know about gender neuroscience that impact how children develop, play, and interact?

Laura: If I had to pick three, I would start with the fact that our brains are wired completely differently from the moment of conception and that's caused by a testosterone flood in a boy's brain while they're growing in the womb. These differences start at that age, and so they really are wired into us before we're even born.

Understanding that this is not something that your children are choosing to be – boys being different than girls, that it's just the way they are. So, it's not a matter of which is better. They're just different.

What I teach is not to get people to favor a boy over a girl or be, in some way, easier on a girl than they would be on a boy. It's just to understand how we're wired differently.

The second thing would be that the major difference in our wiring has to do with communication skills. Coming from a place of understanding that your children – if you do have boys and girls, are going to have a different level of communication skills as well as a different desire to communicate with you. Accepting that from the get go will help you to not get so frustrated with your children and how they respond to you.

Lastly, the third major difference I would say would be how girls are wired to be very relationship conscious, to be very focused on the relationships they build, their social circles, and having those be in harmony and avoiding conflict or eliminating or negating as much conflict as possible. That's how girls are wired. That's what drives a lot of their actions, whereas boys' actions are driven by a hierarchical structure and their desire to be at the top of that hierarchical structure.

Margaret: Okay.

So, the difference in the brain's chemical make-up that you mentioned varies between boys and girls, and that causes us to have different characteristics. Could you outline briefly what some of those characteristics would be in young children, and do those change at all as they grow into teenagers and adults?

Laura: Well, as I mentioned, one of the key ones is little girls have this desire to tend and befriend, to be very social, and build relationships. Boys just don't have that same kind of need. Obviously, they want to have friends, but their actions are not driven by a need to have friends.

So, that's a real key difference for kids. Then as they grow up, the differences becomes more and more important to recognize. A good example is people say girls aren't good at math. Many, many studies have been done on this topic, and we now know that girls are every bit as good at math as boys are. They have a different way in their brain of processing mathematical problems, but they absolutely can do math just as well as the boys.

The reason that a lot of girls start to shy away from math or science or engineering type jobs as they get older is because those jobs tend to be solitary. So, you can imagine if a girl is wired to be prioritizing relationships and to want to be social in a very big way, then she isn't going to be attracted to a job necessarily that includes a solitary function.

Margaret: Right.

Laura: Understanding the differences – they play out throughout our lives, and they influence all the decisions that we make.

Margaret: Right.

Besides the relationship/social aspect, are there strengths for girls and what would that be?

Laura: Absolutely. Communication skills and interest is a big difference in boys and girls. Girls are really good at reading tonal and facial cues in other people. They're very good at being empathetic and being able to put themselves in other people's shoes and understand how other people are feeling.

Throughout your life, you can imagine where those skills would come in handy in your personal relationships, business relationships, really having this ability to get in touch with what's going on with other people helps you relate to them. It helps you make decisions. It helps you support people. It helps you – if you're in business, it helps you be

a leader, helps you manage people. That's one of the key ways that girls have kind of a leg up on guys who won't pick up on the facial cues and the tonal cues because of the way their brain is wired. It's just not wired in a way that they can receive that kind of subtle communication.

Margaret: So, sticking with girls, if those are their strengths, what would be classified as their weaknesses according to their gender?

Laura: I don't like to call things weaknesses, but if we're going to go down that path, I would say that girls tend to shy away from competitive things as it relates to interaction. Of course, girls can be very competitive if they're playing on a sports team, if they're in a debate or something formalized, but in their everyday interaction, because they're driven by wanting to have harmony and negate conflict, they're not going to be driven by a really large competitive drive like men are.

They're not looking for the win for themselves as often as they're looking for a win for everybody involved. In certain situations in life, that can be a detriment as in business. That doesn't really help them get ahead.

Margaret: Are there certain things that girls are more susceptible to than boys that parents and educators should be aware of?

Laura: I'm not sure I understand when you say, "Susceptible."

Margaret: If they internalize and communicate and read faces and tones and understand feelings better, than they would probably react a lot different to that and maybe internalize some people's reactions. So I'm wondering if girls are more susceptible to internalizing how someone reacts to them as a rejection or depression or anything like that.

Laura: Yes, absolutely. That's a great point.

Because girls start from an infant in looking at the world around them to determine their place in the world and they do that by judging the reactions they get from usually its adults, but from all the people around them. If they do something as a baby and the reaction they get is very positive and laughing and happy and cuddling, then they've learned, "If I keep doing this behavior, I'll keep getting this positive reaction."

If they do something or don't do something and they don't get a positive reaction, that concerns them and they will adjust their behavior. Infant girls are very good at this adjusting their behavior to get the positive reactions they're looking for.

From the time they're little girls, toddlers, early grade school, they can tell the difference between when somebody is not paying attention to them, but saying that

they're paying attention. Basically, what we call divided attention. If you're sitting at the dinner table with your daughter and she's talking and you say you're paying attention, but you're looking at the newspaper or your mind is on something else, they'll be able to pick up that you really aren't paying attention, and that will influence their self-esteem.

They use these outside influences to determine how they feel about themselves.

Margaret: Let's switch to boys. Based on brain chemical composition, what would be considered a strength for boys in terms of communication and how they view the world?

Laura: Boys view the world very much in a what's in it for me kind of attitude. I don't mean that in a negative bad way, but they're very much about how do I get to the top of the hierarchy, as I said? For young boys, that's usually about playing sports. Studies have shown that the majority of the time that boys are in play it is competitive play. It's very rare that boys engage in cooperative play because cooperation doesn't give them any feedback on where they stand in the hierarchy.

They're very good once they grow up into men and translate that into business because the business world was created by men, so it's basically just a grownup game. It's all about where you stand on the hierarchy, so they're very, very good at this. They're good at determining where they stand, determining who can help them get ahead, and then using the people around them as resources to achieve their goals.

They're very clear on goal attainment and doing what it takes to achieve the goals.

Margaret: What would they shy away from, then?

Laura: They shy away from emotional interaction in business. As little boys, they'll even shy away from showing emotion. It makes them uncomfortable. There's actually some interesting science that says that when boys smell tears, and it's a very subtle, obviously, we don't smell tears, but it's a very subtle – almost on an unconscious level.

When boys smell tears, their testosterone level drops. So, when other people cry, their testosterone level drops, and just the fact that it drops makes them uncomfortable. They would rather not be involved in emotional interactions.

Margaret: We talked about what girls are susceptible to in interpreting reactions around them. What are boys susceptible to in interpreting reactions around them?

Laura: Well, because boys don't have the same ability to read facial and tonal cues and that coupled with another situation that's a difference in boys linear thinking, means they really pay attention to only one thing at a time. That's how their brain works.

They're susceptible to getting into conflict with their parents, generally, it's with their mother when a parent is calling to a boy from another room, or possibly even in the same room, but the boy is engaged in a video game or watching a movie or playing with his friends, whatever it is. If he's engaged in an activity and you're calling at him and he can't see you, you're behind him or across the room, as I said. Then, he may not even hear you because his brain is fully engaged in what he's doing.

You can imagine a situation where a mom is calling out for the kid to clean up his toys or to get ready for bed or to go brush his teeth, and he's not hearing that. So, she calls out a few times. By the third or fourth time, she's very agitated because she feels like she's being ignored, like the boy is being belligerent or just doesn't care about what she wants.

She gets to a point of agitation, and then she finally approaches the boy, gets his attention and is screaming at him for not listening to her direction, and he's standing there in confusion not understanding what she's talking about or why she's so angry.

This can lead to young boys feeling like they can't predict their parents' behavior and that at any time they could get in trouble for something not even knowing what they did wrong. They'll look – yes?

Margaret: You're saying that a boy has to be able to see you to interpret your tone of voice and what's going on?

Laura: They may not ever be good at interpreting your tone of voice, but they definitely need to have you give you their undivided attention, really. It's just better to know this so that if you do want your child to do something, that you have to really speak to their face and get them to say, "I understand you. I'm going to go do this."

Because if you try to talk to them from the other room, there's a good chance they are not even going to hear you, and even if they hear you, it's just kind of like white noise in the background. Absolutely, it's better to really engage with your kids.

If you're going to scream from the other room, then scream their name and say, "Do you hear me?" and wait till they respond and say, "Yes, what do you want?" so they're at least giving you their attention even if you're not standing right in front of them, it will eliminate or negate a lot of conflict and a lot of confusion because the boys get very confused. They don't understand why they're being yelled at.

Margaret: What can we as parents and educators do to help each group gain skills in the areas that they shy away from?

Laura: Well, the thing about kids is that they're only going to really learn things that they're interested in and that they're ready to learn. The readiness – you know this. The readiness piece is different for all kids. You can't just slap a set of requirements on a 6-year-old and say, "But your six, you should know this." Some 6-year-olds will be ready when they're 4, and some won't be ready till they're 8.

But it's really important that they have an interest, so if you try to get a little boy to be interested in collaborative play and he's just not because he likes to compete, there's really nothing you can do to get him to embrace collaborative skills. They have to really want to do it.

As we know as adults, there are plenty of people who go out of their way to strengthen the areas of their skillsets that they are not really successful at, but for children, they really have to have an interest. The best thing you can do is to understand how their brain works so that you can operate within those parameters and so that you can have and build good communication with your child, and then you just have to support what they're interested in.

Margaret: Right.

Laura: That's just the challenge we have as far as skillsets. The thing about – for instance, the math thing. If your teenage girl decides that she doesn't like doing math because she has to sit alone at her desk and she can't study math with her friends, you can't really study math. You have to just learn it.

Then you can explain to her how it's important that she be good at math or you can figure out a way for her to do math with her friends, because that's what's going to make her interested. She wants to be social. She wants to be around her friends, and she can study social studies with her friends. She can talk about some book they need to learn for English class with her friends, so you have to create opportunities that fall under the umbrella of what they're already interested in.

Margaret: You talked about gender readiness, and there are certain ages that kids go into school and they're expected to master certain skills at a certain time kind of thing. What specific learning areas should we be aware of are impacted by gender readiness and that each gender may or may not be ready for at a specific time?

Laura: Well, the biggest one I would say would be really just entering school to begin with, if your kids are in a formal education program as opposed to home schooling or unschooling. If they're going to school, to be really careful and aware of your kids' abilities when they're going into kindergarten because girls' brains do develop faster, and as we've talked about, have a much better ability in the communication skills arena, so they're going to be ready for school, in general, earlier than your boys.

In addition to that, because boys are not focused on relationship building and social graces. They're not really interested in that at all. Their social interaction skills will tend to be behind girls because they're just not paying attention to that.

Another thing we didn't talk about, but is important is that in boys' brains, the aggression area of their brain is larger, which doesn't mean that boys are going to be overly aggressive for no reason, but it does mean that they will get triggered a lot faster than girls, which is why boys tend to get in little fights and scuffles more often than girls because they're quicker to trigger.

Girls are avoiding conflict. Girls will do anything to mitigate conflict, but boys will jump on a conflict because that's how their brain works. It's a part of their very young fight or flight response, and so they have a quick trigger.

If you've got young boys who don't have wonderful communication skills who are not socially adept who have a quick trigger finger when it comes to aggression, they might not be ready for school.

Margaret: Right. Would gender readiness also affect things like reading or writing or mechanical dexterity or anything like that or is it just a matter of them being able to interpret their environment?

Laura: Well, when it comes to readiness, I don't – based on all of the research I've done and everything that I've been exposed to, I really don't believe that outside of really entering school that there's a big issue in gender readiness as much as it is just your child's individual readiness to learn new skills.

Boys will inherently be better than girls with sports involving balls and moving objects because their eye-hand coordination tends to be a little better. It doesn't mean that girls couldn't have just as good eye-hand coordination. It just means that girls need to work a little harder to have that kind of ability at the level that boys naturally have it.

So, we all have the capability to be good at all these things. It's just what we're inherently born with versus what we have to work a little harder to achieve. Again, I've seen little boys at the age of 2 be able to do just about any sport involving a ball that you can imagine, and they can hit it with perfect accuracy. They can engage in a game, and then I've seen boys at the age of 6 or 8 who couldn't hit a ball if their life depended on it. It's really individual child readiness for skillset.

Margaret: Okay. With the fact that we put our kids into schools at a very specific age and that's pretty much government regulated and all that good stuff, unless you choose an alternative education type of delivery, that kind of sometimes leads to learning labels being attached to children because they can't accomplish their skills. They're just not

ready to do that. What would you say to those labels being attached to those children just because they're not capable at that point in time to read or write or whatever that looks like?

Laura: Well, labels in general are debilitating. Attaching a label to a child, even if it's a positive label, in some instances, is not going to facilitate their learning in any positive or effective manner. I know you're talking about the labels like retarded is one that people use or…

Margaret: ADD, ADHD, special needs, all those types of things.

Laura: They've even done studies with groups of kindergartners in the United States where they divided the class in half, and they told half the class that they were the smart kids, and they told the other half of the class that they were the slow kids. Then they taught the kids, and then they tested them. Of course, the kids they told were smart all got good grades, and the kids they told were slow all got worse grades.

It wasn't even a matter of whether or not the kids had any abilities to be labeled. They just labeled them as an experiment. Labeling does not really effectively accomplish anything. It's really about just addressing what the children are capable of and then helping them grow from wherever they start.

The real key here is not really about the labeling. It's about parents and educators understanding that kids will learn at different rates, and you can't place a label because a child who can't read at the age of six or seven may pick up a book at the age of nine and be able to read effortlessly.

They're not learning disabled. They just are not ready at that particular moment to learn that particular skill. It doesn't mean they're not capable of it. Educators and parents really need to stop with the labeling and deal with where the child is and again, be focused on what the child is interested in because if a child isn't interested in reading, you can hammer that into their head all you want, and they still won't learn to read because they have no interest.

Margaret: Right. I couldn't agree with you more.

Let's go back to communication differences. You were talking about how with little boys, you had to have their full on concentration in order for them not to be confused about you calling them and they didn't hear you.

Are boys only geared to one topic and are girls different from that?

Laura: Well, it isn't that they're only geared to one topic. It's that they are linear thinkers versus girls who have multi-linear thinking. It gets into the actual differences in the communication centers of the brain and how the brain – the left side and the right side communicate to each other and it's a whole complicated thing that I talk about in the process, but that's basically the nuts and bolts is multi-linear versus linear.

The easiest way to explain that to people would be girls are spaghetti and guys are waffles. So, if you think of a bowl of spaghetti and all those noodles all mixed up together and touching each other and intertwined.

That's how women's brains work. That's how girls' brains work. We're able to jump from topic to topic. We're able to make connections between something someone just said and something that we were thinking about earlier in the day or that we are reminded to tell them about next week. We can make all these different connections because of the way our brain is wired.

Boys' brains are more like waffles. They're little compartments, and they can only be in one compartment at a time. So, if you're jumping from compartment to compartment, eventually, they will not be able to keep up, and they'll just stop listening.

When working with boys, teaching boys, interacting with boys, you have to stay very focused on one topic at a time. You may have three different things you want to tell your child. You need to tell them one thing, make sure they understand it and have internalized it and are clear, then you switch topics. It isn't even a bad idea to say, "Okay, now we're changing topics." By the way, this works with men too.

The important thing to know is you cannot jump from place to place with boys, you will lose them, and then you'll get frustrated because what do parents say? You are not paying attention.

Margaret: Right, they're not listening.

Laura: The thing is he's trying to pay attention, but he can't keep up if you move from topic to topic. Again, this happens a lot with boys and their moms because as a mom, we can jump from topic to topic to topic, but the boys can't. So, communicating with someone in a way that works for you, but doesn't work for them is going to be ineffective, and then we hold them responsible and say, "You're not listening." Or, "You didn't pay attention." It becomes, of course, a constant source of conflict in the family unit.

Margaret: I can see where that translates into men and women relationships as adults as well with a lot of communication breakdown where you think the man is listening, but they're not and then they get frustrated, and you're wondering what happened.

Laura: Men will come back and say, "Well, you started talking about what we were going to do on Saturday night, but then you got into this whole story about your friend and some drama they were having, and you lost me. When did we get back to talking about Saturday night?" That's what we do.

We're talking about Saturday night and that reminds us that our friends are in a fight so they may not be showing up on Saturday night, but we've lost them because in their mind we've stopped talking about Saturday night, so if we're off on tangent, they don't know what we're talking about and so they miss the rest of whatever we said.

This happens to teenage girls, unfortunately, I wish I had known this – I wish we'd all known this when we were young girls, but the drama of dating when you're just starting to date as a teenage girl, and you don't understand how boys think. That's what you do with your girlfriends is sit around and try to figure out how boys think, but you get into this crazy making where you're all upset and crying because he didn't say your new haircut looked nice or your new sweater was pretty or whatever, and you wanted him to notice.

Boys don't notice that stuff. It's a subtle cue. They just don't pay attention. It's not something that matters to them, so they weren't not commenting because they no longer like you. They weren't commenting because it's just not in their world. They just don't register those things like girls do.

Then the girls internalize that miscommunication because that's a lack of feedback to a girl which is interpreted as negative feedback. Then they internalize, "He doesn't like me." Then they start acting weird. Then the boy says, "She's weird." Then he really doesn't like her because she's acting crazy to him.

So, you get in these vicious cycles and absolutely, we do them as adults, but it starts when we're teenagers. If I could get my hands on the teenage girls of the world and explain this stuff to them and get them to understand it's not about them, then I think there would be a lot happier teenage girls.

Margaret: That's probably a very, very real statement.

Margaret: Laura, you had mentioned that boys don't notice a lot of different subtle cues that we put out in the environment. What kind of cues do girls notice and what kind of cues do boys notice so that when we're dealing with our children we know what to expect them to pay attention to and what not to?

Laura: Well, as I said earlier, girls are very attentive, and they will notice when the tone of your voice changes. They will notice your facial expression changes. They may not understand them, but they definitely will register them, so as an adult, a woman will have much better ability to see nuances, really subtle nuances, but your girls are going to know when you're angry, when you're disappointed, when you're upset. They'll generally be able to tell when you're upset, even if it has nothing to do with them.

The challenge you have with your girls is that if you're upset about something going on in your life that has nothing to do with them and they pick up on it, they're going to try and make you feel better. I caution parents to not fall into the trap of letting your girls follow through with this desire because the girls literally will take it on as their responsibility to make you feel better. As we talked about earlier they internalize what goes on.

If they try to make you feel better and they feel like they have not succeeded, they will internalize that, and they will feel bad. So, best to put on a happy face when it relates to personal issues that have nothing to do with the children and make sure that your girls are not internalizing your adult problems.

Boys, on the other hand, I hate to say are really not going to pick up on much of anything. In order for a boy to really tell that you are upset and not upset with them, if you're yelling at them, they know you're upset with them. If you've got a look on your face and you're extremely strong in your language, they will clearly see that and hear it, but they aren't really going to register that you're super upset unless they see you crying because that's really extreme. They really need to see some kind of extreme reaction to see that you're upset.

It's really imperative that you develop good communication with your boys so that it doesn't have to get to the point where you're that upset for them to notice.

Margaret: You've talked about the fact that in order for children to learn anything, they have to be interested in it. In your work, I also noticed that you talk about mental hooks. Can you explain what they are and how parents and educators can use them to help kids learn better based on their gender, if there are different hooks for boys that work better than hooks that work for girls?

Laura: Actually, mental hooks are – it's a really fabulous concept that everybody should get their head around, but I have not seen really that there's a difference in gender as it relates to mental hooks. It's more of an overall need for children to make sure that their learning is connected kind of in a stair step fashion.

So, if you're three steps above them and trying to explain something to them, they aren't – they're missing the steps in between so they're not, in general, going to be able

to grasp what you're trying to explain. You kind of have to walk them up the steps to get to where you are, and then they'll be able to learn the concept.

Margaret: Are there specific mental hooks that you would recommend or is it just you have to identify where the child is and work them to the next step?

Laura: Yeah. Mental hooks are really how children learn, period. So, whatever topic it is that you're trying to get them to learn, you need to be aware of the fact that the mental hooks need to be there. They need to kind of have that hook to the next level to get them to understand what you're trying to explain.

It's not really a matter of a specific kind of hook. There are many different ways to come up with hooks. You can use analogies and you can actually do hands-on environmental teaching and show them things to get them to learn the hooks. Pretty much anything you've got in your arsenal to get them connected, but what's important is making sure that they've made those connections.

Margaret: Okay. I noticed in your work that you also talk about nutrition being a factor in moving children from one level to another in terms of creating neurons and synapses to learn different things. Can you explain how nutrition moves them forward and are there specific foods that are proven to aid this more effectively than others?

Laura: Sure. As everyone hears in the news now, nutrition is a big topic. There are books and all kinds of things written about brain foods, foods that feed your brain.

The bottom line is that kids need nutrients in order to grow their brains, in order to learn new things, in order to make new synapses in their brains, in order to grow the neurons, which are your brain cells. You need good nutrition. It's like putting good gas in your car.

Nowadays, kids are so used to things like soda and junk food and McDonald's and all of this stuff that basically is not only nutrition deficient, it's empty of any nutrition whatsoever and in many cases, is also harmful.

So really focusing on your children's diet and making sure that they are well fed with whole foods and foods that are brain foods. Things like spinach and blueberries and salmon and nuts. Any kind of whole food, any kind of vegetable and shying away from all the packaged foods that contain a lot of chemicals and very little nutrition is really important, and I know a lot of people say, "Well, my kids won't eat spinach," and "You're talking about adult food." Things that we all like as adults, kids have no interest in.

I can tell you if you get creative, there are lots of ways to get kids to eat these foods. You can put spinach in spaghetti sauce and they don't even notice it. You can put – I personally make smoothies with veggie protein powder and a banana and coconut milk and raw spinach, and they turn them green and the kids like them because they're green, so they're cool looking, but they taste like a banana smoothie. The kids don't even taste the spinach, and you can put a whole boatload of spinach in one of these smoothies, and the kids are getting all the veggie protein. They're getting all the nutrients from the spinach, from the coconut milk, from a banana, which is a great source of nutrients. They don't even think about it.

You just have to get creative with your cooking for your kids, but it's so important because when they're young, their brain is busy. Your brain uses 12% of your body's energy. So, 12%, that's a lot of your energy when you think your brain is not doing anything. It's sitting in your skull, right? We focus so much on exercise and those kinds of things and using our muscles. Your brain needs food to grow and to be at its optimal performance.

Your kids are going to be doing so much better at school. They're going to be able to concentrate and pay attention and they'll also then be able to pick up new skills much faster if they're being fed really nutritious food.

Margaret: You had mentioned that there's a certain time when children enter school that we'll notice differences in how they learn and what they pay attention to and that the teenage years are another critical period of development. Are there certain strategies that you would recommend to parents and to teachers that work better for teaching children that can be implemented?

I know you spoke earlier about girls being social, and if you can get them to work with a friend, then it doesn't matter what topic it is. They'll learn it. Are there other strategies and what would we use for boys?

Laura: Well, remember we talked about how girls are really focused on feedback, so giving girls positive feedback and if it can't be positive, at least in a constructive way that they can embrace and give them tools or tricks for how they can improve, if they need to improve. Something for them to hold onto, but again, not really focusing on the negative as much as being very constructive and as positive as possible would be helpful for your girls because they will internalize the negative, and certain girls, to an extent, will then be discouraged over the negative.

It's important to make sure that they understand that if they didn't do something in the proper way or as well as you wanted, that they're capable of doing it to give them that encouragement and that confidence.

With boys, really boys are all about action, about moving. They don't like to sit still for very long. Most kids don't like to sit still for very long, but boys in particular. If you're helping them with their homework after school or you have rules about homework first before you play video games or whatever it is, you might want to actually have their homework on a schedule where they do homework for 20 minutes or 25 minutes and then they get 5 or 10 minutes to play a game or run around or throw a ball around or shoot baskets, whatever it is.

Because they have that need, and the longer you keep them sitting in their chair, the more agitated they're going to get. They're not really going to be focusing anyway, and then it just becomes a war of finish your homework. They'll race through the homework to be able to get out and play. Then they'll make more mistakes, so you're not really accomplishing much by forcing them to sit in a chair for long periods of time.

Giving them little breaks might help. Or even doing their homework, if it's possible, while you're shooting baskets. Spelling words are a great thing to do while you're throwing a ball around or shooting baskets because activities like that are very second nature for boys, in most cases. They can be thinking about their spelling words or multiplication tables or things like that while they're shooting baskets.

You could also be throwing a ball around with a boy and have him repeat back to you all the key parts of a book he just read that he needs to write a book report on. It's really about getting creative with your kids and not to mention that also gives you some quality time with your kids, and they feel like you're supporting and helping them with their homework as opposed to a taskmaster with a whip who's forcing them to do this stuff they'd rather not be doing, so it makes things like homework and studying not painful. It's not a punishment anymore.

Margaret: So, basically interaction, positive feedback, group work, and anything that involves action would be the best strategies for teaching children in general?

Laura: Yeah, absolutely. I've seen so many times parents are like, "Do your homework." Then they say, "Is your homework done?" The kid says, "Yes." Then the kid comes home with grades that aren't great. They say, "You said you did your homework." That's not really supporting your kids with their homework. That's not interacting with your kids. I think parents need to redefine what helping with homework actually means.

Margaret: I read a rather disturbing statistic that stated that the average parent in today's busy world is spending only 18 to 23 minutes a day talking to their child and then that's usually happening while they're doing something else that distracts from the conversation, which leads to the perception of disinterest. How does that impact the

development of kids who obviously need interaction to learn to communicate and to build strong relationships?

Laura: Well, it impacts them on many different levels, not the least of which is it sends a message to your kids that they don't matter, that you really don't care about what's going on in their lives. That again leads to confusion when all of a sudden you show up caring a whole lot because they didn't get good grades or they got into trouble.

A lot of parents do the dissociative thing and say, "You're not my kid. My kid would never act that way." Or, "My kid would get good grades." The kids are confused because they're like, "You didn't care before and sit down and do my homework with me or talk with me, but now you care?" Like, "Okay, well, if I need to do bad things or get in trouble in order to get your attention, then I guess that's what I'll have to do." Then we end up with kids who turn into troubled teens and the cycle goes on.

Parents thinking that they're doing an effective job of giving half attention to their kids while they read the newspaper or watch TV or whatever it is, they're kidding themselves.

Margaret: Right.

Laura: It's just not real. If you have children, you signed up to give up your free time to a large extent. Kids, that's a commitment you made when you had kids, so you can't turn around when they actually arrive and say, "Oh, yeah, not so much." You just don't want to do that.

Margaret: No doubt.

So, in today's technological society, what do you view as being the biggest hindrance to children developing effective communication skills and relationship skills?

Laura: Definitely letting your kids have unlimited use of technology, to me, we can no longer say, "Oh, well, you can spend this much time on the computer, but here's a cellphone." You can't separate technology anymore because we're at a point now where the iPad, the smartphone, they're just like computers. Any technology that the kid is playing with is going to make them almost lose the ability to communicate in person.

When you're focused on text messaging your friends and not actually having physical conversations, it shuts down an area of your brain that is the area that is all about integration, and you need that integration area of your brain to develop relationships.

So, if you're texting and it turns off that area of your brain, then you're not exercising those muscles as they were. You're not using those synapses, and they'll just die away.

Then you have to actually communicate, and you will no longer have the skills to do that.

Parents have to be really conscientious about the amount of time that their children are "talking" to people on the computer, on their phones, texting versus actually in-person. I think that it's really important that parents get their kids around other kids without the phones, without the technology, and have conversations with their kids themselves, again, without the phones. Shut it all off and have dinner and have a conversation.

If your kids lose those skills, those synapses will die, and they will not develop those skills, and you cannot get through life without communication skills. You just can't.

Margaret: Right, and since boys and girls communicate differently, is there a specific way to formulate questions to get them to communicate more effectively with us?

Laura: Sure, as I said, boys are very interested in doing things. That includes talking about doing things. If you ask your boys, "How was school?" You're going to get an answer like, "Fine. Okay, whatever." Ask them, "What did you do in school?" Then they actually have to answer you. "We did this. We did that. We did this." Then as they answer you, then you expand on that.

"Was that fun? Who was there with you?" It depends on what their answer is, but with girls, generally, because girls like to talk and socialize and it feeds their happy brain chemicals, you pretty much can ask them anything and then just let them talk. They just want to talk.

Also, if you want to focus on something in particular, you can ask girls about how they feel about things. "Did you have fun at school today? Did you enjoy school? What was your favorite part about your day?" Something like that that then they get to talk about their feelings, what made them happy, what made them sad.

Margaret: If we ask those types of questions of boys, we're not going to get real great answers?

Laura: Well, boys aren't really plugged into their emotions, so if you ask them what made them happy at school today, happy is an easy one, and they probably would say something like, "Recess. Gym class." Because they get to run around.

If you ask them something like what made them sad at school, they just don't even process emotions. They'll kind of look at you like, "What? What are you talking about?" It's just not there – unless they already are showing some kind of emotion because something upset them. Asking them about emotions – they don't quite know what to do with that question because they translate their world from a perspective of emotion.

Margaret: Right.

Laura: They're not going to start a conversation like a girl would that said, "Suzy did such-and-such at school today, and it made me so mad." A boy is not going to even – he would be like, "What? Who cares?"

He'll start a discussion like, "We built the coolest rocket. You should have seen it. It blew up all over the place." It's a doing thing. It's an action thing. That's what he'll talk about. Something exciting that happened that he was involved in or that he watched.

Margaret: Right. Obviously, it would be really nice if we could cater to every child individually in a classroom setting, and I know there are a lot of teachers listening to this. In the situations they're in, that's just not possible. For all the teachers out there, what would you suggest to them to aid their students in bringing out the best in their kids?

Laura: Well, really a great start is just having an understanding of these gender differences so that they can be targeting their questions in the classroom or their interactions with the kids in a way that suits boys versus girls. Really understanding how boys are driven to do things and how they're focused on action and how girls are focused on talking and use the information that they learn about gender differences to influence the way they interact with their students. That will go a long way.

Even if they can treat the girls one way and treat the boys another way, and when I say that I don't mean in a disparaging way. You want to be fair and equal to people, but it's still different.

The way you interact with girls, it really is different. I have many friends with boys and girls, and the time I spend with them – I absolutely engage with the boys in a completely different way than I do with the girls. It's just so much more fun that way. It eliminates the conflict. It eliminates the confusion. It eliminates the drama, and the kids have fewer meltdowns, and they feel heard, and they enjoy your company more.

The same thing can be said in school. If you really get your head around these differences, it will start to naturally impact your interactions with the students. It'll be able to help you motivate them as well.

Margaret: Would you recommend in a classroom setting that if you're going to do group work that you put the boys together and you put the girls together because the girls will all communicate one way and the boys will all do or be involved in action another way? Would that help facilitate better results do you think?

Laura: Well, there's an argument to be made for segregated learning. That's why there are private girls' schools and private boys' schools. I don't know that in our society if the

children are in school that isn't segregated that we shouldn't then start segregating them. I think kids need to learn to interact. At a young age, they need to start learning how to engage and work and collaborate with each other.

Even though collaboration is not something that boys are normally going to do, they do need to learn how to do it. They do need to stretch those skills just like girls need to understand how boys think. They need to understand that you can work on something and t doesn't have to be something that gets you upset. It doesn't have to be an emotional something. It doesn't have to always have a whole lot of meaning.

The boys also bring out the competitive nature in girls. The boys are always going to want to win and be the best, and so that's going to bring that out in the girls, which is good. The girls temper the boys because they want to everyone to get along. They help the boys see that it's good when everybody gets along.

So, there's a lot of cross learning, and I don't know that I would recommend separating the boys and the girls. On occasion, certainly it won't hurt, but as a rule, I would not encourage that, no.

Margaret: Basically, would you say that the qualities that would support learning best would include things like deep listening, open communication, having patience, understanding the differences between boys and girls, giving them enough freedom to allow for creativity, making them feel safe, and not judging their abilities and giving them negative feedback would be a basic premise for education in school and out?

Laura: Absolutely, absolutely. I think that as human beings we have to start looking at the children that we're teaching as mini adults. They aren't kids that we can just order around and tell what to do. We have to engage with them on a level that respects them as people and respects that they're going to have ideas and they're going to have challenges and they're going to be different than the other kids in the class, and they need room and the space and the safety to be who they are.

The only people they're going to get that from are the adults and the adults they're around the most are their parents and their teachers.

Margaret: Yeah, exactly.

What's the one life skill you would have liked to have been taught in school?

Laura: Wow! This gender difference stuff would have been nice, even though it wasn't built back then. It would have been awesome! Wow! One life skill – I think the internalizing thing, especially as a girl. I think that it would have been nice for somebody at a young age to let me know that internalizing what goes on around me, that that stuff really has

nothing to do with me. That people are going to do what they do and say what they say and that that's about them and it's not about me.

Having an adult or somebody that I looked up to really get me to see that would have been an awesome life skill as a girl for me to have learned at a younger age so that I didn't spend my teen years and my early 20's and probably even into my early 30's being so caught up in what was going on around me versus what was going on inside of me.

Margaret: So, how did you gain that skill and how long were you out of school before you accomplished that?

Laura: I was well out of school before I even was exposed to that concept and mostly it was because of my own search for answers to life, probably 15 years ago, so that I would have been in my – yeah, my early 30's when I really started to understand kind of where I fit in the scheme of things and what mattered and what didn't and how I viewed myself needed to come from me and not from outside of me.

Margaret: Right.

Laura: Yeah, that all happened, I would say – it's not something where one day you wake up and you flip a switch. It's a gradual kind of learning, and so, I guess in my 20's I started to kind of see it, but by the time it actually became a full part of me where it wasn't something I had to consciously remind myself all the time, I would say in my 30's.

I think if we could teach, as I said earlier, teen girls these gender differences and to be more centered in themselves, it would completely change our culture.

Margaret: Laura, I couldn't agree with you more.

Folks, thank you for listening to this interview today. Laura, I'm so grateful you were able to join me and thank you for taking the time to share your insights and expertise with our listeners.

Laura: Thank you so much for having me. I love talking about this topic.

Margaret: It was truly my honor to be able to talk with you today.

Folks, that concludes our interview. On behalf of Laura and myself, I wish you an empowered and fabulous day. Take care.