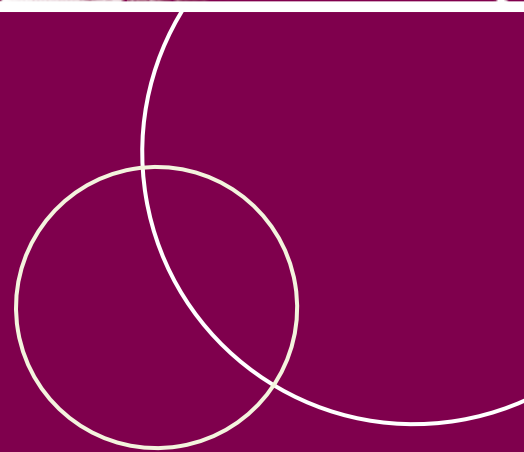




An Australian Government Initiative

MEETING THE *challenge* final report

Guiding Principles for Success from the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme Stage One 2003





MEETING THE *challenge*
final report

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This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training as a quality teacher initiative under the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme*.

Meeting the Challenge: Guiding Principles for Success from the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme Stage One 2003.

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FOREWORD



Where masculinity was once seen as a virtue, it is now seen by many boys as an obstacle to be overcome.

The report of the Federal parliamentary inquiry into the education of boys, *Boys: Getting it Right*, is sobering reading.

Between 1975 and 1995, the literacy achievement of fourteen year-old boys declined. In 2000, 9 percent of boys in Year Three and 15 percent of boys in Year Five failed to achieve minimum reading benchmarks. This compares with just 6 percent of girls in Year Three and 10 percent of girls in Year Five.

Year 12 retention rates are 11 per cent higher for girls, driving a 6 per cent higher rate of university entry. In some cases, the Year 12 gap between boys and girls is up to 19 percentage points with girls outstripping boys in almost 90 per cent of courses. However, the real problems are at the other end of the educational spectrum.

Recent research shows that, in some instances, boys represent up to two thirds of those in the bottom quartile of school achievers.

Boys represent 80 per cent of students in school disciplinary programmes, and are more likely to be involved in assault and drug related incidents. They are three times more likely to die in a motor vehicle accident, and for people aged 15-24 the rate of male suicide is five times that of the female rate.

The problem is not that girls are doing better than boys – it is instead that boys are not doing as well as they once did.

From teachers and parents in remote Aboriginal communities to prestigious independent schools, there is concern for what is happening to boys.

Methods adopted to achieve long overdue progress in relation to the educational needs of girls under the national policy document *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, written in 1996, may have come at the expense of boys.

Neglectful indifference to critically important professional development of teachers to keep them up to date has exacted its toll. Professor Tony Vinson's 2001 report documented the NSW government then spending only \$25.60 per year per teacher – barely the price of a men's haircut.

Only one in four students studying to be teachers is a man. When you walk into a school to find the only man on site is the gardener, how does that affect the development of both boys and girls?

As Federal Minister for Education I take the *Boys: Getting it right* report very seriously. A range of key individual experts in the education of boys has guided our consideration of the way forward.

Absolutely nothing will be done that in any way threatens the long overdue progress of girls.

But as policy makers we should be less concerned about offending sensibilities than we are about getting the very best educational outcomes for both boys and girls.

I initiated the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* in direct response to both the report and the concerns of parents. Under the first stage of the programme, the Howard Government has provided grants totalling \$860,000 to 230 primary and secondary schools to document their successful practices in educating boys.

The final report of Stage One makes it clear that a very large number of Australian schools are already meeting the challenge of boys' education through innovative approaches to engagement of boys. The guiding principles and case studies in this report provide a practical guide for all teachers and schools in search of success with boys.

Congratulations to the schools, teachers, parents and students who made Stage One a great success. I now look forward to the next phase of the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* in 2004. During this period a number of centres of excellence, or 'lighthouse' schools, will be established across Australia to champion, demonstrate and disseminate best practice in boys' education.

The next generation will pay a very high price if we do not get this right and get it right soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brendan Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Brendan Nelson MP
Minister For Education, Science And Training



MEETING THE Challenge:

Guiding Principles for Success from the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme Stage One 2003



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors

Mr Vic Zbar, Director, Zbar Consulting
Ms Barbara Bereznicki, Curriculum Corporation
Mr Stuart Trist, Curriculum Corporation

Project Team

Mr David Brown and Ms Jane Weston, Project Directors, Curriculum Corporation
Mr Stuart Trist, Project Manager, Curriculum Corporation
Ms Barbara Bereznicki, Project Officer, Curriculum Corporation
Professor Nola Alloway (Academic Advisor), Professor and Chair, Academic Board,
School of Education, James Cook University, Townsville, Qld

Programme Advisory Committee

Ms. Joan Holt: Deputy General Manager, Curriculum Solutions, Curriculum Corporation (Chair)
Mr David Mulford: Principal, Radford College, ACT
Mr Warren Grellier: Senior Curriculum Officer, Department of Education and Training, WA
Ms Deborah Hartman: Family Action Centre, Boys in Schools Program, University of Newcastle, NSW
Professor Faith Trent: Head of Faculty, Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law & Theology, Flinders University, SA
Mr Les Smith: Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc, SA
Mr Tim McMullen: Sydney Catholic Education Office, NSW
Dr Michael Carr-Gregg: Adolescent Psychologist, Albert Road Centre for Health, Vic
Ms Dina Guest: Deputy General Manager, Learning and Teaching Division, Department of Education & Training, Vic
Ms Lynne Rolley: Federal Secretary, Independent Education Union, Vic
Mr Paul Dickie: Executive Officer, Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools in
Queensland, Qld
Mr Tom Croker: President, Australian Primary Principals' Association,
NSW Department of Education and Training, NSW
Mr Arthur Townsend: Branch Manager, Quality Schooling Branch,
Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra
Dr Timothy Hawkes: Headmaster, The Kings School, NSW
Dr Kevin Donnelly: Executive Director, Education Strategies, Vic
Dr Ken Rowe: Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Vic
Mr Rob Durbridge: Federal Secretary, Australian Education Union, Vic
Dr Peter West: Senior Lecturer, University of Western Sydney, NSW
Mr Andrew Blair: President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Vic

Participants

The programme is indebted to a number of representatives of State and Territory education departments and Catholic and Independent systems who undertook the challenging task of selecting the schools for the programme.

We wish to thank the many hundreds of school principals, teachers, parents, students and members of school communities who were enthusiastically involved in their school and cluster programmes and generously gave of their time and effort to document and report on their findings.

BACKGROUND TO the programme

In Australia and many other countries there is evidence that, although some boys are performing well, many others are not realising their full potential and are falling behind when their results are compared with those achieved by girls.

The Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, commissioned the national *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* to address this situation and identify, document and disseminate good practices in teaching and learning of boys.

The programme, which is part of the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme*, will comprise:

- Stage One, during which schools from across Australia have received funding of up to \$5000 each to document and showcase successful practices in the education of boys (see below for more details of this phase of the programme); and
- Stage Two, beginning in 2004, where approximately 30 'clusters' or groups of schools will be established across Australia to promote successful practices in boys' education, with each cluster containing a 'lighthouse' school to support the professional learning of teachers in schools around them.

The overarching objective of the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* is to improve the learning outcomes of boys by disseminating best practices and enhancing teacher understanding and quality. In broad terms, the purpose of Stage One, which is the subject of this report, is to provide an informed basis from which improved boys' education can be developed and promoted in Australian schools.

In Stage One, which was managed by Curriculum Corporation on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), funding was provided to schools demonstrating good educational practices in educating boys as a means of examining:

- current best practices;
- strengths and weaknesses in the practices;
- issues that need to be addressed; and
- what needs to be done to improve boys' education outcomes in Australian schools.

The programme did not set out to define a single principle or framework for what is best practice in boys' education. Rather, projects focused on one or more aspects of best practice in boys' education such as:

- adapting pedagogy, curriculum and assessment for different learning styles, including interactive and experiential styles, and with the use of information and communication technology (ICT);
- improving literacy and communication skills and performance across the curriculum, including the integration of structured phonics in literacy teaching;
- developing effective and sustainable behaviour management programmes;
- improving student engagement with schooling and motivation to learn; and
- drawing school and community resources together to provide positive role models for students.



Applications were invited from schools at a wide range of starting points:

- initiating stage – schools at the start-up phase that provided useful information about initiating projects, in particular defining the issues and implementing appropriate approaches to address these;
- developing stage – schools with existing programmes for further development that provided rich descriptions of the processes used and the issues confronted;
- consolidating stage – schools with established long-term projects, often over four or more years, that demonstrated a long-standing commitment to boys' education and provided information and reflections over an extended period of time.

Applications were also encouraged from clusters of schools working together on initiatives to enhance the education of boys in their schools.

Schools and clusters were, in this context, provided with funding of up to \$5000 for an individual school, up to \$10,000 for a cluster of two schools, up to \$15,000 for a cluster of three schools and up to \$20,000 for a cluster of four or more schools. Funds were used in a variety of ways, including engaging consultants and/or professional development expertise to work with the school on its boys' education initiative. Ideally the funding should provide for ongoing programmes that are viable and sustainable within the school or cluster beyond the funding period.

Each selected school/cluster was required to prepare a project work plan at the beginning of the project, submit an interim report on progress and present a final report. In addition, successful schools were required to attend or participate in at least one State-wide briefing session conducted by Curriculum Corporation project officers and an expert adviser (Dr Nola Alloway, Senior Lecturer in Education, James Cook University), to discuss and respond to issues and questions relating to their boys' education projects.

Curriculum Corporation monitored the progress of the school/cluster case studies and provided advice and assistance to help schools deliver on schedule. The Corporation also established a website to provide general project information and updates, answers to frequently asked questions regarding the programme, bulletins and special announcements, and reports and outlines of the school case studies. The website, attached to the Corporation's own site and located at <http://www.boyslighthouse.edu.au>, also provided abstracts of literature to support pedagogy, along with a closed site for project schools to participate in discussion groups with each other and Curriculum Corporation, templates for reporting, a calendar of events and other materials relating to the action boys' study activities.

In addition, project schools and clusters were offered a selection of more than 30 one-hour teleconferences on key areas of interest, scheduled on most afternoons in August and September 2003. These teleconferences were staggered throughout the day to allow maximum flexibility for participation by schools, and the minutes were posted on the web forum for the information of other schools and/or further comment.



The project schools

School funding was, as already indicated, a central feature of the first stage of the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme*.

Schools across Australia were invited to participate in projects between April and September 2003 to document their successful practices in the education of boys. Their experiences are the subject of this report.

Of the 1407 applications received, 110 projects involving 230 schools were selected to receive funding on the basis of the following criteria:

- how the project supports a whole-of-school and, if appropriate, whole-of-cluster approach to the dissemination of good practices and teacher professional development on boys' education;
- what demonstrable education outcomes have already been achieved or are expected from the project, with quantitative support where possible;
- a systematic project implementation process, including an implementation plan, indicative budget, explicit management arrangements, and evaluation and reporting frameworks within the cluster and to Curriculum Corporation;
- consistency with the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (<http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm>);
- links with relevant State, Territory or education jurisdiction frameworks (where appropriate);
- how inclusive partnerships and consultations with school stakeholders, including parents, and with the local community and local business will be undertaken; and
- proof of support from school management, including the school principal.

The final mix of schools selected reflected an appropriate balance of schools from the range of contexts: that is, schools in different States and Territories; government and non-government schools; primary and secondary schools; rural, regional and metropolitan schools; and schools with high numbers of students from challenging socioeconomic circumstance, linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with disabilities and students deemed 'at risk'.

While only a limited number of school and cluster submissions could be accepted for the programme, many of the applicants decided to pursue their project in any case because of their interest in improving education for boys. Along with programme schools, these 'associate schools' were provided with resources and information, and alerted to updates on the programme website. This *Associate Schools* programme provided a means of responding to schools and clusters not selected for the programme, thereby expanding the community of interest in boys' education around the nation.

The full list of project schools and clusters is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme project schools

SINGLE SCHOOLS	
Name	State / Territory
Acton Primary School	Tasmania
Batchelor Area School	Northern Territory
Beechworth Primary School	Victoria
Berri Primary School	South Australia
Braitling Primary School	Northern Territory
Bridgewater Primary School	Tasmania
Camberwell Grammar Junior School	Victoria
Cardiff South Public School	New South Wales
Carwatha P-12 College	Victoria
Catholic College Bendigo	Victoria
Collector Public School	New South Wales
Cowandilla Primary School	South Australia
Crafers Primary School	South Australia
Curramulka Primary School	South Australia
Dana Street Primary School	Victoria
Debney Park Secondary College	Victoria
Drouin Secondary College	Victoria
East Maddington Primary School	Western Australia
Elsternwick Primary School	Victoria
Ferny Grove State High School	Queensland
Glenorchy Primary School	Tasmania
Gordonvale State High School	Queensland
Gymea Technology High School	New South Wales
Hampton Primary School	Victoria
Homebush Boys' High School	New South Wales
Inaburra School	New South Wales
Inverell Public School	New South Wales
Isabella Plains Primary School	ACT
Jasper Road Public School	New South Wales
Karingal Heights Primary School	Victoria
Kingston Primary School	Tasmania
Kinross Primary School	Western Australia
Kippa-Ring State School	Queensland
Kormilda College	Northern Territory
Kuranda State High School	Queensland
La Salle Catholic College	New South Wales
Lakes Creek State School	Queensland

Latrobe High School	Tasmania
Lismore High School	New South Wales
Lismore Public School	New South Wales
Mabuiag Island State School	Queensland
Macquarie University Special Education Centre	New South Wales
Mary Immaculate Primary School	New South Wales
Melaleuca Park K-7 Schools	South Australia
Moerlina School	Western Australia
Moranbah East State School	Queensland
Morwell Park Primary School	Victoria
Mt Barker High School	South Australia
Mt Clear College	Victoria
Murray Bridge High School	South Australia
Murwillumbah High School	New South Wales
Myrning Primary School	Victoria
Myrree Primary School	Victoria
Newtown Public School	New South Wales
North Ainslie Primary School	ACT
Open Access College	South Australia
Palmerston District Primary School	ACT
Port Lincoln Primary School	South Australia
Salisbury High School	South Australia
Sawyers Valley Primary School	Western Australia
Southern Cross Catholic College	Queensland
Southwell Primary School	Western Australia
St Clair High School	New South Wales
St Francis Xavier School	Queensland
St George Christian School	New South Wales
Stromlo High School	ACT
Sunshine Beach State School	Queensland
Swinburne Secondary College	Victoria
The Toowoomba Preparatory School	Queensland
Thornlie Primary School	Western Australia
Thursday Island State School	Queensland
Tom Price Senior High School	Western Australia
Tudor House	New South Wales
Vaucluse Public School	New South Wales
Wagaman Primary School	Northern Territory
Weeden Heights Primary School	Victoria
Whitford Catholic Primary School	Western Australia
Winthrop Primary School	Western Australia
Yahl Primary School	South Australia



CLUSTERS

Name	State / Territory
St Bede's Primary School Sts Peter and Paul's School Holy Trinity Primary School	ACT
Oak Flats Public School Albion Park Rail Public School Balarang Public School Oak Flats High School	New South Wales
St John the Apostle School St Kieran's Primary School St John the Baptist School St Cecilia's Primary School St Mary's Catholic Primary School	New South Wales
St Patrick's Primary School St Joseph's Primary School Holy Family Primary School St James' Primary School St Pius X High School St Therese's Primary School St John's Primary School St Columba's Primary School	New South Wales
Crawford Public School Doonside Technology High School	New South Wales
Wamberal Public School Pretty Beach Public School	New South Wales
Wakefield School West Wallsend High School Edgeworth Heights Primary School Edgeworth Public School West Wallsend Public School Barnsley Public School	New South Wales
Cairns West State School Trinity Bay State High School Freshwater State School	Queensland
Mitchelton Special School ¹ Grovely State School Mitchelton State School Mitchelton State High School	Queensland

¹ Mitchelton Special School subsequently withdrew from the project because the nature of the hands-on activities chosen were considered to be 'less applicable, unrealistic and unachievable for students with disabilities'.



Mirani State School Marian State School Mirani State High School	Queensland
Seven Hills State School Cannon Hill State School Morningside State School Balmoral State High School Norman Park State School Bulimba State School Murarrie State School	Queensland
Wynnum State High School Wynnum North State High School	Queensland
Mother of Good Counsel School Our Lady Help of Christians Primary St Mary's College St Joseph's School St Augustine's School	Queensland
St Mary's School Goondiwindi State School Goondiwindi State High School	Queensland
Northview State School Bucasia State School Fitzgerald State School Farleigh State School	Queensland
El Arish State School Mission Beach State School Murray River Upper School Tully State School Cardwell State School Feluga State School Kennedy State School Lower Tully State School	Queensland
Gilston State School Beechmont State School William Duncan State School Numinbah Valley State School Nerang State High School Worongary State School Nerang State School	Queensland
Thorndon Park Primary School Marryatville Primary School Trinity Gardens Primary School Norwood Primary School East Torrens Primary School East Marden Primary School	South Australia

Morphett Vale West School Reynella South Primary School O'Sullivan Beach School Lonsdale Heights Primary School	South Australia
Trevallyn Primary School Riverside High School Riverside Primary School	Tasmania
Kismet Park Primary School Sunbury Heights Primary School Sunbury West Primary School Killara Primary School	Victoria
Doveton Secondary College Eumemmerring Secondary College – Hallam	Victoria
Silverton Primary School Wooranna Park Primary School	Victoria
Surrey Hills Primary School Glen Iris Primary School Camberwell South Primary School Camberwell High School Ashburton Primary School Chatham Primary School Hartwell Primary School	Victoria
Seymour East Primary School Seymour Technical High School Seymour Special School Seymour Primary School Nagambie Primary School Puckapunyal Primary School Tallarook Primary School Avenel Primary School	Victoria
Port Fairy Consolidated School Hawkesdale P-12 College Penshurst Primary School Koroit and District Primary School Woolsthorpe Primary School Caramut Primary School	Victoria

Hoddles Creek Primary School	
Yarra Junction Primary School	
Millwarra Primary School	
Yellingbo Primary School	
Launching Place Primary School	
Gladysdale Primary School	Victoria
Seville Primary School	
Warburton Primary School	
Woori Yallock Primary School	
Don Valley Primary School	
Wesburn Primary School	
Upper Yarra Secondary College	
Augusta Primary School	
Margaret River Montessori School	
Nyindamurra Family School	
Margaret River Senior High School	Western Australia
Karridale Primary School	
St Thomas More Primary School	
Cowaramup Primary School	
Margaret River Primary School	
Riverside Primary School	Western Australia
Riverside Education Support Centre	
Merredin Senior High School	Western Australia
Melville Senior High School	
Greenwood Senior High School	
Glengarry Primary School	
Carine Senior High School	
Blackmore Primary School	Western Australia
Cottesloe Primary School	
Warwick Senior High School	
East Hamersley Primary School	
Balcatta Senior High School	



This report provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the experiences of the project schools, and the key lessons learned about good practices in educating boys, to be shared with other schools throughout the nation and to inform Stage Two of the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme*.

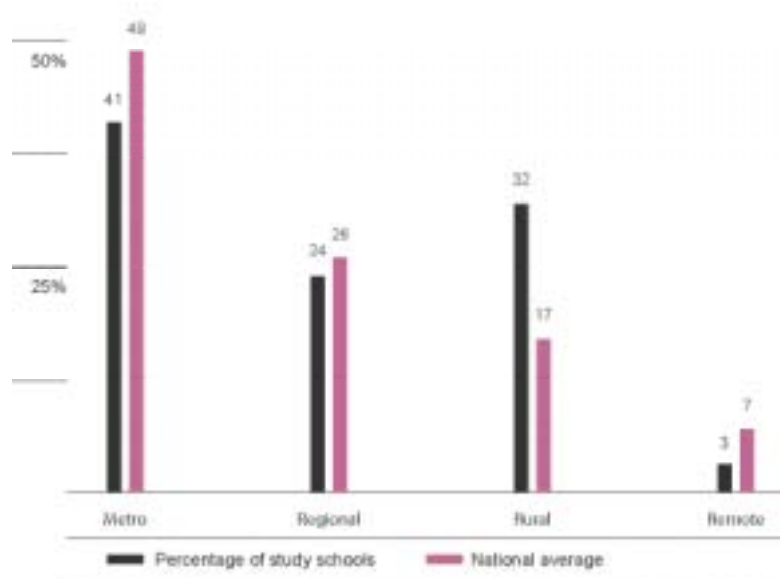
Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in the report are taken from school and cluster project reports and other material the schools and clusters provided.

THE PROJECTS implemented

As already indicated, the schools and clusters selected for the programme represented a cross-section of Australian schools.

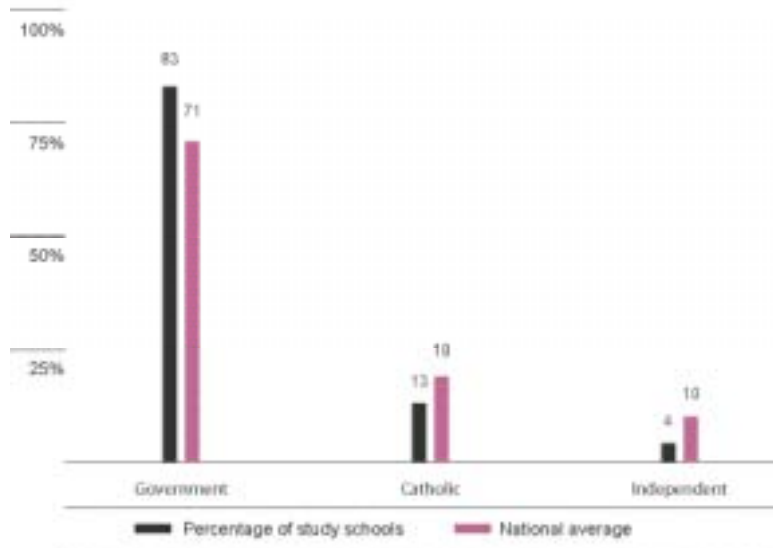
All States and Territories were represented. Almost half of the projects operated in metropolitan areas, with the remainder spread across rural, regional and remote locations, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Location of schools in Stage One



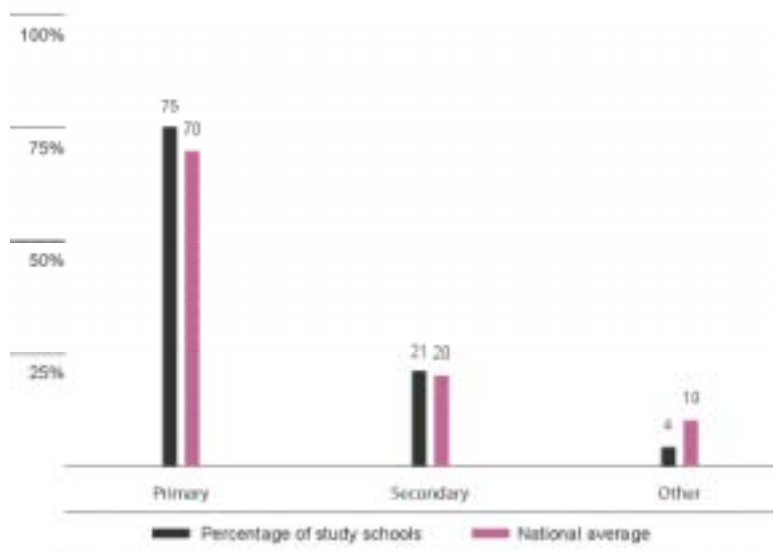
While all sectors were represented in the programme, most schools were government schools, especially in the cluster projects, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Stage One schools by system



Seventy-five per cent of participating schools were primary schools. Secondary schools accounted for a further 21 per cent (with 16 per cent of this group, or 3 per cent of the total, being senior high schools) and 2 per cent were K–12 schools. The remaining 2 per cent comprised special schools, a preparatory school, an education support centre, an open access college and a university special education centre.

Figure 3: Stage One schools by sector



Reasons for involvement in the programme

In all cases the reasons schools and clusters sought to participate in the programme were to address specific concerns about the engagement, behaviour and learning outcomes of boys and to improve education for boys they enrol.

This was driven by data the school had collected, such as in the examples given below.

- A state high school's finding that the proportion of Year 9 boys rated as 'excellent' on the school's assessment scale was a mere 3 per cent compared with 22 per cent of girls. On the other side of the ledger, the proportion of boys receiving D and E grades was much higher, as evident in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of students gaining D and E grades for achievement in one project school

SUBJECT	BOYS	GIRLS
English	12	5
Mathematics	18	10
Health and Physical Education	1	1
Languages	8	0
Science	15	9
Social and Environmental Sciences	6	3

- One New South Wales school's analysis of student behaviour in the playground and records in their discipline files, which revealed that boys were involved in 95 per cent of situations involving conflict or inappropriate behaviours and were far less capable of managing such situations than girls.
- A coeducational primary school's finding that academic outcomes in literacy and numeracy for boys are below those of girls, with 75 per cent of all students in support groups being boys. In addition, boys have accounted for 82 per cent of all behaviour records, 98 per cent of all serious incidents and 100 per cent of suspensions over the last two years; with senior boys the most likely to offend.
- The outcomes of a comprehensive review of a Tasmanian secondary school, which revealed that parents, teachers and students at the school identified student motivation and engagement, particularly of boys, as a significant concern: 95 per cent of all students sent to detention at lunchtime were boys from Grades 7 and 8; 80 per cent of students suspended were boys; and boys were well below girls in State-wide tests of literacy and numeracy.
- The 'staggering' findings in a Queensland cluster that, 'over a five-year longitudinal study, boys were shown to be significantly less likely than girls to select a tertiary career upon exiting Year 12 ... (and) in nearly all classes in the junior years of high school, girls' academic means dominated that of boys by half a rating or more in a five-point rating system over a four-year period' – as the schools cogently observed, 'it was obvious that this was unacceptable and could not be ignored'.

The data on the general circumstances of the school often extends to a broader appreciation of the school's clientele and their needs, as illustrated by one rural Victorian primary school, whose overall approach to boys' education stems from the intake they serve:

'We have 95 per cent of our staff being female, and we find attracting suitable male models for our boys and girls very difficult. We have some very troublesome boys who exhibit anti-social behaviour and aggression and cause our community some anxiety and we are endeavouring to assist these boys in every possible way ... We are attempting to assist our children in need, while providing a safe and secure environment for all children to enable them to grow and learn together and to learn from each other.'

These circumstances are not dissimilar from the original reason for introducing a withdrawal programme for boys at risk in one Western Australian primary school. In this case, 'a significant number of boys were demonstrating educational at-risk behaviours: non-participation, truanting, bullying, alienation, low levels of achievement and low levels of human relationship skills to deal with conflict or their own anger'. This resulted in the school establishing a programme to 'engage boys who are alienating themselves from schooling and the community through their behaviour and non-participation in education', and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to '(become) better decision makers, set realistic goals, (learn) appropriate conflict resolution and anger management strategies as well as learning strategies (on) how to learn'.

In some cases it related to boys' attitudes in general, or to particular aspects of the school operations or programmes. For instance, one non-government primary school sought to tackle the fact that, when questioned about images and perceptions of gender groups at school:

- boys commonly saw themselves as 'sporty, cool and a bit naughty' while girls saw the boys as 'sporty bullies' who 'don't show emotion and try to act cool'; and
- boys saw the girls as 'good at school, talking with their friends and worrying about how they look', while girls saw themselves in much the same way, but as 'gossipy and being bitchy' as well.

Asked about their responses to poetry in particular, which the school had been seeking to foster, 80 per cent of Year 6 girls were positive, whereas 70 per cent of the boys had a negative view.

For many schools and clusters, their project focus also grew out of activity already in place, and research-based findings related to boys' education and how to improve it. One school, for instance, had been discussing issues of gender equity for three years, referring to *Boys and Literacy*² and other resources along the way. As a result, they report, 'we take very seriously the need to take into consideration the role of schools in the construction of gender when planning classroom and playground experiences for students'. Having initially focused on issues of girls' education, the school's discussion and research had seen it become 'much more actively concerned with engaging boys more in the humanities and systematically developing the communication skills of boys and the skills they need to successfully negotiate relationships'.

Perhaps one of the most persuasive outlines of the reasons for doing something about the educational needs of boys, and the nature of the approach adopted, was articulated by the assistant principal of a Northern Territory primary school, who explained:

'In 2000, having spent 15 years in secondary schools (and a period in staff development), I had been fortunate in achieving a shift to a position in primary schools. Over three years, and three different primary schools ... one of the most obvious issues that has become clear to me, is that the education of boys is problematic.'

² Alloway, N and Gilbert, P (eds) 1997, *Boys and Literacy: Professional Development Units*, Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne.



Not only had I been the only male teacher in one of these schools, and one of two males in the others, but also the statistics I was able to collect were compelling. It was clear that for the six-year period that I was able to obtain data, boys had achieved significantly poorly when compared to girls at all levels of schooling from Year 3 Numeracy and Literacy to Year 12 results in all subjects.

Most importantly, I was able to collect data on boys' behaviour management that demonstrated that boys were more frequently alienated from school than girls, with boys being 'in trouble' 86 per cent to girls 14 per cent (sample of 500 data entries on behaviour management collected from two urban primary schools).

From discussing my observations and experiences with others, two ideas crystallised. The first was that the boys who I was dealing with on a day-to-day basis (for poor behaviour or lack of achievement) seemed to lack 'a sense of belonging' to the classroom (not the playground). Second, that these boys also seemed to honestly lack understanding of what it was that alienated them from their classroom teachers (they knew what 'rule' they had broken, but not why they were 'constantly' in trouble with their teacher).

It is important to note that this does not relate to all boys for, to be honest, successful boys rarely came to my attention ... only those who were 'at risk' or who were 'boys behaving badly' were regularly in my focus. These ideas created a strong cognitive tension and in 2001–02 (a boys' education programme) was initiated as our school's attempt to assist those identified boys to develop a stronger sense of belonging and thereby, in the longer term, to achieve better academic results at school.'

While teachers in the programme have shown readiness to evaluate their own professional performance, they also refer to social factors that they see as contributing to boys' under-achieving. For example, 'Many of the boys in our school come from single-parent families ... (and) do not have a male adult at home', and 'many of the male adults at home solve their problems through drinking and other anti-social activities'.

These recurring references to family and community influences outside school have been removed from the specific reports of individual schools, but cover a range of issues relating to crime, violence, fractured families, and alcohol and substance abuse, that impact on the students' school life and the capacity of the teacher to improve students' outcomes.



The focus of school and cluster projects

Schools and clusters were, as already noted, invited to apply for the programme in one or more aspects of best practice in boys' education such as:

- adapting pedagogy, curriculum and assessment for different learning styles, including interactive and experiential styles, and with the use of ICTs;
- improving literacy and communication skills and performance across the curriculum, including the integration of structured phonics into literacy teaching;
- developing effective and sustainable behaviour management programmes;
- improving student engagement with schooling and motivation to learn; and
- drawing school and community resources together to provide positive role models for students.

For the purposes of analysis in this report, all of the schools and clusters have been allocated to one of these five areas as their major area of project focus, as illustrated in Table 3.³

³ In those cases where schools and clusters worked on more than one of the categories listed in the table, they have been included in the area of primary focus as judged by the report's authors.

Table 3: School/cluster project focus areas⁴

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT (34 Projects)	LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS (24 Projects)	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION (28 Projects)
Beechworth Primary	Acton Primary	Carwatha P-12
Bucasia State (Cluster)	Balmoral State High (Cluster)	Dana Street Primary
Camberwell High (Cluster)	Bridgewater Primary	Debney Park Secondary
Cardiff South Public	Camberwell Grammar Junior School	Doonside Technology High (Cluster)
Collector Public	Drouin Secondary	East Maddington Primary
Crafrers Primary	Glenorchy Primary	Ferny Grove State High
Curramulka Primary	Gordonvale State High	Holy Family Primary (Cluster)
Elsternwick Primary	Gynea Technology High	Kinross Primary
Eumemmerring Secondary (Cluster)	Homebush Boys' High	Kuranda State High
Goondiwindi State High (Cluster)	Kippa-Ring State	Lakes Creek State
Hampton Primary	Lismore Public	La Salle Catholic College
Inaburra School	Macquarie University Special Education Centre	Margaret River Senior High (Cluster)
Lismore High	Mary Immaculate Primary	Melville Senior High (Cluster)
Mabuiag Island State	Moerlina School	Mirani State High (Cluster)
Melaleuca Park K-7	Mt Clear College	Mt Barker High
Mitchelton State High (Cluster)	Palmerston District Primary	Murray Bridge High
Moranbah East State	St Francis Xavier School	Murwillumbah High
Myrree Primary	St George Christian School	Nerang State High (Cluster)
Open Access College	Southern Cross Catholic College	Oak Flats High (Cluster)
Pretty Beach Public (Cluster)	Sunbury West Primary (Cluster)	St Clair High
St Kieran's Primary (Cluster)	Trinity Gardens Primary (Cluster)	Stromlo High
Sts Peter and Paul's School (Cluster)	Vaucluse Public	Swinburne Secondary
Salisbury High	Weeden Heights Primary	Thursday Island State
Sawyers Valley Primary	Winthrop Primary	Toowoomba Preparatory
Seymour East Primary (Cluster)		Wagaman Primary
Southwell Primary		Whitford Catholic Primary
Sunshine Beach State		Woolsthorpe Primary (Cluster)
Tom Price Senior High		Wynnum North State High (Cluster)
Tudor House		
Tully State (Cluster)		
Warwick Senior High (Cluster)		
West Wallsend High (Cluster)		
Woorana Park Primary (Cluster)		
Yahl Primary		

⁴ Clusters listed in the table are only recorded with the name of the 'lead' school, as the full cluster list is included in Table 1.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES
(15 Projects)

Batchelor Area School
 Braiitling Primary
 Cowandilla Primary
 Inverell Public
 Isabella Plains Primary
 Jasper Road Public
 Karingal Heights Primary
 Lonsdale Heights Primary (Cluster)
 Morwell Park Primary
 Newtown Public
 North Ainslie Primary
 Riverside High (Cluster)
 St Mary's College (Cluster)
 Thornlie Primary
 Trinity Bay State High (Cluster)

POSITIVE ROLE MODELS FOR STUDENTS
(9 Projects)

Berri Primary
 Catholic College Bendigo
 Kingston Primary
 Kormilda College
 Latrobe High
 Myrning Primary
 Port Lincoln Primary
 Riverside Primary (Cluster)
 Upper Yarra Secondary (Cluster)



While many of the successful schools and clusters did fit neatly into the categories outlined, many others tended to embrace more than one, as is evident in the following examples.

- **Mabuiag Island State School** used 'school-wide pedagogies', with a particular focus on constructivist approaches in the arts, to improve the achievement of boys, while also calling on the support and expertise of an artist in residence and a community consultant, and looking to develop a 'positive approach' to behaviour management. This was similar to the focus of **Murwillumbah High School**, which adapted pedagogy and analysed 'current teaching practices', while simultaneously seeking to improve students' literacy and communication skills and whole school behaviour management.
- **Drouin Secondary College's** primary focus was the improvement of literacy and communication skills and performance, including through the integration of phonics into teaching, but it also sought to improve student engagement, while using school and community resources to provide positive role models for students. In a similar vein, the **Trinity Gardens Primary School Cluster** looked at literacy programmes that 'make a difference for boys', ways of making teaching practices in literacy more appropriate for interactive-experiential learners and ways schools have addressed some of the stereotypes that work against boys' literacy attainment. This was all backed up with strategies to increase male role models in literacy and alternative forms of behaviour management that require students to talk and write things down to help solve problems.
- The **Wynnum North State High School Cluster** taught a small group of targeted, disengaged boys a 10-week *Men and Meaning* course in an off-campus site. The course included a focus on literacy and engaging youth in self-directed activity designed to build motivation and self-esteem.
- **Batchelor Area School** focused on good behaviour management practices based on positive teacher-student relationships and trust, along with innovative methods of engaging students in learning literacy and numeracy, including technology and 'real life tasks'. All of this was supported with an exploration of the positive impact of male role models in the classroom.

- **Kingston Primary School** modelled successful relationships and social skills by engaging students in specific project work with appointed community mentors and peer buddies. The 12-week projects, for targeted 'under-achieving' and 'disruptive' male students in the middle primary years, focused on improved literacy and communication skills through short, strategic daily teaching sessions and improved engagement and motivation to learn through participation in school-based hands-on work.

There was also substantial variety of approach among the schools and clusters involved in each of the different categories of activity, as evidenced by the following examples from each category.⁵

Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment

Some projects in this domain focused on the need to build on boys' strengths, such as the **West Wallsend High School Cluster**, which then used these to inform its participation in a boys' education programme offered in partnership with the University of Newcastle. And in what amounts to an extension of this theme, **Moranbah East State School** sought to increase the level of teacher competence in developing effective thinking strategies to improve both attitudes and learning outcomes for targeted boys.

Targeting of particular groups of boys for additional, intensive support was common to many school and cluster projects such as **Southwell Primary School**, which looked at Aboriginal Studies across the school, along with professional development for staff on teaching and learning strategies to more effectively support Indigenous students, and especially boys. The school sought to involve students in a variety of learning tasks, including designing and painting an Indigenous mural in partnership with the local Myoongah community, and using ICTs across all learning areas.

Such targeting of students for further support implies, as it did in the **Camberwell High School Cluster**, the need to 'identify the individual boys in the "tail", define the characteristics of these students, monitor their progress through the "system", and then provide programmes appropriate to their needs'.

Several schools and clusters in this category of activity sought to specifically respond to different students' needs and learning styles, such as **Cardiff South Public School**, which focused on introducing pedagogy that allows for the different learning styles that all students, but especially boys, exhibit. This included opportunities for boys to express themselves physically through such programmes as break dancing and *Rock and Water*⁶, and involved work with parents to promote the importance of different approaches to supporting boys.

Developing teacher competence and skills was a theme across all the projects funded, and was clearly evident in the **Warwick Senior High School Cluster** where a core group of teachers cooperatively learned about 'appropriate teaching and learning strategies for boys'. The teachers engaged in action learning across the eight schools and used reflective journals to track changes in their own teaching practices and the responses of boys.

Tudor House was one of a number of schools that included an ICT focus in its work for students – in this case in Years 4–6 – which complemented multi-age investigations in science for students in K–3. The school's *Web-Based Support for Independent Learning* was designed to expand on a pilot project implemented in 2002 which involved boys in the use of discussion forums and chat rooms to discuss and plan tasks, and to initiate and pursue extension work. The school is establishing *Tudor Online* as a 'permanent part' of its Year 4–6 network, and is researching the effectiveness of using the 'new literacy' of discussion boards and chat rooms as a teaching strategy for boys.

⁵ These are, of course, merely a cross-section of snapshots to illustrate the range of activity undertaken through the programme, and are supplemented by further reports of school and cluster experiences in 'The outcomes of school/cluster projects'.

⁶ *Rock and Water* is a martial arts based physical and social skills development programme using games and activities to develop self-control, self-reflection and self-confidence, which was used by a number of project schools and clusters in different contexts.



Lismore High School, which has been focusing on boys' education since the 1990s, built on an already comprehensive set of programmes to 'empower boys as learners'. The school has collected a wide range of gender-specific data over several years, which has been used to identify key 'leverage points' for change. The specific focus of the project in this context is the movement from the 'transition period of Year 7' to the 'School Certificate process which commences in Year 8'. The school is implementing a seven-step process to meet the needs of students at risk of failing at this point, which includes a combination of literacy support, intensive withdrawal, self-realisation in terms of learning styles and goal setting, family support, rewards, and pre- and post-testing.

An equally comprehensive approach was evident at **Hampton Primary School**, which employed an educator to work with the prep class teacher and develop 'activity-based learning centres and focused instruction, based on regular and accurate assessment'. The teacher also had the opportunity to visit other classrooms and schools to view best practice, and was able to draw on resources to reorganise the classroom and broaden the reading experience of her prep students.

Literacy and communication skills

The project at **Moerlina School** was designed to explore ways to motivate boys to write by linking 'real life experience and texts in a variety of media'. This involved not just connecting reading, writing, viewing and speaking to matters of relevance to students' lives, but also promoting literacy-based mentor relationships with male relatives and friends. The school began its work by exploring different motivating factors for boys' writing through the structure of '*4MAT* and *Multiple Intelligences*', as a prelude to school-wide change beyond this project period aimed at improving literacy skills and application to writing.

A mentoring dimension also was evident at **Kippa-Ring State School**, which implemented the comprehensive, research-based *Boys Reading and Growing* (BRAG) programme to develop greater participation in class learning activities where reading is a component, improved reading strategies and increased willingness to read. In the first instance the programme involved role models from the local community working with small groups of boys to highlight the importance of reading in their lives. This was followed by a planned visit from a storyteller, further individualised support with small, targeted groups, and the provision of resources to supplement the boys' reading.

Bridgewater Primary School, as with a number of other schools in this category of programme activity, sought to inject phonics directly into its literacy teaching for boys. The school established a research project to track boys' literacy outcomes and targeted a group of students with reading difficulties who required additional support. By integrating a 'structured multi-sensory phonics approach' within its literacy programme (on a whole school basis, but especially in the early years), and using explicit teaching strategies, the school sought to improve literacy skills for all, including boys, and to gather evidence of its success.

Evidence was a key focus at **Macquarie University Special Education Centre** as well. The use of *Making Up Lost Time in Literacy* (MULTILIT) built on a programme already in place that researches and develops more effective ways of teaching 'low-progress readers experiencing severe difficulties in learning literacy skills' (ie students who are at least two years behind their peers in reading accuracy). Preliminary results for the period 1996–1998 suggested average gains for such students involved in the MULTILIT of 15 months in reading accuracy and 13.5 months in reading comprehension over two terms of instruction. This lighthouse project updates those results in an effort to demonstrate the success of the approach so it can be spread to other educational settings.

Palmerston District Primary School aimed not just to improve literacy and communication teaching and outcomes, but to reach out to parents as well. More specifically, the project comprised:

- the implementation of a *Cooperative Reading: As Easy as ABC* programme in two Year 5–6 classes, which is based on good practice and associated professional development in boys' education; and
- a 14-week course during term 3 to assist parents wishing to 'upgrade their own literacy skills in order to support their children's learning needs'.

Student engagement and motivation

Some of the projects in this category, particularly in the primary schools and clusters, involved withdrawing students from class for a period of time, such as the *Special Children Offered Positive Experiences (SCOPE) Boys' Programme* at **Wagaman Primary School**, which used Glasser's Choice Theory and its own conception of 'Nanna's Rules' to make a difference to what boys can achieve.

At the secondary level, where the research suggests engagement lags further behind, the approach adopted often involved a focus on vocational education and, in particular, future pathways for students. **Kuranda State High School**, for instance, used its Future Pathways programme to focus on mentoring and literacy development, as well as providing students with the opportunity to explore 'their ideas and concepts with regard to schooling, future employment and/or future study, and learning and life paths'.

The **St Clair High School** project sought to 'deliver and evaluate the success of a broad range of events and experiences for our boys'. In an effort to strengthen boys' attitudes, elevate their self-esteem, enhance their motivation and increase their engagement, the school targeted a range of skills such as teamwork, refined its English curriculum development for boys, enhanced its primary school links for boys, increased the involvement of parents of boys, provided male leadership opportunities and celebrated boys' achievement.

Sometimes the focus on resilience was manifest in more targeted experiences such as the 'wilderness treks for boys from 11–14 years of age who have been identified (as) at risk within their school settings' in the **Nerang State High School Cluster** of schools. The treks are designed to improve the students' 'self-esteem, goal-setting ability and self-control' through participation in a 'challenging but rewarding outdoor experience'. The cluster intends to subject the programme to a 'thorough evaluation' to determine any short-term changes in student attitudes and behaviours that ensue.

At an even more expansive level, perhaps, **Stromlo High School** embarked on a programme to promote student engagement, leadership and personal responsibility which involved students in 'a mastery process of learning' comprising:

- The *Rock and Water* programme;
- *Response-Ability* training – a vision-driven, goal-setting, behavioural training process that explains and practises how to act responsibly in life's unpredictable situations;
- *The Global Classroom* – a series of specific activities designed to promote global awareness in critical learning areas, in a way that engages boys and prepares them for the future;
- *Motivating Underachievers* – a series of methods designed to improve organisational, task and academic skills;
- *Adventure Learning* – activities that challenge boys to use and develop real confidence in their physical and mental expertise while facing perceived risks in indoor and outdoor leadership and team scenarios.

Behaviour management programmes

The *Rock and Water* programme, used from an engagement perspective at Stromlo High mentioned above, was also adopted by **Thornlie Primary School** and other schools, but with more of a behaviour management aim in mind; in part because of the link between building student resilience and improved behaviour management in schools. The development of a 'gender-based *Rock and Water* programme' at Thornlie specifically sought to improve student self-esteem and self-discipline, backed up by training for staff in relevant strategies to optimise social and academic outcomes for boys, both at home and at school.



At a somewhat broader level, the project at **Isabella Plains Primary School** set out to support students in developing and using appropriate social skills. The school's *Social Skills Programme* places students in multi-age K–6 groups to explore 'a range of skills that are imperative in interpersonal relationships'. By using all available teaching staff, the teacher–student ratio is kept to 1:17 for these sessions, where students participate in a range of learning experiences which follow a set format (developed by staff) and gradually build their repertoire of social skills. Students have the opportunity to 'rehearse the negotiated skill' during the lesson, and are supported in the playground with a number of systems for 'recognising appropriate play'.

A number of projects adopted peer mediation and/or peer support as a key way of positively influencing behaviour. **Jasper Road Public School** implemented three interlinked programmes to provide boys with the opportunity to develop interpersonal and leadership skills, including peer mediation, classroom meetings and buddy support.

Positive role models for students

Typical of a number of projects in this domain was the introduction by the **Catholic College Bendigo** of a 'one-to-one mentor programme that connects interested fathers, grandfathers, retired men and male staff in our school community with boys in Years 7–9 who are seen to be at risk'; with a particular focus on boys who have no father figure living at home. Mentors are matched to students with whom they might share some recreational, vocational or community service interest, and they are encouraged to meet regularly, both in and out of school hours, and to exchange literature relevant to their common interest. The students document their contacts through structured journal writing, which contributes to their reading and writing, as well as their engagement and self-esteem.

In a somewhat more structured approach, the Ten Good Men project at **Kormilda College** saw 10 young men between the ages of 20 and 35 invited to school assembly and to workshop groups of 25 male students for two hours. The 10 involved were asked to discuss 'their life journey with the students, answer questions about points of significance that have assisted them in this journey, and to reflect upon their journey and to make proactive statements about how they could have improved it'.

The **Riverside Primary Schools Cluster** sought a very broad range of school and community involvement through:

- 'high interest', hands-on clubs for six weeks with 50 per cent male leadership;
- a *Let's Have a Story Dad* programme where dads and granddads were provided with some basic training and then regularly read to small groups of students;
- tutoring of small groups of students in circus skills by Year 10 boys from **Coodanup Community College**;
- invitations to 'significant males' from the local community to be guest speakers; and
- sharing of successful strategies identified by teachers involved with all of the cluster staff.

The focus on dads was particularly strong in the **Upper Yarra Secondary College Cluster** of 12 schools where a *Boys and Dads: Making Better Men* programme involved:

- four Boys and Dads sessions, conducted by a psychologist, which addressed adolescence, education and fathering issues;
- nine *Boys' and Dads' Health* Programme Workshops; and
- two adventure camps for boys and dads which promoted teamwork and included a defined educational component.

THE OUTCOMES OF school/cluster projects

Stage One of this programme has seen a vast amount of activity undertaken by schools and clusters to improve the educational engagement and outcomes of boys which, across the 110 schools and clusters, has resulted in:

- greatly improved awareness among teachers and other school community members of issues in the education of boys and appropriate, evidence-based strategies to address these;
- a significant trialling of new pedagogical approaches designed to improve boys' learning outcomes (particularly in relation to literacy) and their engagement in learning, commonly related to research findings on approaches that are more effective with boys;
- increased dialogue within school communities and across clusters of schools about boys' education and how to improve it;
- evidence of improved educational outcomes, particularly in reading literacy, of some boys participating in projects;
- many instances of improved levels of attendance and engagement with learning by boys, and improved behaviour as a result, both at school and at home; and
- effective use of positive role models and mentors from within the school and the wider community.

Most of this activity was informed by a range of research, most notably material provided by Curriculum Corporation through its website and its links, and including the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee's Inquiry into the education of boys, published as *Boys: Getting it Right*.

Almost without exception, the schools and clusters involved report strong support from parents and the community, with no adverse reactions at all. In addition, reports from schools and clusters reveal that the programme gained a significant public profile in many cases, including a degree of local and State or Territory newspaper and television coverage, and interest and comment from a number of State and federal parliamentary representatives.

To provide a comprehensive and coherent picture of the range of activity that did occur, and its impact at the school and cluster level, the five categories for which schools and clusters were selected (previously outlined in detail under 'The focus of school and cluster projects') have been further divided where appropriate with the result that 11 sub-categories are discussed. In each case, the outline of school and cluster activities ends with a summary of the key features of activity that have informed the guiding principles for improved boys' education outlined later in the report.

These divisions are, of course, somewhat arbitrary and at times involve significant degrees of overlap. Hands-on learning, for example, is often as much about student engagement and motivation as it is a matter of pedagogy, but is listed within the first broad category ('pedagogy, curriculum and assessment') because it involves significant changes in the way that teachers work. On the other side of the ledger, the adventure and outdoor challenge programmes are primarily designed to enhance students' engagement and motivation, but do also involve changes to the nature of curriculum programmes and how they are delivered. Alternatively, peer mediation and peer support programmes involve a strong focus on role modelling among students, but an analysis of the reasons why such programmes were adopted reveals that they relate more to behaviour management than to role modelling as such.

Running through all of the sub-categories that make up the bulk of this report were efforts by schools to build a culture that will result in boys engaging in learning at school when appropriately challenged, supported and taught. Sometimes this focused on different teaching and learning styles, an examination of how these may or may not relate to gender



stereotypes, and then providing activities to challenge and expand the range of 'acceptable' activities for boys (eg poetry, drama and dance). In other cases, schools looked at how challenging gender stereotyping can impact positively on issues such as bullying and marginalisation of non-conforming boys and, in all cases, they sought to move beyond perceptions of activities with novelty value to programmes that ensure higher order outcomes are achieved.

Regardless of the categories that apply, however, or the specific approach adopted, the actual challenge the schools and clusters all effectively addressed was a common one. It arguably was summed up by one teacher involved in a project teleconference (involving **Homebush Boys' High School** along with **Trinity Gardens, Hampton, Elsternwick** and **Crafrers Primary Schools**), who asked, 'What does a school that has structured itself to cater for the needs of boys actually look like?'

Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment

Learning styles and teaching practice

This was perhaps the most popular focus of schools and clusters involved in the programme. In broad terms it involved efforts to widen the range of teaching activities to better match the needs of boys, often with an equal focus on improving the nature and quality of teacher–student relationships.

The project at **Cardiff South Public School** is a particularly good illustration of where the primary area of focus (on teaching practice and learning styles) almost inevitably spills over into a range of other focuses. This is evident in the school's statement of key practices that involve:

- a whole school programme, with a particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy, along with special programmes to improve behaviour among senior students; and
- efforts to recruit male role models in a school where only one teacher is male.

Beyond this, the school already was implementing programmes that emphasise more hands-on activity, such as *Count Me in Too* and *Counting on in Maths*, and others that 'acknowledge the boys' enjoyment of gentle competition such as the Premier's Reading Challenge'.

Keeping this broad sweep of activity in mind, the key focus of project activity in this school was training for, and subsequent implementation of, pedagogy that acknowledges and responds to different learning styles. The school's aim, in this context, was to develop a common, whole school approach to pedagogy required for successful boys' education, with particular emphasis on the *Productive Pedagogies*⁷ approach and boys and their male role models through the *Fathers First* programme provided by Richard Fletcher.

Fathers First stresses the importance of fathers in the education of their children, especially boys, and resulted in boys inviting significant male family members and friends to their classes for various activities. *Productive Pedagogies*, along with a programme on the boy-friendly classroom, targeted rich tasks and strategies that involve multiple learning styles, including more physical activity in the curriculum programme.

⁷ More information about this form of pedagogy can be found in the research report: Lingard, B, Martino, W, Mills, M and Bahr, M, 2002, *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys*, Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), Canberra.

The outcome has been a three-pronged, whole school approach. This involved initial training for staff to raise their awareness of how boys learn and the implications this has for pedagogy, educating parents about boys' education, and implementing specific strategies in teaching of boys including more hands-on activities in class. This was all supplemented by the use of the *Rock and Water* programme (used by a number of schools in different categories of activity discussed) which teaches self-defence underpinned by the themes of self-discipline, respect for others and conflict resolution through responsible means.

One particularly interesting feature of the programme was the conduct of boys' dance classes for students in Years 5 and 6, conducted by a dance specialist and supplemented by music and rhythms that were culturally appropriate for the target group. This was a direct response to the need for more physical activity in class and was extremely well received by the students themselves; with boys commonly observing, as one typically put it, 'it was good because we get moving instead of sitting in the classroom all day', to which another added, 'it made me ready for schoolwork ... I got warmed up'. It ought be noted, in this context, that the school decided to deliver the dance classes out of sight of girls, which proved important to avoid embarrassment among some boys.

Another feature was the programme to engage fathers more. This saw fathers invited to classrooms to view completed work and undertake a learning activity with their children, and students surveying their fathers (or other significant male) as part of their literacy work, then writing descriptions and making oral presentations which were videoed and shown to the males. School-based evaluations revealed that the adult males involved found the whole experience worthwhile and sought greater involvement in their children's education as a result. From the students' side, it was seen to build individual confidence and create a reason for students to produce their best possible work.

The **St Kieran's Primary School Cluster** (also known as the Manly Vale–Warringah Cluster) also had a wide-ranging set of objectives for its project, but with a particularly strong focus on different learning styles and expanding teachers' repertoires of practice.

The schools involved in the cluster already were connected through the umbrella Leading Innovative Learning Team (LILT), formed in response to concerns regarding gender balance in their upper primary sections, and which already had nominated a focus on boys for 2003, including:

- education for staff on better ways of meeting the diverse needs of learners, especially boys; and
- extended provision for boys' learning needs as a result.

The subsequent action proceeded on the basis of research findings from Churchill Fellow Ian Lillico which suggest, among other things, that:

- physical activity is a good way to open boys up;
- teachers must teach less and facilitate more;
- boys need to communicate more before writing, and when they talk through their writing, its fluency and volume increases;
- when boys are given responsibility they grow;
- boys have always learnt by being shown and we must encourage teachers to demonstrate more; and
- there is a need to explicitly structure time more so there are suggested time frames for tasks which boys can then manage themselves.



The cluster developed a consistent 'scaffold' to guide the work of its member schools, which encouraged them to plan and record their activities according to the broad, interrelated areas of classroom organisation and teaching styles, classroom environment, learning styles, impact on home environment, and leadership. Schools selected their own focus of activity within this scaffold; the actual projects included engaging the learner in the multimedia classroom, gender stereotypes, two slightly different peer support/mentoring leadership programmes, and learning styles.

Each school arranged a planning day where the school's cluster representative worked with staff to develop specific teaching and learning activities to be implemented over the following 12 weeks. In general, these teaching and learning activities were integrated into the existing school programme so they were not seen as an add-on to an already crowded curriculum; teachers could implement them as 'an integral and immediate part of their practice'.

While a wide diversity of activities occurred, they had in common the fact that students generally took on more responsible roles (including leadership and mentoring) and assumed more responsibility for their own learning and set their own learning goals. They also worked more as independent learners, took risks in their learning, reflected on their experiences and attitudes as boys in the school, and worked in a variety of groups.

One important observation the cluster made in this context is that the whole experience confirmed for them the findings of the 2002 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training⁸ that:

- The quality of relationships between students, teachers and parents is crucial to achieving optimal education outcomes for all students;
- boys like to be shown steps toward achieving success, so structured programmes with clear objectives and simple instructions work best ; and
- boys work best in short, challenging, hands-on teacher-directed classroom activities with physical involvement rather than group work.

Beyond this, the multimedia literacy project in particular provided 'strong evidence' to support Lilloco's view⁹ that 'teacher culture must accept that quiet classrooms do not necessarily equal good learning. Actively engaged boys can frequently be loud and this does not represent failure on a teacher's behalf. Flexible and varied teaching methodologies need to be employed with frequent use of technology, media and interactive teaching aids'. Students in the multimedia literacy project certainly were loud, 'freely moving from one group to another in the Technology Centre and Library, interacting, facilitating and working on different aspects of their own projects (eg filming, photographing, finding and making props). This required a level of trust on the part of the teacher, and responsibility by the children to be productive in a set time frame ... The unstructured and noisy appearance of the activity did not indicate a lack of control or failure by the teacher, rather it resulted in focused, motivated students who were enthused by a sense of empowerment'.

Schools involved in the cluster feel that the project was 'highly effective' in terms of starting to shift teacher attitudes and practice in relation to boys' education, to encompass what works well in the classroom for boys; as evidenced by one teacher who observed that, 'before I set any task now, I find myself thinking about how it will work for the boys – I didn't do that before'. In this context, the cluster was clear in its recommendations to other schools that 'methodology in the classroom should be varied and flexible to adapt to different learning styles' and 'teachers need to provide relevant and meaningful learning situations for boys'. In addition, they advised, 'teachers should provide clear directions and structures for boys, boundaries that are clear, fair and realistic ... (and) boys should have goals to aim for which provide a clear purpose for them and allow for success'.

⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002, *Boys: Getting it Right, Report on the inquiry into the education of boys*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

⁹ Lilloco, I 2001, *Australian Issues in Boys' Education*, Tranton Enterprises, Duncraig, WA: 11.

While **Hampton Primary School's** project ostensibly focused on literacy, and reading in particular, its structure and implementation were designed to have a much broader impact on teaching and learning in the school. With an intake that comprises 61 per cent boys, who consistently perform below girls in literacy and occasion more social and interpersonal concerns, the school took, as its jumping off point, the whole school design elements built into Victoria's *Early Years Literacy Programme*, which it sees as important in meeting the learning needs of boys:

- High expectations and early intervention are essential.
- Teachers need to be able to articulate what they do and why they teach, to ensure clear and focused instruction.
- A common framework of standards is a pre-condition of systemic improvement, and assessment should indicate the extent to which targets have been met.
- Data can drive instruction and improve learning.
- There should be a balanced use of teacher-directed and student-centred teaching, and teachers should provide learning experiences that are both relevant and meaningful to the students.
- There is a need for a team coordinator to act as mentor and 'lead learner'.
- There is a need to invest in training focused on leadership for teaching and learning.

The school, in this context, engaged an educational consultant (Anne Hammond) to work with the teacher of an all-boys prep class to 'develop activity-based learning centres and focused instruction, based on regular and accurate assessment'. During the course of the project, the teacher also visited other classrooms and schools to see 'best practice' and what could be learned from it. In broad terms, the project resourced and reorganised the classroom to broaden the reading experiences of the prep boys, increased the amount of reading in the school's two-hour daily literacy block, developed the boys' independence in the selection of text, identified and sourced books that were of interest to the boys and related to their own experiences, and provided a variety of male role models including fathers as classroom helpers, and high profile footballers who read with the students.

Sitting behind all this was a vast array of more detailed strategies that were trialled, and which are listed in the final school project report. These include the introduction of books involving 'read and perform' or 'read and make experiences' which were 'stored in plastic display containers that allowed the boys to see the cover ... and allowed easy access', or increasing the number of guided reading sessions to assist the boys in developing 'appropriate strategies to construct meaning and explore the language and features of the text'.

Collection of monthly text level data at the school reveals that, 'despite the very slow start, the boys' literacy levels are steadily improving'. Beyond this, the consultant observed that 'boys encourage each other' when working in groups and that 'reading strategies are verbalised and now a natural part of their language use', the boys enjoy Freaky Friday Reading when they get to choose books independently without concern for levels, and they 'are involved in independent reading for longer periods'. Significantly, the school explains, the project also has addressed 'the class teacher's need', and regular interaction with a critical friend and mentor has increased her confidence and raised expectations of her own professional abilities and capacity to make a difference for boys. This suggests a need for more teachers to be involved from the start in any such future activity.

Having identified that 'some boys were not achieving to their full potential and did not seem to be as engaged in learning as girls', **Salisbury High School** sought to build on successes it had experienced with enterprise education – which involves 'working closely with our local community to develop authentic and active programmes which are rich



in problem-solving opportunities, teamwork and verbal communication skills' – to improve the education of boys. In particular, the school was concerned to develop a 'variety of explicit class and school strategies' which include:

- establishing positive and affirming relationships between students and with staff;
- creating opportunities for active learning that extend beyond the classroom, so that boys can see a real purpose for learning and become actively engaged in negotiating their learning;
- ensuring that assessment is both explicit and flexible;
- ensuring specific and clear instructions and structure to support their learning;
- providing extra support and intervention to develop effective organisational skills to support their learning;
- being exposed to a variety of successful male role models among peers and the wider community;
- recognising, highlighting and promoting achievements in a range of activities; and
- addressing behaviour management in a context of mutual respect.

Thus, it embarked on a programme of activity aimed at raising 'teacher and student awareness of issues in boys' education', overseen by a boys' education project team, and integrated with the school's existing pastoral care approach, where every teacher and leader is 'an advocate for the same group of approximately 15 students over their entire secondary education'. A key purpose in this regard was to ensure that the 'pockets of excellent classroom teaching of boys occurring' are shared and adopted more widely through the school.

Since the data collected on student achievement and engagement showed that boys in Year 9 were most in need of support, the programme was aimed at this level, and involved the following strategies.

- Classroom action research was used in different subject areas. Six teachers participated in these trials, focusing on such approaches as:
 - ◆ supporting students in their organisation using folders to collect and store completed work, modified assessments, assessment progress reports to students, parent involvement, structured timeline of activities in lessons, explicit explanations of all activities, and incorporation of 10 minutes of silent working time each lesson;
 - ◆ varied activities in conjunction with changing the physical environment (classroom, outdoor activities, computer Internet assignments), de-emphasis on writing tasks though still included, fun activities for designated times, explicit assessments, open marks book so boys know their progress, and use of set time limits on tasks;
 - ◆ focus on students being more organised by using folders and a set of prepared sheets, shorter and more discrete learning and assessment tasks, and use of graph paper to improve setting out and write-ups;
 - ◆ focus on praise and more positive talk and feedback, weekly quizzes as part of assessment, assessment results displayed, and explicit outline of the programme of work given to students;
 - ◆ focus on proximal learning with groups, one-third of the time in friendship groups, one-third in gender groups and one-third in mixed groups, but not with usual friends, and use of an innovative approach to writing poetry with active performance as an end point;
 - ◆ focus on organising equipment, teacher expectations of students' listening skills, and specific attention to concentration skills including 10 minutes of silent work each lesson.

- Year 9 care teachers trialled the Restorative Justice approach to behaviour management. Thirteen teachers explained the concept to their care groups (which involves accepting the consequences of actions and then improving relationships with others) and how it would work in conjunction with the overall care group and behaviour management system.
- The *Rock and Water* programme was trialled for Year 9 boys in an effort to provide physical and social skills for boys to better engage them in school, strengthen peer friendships and manage bullying behaviour.

Indications are that this three-fold approach is proving worthwhile, though they also point to a need to focus on Year 8 as much or perhaps even more than Year 9. That said, the school has noticed 'a ripple effect from Year 9 into other year levels, especially into Year 8 (and) teachers involved in the classroom trials, and other teachers, have already begun of their own volition to use some of the strategies/methodologies in their other classes'. In addition, the school has noted 'more positive talk among some staff about the needs of boys ... (and) This trial will now lead to productive planning for Year 8 next year, for example, the development of consistent policies around students being supported in their classroom organisation'.

In this context, there is particular value in heeding the advice provided by the school on how best to move forward in relation to boys' education. From their experience to date, they recommend that:

- schools form boys' education project teams to guide the implementation of changes that will improve outcomes for boys – 'it has been an excellent way to keep boys on the agenda and raise whole school awareness';
- schools collect data that give indications of the problems and issues that need to be addressed – 'surveys of staff and students, student assessment results, attendance figures and behaviour management statistics provide data that paint a very clear picture for teachers';
- change must occur in the classroom – 'unless there is change in relationships, methodology and structures then boys will not be as successful as they could be ... (and) key aspects to address are explicit instruction, support with personal organisation, flexible assessment and authentic learning';
- schools should have value-added programmes that address the emotional needs of boys within a physically active context; and
- boys' education should be a school priority and be an integral part of a school's documented strategic plan.

An existing enterprise education programme, which has enabled the school to forge positive links with its community as part of a middle school initiative whereby local business people act as mentors for groups of students to develop and market their own business concept over 10 weeks, was also the starting point for **Yahl Primary School's** efforts to make learning more relevant and engaging for boys.

The school engaged Year 3–7 boys in a process of data collection in relation to literacy, learning styles, social issues, attitudes to school and areas of interest so they could then identify strengths within the school and opportunities for improvement. Boys then nominated to participate in 'elective' activities offered by the school that catered for a range of different learning styles and levels of learning, and focused on developing a range of literacy skills such as writing styles, communicating with others and planning activities. The specific electives offered (all but one of which was facilitated by an adult male community member) were:

- carpentry, where students worked in small teams at the feeder high school constructing garden seating;
- cooking, where students worked alongside the head chef at TAFE to plan and prepare a range of meals;
- physical education, where students organised and participated in golf coaching sessions with a local community member;

- art and design, where students completed a design brief allocated by their mentor based on a topic of interest; and
- ICTs, where students developed multimedia skills, planning and preparing a short video.

Regardless of the elective chosen, the boys had to complete a set of accompanying literacy-based activities including development of a bank of words associated with their elective, writing a set of instructions relevant to their elective such as a recipe for cooking, identifying the use of key competencies within their project, researching occupations in industries related to their elective, and evaluating the learning experience. In this context the school has noted that, although the tasks worked because the students could see their relevance, the time allocated for them was insufficient; and in future they would consider two one and a half hour sessions a week instead of one, so there could be one for the activity and the other for explicit instruction in literacy and completion of those tasks.

The level of engagement observed from the boys participating 'was very strong' due, in the school's view, to the range of activities offered and the fact that the boys had a choice. As one boy typically noted, 'I thought our project was good because we got to get out of the class and we got to do different things'. Parents were equally enthusiastic, with one noting they had never seen their son 'so keen to go to school. He is simply loving hands-on cooking, working outside of the school. He comes home each time and makes for us what he has done during the day and is very keen to talk about what he has done. He is now talking about wanting to follow this career path at high school'.

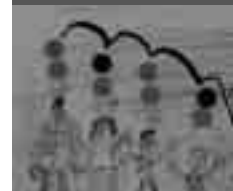
The question of 'which boys?' framed the **Bucasia State School Cluster** (also known as Mackay Cluster) project. It was evident to the schools involved, from their readings and discussions, that the issues of boys' education need to be focused; especially since 'some boys experience success every day in schools while some boys do not experience success at all'. So it is a matter of being clear about which boys to target and which aspects of learning to address.

To this end, the cluster adopted a two-part strategy that involved:

- each teacher looking at their own group of learners, with particular reference to boys, and then identifying an aspect of learning for these students – with seven teachers then trialling and sharing specific strategies related to critical literacy (with an emphasis on comprehending texts), engaging the learner, addressing hierarchies of masculinity and social skilling; and
- building teachers' professional knowledge, including the provision of substantial professional development, so they can 'move beyond a "tips for teachers" approach in addressing the educational needs of boys'; and instead bring together 'sophisticated research-based knowledge with deep knowledge of the best teaching practices'.

While the seven teachers used quite varied approaches, students across the four sites of intervention engaged in such activities as:

- substantive discussions using scaffolds such as Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* and subjects such as 'what it is like to be a boy';
- reading and viewing texts (eg television commercials, magazines, literature);
- creating texts (eg narratives for younger readers);
- exploring emotions through drama;
- the use of problem-solving skills (eg playing chess); and
- socialisation activities of various sorts (eg running a computer club).



The outcomes of the individual projects have proved very positive, with teachers noting:

- heightened engagement as evidenced by, for instance, increased quality participation in class discussions, improved oral communication, transfer of learning to other classes, and increased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem which in turn are resulting in greater perseverance and completion of tasks;
- improved boys' vocabulary in relation to explaining and discussing emotions and feelings, greater awareness of others and improved capacity to work in groups, and improved relationships between teachers and the targeted boys; and
- improved literacy outcomes as evidenced by enhanced knowledge of decoding strategies, better understanding and application of all four resources of a reader, and improved attitudes to reading and hence motivation to read.

The cluster arrangement between the schools then enabled these teachers to share their experiences and engage in critical reflection and supportive discussion, and to receive constructive feedback while alerting others to new practices they might consider. Across the four schools, the 'deliberate choice to ask the question "which boys?" forced each participant to look at the individual and his needs. This concentration of focus led to increased opportunities to catch boys doing the right thing, provide positive reinforcement and praise specific behaviours. The "which boys?" paradigm inspired connection to the individual ... (and) the virtual backpack (ie prior knowledge, home literacies and home culture) that each child brings to school'.

At the beginning of 2003, **Southwell Primary School** identified students 'at educational risk' as a particular focus for the year. In this context, an analysis of school data showed that Indigenous students performed at 'a lower level' than non-Indigenous students, and Indigenous boys performed at a lower level than Indigenous girls; with lower levels of attendance as well. Hence, there had to be a particular focus on the teaching and learning of Indigenous boys.

Professional development undertaken by teachers in relation to both literacy and Indigenous education 'alerted the staff to the wide range of learning styles and the necessity to present learning activities to cater for all students regardless of ability, culture or background'. Literacy Net, which is based on checkpoints and the development of individual profiles, was adopted as a 'pivotal tool' in this regard, to identify the students at risk and devise individual education plans with specific strategies to meet their needs.

Sitting behind the use of Literacy Net was the support of youth workers working with families to improve attendance, and a comprehensive array of pedagogical activities to engage students more. These covered:

- the arts – including engagement of a 'highly successful' dance instructor to take weekly lessons for a nine-week term culminating in a concert where all students participated and families attended;
- Aboriginal Studies – including adoption of an Aboriginal theme across all learning areas in the school during term 2 and the design and production of a mural by Year 5–7 students working with Indigenous grandparents who also shared the significance of the art and their cultural heritage;
- languages other than English – production of plays in English and Italian by students in Years 3–7;
- sports clinics – conducted by a range of outside sporting bodies, which not only exposed students to a range of physical skills, but also provided an opportunity to interact with some male role models; and
- whole class thematic approach – beyond the term 2 theme, each teacher now is committed to 'an integrated class theme with the topic negotiated with the children each term' and subsequent communication with specialist teachers to ensure that it is integrated across teaching and learning programmes.



This overall approach is based on staff recognition that students at risk require 'a clear structure, clearly articulated purposes for learning, easily understood and shared methods of assessment, explicit teaching of values and positive goals'. In terms of learning styles there then is, according to the school, a need to acknowledge that boys 'need more explicit teaching; like to be shown steps towards achieving success; work best in short, challenging, hands-on, teacher-directed activities; and respond to relationships with teachers who are consistent and attuned to boys' sense of justice'.

The upshot of this array of activity has been improved attendance, evident in the attendance registers, a decrease in behavioural misdemeanours, increased participation and willingness to take risks and contribute to sessions, and a higher level of cooperation and collaboration in class. In addition, evidence from portfolios, Literacy Net and other review sources suggests that students are more engaged in literacy learning, and the use of Literacy Net as a monitoring and planning tool has raised the profile of literacy while expanding the range of strategies used.

Indigenous students were also the focus of activity at **Tom Price Senior High School**, which is a small school in the remote Pilbara characterised by high levels of transience and high turnover of teachers, with the result that most teachers are in the first, second or third year in the profession. The core idea underpinning the school's project in this context was that 'the best schools for the education of boys are those in which teachers are able to apply a range of teaching strategies according to student needs, value time on task, develop positive and caring relationships with students and who encourage high standards of student performance'; hence teacher development and learning is the key.

The 'inclusivity and difference' principle implicit in this belief is especially relevant at Tom Price because of the focus on Indigenous boys who, perhaps more than other students even, require 'learning experiences that are motivating and which have a clear purpose'. This is especially the case at Year 10 in the school, which has twice as many boys as girls, a number of whom have poor behaviour and/or attendance.

There were two main strands of the project. One involved professional development of various sorts to enhance teacher knowledge and skills in relation to educating boys in the classroom – with particular emphasis on developing the analysis and problem-solving abilities of boys along with their capacity to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others. The other was the implementation of strategies that would engage Indigenous boys in education by providing a 'more inclusive school learning environment and through goal setting and seeing what is possible'. Specific strategies used in this context included:

- visits by an educational consultant (Greg Mitchell) to provide professional development on adapting pedagogy, curriculum and assessment for different learning styles and to conduct demonstration lessons for staff;
- parent workshops delivered by the visiting consultant to strengthen their support for teachers' work;
- individual professional development for teachers on boys' education strategies using a train-the-trainer approach to ensure they flow on to others;
- Indigenous cultural awareness professional development for staff, such as a *Wannu Wannu* and *Our Story* programme provided by the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, to 'sensitise teachers to how aspects of Aboriginal culture affect teaching of Indigenous students', especially boys;
- involvement of Indigenous men within the community as mentors and guest speakers to Indigenous students as an initiative of the *Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committee*; and
- continued revision of the school's behaviour management policy to ensure that teachers are proactive in stopping problems from occurring, while also tackling teasing and bullying which takes place.

There has been a 'very good uptake' of pedagogical strategies to cater for different learning styles among staff, with 14 of the 15 teachers indicating they had tried ideas from their professional development: four 'somewhat successfully', seven 'reasonably successfully' and three 'very successfully'. All teachers surveyed felt they had increased their knowledge of the issues regarding boys' education and all were keen to continue learning and trialling new approaches.

There also has been an improvement in the attendance of Indigenous boys, with the group as a whole improving its attendance by 10 per cent; albeit with substantial differences between individual students involved. In addition, there have been 'significant and sustained improvements in student behaviour' and a substantial drop in the number of suspensions recorded by the school. Of 12 teachers surveyed, seven thought the behaviour of their Indigenous students was either 'better or much improved' and only one felt it was worse, largely as a result of an issue with one particular student.

Certainly the whole experience has convinced the school that boys' education programmes should include 'thorough and ongoing professional development concentrating on teacher effectiveness in relation to classroom management, instructional strategies, instructional skills and curriculum'; and such professional development should, if possible, include 'practical demonstration of strategies with credible and experienced presenters'.

The pedagogy and engagement link noted in a number of the projects outlined above was equally evident in the **Open Access College's** R-10 School project, which sought to re-examine practice and adapt pedagogy 'in light of our rapidly changing clientele'; whereby there are 'increasing numbers of students enrolling as a result of an exclusion from their local school', the majority of whom are boys.

The college, which enrolls students unable to access teaching and learning programmes at their local school for a variety of reasons (geography, exclusion, psychological issues), redresses educational disadvantage by 'providing access to a broad, balanced curriculum using a mode of delivery different from face-to-face school. R-10 educators use the telephone and interactive learning programmes. The numbers of students in teaching groups are small, typically fewer than six, and so staff-student and student-student interactions are frequent and occur in a non-threatening environment'. The key, as far as the college is concerned, is to focus on developing the relationships and meeting the specific needs and styles of each individual learner.

The lighthouse schools project enabled volunteer staff in the college to test out an area of pedagogical interest which they believe will enhance learning outcomes and engagement for the boys involved. The range of projects initiated in summary were:

- *Literacy Intervention for Reluctant Readers and Writers* – an intervention programme for students in Year 1 using electronic technologies, structured language programmes, popular texts and a thematic approach to planning and programming;
- collecting, collating and preparing material based on low literacy and numeracy levels with interesting, visually appealing topics to encourage engagement – action research to develop the set of materials for upper primary boys who frequently have a negative attitude to traditional schoolwork (which has proved very time consuming and not easy to produce, leading to a suggestion it ought be a role for centralised curriculum authorities);
- a primary programme to 'thematically' compile lists of resources and accompanying activities on motivating topics or themes;
- exploring and developing the concept of 'flexible boundaries' with a disengaged learner, which primarily focused on developing a meaningful relationship with one Year 9 boy;
- learning technologies focus – a more hands-on approach for geographically isolated primary students and middle school students who attended group workshops, using Movie Making with iMovie and Clay Animation;

- *Beyond the Fluffy Slippers* – pedagogical–dialogic analysis to promote rigour in curriculum delivery – implementation of an action research model with Year 8 boys enrolled on a range of medical and/or behavioural grounds to identify and then extend their comfort zones, while developing their understanding of maths;
- dialogic action in telephone lessons – developing more dynamic groupings for lessons and changing the way in which questioning is used to structure them;
- mentoring for a Year 9 Indigenous student whose attendance has been very poor;
- pedagogical change to build bridges for marginalised students in order to realise social inclusion – working with marginalised boys to build social capital, primarily through developing relationships and accepting each individual involved;
- *Student Voice* – a student representative council involving 15 students who plan actions for the entire student body and give feedback to the college;
- differentiated learning programme involving the provision of some hands-on, open-ended tasks for Year 10 boys, related to real world problems, which saw three boys enter the invention section of the Oliphant Science Awards; and
- Indigenous boys at the Open Access College where teachers have supported R–12 learners through ‘negotiated high interest, success focused, relevant, localised activities’ and thereby engaged and retained them in schooling.



Teachers’ reports point to enhanced participation and engagement in learning, which is a threshold requirement for improved learning outcomes. The main things that appear to have worked to date are the development of stronger student–teacher relationships, the application of technology to learning tasks, and the use of more hands-on activities with a focus on real problems and issues.

The *ARTernative* programme instituted at **Mabuia Island State School** could easily have been reported in the withdrawal programmes section of this report, but is included here because of its strong focus on pedagogy in the particular class involved. The programme, which aims to improve self-esteem for 13 Year 4–7 boys who had been under-performing academically and regularly displaying off-task and inappropriate behaviours, focused on art in ways that directly connect to literacy and behaviour.

The boys involved were placed in an *ARTernative* class, which commenced in 2003, with one teacher and two teacher aides. The students, who already had shown they were more motivated when undertaking art activities at school, were told ‘they would be doing a lot of art as a regular part of their school programme, and that they would have the support of not only their classroom staff, but also visiting artists and other personnel to help them be successful.’¹⁰ They were introduced to an online art course, <http://www.kids-artwork.com> ... offered by a practising artist and teacher the boys knew ... to expand their art skills ... (and) their technology skills’. The purpose of the class, which reflected the boys’ own desires, was to develop the students as a group of successful young artists. At a less overt level, the school intended that the class would also develop students’ literacy skills and ‘teach them the rules of how to be successful’ using the *You Can Do It!* programme with consultancy support.

The actual class programme focused on many and varied art activities, from which other classroom programmes flowed. The class teacher offered these activities on a daily basis, supplemented by the online course, visiting artists including artists in residence, and the visiting behaviour management consultant once a term. The principal acted as a mentor to the class teacher and the programme as a whole, and coordinated many of its components.

¹⁰ An important spin-off of the programme that ought be noted is the fact that artists visiting the school not only worked with this boys’ class, but also provided workshops for staff and community members. This is ‘particularly important in remote places like Mabuia Island where the type and variety of services available are quite limited’.

While the programme is only relatively new, with some components such as *You Can Do It!* only starting earlier this year, the school already is seeing 'marked improvement in on-task behaviour and educational output. This was very noticeable in the artwork that the boys produced', but not so evident in the literacy domain where the school now intends to introduce daily one-to-one literacy intervention of 30 minutes for each student in the group.

Improvements in on-task behaviour have, the school explains, 'allowed this group of boys to spend more time on regular class learning activities. As a result, the students are getting through more work on a daily basis, and this has the potential to improve academic outcomes' even though it is too early to gauge using the standardised measures generally employed. At an even more practical level, the boys' sketchbooks demonstrate 'the huge gains that have been made in the area of sketching through daily sketching (undertaken for at least five to 10 minutes). When the daily sketch programme was introduced in May, the boys were tentative and often said that they could not sketch the still life ... A huge amount of encouragement was provided, and the phrase "nothing is wrong" was constantly repeated in the room. Over time all the boys have become confident and competent sketchers'. And the classroom walls and ceiling 'are a reflection of the quality artwork that the boys now produce ... (and) proudly show ... to all visitors who enter the room'.

Parents and community members frequently comment on 'the success of the programme that they see reflected in the artwork of the boys', and the programme will continue in 2004. The school staff also have commented on 'the improvement in behaviour of this class, and all have noted a significant improvement in the boys' confidence, as well as on-task behaviours'.

Somewhat similarly, the **Goondiwindi State High School Cluster's** focus on teaching and learning practices in the classroom was designed to strengthen boys' engagement in learning almost as much as improving their learning outcomes; in large part because of the synergistic nature of these two objectives.

The driving force in the cluster's *Mission: Boys in Transition* (M:BIT) project was the coordinating committee's belief that the academic and social under-performance of some boys that the data reveals can be attributed to two main factors that need to be tackled:

- The school system itself 'discriminates against some boys' – and some girls' for that matter – learning styles and it is imperative that we, as educators, listen to our client group, examine possible reasons for under-performance, and critically explore the latest research on this topic so that we can understand how best to create an environment in which all of our students can flourish'. In this context, the cluster is very much driven by the *Productive Pedagogies* approach being pursued within Queensland.
- The 'devaluing of education by some of our boys ... (as) a by-product of the cultural beliefs and values belonging to the community in which we live'. While Goondiwindi is more affluent than a lot of rural and remote areas, the district does hold certain beliefs about being male which 'can make appearing "bookish", exhibiting emotions (other than anger), or participating in the arts ridiculed as representative of feminine behaviour'.

The cluster's project responds directly to these two beliefs by focusing on education of the community and staff to maximise opportunities for all students. 'It is through education that we can challenge and expand teachers', parents' and community members' practices and understanding of boys' learning styles and inherent beliefs about being male'.

To provide an appropriate focus to such education, the cluster appointed research officers in each of its three schools (supported by Professor Amanda Keddie from the University of Southern Queensland as a critical friend) to collect and collate data on student performance, gender participation in various activities, innovative classroom practices targeting boys, and boys' beliefs about schooling. This was then used to inform an awareness-raising and media campaign to 'provoke conversation and thinking in our local community as to the impact our beliefs about being male might be having on our boys', and professional development activities for parents and staff.



This whole educative approach was backed up by a mentor programme that was launched to bring past, mostly male, students back to the schools to expose boys to positive role models, motivate them to achieve to their fullest potential, and instil in them the importance of lifelong learning and their ability to shape their own futures.

Underpinning it all was the trialling and implementation of a number of innovative classroom and school-wide approaches targeting boys. At the high school level these included a 'deliberate and continued emphasis on boys' participation in cultural pursuits via such things as the school musical, the local eisteddfod, dance classes and expressive arts week; the separation of the genders for physical education to offer appropriate gender challenging activities; the use of resources specifically targeting boys in selected English and arts classes; and a hands-on withdrawal programme for Year 8 students at risk. In the primary schools it could be seen in such initiatives as the use of *Multiple Intelligences* in the classroom; intensive drama lessons to raise boys' self-esteem; Year 4 Science (circuits and batteries) and Year 5 SOSE (Egypt and Antarctica) units that challenge and engage boys through construction, problem solving and creativity; and the use of Literacy Circles to generate higher order thinking, team responsibility, critical literacy and oral communication.

To date the cluster has found that its 'boys' education push' has generated significant interest among teachers and parents alike; which in turn can be used to 'ignite enthusiasm for implementing good teaching practices' that reflect the desires of the students themselves who, when surveyed across a range of year levels, pointed to the need for:

- intellectually challenging activities;
- their teachers to connect with them and to connect their learning to the real world; and
- a supportive environment to be created in which boys feel that teachers genuinely are interested in them.

It is interesting to note, in this context, that the schools would recommend, in relation to implementing pedagogical change, that 'key teachers' be targeted first. 'It is vital to get a few teachers on side early who are willing to take risks and be innovative.' In this cluster they all were volunteers, and the schools monitored their 'failures and successes and shared them with other staff via storytelling, hypothetical classroom re-enactments, videoing and observations'. This reflected the important belief that it is only through 'de-privatising of our own teachers' practices that others can begin to challenge and reflect on their teaching, leading to true pedagogical reform'.

Teachers were also arguably the focus in the **Camberwell High School Cluster** (also known as Booroondara Cluster) which centred its activity on the transitions between feeder primaries and their high school and the fact that boys are more likely to be represented in the 'tail' of performance. Activity across the cluster has, for some time, focused on the three areas of:

- curriculum – with attention given to the selection of novels across the schools and more appropriately meeting boys' interests, and professional development of staff in relation to mixed ability teaching (including on Multiple Intelligences, a greater variety of presentation modes, alternative modes of learning to the usual class/teacher model such as peer tutoring and other small group work, and increased opportunities for student self-assessment and reflection);
- structural changes – especially in the middle years, including the introduction of a junior (7–9) school in the high school with identifiable themes for each year level, the graduated development and introduction of a teams approach (fewer teachers with fewer students), and the introduction of a more structured timetable in the later years of primary school; and
- pastoral wellbeing – opportunities for primary students to be involved in the *Personal Best Programme*, enhanced leadership opportunities for students in all schools, appropriate use of local services and a pastoral care programme based around the teams in the high school.

All schools agreed, in this context, that the key to really moving forward on boys' education was knowing 'where to start'. Though a range of responses was aired, the key issue they felt they confronted was to 'identify the individuals (of concern), define the characteristics of these students, monitor their progress through the "system", and then provide programmes appropriate to their needs'. This would, the schools believed, enable them to really tackle the advice they received from Dr Ken Rowe, from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), during a professional development day, 'to maximise the effectiveness of teachers', since teaching quality is the key determinant of students' experiences and outcomes at school.

The cluster is, in this regard, still very much at a setting-up stage, with a particular focus on developing a register with the support of another ACER consultant (Marion Meiers) that will become part of the normal processes of each school. A major twilight evening also was conducted for staff to extend their thinking on boys' education and provide them with strategies they can consider and use.

Inabbura School sought to focus on teacher talk as a means of improving boys' oral communication skills and consequent engagement in class and hence learning outcomes. In doing so, the school was clear that it needed to 'hasten slowly' to ensure that change is 'brought about in a careful and methodical manner' which carries teachers and parents with it. Thus, its efforts to improve the level of directed talk within classrooms centred on a trial programme in Year 2 following the relevant teacher's involvement in professional development provided by a speech therapist.

The trial proceeded on the understanding that 'there is too much talking "at" the students, and in particular the boys, instead of talking "with" the boys'. This especially is the case once we realise that teachers can 'have a great influence' over the development of students' oral language skills, including by modelling the sorts of talking and answers to questions that contribute to effective 'discussion, debate, dialogue, argument, chat and talk' in class.

The six-week intensive programme, which sought to 'have the students speak clearly and think about their words before communicating' saw students placed in groups and rotated through a set of activities, integrated with learning area topics and themes, and designed to 'actively engage them in developing their speaking and listening skills'. The students constantly were reminded that they were aiming to improve their communication, to ensure that they were fully aware of the purpose and outcomes of the approach. They also were exposed to a variety of questions and prompts, and feedback was provided on their efforts in positive ways.

The students participated 'particularly well in the programme' which also helped to identify at an early stage students at risk, so they could be helped to overcome any oral language problem. Perhaps the major outcome of this initial trial, however, was to clarify for teachers in the school the 'importance of integrating "talk" into the general teaching programme' and that such talk needs 'to be directed in order to assist the students to improve. The teachers with whom we have worked have begun to understand the importance of developing the language of students as opposed to allowing it to happen by chance'.

The **Sts Peter and Paul's School Cluster** went even a stage further, stating that theirs was an 'adult-centred, not child-centred' project, although its focus on providing teachers with 'enhanced strategies and more thorough information about the educational needs of individuals and groups in our schools and strengthening the teacher-parent partnership' would, they believe, in time result in improved educational opportunity for the children. The schools were, in this context, also keen to ensure that the teachers did address the real circumstances of their students, regardless of gender, rather than responding to stereotypes about boys or girls; especially since the data on boys in these schools did not always match broader reported trends.

The focus, therefore, was very much on educating teachers and parents in different ways that would improve student engagement in learning, behaviour at home and at school, and outcomes in general. More specifically:

- Teachers were offered professional growth opportunities in the form of readily available professional development for all staff (including two speakers with specific interests in the education of boys), regular 'bite size' input through inclusions in the weekly staff memos and handouts at staff meetings to help maintain momentum through the project, opportunities for enhanced 'professional conversations' at school and cluster level, provision of resources (books, audiovisual material, electronic resources and print handouts) selected by the leadership teams from the schools, and increased meetings of leaders at a cluster level.
- Parents were offered opportunities to learn more about parenting via parent meetings and weekly newsletters which included a section on gender issues in education, the provision of 'bite size chunks' of practical information to stimulate discussion on issues related to boys' education, and development of a resource library with shared resources across the cluster to support parents.

The schools are in little doubt that this array of activity has seen 'raised teacher awareness' and, although they are still awaiting relevant student achievement test results, evidence points to 'changes in pedagogy reflecting the willingness of teachers to modify their practices to more effectively meet the needs of the individuals in their classrooms'.

Teachers again were the prime initial target in the **Seymour East Primary School Cluster** to provide 'the platform for significantly heightened awareness of the key issues relating to the education of boys and the development of further action that will assist boys both inside and outside our schools, academically and socially'. The schools, in this context, organised a range of professional development for staff centred on:

- a common curriculum day (Cluster Muster) to 'inform all our staff across the cluster on data about boys and their learning';
- professional learning teams established in relation to literacy, numeracy and boys with 'in school time' to discuss engagement and shared professional reading to underpin future planning; and
- some initial trialling of teaching strategies, such as cooperative group work and other techniques to enhance the engagement and learning of targeted boys (eg Year 5 students working together with targeted Special School boys for six weeks on such activities as cooking, football skills, woodwork and construction with Lego Technics, and a cross-age mentoring programme involving Year 10 and Year 6 boys).

Teachers maintained reflective learning journals throughout and engaged in formal and informal discussion across the cluster via email and meetings 'to improve personal and team practice'. As a result of all this activity, the cluster has raised awareness of the need for boys' education to be an ongoing focus, and generated discussion on what teachers can do in the classroom in this regard. Work has now commenced on an action plan which – for each of the four areas of conflict negotiation and social skills, real and relevant curriculum learning, community involvement, and structure and environment – spells out the current and desired situation, action to be initiated and measures to evaluate progress. This work will continue throughout 2003 with a view to moving to implementation 'so real change occurs' within cluster classrooms and schools.

Science and technology were the key to the project at **Tudor House**, an independent primary school established as an all-boys institution in 1897. The school recognises that it is as susceptible as any other to 'gender bias in our curriculum and pedagogy ... (and that) The learning experiences we provide must be constructed with an awareness of the needs of boys as learners, and cater for the various learning styles we encounter in our classroom'.



The two components of the school's project *Developing Independent, Reflective Learners through Collaborative Learning Experiences* were, in this context:

- Multi-age investigations in K–3, which saw students 'forming interest-based groups to develop and pursue a science-based investigation drawing on the process strands of the K–6 NSW Science Syllabus'. A target group of boys was involved in nominating their areas of interest, learning how to frame investigable questions in science, learning collaborative skills, and learning the kinds of skills needed to be able to investigate in a scientific manner.
- Web-based support for independent learning in Years 4–6, which involved the creation of a permanent school intranet, *Tudor Online*, using the Microsoft SharePoint software, which includes a discussion tool and enables teachers to post documents for students and other staff (though it is not software the school would, in hindsight, have used as it 'is not as effective as other discussion tools used'). Teachers involved in this component of the project planned units of work in English, Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), and Science and Technology that incorporated the use of moderated discussions on negotiated tasks via the web-based forum. Access to *Tudor Online* was scheduled as part of teaching time, but students also could access it outside class time.

Teachers noted in their journals a number of significant advantages of these two projects for the students involved, such as the 'increased enthusiasm and interest' resulting from the development of an online community and the development of students' capacities to work in groups. Perhaps equally important, though, were the advantages for the staff themselves and the implications these have for the teaching and learning of boys. In particular, teachers have observed that the boys 'need scaffolding with their learning' and that when structure is provided for them during class time, the majority 'thrive' with the learning experience. 'Structure is crucial ... (and) boys need a lot of scaffolding'; and while this may be well demonstrated in the research, to the members of this project 'this aspect was a significant finding' that will continue to inform their practice in the future.

Crafers Primary School based an array of different activities in the classroom on a common understanding related to learners and their different learning needs. Having gathered and reviewed data on students' learning styles, the school discovered that 82 per cent of its boys are tactile learners (compared with only one member of staff), occasioning a need to examine pedagogy and changes that might be needed to cater for various preferred learning styles.

With this data in mind, each member of staff chose specific strategic interventions to implement as an action research project in their classroom aimed at meeting their students' specific learning needs. They also met regularly as a group to 'discuss, share, reshape their research', and wrote up their findings using a common template for consistency across the school.

In summary terms, the actual projects implemented in the three different school teams involved:

- the visual and verbal learning styles in the early years, with such activities as creating a purposeful 'show and tell' session, using computers individually and in same-gender and proximal groupings, and creating a climate of 'have a go' supported by appropriate 'classroom norms';
- a primary years team focus on the two key strategies of developing on-task (participation) behaviours by finding out what boys considered to be the barriers to their learning and then designing a cross-curricular unit of work to address these, and improving organisational skills through such means as the explicit teaching of graphic organisers; and
 - ◆ exploration of the visual–verbal and tactile–kinaesthetic learning styles in the middle years by disclosing to students the results of their survey and helping them to use this information in a variety of ways such

as designing specific activities in spelling and different ways for boys to be more tactile in their learning activities. This middle years work was backed up by an examination of new directions in assessment (Rubrics) which saw students and teachers setting explicit criteria for success and involving boys in peer evaluation, as well as developing a climate of 'clear direction that involves student responsibility for learning, explicit teaching about how to manage time, proximal and same-gender learning and an environment that focuses on the positive'.

Students in the middle years in particular expressed appreciation of the fact, as one put it, that 'it was good to know how I learn best because now I can understand why sometimes learning is harder for me'. This was reinforced by a parent who observed that 'it was great to see the students knowing about themselves as learners'. In a more general sense, teachers feel, as one explained, that 'we have now a huge range of ideas and strategies that we have learned, experienced and want to pursue further', with the result that parents are seeing that 'the boys seemed more settled in their work and were more confident to share their learning with us at home'.

An important outcome of the whole project in this context was staff taking on 'individual responsibility to research and do training and development in the areas that most impact on the boys in their classes'. This in turn led the school to recommend that 'schools develop a repertoire of good practice (person skills and resources) to support the learning, emotional and social development of boys'.

Development of such a repertoire, and resources to support it, was front and centre in the work of **Pretty Beach** and **Wamberal Public Schools**.

As with the other schools and clusters discussed in this section (if not the report as a whole), this cluster of two schools based its project on the presumption that 'boys can and will learn successfully if the right approach to that learning occurs'. This in turn requires that schools 'modify the way we teach to accommodate the way that boys learn best, without disadvantaging girls'. For these schools, this meant jointly incorporating *Productive Pedagogies* in ways that teachers can 'easily put into practice, doesn't require any more work on their behalf, uses day-to-day teaching activities that are already written and offered to them, brings demonstrable success, and improves the tone/behaviour levels in their classes'.

To achieve this, the schools developed a resource pack on the topic of beach and surf safety that could be used by both schools during term 4, 2003 when the local surf lifesaving association runs its beach programme for local schools. The resource pack, which is extremely professional and would be of value to other schools and clusters around the nation, exemplifies effective teaching strategies that induce maximum student engagement and improved achievement of a variety of outcomes in several learning areas. It is built on a range of inputs, such as material prepared by Central Coast Surf Life Saving (including a multimedia presentation and culminating activity for the whole unit of work), and includes a range of units such as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE); Science; English; HSIE and Visual Arts units; and a template for a student website on beach and surf safety. Student assessment procedures are built into the unit procedures along with final student and teacher evaluation forms.

The resource pack will be distributed to teachers in the schools at the end of term 3, 2003, so staff can be trained in its use to teach it in term 4, and includes:

- a contract to be negotiated individually with teachers to allow students to work at their own pace and level;
- clearly written instructions for work, which also are given orally;
- explicit and systematic teaching of literacy skills;
- catering for different learning styles by encouraging students to examine the ways they work most effectively and to work individually, in pairs or in small groups;



- productive pedagogies throughout the units of work;
- many hands-on activities;
- extensive use of ICTs, especially around the development of student websites; and
- use of effective teaching skills such as *4MAT* programming to encourage right and left brain focused activities, and the individual learning contract based around Bloom's *Taxonomy* which encourages higher order thinking.

Perhaps most importantly, from the perspective of other schools seeking to learn from the experience, this two-school cluster provided the following specific advice for teachers on strategies to adopt to engage boys in learning (included as the front section in the resource pack).

- Choose interesting topics that appeal to boys (and girls too!).
- Build choice into your learning activities – 'boys like a sense of control of their own learning, they like to know they can choose from several activities to find one they might engage with more readily'.
- Let boys set the pace of their own learning (within reason of course).
- Negotiate – 'let boys ... make a study plan of their own, where they can negotiate with you how much will be done and what form it will take; get them to write it down in advance and sign it!'.
- Set goals, which are evaluated at the end of the session.
- Try different learning styles – 'arrange an activity to discover which way they learn best, try some different ways, which way produced the best result? Then, when you are doing a class task, work directly with a small group who like assistance and direction, and let the others do what suits them best. Be flexible'.
- Include hands-on work, because some boys respond better to hands-on work.
- Use technology – 'if there is a screen involved, buttons get pushed, something glows or makes an electronic noise, the chances are you have their attention already'.
- Ensure success – 'learning activities need to be structured so that boys get early and demonstrable success'.
- Write instructions as well as giving them orally.
- Employ effective teaching skills – 'try *4MAT* programming ... Bloom's *Taxonomy* ... Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* ... and Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*'.
- Use humour.
- Talk about the differences in the ways boys and girls learn – 'it is good to raise their awareness about what is going on and encourage them to think about why they do what they do'.
- Use role models – 'some boys respond very well to male role models so it can be a good idea to bring in outside expertise, but make sure they do exemplify the qualities you are looking for'.
- Have high expectations – 'establish a very strong anticipation of success, talk about what success in learning is and how we recognise it, and praise, praise, praise'.

Elsternwick Primary School saw a need to develop a broader repertoire of evidence-based teaching approaches when it recognised its own 'lack of a common philosophy' which meant 'our practices tended to reflect the wide range of beliefs existing across our staff'. Thus, some staff 'reflected the view that boys were the way they were, and behaved

the way they did, because of family and societal influences that were beyond our control'; some 'articulated concerns about current curriculum guidelines and practices' and their effect; and, above all, there was a lack of any agreed understanding of 'what practices needed changing to better cater for boys'.

In response, the school implemented a professional development programme to improve its understanding of how boys learn and methods that can enhance their engagement and learning outcomes. Central to this was a visiting programme to other schools already implementing good practice in boys' education, including:

- observing an all-boys prep class implementing a literacy block to engage boys;
- discussing another school's curriculum innovation to enhance the engagement of boys through a focus on rich concepts in an integrated curriculum;
- examining the use of digital portfolios to engage boys through technology and involve them in assessment;
- observing an anger management programme to promote the wellbeing of all students, with a particular emphasis on teaching boys how to be in touch with and describe their feelings; and
- examining one school's implementation of the *Tribes* programme which involves students in cooperative learning and the specific teaching of social skills.

In some cases the visits already have had a flow-on effect, such as the trialling of scaffolding and writing frames by some staff at the school following a visit to a local primary school using such supportive structures across the curriculum. Perhaps more importantly, though, the school has, as an outcome of the project, contracted the services of a respected curriculum consultant to work with their community over the next three years 'to develop an approach to the delivery of an integrated curriculum that ensures that topics studied are of maximum interest, intellectually challenging and incorporate higher order thinking skills and an element of student self-management and control that engages all students, but with particular emphasis on the boys'.

In this context, it was particularly exciting for the school that, since it only was intended as 'an initiator', the project has in fact 'served to raise interest and have staff and members of the school community ask, "What next?"'.

Expanding teachers' repertoire in the **Warwick Senior High School Cluster** was closely aligned to a focus on catering for different learning styles of boys and using *Multiple Intelligences*. The eight schools, with the support of their district, targeted a core group of teachers to 'facilitate the shift using appropriate learning and teaching strategies for teaching boys' and provided them with professional learning opportunities and a chance to trial something new. Action learning was undertaken in each of the schools and teachers used reflective journals to track their changed teaching practices and their effect. Collegiate mentoring occurred across the cluster to share and guide the development of new and effective pedagogical approaches.

All schools developed a plan aligned to this overall approach and the actual strategies included:

- significant work on improving boys' organisational skills (eg keeping their diaries up to date, setting goals);
- the use of the *Rock and Water* programme on a trial basis;
- surveying students to identify their preferred learning styles with pedagogy adapted to cater for these;
- single-gender groupings for particular activities;
- student mentoring, substantial use of cooperative learning techniques;



- investigating the use of drama as a way of dealing with boys' issues;
- a balance of explicit teaching and activity-based learning;
- changed Year 9 literature programme to include non-fiction and more choice with 'books for boys'; and
- changing rooms on the basis of plans and measurements made by students who presented them to the principal and then painted the rooms under expert tuition.

The project has proved particularly effective in raising teachers' awareness of their own teaching practices, each other's teaching styles, the preferred learning styles of boys and the consequent need for pedagogical change. Teachers have, as one put it, 'become more explicit in my teaching and learning practices and related learning outcomes, particularly self-evaluation and reflection'. Feedback from parents suggests they have noticed the difference in terms of 'positive changes in boys' attitudes', and there is increased willingness of boys to try new things.

Using cooperative learning and planning lessons to cater for multiple intelligences has resulted in fewer behaviour management problems with boys and greater levels of engagement in learning. What is more, the enthusiasm of the teachers involved in the various trials appears to be flowing on to others not involved in the project. The cluster now wishes to cement in place what it has learned, in particular ensuring that boys are 'taught according to their preferred learning styles, with opportunities for them to develop different learning styles'.

Beyond this, the cluster would recommend that:

- there is a place for 'single-gender classes in some areas';
- there should be 'opportunities for short bursts of learning with frequent breaks ... for boys and that students are provided with clear boundaries and expectations';
- there should be a technological focus;
- 'a minimum of 50 per cent of learning is activity based, with all teaching to be made as relevant and meaningful as possible';
- cooperative learning is incorporated into learning strategies along with Multiple Intelligence theories and strategies; and
- boys be 'encouraged in risk taking by providing a supportive environment'.

An interest in learning styles and catering for different capacities and needs was arguably also a focus at **Sunshine Beach State School**, which has long been involved in its own process of 'total school renewal' where staff and students alike are learners and where all learners' behaviour is 'self-managed' in the context of quality teaching and learning, and quality outcomes for all. Central to this process has been the development of a school vision that seeks to produce students who are competent, skilled learners; lifelong learners; effective communicators; creative, critical thinkers; happy, confident, self-managed individuals; and socially and environmentally responsible citizens. This vision is 'inextricably linked to the pedagogy in the classroom' and supported by a whole school 'psychological and philosophical' commitment to Choice Theory (described in 'Withdrawal programmes for at-risk boys') and developing individual responsibility.

This broad, systemic approach has led the school to focus more on 'learner-centred pedagogy, assessment and curriculum' and, in particular, the provision of 'an individualised, appropriate curriculum to address identified academic and social needs of all learners'. As the school went through the process of identifying the needs of individual learners, 'it became apparent that there was as much diversity within each gender as there was between genders and that stereotyping a person because of their gender would result in very exclusive practices for many learners'. Instead, the



school considered each learner individually and used the impact of gender as an additional source of information to take into account when relevant.

The way this approach then manifested itself in practice can be seen in the following three case studies the school prepared of student characteristics and programme responses, which also illustrate the importance of responding to the individual and their needs.

- Oldest in family, aged 6; he is struggling to grasp letters and sounds and is still developing one-to-one correspondence with text, while having difficulty with counting by ones: The school developed an individualised programme involving teacher aide support and regular work with specialist teachers and the administration. Bodily–kinaesthetic strengths were harnessed for learning, and love and belonging were acknowledged as key needs.
- Advanced all-round learner as well as an accomplished sportsman; well-developed interpersonal skills; a leader; very supportive family: In this situation the school provided the opportunity to work at an advanced level in key learning areas. The student is excelling academically and representing the school in sports.
- Achieving just below benchmarks; no male role model at home and a challenging home situation; a loner who finds socialising difficult; high freedom need: The school included flexible attendance as a component of this individual programme and hands-on activities as a feature of in-class work. He works with a male teacher aide and a male Life Skills teacher on a regular basis.

Both internal school data and external system data indicate that this individualised approach is resulting in boys performing well and achieving ‘above State and “like school” means in State-wide tests of aspects of literacy and numeracy’. In addition, ‘monitored learner outcomes over time in the area of learner self-management reveal continuous improvement in the number of learners who are self-managed, both boys and girls’, in a context where ‘what we want for our learners ... determines everything we do and drives our practice’. For all of this, the school is quick to advise that changing culture and behaviour in such ways requires a systemic, whole school approach, rather than any sort of quick fix, and takes substantial time to achieve.

Focusing as it did on ‘improving motivation and attitude to learning as a progression to improved learning outcomes for boys’, the **Moranbah East State School** project honed in on thinking skills in particular and the trialling of an approach to their use across the school.

More specifically, the school's *Thinking it Through* project provided teachers with direct professional development support from an external consultant on how to introduce and implement a range of thinking strategies in the primary classroom. This was conducted in small groups, rather than as a full staff, ‘to facilitate sharing and discussion with the consultant about individual teacher practices, work programmes, and for teachers to ask questions pertaining to their students’.

Drawing on the professional development provided, teachers then nominated strategies and methods they would like to see used on a regular basis in the school at their particular year level. This would in turn inform the development of a whole school *Scope and Sequence* document related to thinking skills, and an associated teacher handbook of materials and resources. In this context, it is interesting to note that, if the school had its time again, it would include more visits to each other's classrooms to experience and share a range of approaches (especially since the school's rural location means it experiences a significant degree of staff turnover and oversees a number of new or beginning teachers), and would consider having the educational consultant or an experienced teacher demonstrate for others how to teach certain skills to particular boys.

The school's professional development underpinned an actual trial with a Year 4 class for four weeks to see how boys responded to the different teaching approach; and an initial handbook of ideas was provided to support the teachers involved. Both the handbook and trial involved the conscious use of such well-known thinking skills tools as Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*, Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* (supported by a checklist for teachers in the Year 4 handbook) and the use of higher level questioning skills.

The early indicators are positive and point to:

- increased participation from the targeted boys in the cohort when using thinking skills in the curriculum and applying them to real world problems;
- higher levels of thinking and responses from those students considered academically 'at risk' during class activities (eg 'incidental use of the "green hat" ... to solve a design problem for the school garden');
- increased teacher motivation to implement thinking skills with classes after small group professional development; and
- an increased level of discussion regarding gender-specific learning among staff.

Beyond this, the project has seen some important spin-offs related to using and implementing thinking skills and strategies across the school, including a range of extension groups for students in the areas of robotics, literacy and individual projects for beginning and lower primary students. In addition, the school is researching and planning for a middle school arrangement (Years 5–7) where students would be placed into gender-based classes for the core learning of English and Mathematics, and then ability level groups integrated for other learning areas.

This last initiative, if implemented, reflects the school's view that 'best practice to address the needs of boys in education should first recognise that there are proven differences between boys and girls in student achievement, level of engagement in tasks, motivation to learn, and therefore their ability to participate effectively in school activities'.

The school's experience through this trial and its broader research has convinced it that successful efforts to improve the education of boys are characterised by:

- practical application of thinking strategies to solve problems in real life situations and in small group projects, which enhances motivation and ownership, and encourages social interactions between boys;
- flexibility of choice about what is learned and how, by providing, for example, individual projects and a range of presentation options for students;
- opportunities for boys to apply their own ideas to learning and real life through, for instance, thinking skills such as the *Six Thinking Hats* where there are no judgments made of the ideas themselves, but of the type of thinking employed; and
- a focus on individual interest areas and preferred learning styles so that teachers can cater more effectively to the needs of all students and modify their teaching approaches accordingly.

Having participated in a Quality Teaching Project that explored numeracy and how student achievement could be improved, the **Melaleuca Park K–7 Schools** had implemented a one-hour numeracy block (based on Victoria's *Early Years Numeracy Program*) which focused on 'real, open-ended and hands-on activities, including utilising information and communication technologies to enhance student learning'. This was backed up by strategies to improve student engagement, participation and provide student voice through an eight-day *Values Education Programme* implemented in the first two weeks of term along with School Community Groups.

While these programmes had generated improvements for girls and boys, the data indicated that the improvement for boys was not as marked. In addition, teachers were finding that boys were 'less likely to complete homework contracts, less engaged in numeracy activities and more likely to be disruptive during Numeracy Block, and less inclined to answer questions in class'.

In response, the school initiated a project focused on boys which included:

- collection of baseline data using ACER Numeracy Tests to identify boys deemed at risk in each class;
- professional development to support focus group reflection on the implications of relevant research for numeracy teaching in the school;
- surveys of boys' attitudes to numeracy and collection of feedback on activities boys felt most supported their learning;
- further assessment of the boys identified as at risk using the Early Years Numeracy Interview to provide detailed information about their learning which can be used by teachers to plan for their needs; and
- engagement of a consultant from the *Early Years Numeracy Project* (Jill Cheeseman) to work with the school on problem solving and engaging boys.

In broad terms, even though the project is still at an arguably early stage, it has been effective in increasing 'staff dialogue in relation to the learning needs of boys and had a positive impact on classroom practice'. This is most significantly evident in 'the introduction of numeracy journals in the early years, an increase in hands-on activities and the use of multimedia, the use of self-assessment (particularly students using capacity matrices in the middle school classes), and the increased engagement of students which is most notable in the primary classes'. Cross-age tutoring also has emerged as a strategy that generates considerable success.

Student attainment data collected to date is somewhat mixed, if not even contradictory between different assessment tools, and requires further evidence to be collected and analysed over time. This may also reflect the fact that the school's sweep was too broad and its own feeling that it would in future 'narrow the focus ... (perhaps) to target a specific group of students who we could have monitored more closely'.

Overall though, the school feels it has learned enough from its experience to recommend to others that, among other things, boys should be:

- provided with plenty of games and hands-on activities to practise and reinforce skills;
- challenged in the form of competitions and quizzes; and
- given the opportunity to work on computers to practise skills and record work.

In planning activities for boys, teachers should, they believe:

- start with closed, shorter tasks and move on to longer, more open-ended ones;
- allocate time for individual and class reflection;
- use tasks that are relevant to students, build on their existing knowledge and have a connection with real life experiences;
- provide opportunities to work individually and in groups both ability based and mixed ability depending on the task and/or focus; and
- structure in short celebrations of success on a regular basis.



Having had a focus on boys' education issues for at least four years, **Lismore High School** decided to construct an approach that would take better advantage of two existing school strengths – the existence of a 'highly successful and well-resourced Learning Centre and the delivery of teaching and learning through the Vertically Unitised curriculum delivery model (VU)'.

The school's *Boys Getting Centred on Learning* programme identified boys from across the spectrum of achievement who were withdrawn from classes for approximately 20 periods to participate in an intensive programme of activities in the Learning Centre environment (with material resources, laptops and a support team). The boys involved made an agreement to work on assignment topics of their own choosing that would 'convince VU teachers that they had the skills needed to work in the Learning Centre as part of their VU class work'. They then learned how to plan and deal with an assignment in manageable chunks, took responsibility for a folder of learning, produced a display folder of their work and did a formal evaluation. They simultaneously learned and practised the Calm, Controlled, Consequences way of dealing with conflict situations in the classroom and ways of constructively expressing their feelings and needs. It is an approach that the school feels accords with Nola Alloway's suggestion in programme briefing sessions that teachers work to the boys' strengths as people and as learners, while offering them 'a range of strategies which, if chosen and practised, would shore up what they identified as the barriers to success and learning that operated inside them as individuals'.

The whole programme was underpinned by a reward system, involving prizes gained from raffle tickets that were distributed to all boys at some stage during the sessions for a range of 'clever, or thoughtful, or nice, or entertaining, or constructive' reasons. The school feels that the whole experience has demonstrated to its staff that 'there are ways of getting boys to engage in learning in your classroom that are quite easy to incorporate in your daily work ... (and that) the Learning Centre offers a valuable strategic resource ... (including) attractive learning processes, meaningful decision making and attractive learning technology to boys'.

In this context, the school believes that any programme it, or another school, introduces should:

- begin with 'a clear picture of the situation;
- ... (be) carried forward in the classroom in the areas of what boys do best;
- ... seek to identify and create ways to provide opportunities for independent learning ... that engage boys' preferred learning styles; (and)
- ... occur in contexts which allow boys to discover who they are, extend their capacities to plan, extend their capacities to set meaningful learning goals, and extend their insights into the relationship between short-term, medium-term and long-term learning'.

Finally, the **West Wallsend High School Cluster** project emerged from the schools' examination of the *Boys: Getting it Right* report and their judgment that, 'of the 11 factors listed in this report, 6 of these are factors beyond the control of the schools. We have taken the view schools can't redress all inequities in society, so it is more productive for us to put our energy and resources into the core business of schools, that is teaching and learning. Therefore, the factors identified in this report that we have addressed in our project are those we can improve: "the quality of teaching, curriculum, early school achievement, literacy and numeracy achievement, attitudes to school" '.

In this context, the project built on the cluster schools' existing partnership with the *Men and Boys Programme* at the University of Newcastle to undertake a *Boys' Education, Boys' Outcomes Project* (BEBOP). This assisted action learning project focuses on boys' strengths in relation to learning and social development, rather than their negative behaviours. By simultaneously addressing the four aspects of engagement, academic outcomes, behaviour and relationships, and the broadening of options for boys, it has a track record in terms of improving the learning outcomes and participation of boys but also, in conformity with the philosophy of the cluster schools, of girls as well.



Central to this activity was the collection of an extensive range of baseline qualitative and quantitative data against which performance could be judged and the BEBOP evaluated.

Drawing on the four aspects of the BEBOP outlined above, the schools decided to address an issue in boys' education within each stage of schooling from K–12, and to choose a different focus each, that addressed the most immediate concerns of staff and that would maximise sharing across the cluster. An action learning team was formed in each school to implement the project elements, which all proceeded from the common understanding that the strengths of boys in this cluster were: 'energy, enthusiasm, affection, honesty, risk taking, surprising, enthusiastic about using new technology, practical, resourceful, not bitchy, creative, openly appreciative, and broad range of interests'.

Actual projects implemented in the schools included such things as:

- a target group of Stage 1 and 2 boys working with teacher and community volunteers on an art activity that encouraged social skills such as taking turns, working in groups, communicating ideas, decision making and respecting the ideas of others;
- a literacy and numeracy programme for targeted Stage 2 students based on surveying their interests so that everyday materials such as brochures, menus, magazines and advertising could be used in English, and using hands-on construction in maths related to identified learning styles;
- a literacy mentoring programme for boys which saw Stage 3 students assessed as being at risk due to low level literacy skills being trained to mentor Stage 1 students deemed at risk; and
- an all-boys class which worked on a virtual tour of Britain as a cross-curriculum project keeping a virtual travel diary of their journey, measuring distance, time and money exchange, conducting virtual exploration of the flora and fauna and so on, using computer technology extensively all along the way. The boys also collected a portfolio of their work – some pen and paper, some digital, and some construction works – and presented this to parents at a student-led conference.

While the schools intend to judge the success of the programme over a substantial period of time, the major task of developing baseline data gathering instruments has been completed and they now have a range of basic skills tests, a school map survey to compare student and teacher perspectives on teaching and learning of both boys and girls, a *Quality of Life Survey*, a range of behaviour management indices, homework completion rates and comparisons, attendance and library usage data, cultural participation rates and more. That said, some early quantitative evidence does reveal that in the Year 7 (Stage 4) all-boys class, all 14 students completed their portfolio and the rate of referrals for inappropriate behaviour of boys targeted in the project decreased dramatically from 38 in term 1 to seven in term 3 during project implementation. Beyond this, there is evidence of increased confidence being displayed by boys and 'the identification of learning styles of our boys has provided impetus for a number of teachers ... to ask for and trial a wider repertoire of teaching strategies'.

Key features of activity in this category of projects that have informed the development of the guiding principles outlined later in this report are:

- *Schools should acknowledge and respond flexibly to different learning styles, including, where appropriate, having single-sex groups.*
 - *Schools should have high expectations for all students and seek to promote a culture where learning is valued by and for boys.*
 - *There is a need to structure time and provide clear directions for tasks, with an indication of their purpose and intended outcomes.*
 - *Schools should include more hands-on and physical activities in class and, where appropriate, in the wider community as well.*
 - *Teachers should demonstrate more in class and show boys how to do things rather than just explaining.*
 - *Boys should be given more choice and responsibility about the nature of tasks and how they may be presented.*
 - *There is a need to ensure a balanced use of teacher-directed and student-centred teaching, and provide learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful to boys' lives.*
 - *Teachers should adopt flexible and appropriate assessment techniques that provide boys with feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, recognise their achievements and indicate how to improve.*
 - *Data has an important role to play in improving teaching and learning, and hence boys' outcomes.*
 - *ICTs are an effective way of engaging boys in learning and extending their research capacities and thinking skills.*
 - *There is a need to be clear about 'which boys' are the focus of attention and, where appropriate, targeted support.*
 - *Schools should seek to expand teachers' repertoires of practice in relation to the teaching of boys.*
 - *The quality of relationships is critical to achieving better educational outcomes for boys.*
-

Hands-on learning

Hands-on learning is a well-established approach to engaging students, and in particular boys, in a range of curriculum areas by providing more practical, visual and tactile activities that emphasise physical movement and interaction. A number of schools sought to address foundational educational skills for boys through practical and experiential processes, while others adopted highly structured and purposeful use of hands-on learning to ensure that higher order outcomes were achieved.

Collector Public School, which is a small rural school and typical of country towns where the 'village is losing its young men as the traditional forms of employment disappear', has a long-standing commitment to high expectations and high achievement for its students. Its *Designing Boys* project was predicated both on this belief and research outcomes gained from professional development sessions. In these Ian Lillico outlined strategies for improving boys' education such as those previously discussed in 'Learning styles and teaching practice', and he additionally observed that:

- boys need to connect with nature; and
- boys should be given every opportunity to relate to animals as this brings out the empathetic, caring side of their nature.

In this context, the boys themselves created the basis of the project by expressing concern about the number of species of native flora, bird life and fauna that had disappeared from the local environment. This in turn led to a suggestion that 'perhaps we could endeavour to provide an attractive and supportive habitat for these species, initially in the school grounds'. The *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* enabled the school to move on these concerns and 'actually plan, construct, plant and then publicise a garden project that would be environmentally sustainable and attractive to the native fauna and bird life'. The actual task set, and substantially delivered, was 'to landscape and create for a section of the school playgrounds a water-friendly, fauna-friendly environmental reserve, planted to attract and support local flora and fauna, that would fit within the school's environmental management plan'.

Since the school was concerned to promote higher order thinking and students' capacity to use ICTs in a sophisticated way, an important component of the project was planning and reporting on the activity, including development of a web page and PowerPoint presentation to ensure the practical solutions developed would 'extend beyond the classroom to real life'. This reflects the fact that the project was designed not merely to generate the product, important as that was, but also to 'develop in our boys the capacity and ability to discuss, communicate and analyse at a conceptual level, and to do so in a cooperative manner'.

Put simply, *Designing Boys* revolved around 'physical activity and ownership of the tasks. The landscaping of an area within the school that would become their own creation would address those boy-friendly aspects of the curriculum – hard, physical activity, familiarity with tools and manual craft skills, designing and making use of ICTs to publish and broadcast results'.

In addition, since the school believed 'that boys learn by being shown', they consciously used direct instruction wherever possible for landscaping, land care and web design, with a focus on using respected male role models from the local community. Thus, the project involved such components as:

- consultation with a landscape design firm and nursery experts;
- researching and sourcing plants and structures for garden areas;
- preparation of the garden areas including tree lopping, levelling and the like;
- using plants and other materials; and
- preparation of the *Designing Boys* PowerPoint™ slide show and web page.



In purely physical terms the project achieved its outcomes except that weather factors have slightly delayed the completion of planting, and systemic Internet difficulties have impacted on loading the web page. Equally important, the written work, oral reports and discussions, addresses to visitors and the final electronic report signal success in clear learning terms. While the school expected that the students would enjoy the hands-on aspect of the project, they did not expect 'the extent to which they became immersed in the concept planning ... (which in turn saw) the outdoors level of enthusiasm and engagement translate to classroom tasks of writing, researching and planning, and enabled the boys to lead their inspection tours with confidence and authority'. Beyond this, 'the common sense of purpose engendered in the boys by the project has been fascinating to observe ... (and) The capacity of a group of quite young children to join in substantive and prolonged discussions about the project was something that many of them had never been observed to do before'.

The whole experience led the school to conclude that 'pedagogy in schools has to change to force boys into actually completing and performing more learning tasks in the classroom (ie school environs). Less time must be spent talking about the learning, more time facilitating the doing. From our experience, this school recommends that giving boys responsibility and control of their learning encourages their engagement with learning ... (and) teaching strategies for boys should include highly structured tasks, clear expectations of those tasks, short-term targets and clear and firm deadlines'.

While Collector focused on nature, the **Wooranna Park Primary School Cluster** based its project on technology in a variety of ways. Given the research finding that boys tend to socialise via such activities as sport and technological games, the two cluster schools decided to enable boys to 'express their ideas, opinions and emotions ... (through) collaborative, small group learning using media and communications technology'. In particular, the schools were keen to see if 'the level of enthusiasm and confidence was raised by their involvement in computer games, music technology and video technology'.

In this context, the cluster developed a project which still is underway, comprising a Games Factory Team, school radio stations, school TV and a Net meeting. The radio stations already are live and the teams have their game designs established, but the television and Net meeting are yet to come.

The computer game design project gives something of the feel of the approach and what can be achieved with fairly 'minimal' requirements for equipment and materials. As the cluster explains it, 'students were able to choose their own theme, story and characters, but the project was to be made to a structure. The structure requires a title (to state or suggest an idea central to the meaning of the game, an angle) – one central idea expressed as a sentence; a synopsis – a paragraph about the main aim of the game; and six characters with an illustration profile for each, including skills and powers. This work is then assembled on to a "Game Design Document", modelled on a "real" game design document loaned to us by a computer game design company'. This phase of the project has been completed and students are now developing the design documents into web pages to put on the school intranet and website.

As indicated above, the radio stations are operating and actually broadcast 24 hours a day, seven days a week using 'a play-list on their computers' which, in the case of one school, includes original music created by the students themselves along with station IDs, pre-recorded stories and opinion items playing as part of the play-list.

Perhaps one of the 'strongest' aspects of the project to date from the perspective of the schools involved has been the development of 'high quality products', using ICTs, which in turn have expanded students' skills and helped them overcome academic difficulties. It is worth noting, in this context, that the schools have 'allowed the students to take their time to produce a high quality product', and, in turn, 'we have also taken the time to introduce interesting processes into the project' such as scanning, image manipulation and web design. As a result, the boys' work 'demonstrates a rich process of thinking, exploring and presenting ideas, problem solving and planning'. While the product to date is not the games themselves, but rather the sophisticated plans to make them, 'the students' drawings, designs and information has been detailed and precise'.



Beyond this, the subject matter of what they are doing 'is held in high esteem within the "youth culture" of the school. All their friends want to join the team and be part of the project. Being in the team is something special. We know this because the other students are constantly asking to take part. The students themselves take great pride in being part of the team'. In addition, teachers increasingly are involving the project in the general curriculum of the schools; for example, by recording the reflections of students on a Grade 1 excursion to be broadcast on the radio with music underneath and providing an outlet for Grades 3 and 4 to read out the stories they write.

The hands-on project in the **Tully State School Cluster** included a strong literacy focus, in response to some behavioural issues in the eight schools that were attributed to 'apparent limitations in literacy skills and attitude/motivation to fully participate in class work, among some boys'.

Starting from the premise that 'many boys learn and participate more fully when there is a connection between real life activities and the reading, writing and speaking they engage with', the cluster focused its activities on 'connectedness', where all aspects of the programme had 'obvious links with real life activities', and kinaesthetic learning styles where boys learn by doing, albeit with a strong literacy focus and the use of ICTs.



Thirty-two at-risk boys from Years 6 and 7 were selected to participate in small groups of four, one day a week for four weeks during which they were involved in hands-on construction and cooking activities, which extended into the areas of literacy and ICT. More specifically, the boys engaged in woodwork, archery, bush cooking and using technology to record and report their findings in a multimedia format. Male staff involved in the project (who included a special education teacher released for the purpose and a male aide) modelled 'appropriate courtesy and manners to all female staff the groups encountered and the boys were encouraged to solve problems, offer solutions, talk about personal experiences and cooperate in small group activities'.

Evidence to date points to raised levels of enthusiasm and motivation to read, write and produce oral presentations about the topics and produce actual written texts in a functional form. In addition, there have been attitudinal shifts in terms of 'desire to present written and visual information using correct spelling' and some 'measurable attitudinal and behavioural improvements among many, but not all, of

the 32 participant boys back at their own schools'.

In this context the schools have, however, raised questions about the high cost of the approach adopted, and concluded that it is 'a style of programme (that) could only be realistically implemented for selected, small groups of specifically targeted students'. That said, there are some pedagogical lessons that can readily flow through to other classes and larger-sized groups. These particularly relate to:

- the use of kinaesthetic, highly visual and manipulative activities as a stimulus to generate language outcomes;
- the use of ICTs and the application of multimedia production as an adjunct to spoken and oral communication;
- reading for a genuine purpose (eg reading and viewing plans before carrying out a construction activity, reading recipe instructions and then cooking);

- the use of digital imagery to record boys' involvement in activities so their subsequent writing is based on real experiences they had; and
- the selection of hands-on activities that have a connection to real life so the boys can create 'a physical product or item to engender a feeling of achievement and a desire to communicate about it'.

Hands-on learning at **Sawyer Valley Primary School** in rural Western Australia focused on maths in particular, linked to Technology and Enterprise learning. Starting from the premise that 'boys need to engage in their own learning and need to be physically involved (eg moving, doing, making, building)', the school planned practical projects and made use of equipment that would attract boys.

More specifically, the school extended a hands-on building-in-maths approach (already in place in the senior years for a number of years, which had proven 'enjoyable and productive') across all years and integrated it with the Technology and Enterprise learning area. Each classroom teacher worked with students to brainstorm themes or integrated topics 'that would engage all students in practical tasks that had a mathematical component, but would motivate the students, especially boys, to tackle the new challenges'. Thus, for example:

- the pre-primary–Year 1 composite class saw children making large rockets (dramatic play) as well as retelling the story using blocks as part of their 'solar system' theme, supplemented by opportunities to work in small groups and share what they know; and
- the Year 4–5 'motive power' theme involved students in making boats that would travel three metres and back loaded with an egg.

Activity for Year 6–7 students went a stage further and focused on more complex challenges, as well as peer mediation training and student leadership to form a student council and link to a broader whole school values education programme that was being introduced.

Research evidence from students, teachers and parents, along with samples of student work, suggest that 'boys have become very organised and self-directed' through such challenge activities and that they certainly 'do enjoy' hands-on work. Boys are, in this context, 'fascinated by the new technology equipment and are more than happy to use it to complete their challenges'; and an element of competition, such as the school's 'reading race', results in improved organisation and independence among boys.

One positive outcome of the project has been increased teacher and parent awareness of the needs of boys and the fact that changes can 'subtly be made to not only enhance their learning but the learning of all students in the class'. What the school would do in future, however, as it maintains and further extends the approach, is to use more male role models, if they are available, to work with students in small groups.

The overall approach at **Beechworth Primary School** stemmed from the school's efforts to 'discover how each student learns best and use this in their daily learning experiences'. In this context, the project grew out of an existing *Leamscapes* project and enabled the school to provide students, and especially boys, with 'a part to play in school-wide development' by constructing a mandala garden for the school. In this way, the school sought to link curriculum with physical activities while allowing boys to 'engage more meaningfully and to learn in their preferred style'.

It is interesting to note that this environmentally related approach derives not just from research related to boys, but also research uncovered by the school that shows 'the success of schools – kids' learning, effective teaching, teacher morale and community confidence – is intimately linked to the school's physical environment'. This is, they argue, 'a neglected aspect of education reform' in Australia, especially given that 'even the youngest students want to see radical changes to the physical school and have definite notions of what a learning space should be'.



The way in which the construction project was linked to the curriculum, and not just an add-on to engage the interest of boys, is evidenced by the fact the project was assessed in terms of the outcomes of the Victorian *Curriculum and Standards Framework* (CSF). For example, in building the garden, 'boys were asked to research the task, cost out requirements, prepare the area, inform other students of the progress, keep the school and wider community informed, liaise with the school council on cost, and all of these type of curriculum-related issues. They also needed to assist with the fundraising and look at all health and occupational requirements'. This in turn challenged teachers to 'look at their pedagogies and implement fully the thinking curriculum and use *Multiple Intelligences* to engage students in their care in a meaningful way'.

The school is clear that the project has provided a way for learning to be made more 'authentic and engaging', closely related to boys' lives and values, and to the world outside school, which supported the students' work, including through the involvement of males in the community who provided mentoring support. 'It is a means to have students be responsible for their own learning, for them to love learning and also to increase their basic skills to maximise their options for their futures.'

These gains are clearly evident in such observations as:

- the remarks of two students that 'I didn't know how to work out the capacity of a length of hose and how much water went through it for our irrigation ... but found out and it wasn't hard at all. It was cool. I went and got the stuff at the hardware and the fella' thought that I was clever 'cause he didn't know how to do it', and 'I learnt how to lay bricks and how many I would need. I think maths is important now 'cause you use it all the time. I am really listening in class now and I don't muck up. It's good as school has changed';
- a teacher's acknowledgement that 'I have changed my approach markedly. I thought it would be harder but the kids have run with it. I'm really enjoying it too'; and
- the parent who frankly commented that 'at first I thought it was a way to get rid of him out of class as he was being disruptive, but it wasn't. He actually wants to do maths and he reads his work. I have seen more of his work this term than for the past four years'.

They are gains that the school believes, however, require the combination of a whole school approach and the commitment of all staff to making a difference for boys in the school.

The **Eumemmerring Secondary College Cluster's** 'air brush' project was targeted at senior school boys and built on existing, hands-on automotive programmes at the two schools, with a focus as much on student engagement as on their learning outcomes and future pathways.

The project targeted the visual arts curriculum and sought to make it more practical and engaging for students by linking it directly to industry-based practices, the use of specialised equipment, training in relevant occupational health and safety, and the sorts of occupations the students might pursue. Thus, it included training of various sorts, including from Air Brush Venturi Consultants on designing art images, and industry visits to view such practices as panel preparations and assemblies, masking techniques, paint techniques and air brush equipment use, and computer-generated decals. Students also attended Kangan-Batman TAFE for a full-day hands-on training experience. Throughout the project students developed and refined their own designs, as they progressively gained more skills, and worked on templates related to Holden and Ford logos, with each student completing two pieces for exhibition at **Doveton Secondary College** in November.

Overall, the project has exposed boys to 'skills which linked their art studies in school to a prospective career. They learnt about industrial applications of air-brushing techniques ... were exposed to the latest techniques and technologies (particularly information and communication technologies) ... (and) were encouraged to explore their creative boundaries in producing art using air-brushing techniques related to automotive panelling ... This project

gave senior VCE students in art an opportunity to experience a component of their course which has direct vocational relevance'. From the perspective of the schools involved, 'a pathway plan' can now be encouraged and developed for students from these experiences. Beyond this, the teachers involved observed that the boys who participated became self-starters, developed confidence in tracking new concepts, learned team discipline in relation to sharing resources, were more willing to accept responsibility, and became more independent learners as a result.

Myrrhee Primary School adopted a broader focus still with its *Vine to Wine* programme designed to meet the needs of the large number of students who attend the school with special learning and social needs. The programme provides a 'balanced selection of practical and theoretical challenges' that engage students in producing and marketing wine in partnership with local wine industry personnel.

Work experience forms a major part of the programme at harvest and processing time, and students work together with male community members. A joint 'stomping days' celebration marks the harvest, conducted in the school's newly equipped science workshop. Beyond this, the students have established a small business with its own ABN to promote and market the wine; and the business is heading towards 'a significant profit this year' to put back into school programmes.

Activity in the *Vine to Wine* programme is integrated with learning across the curriculum, and does not occur separately. It is, for example, 'particularly well suited to science, maths and technology in a practical way'; this also aligns to the preferred learning styles of many boys. Students have, in this context, also worked with students in secondary schools on science and technology activities and even had first-hand involvement in learning with TAFE students to design and produce labels for their wine. In addition, of course, the 'opportunity to use the local industry over a long period of time gave students time to develop the skills necessary to master complex tasks'; such as testing grapes brought to the school by local growers, to the point where the students achieved levels of accuracy equivalent to industry standards. An interesting supplementary component of the programme has also been the use of creative dance, which offered 'a different way' for boys to express their understanding of the whole process and the joy of their involvement in it.

The programme has, it should be noted, not only been evaluated by the school as it progresses, and charted in a school-made CD-ROM, but also received a State-wide curriculum innovation award at the 2003 Victorian Education Excellence awards ceremony. In this context, the school believes that much of its success stems from the fact that 'all aspects had a real application and hence the learning was rich and powerful. Assessment and feedback was built into the programme in a meaningful way. The science tests were all cooperative activities where success was rewarded ... (and) Students could experiment, make mistakes, view the work of others, and try and try again to achieve the goals'. Students have subsequently 'shown significant development and transferable skills to other areas of the curriculum' and the school is seeing the development of a large number of 'switched on boys'.

There is, the school's experience suggests, 'a need for students (and especially boys) to be actively engaged in their learning. The community is ... a rich and varied place to get support and expertise and this is largely untapped by schools'. One of the key outcomes from the whole *Vine to Wine* programme has been to gain the trust, involvement and respect of the community, including the local wine industry, and to form partnerships that involve 'sharing responsibility' for the development of young boys. Men in the community were particularly supportive of the students in the programme, and the role they played was especially important.

The success of the whole approach has seen the school working with other schools to share their experiences. The school is in the process of looking for a young graduate wine maker 'to work in the educational field and really extend our programme to great heights'. It also readily applies to other industry areas, and the school has been helping other schools to develop programmes suited to the olive industry, the wool industry and a more urban-based programme with a local pie manufacturer.



Curramulka Primary School had a similar view to Myrree, and even a similar circumstance, though in this case there also was a commitment to single-gender classes on a weekly timetabled basis to encourage group identity. The school, which is in a rural community in Yorke Peninsula, instituted a Year 2–7 project that saw boys working in conjunction with the local authorised officer of the Yorke Peninsula Animal and Plant Control Board to breed, release and monitor leafhoppers in targeted sites to reduce the infestation of the noxious Bridal Creeper weed.

This project, which encouraged boys to learn good environmental practices and enhanced their agricultural knowledge and understanding, accorded with the school's belief that students respond 'positively to projects that are conducted within their community ... (and) Boys enjoy manipulation and doing hands-on tasks'. It also involved a range of learning outcomes relevant to other, more formal areas of the curriculum such as science (eg the study of the life-cycle, food chains, ecosystems and biodiversity, and working scientifically) and maths (eg data collection, analysis and documentation). The structure of the project also built in 'numerous opportunities for students to communicate orally and verbally with a range of people including peers, parents, teachers, wider community workers and professionals', while developing their broader competencies and life skills.

Making educational choices and having a positive impact on the local environment through the project has resulted in enhanced levels of self-esteem for the students involved, while also helping to 'focus and guide their attention and behaviour in a positive direction'. It also has caused teachers involved to examine and adapt their pedagogy, curriculum and assessment 'to allow for the different ways that boys learn ... The project was very interactive and adopted a constructivist approach which allowed them to build on their prior knowledge and skills and developed a positive attitude towards caring for the environment'. And, as a bonus, the 'young, enthusiastic project officer (from the Animal and Plant Control Board) ... provided an excellent (male) role model for the students'.

As a result of these positive outcomes, the initial topic has now extended into other areas relevant to boys, and the school feels they have 'demonstrated an ability to transfer their knowledge and skills'; including to a field trip where they used their knowledge of weeds and bio-control to look at other environmental issues in the community, and the conduct of quarantine experiments at the CSIRO in Adelaide. Beyond this teachers have observed, as one put it in a newsletter article, that 'the way the boys have taken ownership of the project and the development of literacy skills through involvement in the project has been excellent to observe'.

Starting from the premise that boys' literacy development is at risk, schools in the **Mitchelton State High School Cluster** sought to create a more effective learning environment for boys that would engage them through hands-on activities that are practical, challenging, interesting, authentic, based on real life tasks, and that encourage safe risk taking and use boys' resources of energy and humour. By drawing on male role models and using ICTs as a motivator, such tasks could also develop positive self-esteem, while encouraging teachers to examine issues around boys' education and modify their classroom practice accordingly.

In this context, the cluster centred its lighthouse project on a practical focus task – the building of a billycart – that would 'stimulate literacy performance, engage learners, encourage them to set realistic personal goals and improve self-esteem'.

Each of the schools selected 10 boys from Years 6–8 who were considered at risk, but capable of improvement with the right support. These students initially were involved in a team-building 'high ropes course' and literacy workshop on a cluster basis. Individual schools then ran a series of five half-day workshops incorporating a literacy session with defined tasks, and a session building the billycart. All of this activity culminated in a concluding literacy workshop and a public presentation of the students' work to teachers, parents, fellow students and the local media, as well as testing of the billycarts in appropriate areas around the schools. Efforts were made throughout the project to promote it among teachers and the community to enhance awareness of boys' education and how it can be improved.

Evidence collected by the cluster suggests the project has successfully:

- improved the boys' literacy – 'a number of classroom teachers indicated ... (the boys) were writing more than usual, completing literacy tasks and showing an interest and willingness to work on literacy tasks';
- demonstrated their willingness to participate in multi-literacy tasks – 'literacy tasks undertaken on the computer were much more enthusiastically approached ... (though) the area in which students showed most reluctance was in speaking to a group';
- increased their engagement with learning – not just the obvious interest in building the carts and the high ropes course but, 'in an apparent contrast to the research, the other event which 25 of the 26 boys enthusiastically recalled as a highlight was the poetry sessions with the guest poet, Marco Gliori ... (who had) an astounding ability to captivate at-risk literacy students ... (with poetry) based on real life incidents';
- increased their motivation and enthusiasm for school – as one teacher observed, 'it was great to see the students so animated and hear them want to talk to lots of different people about the project';
- reduced unexplained absences and disruptive behaviour – 'conspicuous by its absence was the lack of teacher comment about disruptive behaviour'; and
- enhanced self-esteem – as two of the participants observed, 'I'm more confident now' and 'next time I will have a go at new stuff'.

Beyond this, a significant number of teachers are now more aware of issues surrounding boys' education and are 'exploring strategies and viable solutions' to improve it.

For all of this, though, the schools recognise that the real test now of the success of the programme is the extent to which 'there is any significant transference of improvement from the project to the classroom' (including in terms of changed pedagogical practices), along with long-term changes in student behaviour, self-esteem and general achievement. With this in mind, the cluster schools have been starting to timetable some single-sex classes with the same-sex teachers so these types of opportunities can continue for boys, and girls also can benefit from what the cluster has learned.

The key features of activity in this category build, like all other categories that follow, on those listed for 'Learning styles and teaching practice', which, in the interests of brevity, are not repeated in the report. Thus, the dot points listed after each category progressively build up a picture of the main factors to emerge from school and cluster projects that have influenced the set of guiding principles advanced at the end of the report.

Major aspects to emerge from hands-on projects in this context relate to:

- *The provision of more practical, visual and tactile activities that emphasise physical movement and interaction to engage boys in learning.*
- *The belief that teaching strategies for boys should include highly structured tasks, clear expectations and targets, firm deadlines and direct instruction where required to demonstrate what is expected.*
- *The capacity for hands-on activities to provide a way of learning that is authentic and engaging, and closely related to boys' values and lives.*

- *The contribution that hands-on activities can make to improved teamwork and cooperation among boys, as well as increased responsibility for their learning and work.*
- *The opportunity afforded by hands-on activities to effectively involve community mentors who can both share their knowledge and skills, and act as positive male role models for boys.*
- *The need, as far as possible, to link hands-on activities to other components of the curriculum and especially the development of literacy and numeracy skills.*
- *The suitability of hands-on activities to presentation and reporting in a variety of formats, rather than just written assignments.*
- *The role that developing and producing a high quality product can play in giving purpose to the learning of core knowledge and skills, as well as promoting feelings of achievement and a desire to communicate with others about it.*



Literacy and communication skills

Common themes identified by schools in this strand through their teleconferences, which reflect the findings of schools already discussed under 'Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment', and which arguably apply equally to the other strands of the project as well, were that:

- boys need to be provided with concrete, hands-on activities that have a literacy component;
- activities need to have current relevance for boys and not just relevance some time in the future;
- boys will take risks with literacy activities in small group discussions and peer tutoring sessions; and
- boys respond positively when given leadership roles and responsibility – 'they enjoy the limelight, even boys who have challenging behaviours or difficulties in literacy'.

Literacy programmes for boys

Many schools investigated, implemented and/or evaluated highly structured approaches to literacy, including the teaching of phonics, and their implications for the literacy development of boys. Others took a broader, engagement-related approach, developing programmes to make literacy more appealing and hence engaging for boys.

The **Bridgewater Primary School's Literacy Strategy** originated in 1997 in response to the staff's finding that more than 50 per cent of the school's Grade 6 students going to high school 'were not achieving appropriate skills in literacy'. The approach adopted involves 'the implementation of a structured, sequential, whole school (K–6) programme, 'embedded with explicit, consistent teaching strategies'. This specifically incorporates 'a structured, multi-sensory phonics component beginning in the early years (and for effective intervention purposes), as well as explicit teaching of the writing process and thinking strategies required for making meaning from text'. The whole approach is backed by professional development to build 'teacher threshold knowledge in the discipline of teaching literacy; ... a range of appropriate high quality literacy practices; ... (with) supportive ongoing professional learning, mentoring and coaching' as a critical component.

Central to the whole approach is the use of dedicated literacy blocks involving smaller ability groupings across two or three grade levels. These blocks are conducted three days a week and, since students remain in heterogeneous groups for most of those days and the remaining two days, 'the labelling effect is ... negligible'. Such grouping practice has, the

school explains, 'been found to have a positive effect on student achievement at primary school level when used for a specific purpose, eg English or Mathematics ... (and) By using the "Flying Start" teacher, the Literacy Support teacher, as well as classroom teachers, these "ability groupings" are smaller than regular class sizes'. It should be noted that, although transdisciplinary learning (integrating literacy into inquiry-based units) and broader, whole language practices are part of the literacy programme, they are not the major focus in literacy blocks.

From the school's perspective they have adopted an overall approach that is 'child-centred, quality, integrated and purposeful. All students read natural language texts. The emphasis is on quality literature and enjoyment of reading ... The implementation of smaller, flexible groupings has ensured all students are targeted and are working at their ability level. These groupings have also provided an intervention programme and assistance for students with special needs, including our at-risk students'.

The tasks the school has now set itself in the context of the literacy programme it implements, and which this lighthouse project has set in train, are to:

- establish a longitudinal research project to systematically track boys' literacy outcomes, including unpacking and evaluating data available from the last five years as the basis for evaluating future performance; and
- explicitly teaching the first three thinking strategies required for making meaning from text¹¹ to a targeted group of 17 students with learning difficulties (including 10 boys) in Years 5–6.

To this end, the school identified and transferred its literacy data from the 1998–2002 period to electronic form so it was better able to analyse and evaluate performance and the impact of its literacy approach, and used the services of a skilled staff member to train and mentor the teacher of the targeted Mental Actions group.

Some interesting information is emerging from the literacy data analysis in particular, in relation to the school's overall approach. It appears, for instance, that although the *Literacy Programme* did not specifically target boys, 'it is a literacy acquisition strategy that supports all students to access the curriculum ... (and) by implementing an approach that involved explicit, sequential, multi-sensory instruction in spelling (including handwriting and phonics), writing and reading', the school is catering for a learning style suited to boys.

From the school's perspective, it also fits well with some key research-based findings of the House of Representatives Standing Committee that, as listed by the school:

- boys respond to structure, clearly articulated purposes for learning and easily understood methods of assessment;
- boys need more explicit teaching than girls and early diagnosis of problems;
- structured programmes with clear objectives and simple instructions work best;
- early literacy – these foundation skills are the most reliable predictor of long-term educational outcomes and personal and economic wellbeing;
- research and teacher observations emphasise the importance of phonemic awareness and phonological skill of literacy learning – current research shows that emphasis on systematic teaching of phonics, combined with reading natural language texts, is successful with children experiencing difficulties;

¹¹ The Mental Actions of monitoring comprehension, making connections, and making predictions.

- effective approaches should be multi-sensory, sequential and structured with clear objectives understood by teachers and students; and
- there should be a whole school strategy where teachers have opportunities to review, discuss and reflect on their practice.



The early analysis of data also suggests that the literacy strategy employed by the school is proving effective, with improvement evident over time. In addition, the results of *Waddington Diagnostic Spelling and Reading Tests* at least reveal a 'similarity of performance of boys and girls' that the school believes 'could also be interpreted as confirmation of the effectiveness of our strategy specifically for boys as the literature would suggest that boys would generally under-perform on such measures'. That said, this only draws on data collected from the first cohort of students to have benefited from the strategy from the start of their formal schooling, and an examination of future cohorts is now required.

Having had an unsatisfactory experience with poetry, whereby boys substantially remained aloof from a Year 5 and 6 activity involving a nationally respected poet, **Mary Immaculate Primary School** adopted a more narrowly focused approach than Bridgewater Primary and introduced a programme designed to increase the confidence, self-motivation and attitudes of boys toward poetry, with the intention that it would flow to other aspects of literacy.

Right from the start, the school addressed a question raised by many schools and clusters in this programme: 'Which boys?' In this case, the school avoided choosing 'the most creative and confident performers in order to conduct a poetry recital night for parents and guests'. Instead the school decided to work with all boys in Years 5 and 6 to help them become more confident in their writing, then to publicly recite their own work.

The actual programme involved one classroom teacher being released for one day a week for a 10-week programme. The teacher then took boys from each of the Year 5 and 6 classes for one half-hour poetry lesson in groups of around 15. The groups were kept deliberately small to promote closer interaction and attention for all involved. The culmination of the programme was an evening with parents and guests where the boys recited some of their own work.

While the detail of the 10-week programme is beyond the scope of this report, a few particularly interesting facets included:

- an initial lesson where boys' stereotypes about gender, gender roles and career options were challenged – when catering was nominated as a female occupation, the teacher invited students to name people from cooking shows and used the male names elicited to challenge a range of stereotypical views;
- the expectation that students would write two poems of any style, on any topic, and recite one in class, which, at first, they did 'apprehensively' but soon was done more confidently 'when they realised that they were not being marked or judged on their work, but rather being praised for their efforts';
- the use of popular culture, such as rap music to engage boys more and expand their views on what constitutes poetry; and
- the collation of 20 selected poems from the boys' nominated favourites in an anthology that also formed the basis of their public presentation.

The most obvious sign of success for the project is that a survey conducted at its end revealed that boys' attitudes shifted from 70 per cent seeing poetry as 'boring' to 90 per cent viewing it favourably and expressing such comments as 'I understand poetry a lot better now ... I can rhyme words more easily'. Teachers too observed 'several positive changes' in boys in class including 'an increase in boys' assertiveness and confidence in public speaking, more willingness to share their writing ideas, improvement in descriptive writing and attitude towards language activities'.

One important outcome of the project from the perspective of the school is that it has confirmed 'a lot of the research we have been reading in the University of Newcastle's *Boys in Schools Bulletin* regarding single-sex classes within a coeducational school'. Some of the claimed benefits advanced that the school would endorse on the basis of its experience are:

- girls demonstrating higher motivation, leadership skills and academic achievement especially in maths (which interestingly enough was the subject of a companion programme for girls at the school while the boys were doing poetry classes) and science;
- boys may be demonstrating higher academic achievement, but definitely showing more positive attitudes and behavioural outcomes;
- boys gaining a more egalitarian attitude towards women's and men's roles in society;
- boys being more likely to engage in singing, drama, poetry and language;
- single-sex groupings better accommodating the specific developmental needs and interests of students;
- boys and girls being less distracted, more willing to contribute during lessons and to take risks answering questions;
- without the girls to 'impress', the boys gaining a better attitude towards school and learning;
- less concern about body image for both genders;
- increased verbal skills as both girls and boys take more risks in conversations allowing for greater depth in discussions; and
- improved self-esteem from breaking down undesirable stereotypical behaviour.

What's more, parents noted the positive impact, which they saw reflected in 'the happy and more relaxed demeanour of the children who had developed a greater sense of self-worth'.

These findings were endorsed by the survey of students which found that approximately 90 per cent of girls said they would like to be split into single-sex classes more often, though only half wanted it on a permanent basis; and boys responses were similar, with many stating their overall behaviour had improved with less 'showing off' and 'trying to act cool'.

In this context, the only thing the school would seek to do differently in this programme is to make the sessions longer, to ensure even more individual attention, and to target a single year group to avoid repetition and maintain interest.

The issue of 'Which boys?' was central to the **Balmoral State High School Cluster** (also known as Gateway Learning Cluster or GLC) project which focused on literacy but embodied a concern about 'the limitations of seeing the problems identified as specifically gendered'; since several of the 14 teachers involved (two per school) 'have taught girls with significant literacy problems and have taught boys who were very successful with literacy'. Thus, the focus of the cluster was very much on knowing the students well, adopting a 'local solutions to local problems' philosophy, and espousing the need for 'inclusive, rather than gender-specific, pedagogy' in classrooms, consistent with their reading of Rowe and Rowe¹² that 'what matters most is the quality of teaching and support by professional development'. That

12 Rowe, HJ and Rowe, KS 2002, *What Matters Most: Evidence-based Findings on Key Factors Affecting the Educational Experiences and Outcomes for Girls and Boys throughout Their Primary and Secondary Schooling*, ACER, Camberwell.

said, the experience of the schools did then result in the identification of 'certain pedagogies as effective for the majority of male students ... (and) these include providing boys choice across various facets of the literacy curriculum (such as allowing students to type rather than handwrite, choosing genres to write, and choosing materials to read) and using short lessons and frequent changes of activity'.

With the overall aim of improving the skills of teacher participants, creating a base of teacher leadership on boys' literacy issues, sharing experiences and resources across the cluster and generally raising the profile of literacy across the cluster, the project centred on:

- a week-long Wildwords Festival celebration of literacy and art, which saw speakers, authors and artists travelling to all cluster schools or students going to see them at community venues, to 'demonstrate the many uses and pleasures of literacy';
- instruction for teacher participants about action research as a prelude to conducting literacy-based trials in their classrooms focused on such questions as 'How can we engage our boys in writing? Why do some boys engage well while others do not? What causes our boys to change their engagement as they get older, and what are these changes?'; and
- exposing the teachers to three well-respected Queensland authors who each spoke about issues of boys' literacy and general methods for engaging all students in literacy across the school.

The key for the schools in this context was to really impact on pedagogy in the classroom over the long term, rather than adopt 'simplistic quick fixes ("tips for teachers") ... (or) "dangerous" over-generalisations that potentially threatened the educational gains of girls over the past two decades'. And this essentially had to start with a major awareness-raising phase.

Surveys of those who attended the Wildwords Festival reveal that it was 'highly successful in raising the profile of literacy within the GLC schools' and students 'overwhelmingly enjoyed' the activities; with one even going so far as to observe that 'it was awesome. It was better than camp'. Teachers also were very positive about the professional development workshops and acquired 'several practical strategies' which they already had used or were planning to adopt.

The action research component of the project probably produced the most usable data to inform teachers' practice. Above all, it confirmed that no sole finding about the students – whether it be that reluctant writers are more easily distracted or that many boys write only when they have to and not for pleasure – was 'universal or without contradicting evidence', which merely 'underscores the notion that individualised, rather than formulaic, methods be applied to each classroom and each student'.

There were, however, some general findings that can be used to inform teaching across the cluster, including:

- the need to redress 'the discordant definitions that teachers and students hold of writing' (eg 'many students conflated writing with handwriting');
- the need to increase the amount of time spent on writing or on sharing writing between students;
- the need to increase the amount of modelling of the writing process, especially revision; and
- the potential value of introducing literacy blocks free of interruption to increase the amount of time students can spend writing.



Finally, and perhaps most importantly in some ways, 'teachers identified a need to infuse their teaching of writing with "passion" and enthusiasm ... to encourage students to like writing and to write for pleasure'.

Reading was the focus at **Palmerston District Primary School** with a particular effort to engage parents and enhance boys' (and for that matter girls') motivation to read and engagement in reading. Two specific programmes were introduced with this end in mind:

- *Cooperative Reading: As Easy as ABC* – this programme, developed by Glenda Raison and a team of researchers, is designed to 'create a supportive environment in the classroom' and describes ideas for introducing different aspects of reading instruction. An added advantage of using this approach is that it 'provided a link to our feeder high school ... as they are also implementing a programme using the same principle in Years 6, 7 and 8 of the middle school'.
- *Talk To a Literacy Learner (TTALL)* – a 14-week programme to assist parents to support their children's literacy. The programme, designed by Professor Trevor Cairney and Lynne Munsie, provides specific sessions to 'raise parents' participation in their children's literacy activities and to improve the quality of interactions parents have with their children as they read and write'.

Cooperative Reading was introduced into two classes of Year 5–6 students and involved their undertaking, on a daily basis, the *Cooperative Reading* programme through teacher modelling of reading for 10 minutes; students breaking into groups of four and taking turns reading aloud for 15 minutes; using discussion roles set out in the programme to conduct group discussions for 10 minutes; and recording of reflections in the students' personal reading logs to conclude the session. The school intends to continue implementing this approach through 2003 and then into next year. However, the school has identified a need, on the basis of teacher and student feedback and its own analysis of research, 'to incorporate ICT and multimedia as a means for the students to further reflect on their novel and express their understanding'.

The nine parents trained through the TTALL programme were provided with strategies for various home tasks in the areas of how children learn, reading, writing, spelling and research. Data from a survey collected from this group shows that they all feel it changed their views to some extent, and that the most popular strategies they subsequently employed at home were (in order of use) reading predictive books, paired reading, listening to children read, directed reading and thinking activities, conference writing, editing and using personal spelling dictionaries.

Cooperative Reading: As Easy as ABC was also the basis of the *Cooperative Reading Circles Programme (CRCP)* progressively trialled at **St Francis Xavier School**, as part of a broader focus on the middle years (2–4 in this primary school) and enhancing boys' social development, sense of autonomy and achievement of success. The CRCP aims to 'equip and empower the children to become engaged text readers through their undertaking of reading roles in a real reading context. This has been enabled through the explicit teaching of effective reading practices, social behaviours and personal goal setting, which have then been practised by the children in their Reading Circle. Varied social interaction has created the opportunity for the children to develop self-esteem and consolidate leadership skills as the Reading Circle make-up changes regularly'.

The CRCP guides teachers and school support officers to prepare for, and then implement, 'explicit teaching of ... reading tactics and an understanding of the four reading roles as derived from Freebody and Luke'¹³.

¹³ See, for example: Freebody, P and Luke, A 2003, 'Literacy as engaging with new forms of life: the "four roles" model, in Bull, G and Anstey, M (eds) *The Literacy Lexicon*, 2nd edition, Pearson Education Australia, French's Forest, NSW; and Luke, A and Freebody, P 1999, 'A map of possible practices: further notes on the four resources model', in *Practically Primary*, 4:2, pp 5–8.



In summary, the four roles that readers need to learn to be literate in our society are:

- Code Breaker – the reader learns how to relate graphemes to phonemes; learns letters, words, spaces, left to right eye movement, punctuation; learns grammatical structures; learns an emphasis on accuracy rather than meaning.
- Text Participant – the reader learns to be involved in texts; to identify with character, to imagine setting, to anticipate plot, to experience tension, to enjoy resolution; and to respond to non-narrative texts in appropriate ways.
- Text User – the reader learns pragmatic aspects of texts; learns how to respond to texts in a social context by sharing and discussing, by relating texts to other texts, by producing new texts, by acting in certain ways as a result of reading the text.
- Text Analyst – the reader learns to interrogate the text; to consider the socio-cultural factors that underlie the production and interpretation of the text; to consider what social groups and political positions are privileged by the text; to consider what ideas, attitudes and events appear to be 'natural' within the text; to consider not only what is stated and implied in the text, but what is left out.

Students then used the skills and tactics they had been taught within a real reading situation where they selected suitable reading material and groups based on the material chosen. They then determined team and personal social and reading goals and negotiated the reading roles and the number of pages to be read prior to each session, which were reviewed after the session concluded. Teachers would read aloud with periodic pauses to model what readers do, and students read silently, if necessary drawing on peer support to scaffold reading of difficult texts. Discussion and sketching also were used to stretch students' imaginations and the various reading roles were the subject of team discussion around the text being read.

The major strengths of the approach and outcomes achieved, as far as the school is concerned, are 'the interest and enthusiasm it generated, not only within the classroom, but also within the school community. The students, both boys and girls, demonstrated a positive attitude and sense of commitment to the Reading Circles. A sense of identity was achieved within the class as they worked together to build their classroom environment and participate in the Reading Circles'. And the school expects this to further be strengthened as the students 'take their knowledge and skills into other classes as tutors and show their leadership qualities'; though analysis of quantitative data on literacy outcomes will be done over the longer term.

The overall approach is one that works, according to the school, because social and reading skills are explicitly taught with clarity, and the teaching involves 'knowing the learner, responding to the learner, implementing focused lessons, and reflection and review'. Certainly several other teachers in the school are now keen to adopt the approach and are merely awaiting the relevant professional development.

The *Boys 'N' Books* programme at **Gordonvale State High School** inevitably involved its feeder government and non-government primary schools as it was based on using 'older lads to act as reading tutors for early readers ... (and) good role models in reading behaviour'. *Boys 'N' Books*, which is now in its fourth year of operation, is essentially a reading support programme where Year 8 and 9 boys are invited to volunteer to be trained as reading tutors for buddies in Years 1–3 at either of the nearby primary schools. Priority for this support is given to boys over girls because of their literacy results and, in this context, to ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island) boys over non-ATSI boys who are low achievers. In selecting the tutors, some effort is made to break down perceptions that activities such as reading are 'sissy' by drawing on boys who have been successes in sport and other valued domains.

Once selected, the tutors are required to commit to providing reading support once a week for around 30 to 40 minutes for their nominated buddy over a period of six weeks. The programme runs in term 4 'when it causes least disruption to all schools ... (and) is of the most benefit to all students involved'. It is worth noting, in this context, the importance of school-level flexibility to enable such programmes to occur, as outlined by one key teacher in the following terms: 'One of the key issues was trying to schedule the programme, juggling the timing of the tutors' visits to the primary schools to coincide with minimal disruption to the schools. Because the timetables are quite dissimilar, it was a challenge to have all this happen, in one sector with very little flexibility locked into the whole school picture, and the other on the surface appearing to have little formal structure in scheduling, yet running to an informal "hidden" routine. Break times were different: we had to accommodate the primary schools' access to their specialists' lessons and then there were the incidental unplanned, unavoidable disruptions. Our solution was to accommodate the primary schools' needs first. Because the lunch hours were different, our students missed part of a lesson. This meant that each subject teacher had to agree to support the move, the students had to agree to catch up and keep up, and this required a commitment from the kids. Luckily, as the programme is an initiative of the maths department, and ... as maths is blocked on the timetable, we were able to solve that one'.

The actual training provided for the tutors incorporates the reading process, supportive reading strategies and intervention techniques for poor readers, as well as developing good listening skills and some basic techniques for managing student behaviour. Liaison with the primary teachers gives 'the trainer details of buddies' reading levels ... and appropriate strategies to put in place ... (which) is invaluable in matching tutors and their buddies and in preparing tutors with specific strategies for students at risk'. Then, in the reading sessions, tutors apply basic strategies to support reading and keep a record that notes issues or questions to raise at debriefing sessions, along with their own learning journal to capture and then later reflect on the experience from their perspective. All participants in the programme receive an individual certificate prepared with a photo of the tutor and buddy watermarked and their quote about the programme typed in the corner.

The almost four years' experience of this programme is that it definitely improves students' attitudes to reading, and also enhances the confidence and self-esteem of all involved. As one teacher explained, what has impressed her most has been to see 'the delight on the primary students' faces as the high schoolers came to their school for them to read ... You could see the quality of their reading improve each visit. The improvement in self-esteem the high school boys (exhibited) and the way they approached the task showed another side to the volunteer tutors not seen in normal school activities'.

Of even more note, perhaps, is the feedback received from a Community Education Counsellor who also is the mother of a Year 8 boy involved. 'I have encountered the *Boys 'N' Books* programme from two different angles. The first being as a mother of an Indigenous student who participated in the programme, and the second being as an Indigenous worker at the school and supporting some of the Indigenous students involved in the programme. As the mother of a Year 8 student involved in the programme, I witnessed some really great changes in my son which I have no doubt were attributed to the satisfaction he received from being involved in the programme. His self-esteem has grown in leaps and bounds. My son was a boy who would never have put his hand up for something like this, so imagine my surprise when he came home and couldn't stop talking about the programme. He loved the thought of working with younger students.'

This sort of success is, according to the school, due to a number of design features that generally conform to what the research says on boys' education and include that:

- a routine is set, the programme has structure and outcomes are simple and easily articulated by participants;
- each tutor's performance is easily monitored, visible and active, and positive goals are set both for the tutor and the buddy;

- directions are clear and simple and the tutor has room to make his own decisions and choices;
- reading skills and strategies are learned and applied, and new learning is presented with a balance of theory, demonstration and practical participation;
- the programme offers challenges in short and simple sessions where a lot happens and there is plenty of praise; and
- learning journals are kept to encourage reflection, supported by oral feedback after each session.

Group bonding and identification with the programme has been particularly strong among the 10 to 12 tutors and 20 to 24 reading buddies involved each year, and 'the little guys eagerly anticipated the arrival of their tutors, tried to impress them by bringing difficult books that they tried to read to the tutor, they ran to tutors and huddled up close to read. In their turn, the tutors were possessive of their buddies, proudly exchanging achievements referring to "my little bloke/fella/buddy" '. The school is now keen to share its success and will produce a basic *Getting Started Kit* 'to help anyone who wants to set up their own programme', including video footage to be shot by Year 12 Film and Television students in term 4 as a way of involving these older students as well.



Instead of reading, **Camberwell Grammar Junior School** focused its efforts in literacy on the writing domain. Having identified in 1999 that boys' literacy levels did not match their numeracy outcomes, the school engaged a consultant (David Hornsby) to provide professional development on reading once a fortnight to all teachers over time. This was supported by texts to interest and engage boys in reading in a more substantial way. The school then put boys into small ability-based groups where they were exposed to a range of genre and text types, matched to their reading levels, and encouraged to respond in a variety of ways. Information technologies were then added to the literacy block at all levels of the junior school and a range of software integrated to capitalise on their 'natural interest' in computers. The reading development of each boy was recorded using comprehensive diagnostic assessments identified in consultation with the ACER, and individual or small group intervention support provided for all boys requiring it.

The upshot was a significant improvement in the reading skills and performance of boys in the school which did, however, reveal a need to focus on writing as well. In this context, the school instituted 'an intensive focus' on writing, supported by professional development to 'assist teachers to identify the specific pedagogies needed to promote the improvement of boys' writing and spelling'. The decision to focus on professional development in particular, and thereby improve teachers' skills, derived from the school's reading of Rowe and Rowe's submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee¹⁴, in which they observed that 'the provision of quality teaching and learning in literacy, supported by ongoing professional development, must be given the highest priority'.

More specifically, the school implemented a comprehensive programme that involved:

- whole school professional development in writing and spelling;
- collection of samples of boys' writing at the beginning and end of the project;
- preparation of a writing/spelling interview to obtain student feedback in lower primary and a self-evaluation pro forma for the upper primary years;
- identification and use of software to motivate boys' writing and improve their skills;
- development of a more systematic approach to the teaching of spelling;

¹⁴ Rowe, HJ and Rowe, KS 2002, *What Matters Most: Evidence-based Findings on Key Factors Affecting the Educational Experiences and Outcomes for Girls and Boys throughout Their Primary and Secondary Schooling*, ACER, Camberwell.

- introduction of the *THRASS* spelling programme¹⁵ in the lower primary years;
- the use of more comprehensive techniques to analyse boys' writing and spelling;
- improved literacy intervention strategies for boys deemed at risk;
- more explicit and meaningful teaching;
- improved documentation of students' skills;
- development of a new writing continuum to be implemented; and
- regular meetings to discuss project progress and share ideas and experiences.

The effect on students appears to be enhanced 'awareness of spelling strategies and improved understanding of phonics, ... of the craft of writing, including the different genre and technical aspects of writing, ... (and) of their own spelling needs and preferences'. Beyond this, the school and its teachers have reported increased engagement in writing and spelling by boys, along with improved written communication and spelling skills.

The whole experience has led the school to conclude that successful writing requires that boys:

- see purpose in their writing tasks;
- write best when they are given choice and have some control over their writing;
- like to share their writing with an audience;
- write best in short, intensive sessions;
- like writing when they are informed and interested in a topic;
- like variety;
- like paired or shared writing;
- enjoy using humour in their writing and enjoy writing narratives where they can write imaginatively;
- enjoy writing procedural texts because they like factual writing, albeit needing structure to guide them;
- respond well to the explicit teaching of spelling and positive encouragement; and
- thrive in classrooms where their knowledge and opinions are valued.

Certainly the boys themselves appreciated the overall approach, observing as one typically did that, 'I enjoy the challenge of writing a story which is good and finished well. I like it when I can choose my own topic because I have control over what's going to happen and how the characters think and feel'; to which another simply added 'most of all I enjoy writing about things I care about'.

Homebush Boys' High School, which caters for a large enrolment of students from a non-English speaking background (NESB) (including a significant proportion from Intensive Language Centres), sought to extend an already comprehensive approach to literacy improvement in reading and writing by focusing on talking and listening as well.

¹⁵ *Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Strategies (THRASS)* is a language programme gradually being implemented in lower primary classes in the school. 'It teaches boys the building blocks of reading and spelling ... (and) that basically when reading we change spelling choices to speech sounds and when spelling we change speech sounds into spelling choices.'



This was important since an evaluation of student achievement had identified that boys, and especially NESB boys, 'can lack confidence' in these domains.

The challenge the school set itself was 'to devise a variety of tasks involving these skills that address current curriculum topics, are varied and seen as relevant by boys'. Volunteer teachers from each faculty undertook to devise specific units of work aimed at building students' skills in both talking and listening, based on the *NSW State Literacy Strategy and Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools* (a paper that emphasises the promotion of high levels of intellectual quality, a quality learning environment and the need to develop and make explicit the significance of work to students).¹⁶

The units of work were to target Stage 5 courses and Year 9 students in particular, and required explicit teaching and assessment of talking and listening during weeks 5 and 6 of term 3. The time frame selected was designed to enable the school to evaluate the units for the final lighthouse project report but, as things turned out, it was found to be 'wholly inadequate and some students found the abrupt change in pedagogy somewhat unsettling'. Units were in fact prepared and delivered in nine subject areas and included such activities as:

- students working in groups of three in maths to conduct interviews where they acted as interviewer, respondent and observer and engaged in peer and self-assessment;
- students using stimulus pictures from the Hubble telescope in science for group work where they devised questions and responses and then made short speeches to class;
- students presenting two-minute AFL skill presentations to the class as part of PDHPE, which were then assessed by their peers; and
- students playing Art Cluedo in groups of three where a work of art was presented and each member of the group given clues that they then shared and discussed to identify the piece.

Both teachers and students have 'openly embraced the introduction of an increased focus on talking and listening as part of teaching and learning', with students commonly observing that it was 'enjoyable' and 'fun' – with one even referring to it being 'educational' as well. Teachers involved in the trials found, as one English teacher explained, that 'the standard of oral presentations was very high. Students were able to synthesise task requirements, producing highly effective presentations'.

Beyond this, teachers felt that their own repertoires had been extended in useful ways and the school is now undertaking a review of its Stage 4 and 5 teaching to ensure that all aspects of literacy are embedded in the programmes; with teachers 'now required to build talking and listening into their outcomes for all subjects, including assessment tasks as part of their programming'. In this context, the school believes a whole school approach is 'essential for success' and, with this in mind, is preparing a booklet of sample lessons as a resource for all faculties and using teachers involved in the trials to provide professional development for colleagues who were not.

In a sort of variation on a theme (of addressing literacy through a particular strand of English), **Glenorchy Primary School**, which had long been concerned with the declining performance of boys in literacy and which already had trialled a separation of boys and girls in Year 6 and a number of different teaching approaches, focused directly on drama.

'Through observation, reading and experience ... (the school had) developed a philosophy based on the belief that, for boys to actively engage in literacy learning, there needs to be a focus upon practical, or "real life experiences". And the school saw drama and role-play as the means of providing boys with the motivation for their literacy learning

¹⁶ NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) May 2003, *Quality Teaching in NSW Public Schools: Discussion Paper*, DET, Sydney.

and enabling them to engage more fully in that learning. Through drama, where students have the opportunity to experience replicated life situations, the motivation and stimulation to research, read, write and speak is inherently provided by the situation. Beyond this, many of the behaviour problems and low self-esteem exhibited by boys 'can be addressed through drama where boys can step outside themselves and, in contexts that are "real", demonstrate confidence and competency as effective language users'.

Thus, the school provided its staff with professional learning to develop good practice of role-play drama and teachers then initiated activities in their classes; backed up by such other important applications as journal writing, ethical decision making, voicing opinions, and reflecting on the whole experience. The professional learning activities were particularly important because, as one teacher explained after one activity, 'this session has taken the fear out of doing role-play in the classroom ... The opportunities for role-play are obviously endless and open up new avenues for expression for many children. Wonderful opportunities for literacy development'. That said, the school feels it did not sufficiently address for all staff the connections between role-play drama and literacy development, with the result that some teachers 'saw the literacy benefits of using a role-play drama approach as incidental rather than the purpose for such a programme'. This is a task for the programme as it continues into next year.

Following the necessary teacher preparation, many students were involved in a number of one-off role-play drama experiences and students from four classes (two Grade 2, a Grade 6 and a 5–6 class) were involved in more extended experiences.

The two extended role-play dramas involved:

- Grade 2 students being 'enrolled' as residents in the fictional town of Cooler Bay, fully developing their part in the context of a proposal to build a large seaside resort on the foreshore of town, and with a culminating town meeting to vote on the outcome. Other literacy activities undertaken as part of this drama included constructing visual representations such as protest signs, writing newspaper reports, writing and presenting speeches, reflective writing and so on.
- Grade 5 and 6 students participating in a role-play involving a threat to the immediate future of the world and the consequent establishment of a community in the Antarctic living independently of any contact with the outside world. Activities extended beyond the role-play itself to include journal writing, cooperative problem solving, group research and presentations, public speaking and more.

The enthusiasm and motivation generated by the extended role-play dramas in particular 'was evident to all concerned and was displayed in the boys' eagerness to write and participate'. In addition, case studies of individual boys showed the effectiveness of the whole approach as they were seen 'making decisions and supporting those decisions, critically reflecting on their learning and using higher order thinking. Boys who are reluctant learners, or who are behaviour problems are engaged and feel empowered to attempt tasks they would normally refuse to do or even attempt'.

The whole experience confirms for the school that role-play is particularly effective in addressing Alloway and Gilbert's findings¹⁷ that boys are more likely to participate and achieve in school literacy work if they see it as relevant and useful for understanding their own lives, in making their lives richer and fuller, and in offering them new and different ways of remaking their lives. 'In fact', the school argued, 'role-play drama provides boys with numerous opportunities to engage in literacy activities without challenging their construction of masculinity. It was seen as legitimate, for example in the Cooler Bay drama, for boys to be emotional and passionate about the possibility of losing their home or animals' habitat being threatened'. In a couple of cases it even went too far, with boys continuing to live out their parts beyond the drama classes themselves, suggesting a need for some debriefing of the whole experience.

¹⁷ Alloway, N and Gilbert, P 1997, 'Everything is dangerous: working with the "Boys and Literacy" agenda', *English in Australia*, October, pp 35–45, pp 119–20.

Moving beyond a single strand, **Southern Cross Catholic College** set out to develop a whole college literacy plan to guide its work over the next three years. The college, which is a coalition of four primary schools and one secondary school, has emphasised boys' education as a priority since 1999 when a taskforce was established to recommend on the delivery of high quality education for all students with particular reference to boys.



The broad approach adopted, in this context, includes a focus on:

- achieving a sustained engagement in learning through an environment that students find 'worthwhile, relevant, challenging, meaningful and enjoyable';
- expanding repertoires of practice in accordance with relevant research on effective boys' education; and
- providing a curriculum based on the four principles of productive pedagogies ('intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference') so that all teaching 'is learner-centred; has connectivity and purpose; simultaneously raises expectations/self-esteem and promotes meta-cognitive development; values a balance between explicit teaching and a constructivist approach; provides choice, negotiation and differentiation in a democratic environment; strives to ensure alignment of development needs with appropriate pedagogy; counteracts effects of cultural socioeconomic deprivation by mediated learning experiences; and links planning and assessment.

The school engaged the services of an 'external, internationally recognised educational consultant' (Professor Loretta Giorcelli) to assist it in developing a shared vision and common understanding regarding boys' education and literacy development, to underpin what goes on in the classroom. This vision, expressed in a *Literacy Plan, P-12*, for 2003-2006 incorporates the school's understanding of best practice in literacy education for boys including:

- an acceptance that literacy is core to all learning areas and 'subject mastery involves competence in the literacy of the subject to equip students for diverse literacies in life';
- the need to explore 'the interaction of literacy, masculinity and culture';
- a focus on 'sustained cognitive and emotional engagement of all students, especially boys, through a learning environment relevant to their interests, experience, needs and abilities';
- 'timetabling of literacy blocks and learning centres that offer opportunity for choice, negotiation and differentiation';
- identification of 'how success in literacy is measured, recorded and reported in all Key Learning Areas'; and
- use of student self-assessment as 'a tool to increase learning and self-knowledge'.

The plan will now define 'strategic renewal and directions for all schools for the next three years' and build on advice received from the expert consultant. Such renewal will also build on existing practices confirmed through the project and associated research such as the school's levelling of readers to appropriate levels, its use of benchmarking, its emphasis on phonemic and phonographic skills teaching, its consideration of learning styles and *Multiple Intelligences*, the use of learning technology as an important teaching and learning tool, and the inclusion of activities such as dramatic productions, musicals, book week activities and quizzes in the form of the 'Battle of the Books'.



One particularly positive unintended outcome of the whole project approach is that it has led to a major focus across the school on the development of higher order thinking skills and the teaching of philosophy. Teachers are, as a result, 'developing more sensitivity to boys' repertoires of learning practices', establishing more thoughtful classrooms 'where teachers and students examine their thinking to identify higher order thinking skills/strategies', and teaching thinking more explicitly while encouraging students to reflect on their own thinking and to record instances of higher order thinking skills in their files.

Weeden Heights Primary School moved beyond planning into substantial implementation which built on an existing approach to literacy development involving 'small class sizes and carefully selected and trained staff in our early and middle years who are equipped to identify and provide additional assistance, intervention and support to identified boys at risk'. Through this project the school provided substantial professional development and other support, including teaching and learning resources, to expand teachers' repertoires and skills in relation to literacy teaching for boys, and to engage them in trialling such innovative practices as:

- the development of Individual Learning Improvement Plans for boys identified as at risk; and
- modified activities for classroom use within the daily literacy block that could better address the needs of boys, including increased use of computers, regular breaks in passive activities for boys to have some physical activity (eg a walk or snack break), additional hands-on tasks, use of plays as a major source of reading materials, reciprocal teaching, implementation of gross motor literacy tasks, and additional phonic instruction.

The school also conducted a literacy week where male family members were invited to participate in classroom literacy activities and male staff members read to students at lunchtime. The whole approach was backed up with a school-wide focus on student welfare and building resilience in boys.

While the school feels that its assessment data still needs developmental work, there is evidence of boys more frequently choosing to read a book on a voluntary basis and increased engagement at the beginning of sessions in junior years as students 'looked forward to the hands-on activities'. At a more 'academic' level, teachers in Years 4–6 commonly report that their phonological awareness assessments show improvement for at least half or more students in such areas as segmenting words, breaking words into syllables and separate sounds and so on. That said, at-risk boys in the school have difficulty isolating sounds, breaking up words into sounds, following instructions, hearing and recording sounds in sequence, and with media vowels, which is why the school intends to provide additional phonemic instruction for boys at risk in literacy.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the project to date, though, was to further the approaches the school already had in place, with enhanced awareness of the learning styles of boys and what they mean for how teachers then teach. It is interesting to note, in this context, the advice provided by boys themselves who, when interviewed on the best ways for teachers to help them learn something new or difficult, nominated the following:

- giving individual help;
- demonstrating first, using objects if possible, or including it in an activity;
- explaining patiently;
- let me work with a friend;
- give me lots of practice time;



- offer extra help;
- let me try it out by myself;
- explain to me in a small group, not the whole class;
- have games and prizes; and
- make it fun.

Efforts to extend the repertoires of teachers was a focus at **Winthrop Primary School** as well where 'there is increasing use of scaffolds for written assignments ... A variety of creative pursuits has been instigated this year through our performing arts programme where boys have been encouraged to participate in dance, percussion and choral work ... (and there is) Increased interactive class teaching practice – increased use of technology, use of media supporting audiovisual instruction'.

The project enabled teachers to be provided with an even wider range of strategies to use in classrooms 'to address the needs of both boys and girls' and the opportunity to experiment with different strategies to 'engage Year 7 boys in literacy activities'. In particular, the school introduced a *Guys Read – Girls Compute* programme whereby boys were:

- initially engaged for 45 minutes a week in investigative visual literacy sessions using picture books, and also were involved in previewing fiction and recommending future purchases for the school library; and then
- received visits from authors, including an author-illustrator, who worked with them in one-hour sessions talking about the authorship process and sharing strategies and helpful tips for future writing and dealing with writing blocks.

The latter strategy was so well received and successful that the school will budget for more such workshops in 2004, for both boys and girls in a range of levels, and feels that in hindsight it would have liked to include more sessions this time round. Certainly the boys themselves expressed appreciation of the approach, typically commenting that 'now I can read novels well because I have done so much work with books' and 'previewing books was quite fun because you got to read new books and learn how different authors write different stories'.

Teachers at **Vaucluse Public School** were encouraged to trial a range of different evidence-based strategies as action research projects with their grades, with a view to generalising those that worked in the context of the school.

In the first instance the school arranged a number of K-6 staff meetings to examine data on boys' literacy performance. These were then followed by sessions examining selected articles containing ideas that researchers previously had found to be effective in improving boys' literacy performance, to inform what teacher volunteers might try. Both teachers and students then completed survey forms on their experience of the strategy employed and its potential lasting effect.

In broad terms the major ideas piloted by teachers focused on more practical, hands-on activities for boys and increased involvement in performance activities. They included such initiatives as:

- increased use of word processing and drawing programmes on computers for writing and publishing;
- the use of guiding templates or scaffolds to help structure writing activity;
- the use of computerised and interactive reading activities;
- more demonstrations by teachers;

- staging classroom activities in several smaller, task-connected blocks;
- sharing initial discussions about topics in small groups prior to writing so that ideas can be thought about and organised;
- using more competitive activities in class such as quizzes; and
- a book fair which had a special component of boy-friendly books from which parents and children, especially dad and son combinations, could select.

While all of this was only implemented over a short period of time, it has raised teacher awareness of different approaches that can be used successfully with boys, without their having to 'reinvent the wheel'. It also has created the basis for a potential follow-up project with the University of Technology, Sydney to further investigate issues relating to improving the performance and engagement of boys. In this context it is worth noting, however, that the school would, in future, be inclined to engage in more preparatory professional development and 'telegraphing' of the project so it becomes 'part of the overall school management plan rather than an add-on extra' that is seen as the 'boss's/School Council's pet project'.

The **Trinity Gardens Primary School Cluster** of six primary schools sought to challenge 'popular constructions of masculinity which can impede success in literacy', thereby improving boys' engagement in literacy and their literacy performance through approaches which 'privilege literacy proficiency'. This in turn required the schools to challenge a particular construction of schooling as well by 'adapting pedagogy for more interactive-experiential learners ... (and using) rich alternative strategies focused on learning rather than control'.

To achieve this aim, the cluster surveyed students about their preferred learning styles and then used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software to determine the correlations between these and basic skills results in literacy and numeracy, attendance, behaviour issues, gender, poverty, ESL and more. This, together with a survey of teachers' learning styles, and a conscious decision to target the schools' 'most at-risk boys' rather than boys as a homogeneous group, revealed a need 'to cater more for our experiential learners by mobilising students' motivation through relevant, engaging literacy experiences, connecting boys with their communities and addressing the cyclical effect that under-achievement can have on attainment in other areas of the curriculum, participation in school and post-school options'. This took the form of getting better linkages between literacy activities and a range of experiences in the arts, technology, science and physical education to help students see 'literacy as an important and meaningful part of the world'.

This common theme was then addressed in the following different, contextually relevant ways in each of the schools in the cluster.

- **East Marden Primary School** explored ways to improve boys' literacy levels with guided reading and factual texts, including the introduction of Lexile levels for all students in Years 3–7 and library sources identified and coded to, for example, indicate which contain quizzes to engage boys.
- **East Torrens Primary School** sought to improve boys' engagement in literacy through an examination of boys' and teachers' learning styles including the development of individual charts to enable teachers to plan activities that cater for multiple learning styles and to enable students to seek assistance from others with strengths in particular areas.
- **Marryatville Primary School** explored the link between the culture of the school and boys' literacy achievements, including a challenge to stereotypical views of masculinity for boys (and a consequent lack of engagement in literacy) through a focus on heroes and the use of the novel *Billy Elliot*. This school also

matched Year 6–7 boys to boys in a Reception class to read picture books to them that have bullying as a theme, and work with them one to one in a mentoring role; thereby breaking down some of the ‘pressures to conform’ and reducing younger students’ perceptions of older ones as sources of fear.

- **Norwood Primary School** improved boys’ literacy by addressing issues of engagement through the use of a fitness programme in the early years before, and then during the middle of the literacy block (which worked better when conducted before the block, and improved engagement rather than breaking up the session once it had started), and a focus on feelings and getting along in the primary years (which saw boys expressing their feelings through the journal entries they kept).
- **Thorndon Park Primary School** promoted writing for a purpose with sustained writing about a variety of topics and in varied genres, which children shared and discussed as an audience for each other’s work.
- **Trinity Gardens Primary School** improved boys’ literacy engagement through the use of mentors at various levels – teachers mentoring each other on engaging students more actively in literacy experiences, including the librarian providing resource materials and ideas for other teachers to use in class; older boys mentoring younger ones in how to negotiate differences with others; male teachers running an interactive programme to challenge ‘the narrow construction of gender’ which limits many boys’ progress in literacy; and parents, grandparents and adults in the community providing experiential learning opportunities for both boys and girls in gardening, publishing, science, technology, sports and more. The success of the peer mentoring in particular has resulted in the school approaching secondary students to develop transition or mentoring programmes with some at-risk boys.

To date, the quantifiable outcomes from the project across the cluster have been a reduction in non-attendance rates, lateness and suspensions, and improved achievement in reading as determined by *Reading Recovery* levels of students in Years 1 and 2 and the *Waddington Diagnostic Spelling and Reading Test* used in Years 3 and 5. This suggests to the schools involved that the basic approach ought be continued, and they now intend to focus on embedding experiential learning practices, mentoring and critical thinking within the literacy curriculum on a collaborative, whole cluster basis in 2004.

As with several of the schools already charted in this section, **Kippa-Ring State School** used its project to take an existing comprehensive approach to improving boys’ literacy one stage further. Since 2001 the school has implemented a balanced, whole school approach to teaching literacy that involves the implementation of the *Early Years Literacy Programme* including the establishment of a dedicated two-hour daily literacy block, fluid teaching groups, early years teaching approaches, a monitoring and assessment schedule to inform teaching, a Reading Room with levelled texts for classroom and home use, and professional development and a professional library for staff. In 2002 this was extended to respond to growing evidence that boys were under-performing compared to girls, through the introduction of a *Boys Reading and Growing Programme* (BRAG) which was even further extended in 2003.

Key strategies used in BRAG, which were a direct response to the school’s reading of the *Boys: Getting it Right* report and its recommendations (especially that boys need explicit teaching, to be challenged, hands-on activities and structured educational programmes) include:

- skilling teachers to more explicitly use ‘boy-friendly’ strategies during lessons;
- increased opportunities for boys to practise reading strategies including targeted intervention for defined groups of boys;
- the use of male mentors from the community and high profile professions to model positive reading behaviours with all boys from Years 3–7;



- employment of a male teacher aide for the *Support a Reader/Writer* programme;
- promotion of reading across the school as useful, enjoyable and 'cool'; and
- use of high interest reading materials for boys.

Specific activities undertaken then included reading books from the *Hot Links* series and working on activities related to them; developing a research project on the basis of KWL (ie What I know, what I want to know, and what I found out); using ICTs to publish the research; and using the skills learned in classroom activities. A further key component of the approach, again directly related to the Standing Committee's report, was encouragement for fathers to become involved under the slogan, 'Let's Have a Story, Dad'.

Data collected and analysed by the school indicates greater engagement by boys in learning activities where reading and writing is a component; improved reading strategies related to decoding, comprehension and critical literacy; and a general increased willingness to read. In addition, boys' borrowing from the library has noticeably increased and the early indications are that BRAG boys are demonstrating improved reading levels at a faster rate than non-targeted boys.

GyMEA Technology High School also sought to move an existing successful approach forward to address the fact that its welfare data revealed a group of boys, 'usually from the lower ability levels' in the middle years, who 'featured heavily ... (and) was over-represented in all areas of concern'. In general they are boys who 'lack confidence across and interest in the range of most literacy skills and (have) tendencies to resolve problems quickly and violently ... characteristic features of disaffected, resistant male learners'. This led the school to adopt a three-part approach to more effectively meet at-risk boys' learning needs, which built on a cross-age mentoring programme already in place.

More specifically the project involved:

- continued implementation of the mentoring programme while evaluating it to determine how it might be improved;
- a literacy initiative whereby the school employed an additional teacher to work with targeted students on a withdrawal or small group basis, supported by broader professional development for staff on good practices associated with literacy development across the school (including work to develop specific faculty literacy plans); and
- investigation of the *Cooling Conflicts*, drama-based peer tutoring programme to help students manage conflicts they encounter at school, which the school has decided meets their students' needs and will be trialled in Year 11 in 2004.

The evaluation of the mentoring programme revealed 'more focused and constructive school performance for at-risk students' and that most mentored students 'were able to report improvements or at least stable ratings in a majority of survey items at the end of programme review'. Students found the programme enjoyable and helpful and primarily requested its continuation but for longer periods of time. Beyond this, an analysis of relevant data revealed 'more stable middle terms' for most of the students involved in behavioural terms, and monitoring will continue for data collected in the subsequent semester.

The literacy initiative has enriched teacher knowledge about literacy development and boy-friendly teaching strategies, and the targeted support for students at risk has resulted in 'more focused and constructive school performance' for this group. An important strategy in this regard was to provide opportunities for students to develop literacy skills that are relevant to their working and post-school lives and for them to experience success in literacy at some level.



The major lessons to emerge from this category of activity, which complement those noted for 'Pedagogy, curriculum and assessment', are:

- *There should be a whole school strategy where teachers have opportunities to review, discuss and reflect on their practice.*
 - *Boys can benefit from explicit, consistent teaching of literacy that incorporates a structured, multi-sensory phonics component, especially in the early years of school.*
 - *An emphasis on the systematic teaching of phonics, combined with reading natural language texts, is successful with boys experiencing literacy difficulties.*
 - *There is a need for early intervention for boys at risk to ensure that they achieve the literacy skills needed to succeed at school.*
 - *Flexible groupings should be applied for literacy teaching blocks including, where appropriate, single-sex groupings and/or ability-based groups.*
 - *Boys respond positively to structure, clearly articulated purposes for learning, simple instructions and easily understood methods of assessment.*
 - *There is a need to cater for the identified needs of each individual, perhaps including the development of individual learning plans with specific learning goals and targets.*
 - *There is a need to challenge gender stereotypes about gender roles and career options, and to reinforce the need for boys to develop high level literacy skills.*
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Literacy programmes for boys with special learning needs

Somewhat similar to the previous category, these projects applied a structured, systematic approach that often involved phonics, but also often linked to issues of student behaviour and management, and the engagement in literacy of boys with special learning needs.

The **Sunbury West Primary School Cluster** of schools used a range of literacy interventions to improve learning outcomes for boys, including *Bridges – The Middle Years*, *SRA Corrective Reading* and the *Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Strategies* programme (*THRASS*), described earlier in this report.

Based on the research evidence and their own experience that ‘the difference between boys’ and girls’ achievement was especially notable in relation to literacy achievement’, and that ‘40 per cent of boys said they never read for enjoyment compared to 25 per cent of girls’, schools in the cluster implemented:

- individual literacy intervention programmes targeting at-risk boys who were about to make the transitional step to high school within 12 months;
- professional development for educators about ways they could expand their teaching repertoire to provide programmes and classroom practices aimed specifically at improving boys’ literacy outcomes;
- level reading material that specifically targeted boys’ reading abilities; and
- additional professional development for teachers and parents about gender differences and practical strategies that support the learning needs of boys.

Of particular interest, perhaps, was the cluster provision of:

- parent information evenings using a well-known and entertaining writer on boys’ education (Michael Grose), which attracted more than 300 participants and, in particular, a large number of fathers of students; and
- a shared resource base of materials for teachers and parents to be housed in individual schools but to rotate between them to develop boys’ literacy and also improve understanding about the education of boys.

The cluster is in the stage of setting up the basis of its ongoing programmes for boys, with a focus on training, initiating programmes for individual boys, providing information to parents, and generally developing appropriate and scaled resources. The initial evidence is positive, with teachers commonly observing that the intervention programmes are proving beneficial for the students involved. As one teacher observed, ‘through pre- and post-testing we have been able to clearly monitor the progress of each student. It is evident that one-to-one and small group programmes enabled the boys to participate without feeling inadequate or embarrassed. The growth of confidence and self-esteem is an added positive along with the improvement and development of literacy skills’. In this context, it is worth noting that the cluster schools did advise, on the basis of their experience, that ‘one-to-one intervention strategies are the most successful, especially with boys facing difficulty in literacy’ and this ought occur ‘before the boy commences secondary education’.

In some senses **Drouin Secondary College** also is in something of a ‘set up’ phase in its efforts to simultaneously ‘improve and enhance literacy and numeracy across all key learning areas for students in levels 7–12, and promote a culture where the college community embrace the pursuit of excellence and a powerful work ethic’. Given the relatively poorer performance of boys than girls in literacy and numeracy at the college, and the higher level of student disengagement and behaviour issues among boys, it was inevitable they would be the prime focus of activity – although the school was keen to ensure that it did not ‘assume that all boys are the same’ and instead ensure that the problems experienced by at-risk boys are addressed at the level of the individual rather than ‘fixing the boys’.

The three key aspects of the project implemented to achieve these outcomes were:

- a LOTE withdrawal programme whereby Year 7 and 8 boys identified by their feeder primary schools as having poor levels of literacy and numeracy did one extra lesson each of English and maths with their regular subject teachers instead of taking a language other than English;
- efforts by the school to implement teaching and learning strategies across the curriculum that reflect research findings on enhancing the engagement and motivation of boys, which is very much a work in progress at this stage;
- a Year 9 boys mentoring programme for eight boys who had shown for various reasons that they were disengaged from learning and required extra support.

The mentoring programme was able to be evaluated to some depth, and the school has arranged *THRASS* training for the literacy coordinator and used resources that it expects will, in time, work through into improved literacy outcomes for students in the Year 7 and 8 withdrawal programme.

The mentoring programme was underpinned by a belief that boys at risk would benefit from weekly support from a positive role model who would assist them to improve their organisational skills, application to school-related work, attendance at school and overall self-esteem. Four students with behaviour problems were matched to a youth worker mentor who already was involved in a *Positive Choices* programme at the school, and the other four, with low academic skills and poor motivation, were matched to a local accountant who had previously done volunteer work at the school, including assisting on camps and excursions. The mentors met individually with each boy for one period a week and encouraged them to discuss issues related to schoolwork, attitudes to school, problems they may be encountering, and ways in which the mentor might best assist them. Two of the eight boys had insufficient attendance for the programme to prove effective but, for the other six, the initial results were 'encouraging'; with student survey responses showing that the boys believe there has been a significant improvement in organisation, behaviour, and understanding and submission of work since the mentoring began, although the teachers do not see it to the same degree.

In particular, the experience suggests to the school that a one-to-one programme is 'very good for boys' at risk as it 'gets them to do things they wouldn't get done on their own, such as homework, attempting tests, etc. It is an opportunity for boys who may not otherwise succeed' and is consistent with the college view that 'we need to tackle the problem of boys and literacy at the level of the individual rather than at the level of the social construction of gender'. That said, the college believes that further benefits can be gained from the approach by ensuring closer connections between the mentors and parents on the one hand, and mentors and the boys' teachers on the other, so a consistent approach is adopted and the issues uncovered during the mentoring sessions can be more effectively addressed.

Acton Primary School, which has 'significantly restructured and resourced' its programme over time to focus on the explicit teaching of literacy skills, used its project to respond to the fact that, although improvements in literacy outcomes had been achieved, 'many of our Grade 1 and 2 boys were still not achieving the anticipated literacy targets'. What is more, a small number of them also were 'manifesting their failure and frustration through anger and misbehaviour in class and were beginning to impede on the learning programme of others'.

In this context, the school initiated a trial of its own *ABC Read* programme, which built on existing *Reading Recovery* and *Bridges* programmes in place, with six Grade 1 and 2 boys from the target group. *ABC Read* provided them with one-to-one tuition from trained literacy tutors for half-hour sessions four times a week. Each session focused explicitly on the acquisition of reading, writing and spelling skills and followed the same basic format:

- vocabulary building – games and activities to build basic sight and high frequency vocabulary;
- reading of familiar text – for practice, enjoyment and fluency to develop competency;



- instructional reading – introduction of a new text, teaching of reading strategies and skills;
- written work – responding to text with co-constructed sentences, and a focus on alphabet and spelling patterns within words;
- literacy games and activities – enjoyment, reinforcement of skills and strategies; and
- reflection time – dialogue between the student and tutor to provide immediate feedback.

Each of these components was deliberately short, structured, sequential and matched closely to the student's needs. Expectations and instructions were concise and clearly explained and all progress and achievement received immediate, positive feedback.

Early indications are that *ABC Read* has been 'very successful, particularly in evaluating the improvement of the boys' literacy skill over the 10-week period'. Data collected shows that the boys made 'outstanding progress in their reading development'; with *Waddington Reading 2* results showing each boy improving 7–13 months in the reading age over that time. Although 'their acquisition of literacy skills was undoubtedly accelerated when compared to their chronological age', the school recognises the need to ensure that these 'outstanding results' are sustained over the longer term.

Beyond these literacy outcomes, tutors in particular, but also mainstream class teachers, have noted improvements in students' attitudes to school and general behaviour in class. This in turn is reflected in improved levels of student enthusiasm and the confidence with which they will attempt new tasks; as evident in the comment of one boy confronted with a reading task in class who confidently responded that 'I can do this 'cos she taught me'. The school, in this context, is currently exploring funding options to maintain the programme into the future and will use it to inform its broader professional learning in 2004.

In the case of **Mt Clear College** the focus was on secondary school students in Years 7 and 10. Evidence gathered by the college over the last three years has indicated that its Year 7 intake 'has a very significant proportion of students with below expected literacy and numeracy levels' many, if not most of whom, are boys. In response, the college decided to trial the use of the *Sound Way* programme, which had been the subject of favourable feedback from other schools in terms of how it addresses spelling, reading, word recognition and handwriting, while producing a positive impact on students' self-esteem, absenteeism and truancy. In addition, it is a programme the college believes fits well with broader efforts it has in train to develop a curriculum programme for targeted students in the middle years of schooling that provides 'more experiential and relevant learning experiences and which more effectively addresses identified literacy and numeracy difficulties'.

Thus, the college instituted a trial with two groups of students with low literacy levels (28 selected from Year 7 and 12 from Year 10) of the systematic and explicit phonics instruction and focus on handwriting, spelling and reading that the *Sound Way* programme provides. Instruction through the programme is, it should be noted, multi-sensory and each of the 35 sessions involves a video presentation that introduces language facts and phonic communicators, and then a consolidation workshop. Year 7 students in the trial attended sessions for periods 1 and 2 each day for eight weeks during term 3 and the Year 10 students attended during periods 3 and 4.

The college selected this programme for trial not only because of the feedback it received from other schools, but also because it accorded with its own research that 'an important area of literacy development' which arguably is 'not promoted enough in the whole language approach that has predominated in Australia for the past several decades, is the systematic and explicit teaching of phonics'. While it is recognised by the college 'that phonic-based instruction is only one aspect of a well-balanced literacy programme ... we felt that for some poor readers and spellers an intensive, systematic instruction of this kind would provide them with some of the basic skills they had failed to develop in primary school'.



The preliminary results of the trial have been encouraging. The vast bulk of student participants completed the programme and post-tests 'appear to indicate some improvement'. Comparisons of handwriting samples taken from the first and last workshop lessons indicated that 83 per cent of students improved their handwriting significantly and they generally had a positive attitude to the programme. Students also exhibited clear 'social benefits' from their participation with one observing that what he liked most about it was 'knowing that he was not the only one who needed help'. Another appreciated the opportunity to meet new people from other classes, while a third commented that he felt 'more confident' about things in general. Seventy-three per cent of the boys involved indicated that they enjoyed the programme to some degree, and 41 per cent felt they had benefited a lot. The college will now analyse the actual literacy data more closely, which to date appears 'positive but not overwhelming', and look to extend the trial on a broader basis next year.

Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) School for Children with Special Learning Needs is 'not interested in labels or categories, just in children as individuals', though the majority of its intake is boys. The main aim of the school is, therefore, to provide 'effective education for all our students with special learning needs' regardless of any categorisation. The key components of the school's programme to achieve this are its *Making Up Lost Time in Literacy* (MULTILIT) programme and a Positive Teaching approach to classroom management.

The goal of MULTILIT is to help students achieve functional literacy ('a level equivalent to a reading age of around ten and a half years that is achieved by most students by the end of Year 5') so they can participate in a meaningful way in both school and community settings. The programme, which specifically was referred to in the House of Representatives Standing Committee Report as one which ought 'inform and enhance initial and remedial literacy instruction throughout Australia and form the core of remedial reading programmes in primary and high schools'¹⁸, is typically delivered with 'very favourable teacher–student ratios' – a maximum of 15 students with a full-time programme manager, a full-time classroom assistant and a part-time classroom assistant. In this environment, students receive three hours of intensive instruction in reading, writing and spelling daily, both individually and within small ability-based groups, and daily individualised lessons cover phonic word attack skills, sight word recognition and reading text at an appropriate instructional level.

Positive Teaching for effective classroom behaviour management is based on the understanding that one of the most powerful influences on children's classroom behaviour is 'contingent teacher praise and attention'. Research in this regard, which the approach seeks to redress, suggests that although 'praise for appropriate academic work is relatively plentiful, praise for appropriate classroom social behaviour is relatively rare. Moreover, reprimands for inappropriate behaviour are very frequent, especially for boys'.

While the effectiveness of the MULTILIT programme had been demonstrated via a number of standardised and curriculum-based measures, this related to students involved over the period 1996–1998. The purpose of this lighthouse project was, therefore, to examine the impact of the programme for students participating between 1999 and 2002, and the extent to which Positive Teaching was making school a less forbidding experience for boys.

In broad terms, the findings related to MULTILIT, for a sample of 82 students who attended for at least one full school year, reveal that, after four terms of MULTILIT instruction, 'boys made mean gains of 15.9 months in reading accuracy, 15.6 months in reading comprehension, 20.93 months in single-word recognition, and 17.7 months in spelling. On the WARP test of reading fluency, boys could read 48.9 more words correctly per minute than they could at the beginning of the year, an increase of 55 per cent'. These results are, the school explains, 'particularly impressive considering that 60–72 per cent of these boys had a documented disability'. In fact, the gains made by these students and others with special learning needs 'are superior to gains made by typically developing students in regular schools who, of course, make an average of one year's gain following one year's instruction'. It also should be noted that 'the literacy gains for boys and girls in MUSEC School are very similar'.

¹⁸ *Boys: Getting it Right* (October, 2002): 114

Classroom observations of teachers at MUSEC in relation to Positive Teaching found that MUSEC teachers are 'considerably more positive in their interactions with students' – while a sample of 36 teachers studied in 1994 found that for teacher responses to social behaviour, the rate of negative responses was nearly four times as great as that for positive responses, MUSEC teachers in 2003 gave over three times as many positive as negative responses – reflecting the philosophy of the school, and no doubt too, the small class sizes that apply. Not surprisingly, students 'typically display very favourable attitudes towards their school and their teachers' and parents are very positive about the whole experience, as indicated by one who wrote in a note to the school 'how thrilled we are with (name deleted)'s progress. Not only has his accuracy improved, but he is now wanting to read on ... This is an unheard of phenomenon in our household! And it, together with the MULTILIT approach, is something that MUSEC is prepared to share with other schools via a consultancy service it provides.

The withdrawal programme at **St George Christian School** focused not just on literacy in a strict sense, but also on the 'limiting nature of gender views' that society promotes. 'The common perception of masculinity does not', in the school's view, 'necessarily include the option of an articulate, reflective and literate person. Books are not generally valued in boys' popular culture as much as outdoor activities, working with one's hands, sport and technology. This perception is compounded by the lack of male role models in the primary school environment. Further, girls are seen by boys as more successful in reading, writing and verbal expression. Boys draw the conclusion that literacy tasks are something they can't do well and therefore don't want to do'.

By contrast, the school seeks to 'give boys a much more comprehensive view of masculinity by acknowledging and encouraging their male strengths', such as energy, humour, a sense of adventure and competitiveness. To this end, the school developed a literacy-based unit of work for 26 Year 5 boys that explored ideas about 'Heroes' and involved a cycle of 'active, visual, sequential, sensory, verbal and reflecting learning experiences'. Short, sharp, teacher-directed learning activities were provided in the whole class, small groups or pairs along with sequential questioning, a slide show each fortnight with photos of recent highlights in their learning as a prompt to reflection and discussion, and the use of a broad range of male role models, including dads, reading to the students. The boys also agreed to develop and sell a newspaper at the end of term to present their experiences, and a rap item as a culminating event for other students, staff and parents.

In broad terms the unit, delivered to the boys in separate classes for one day and two hours per week, saw them engaging in reading, viewing visual texts, making lists, reasoning, classifying, debating, analysing, interviewing, comparing, writing and publishing. Their presentations were made in PowerPoint™, posters, narrative acting, music or any other method they negotiated, with a focus on group work at this stage. At a conceptual level, the unit included perspectives on heroism that 'encompass striving and perseverance to overcome obstacles, the ephemeral nature of some forms of fame and success, and the recognition that there is a potential hero in each of us'.

Data collected by the school points to enhanced engagement in literacy learning, greater expertise as literacy learners, greater confidence in literacy practice, and an overall enhancement of self-worth. These results in turn reflect the extent to which the approach was effective in terms of involving boys in bodily engagement as part of their learning, using technology intensively, particularly for their presentations, and receiving explicit teaching of literacy skills. In addition, their writing was given a purpose and audience through the newspaper they produced for sale. Beyond all this, the 'enthusiasm of the Year 5 boys created an interest in the school such that Year 6 students were asking questions and seeking a similar programme ... (and) Year 6 teachers have now implemented a literacy unit which is gender based'. An associated unintended outcome of the approach is that girls appear to have appreciated the opportunity to learn 'without the boys and their disruption'.

The whole experience, which led more than one boy to make such comments as 'it made reading better' or 'I'm finding that I'm reading more fiction books now', confirmed to the school that teachers should 'establish a clear teaching style

which includes active, visual, sequential, sensory, verbal and reflective learning as part of good teaching strategies for boys', while also 'utilising boys' experiences and interest in technology'.

Moerlina School took on writing, in response to a perceived lack of engagement from the boys it enrolls. The school, which was started 30 years ago as a coeducational school which, among other things, would 'cater for the needs of boys who were failing in conventional classrooms', historically has had a 'very hands-on approach to learning ... drawing on real life experience'. While they have 'long been proud of the literacy programmes we operate' in this context, the school has identified that it still is not working for all students, primarily boys.

This led the school to explore its teaching methods and examine such key questions as 'Which ones were currently working for boys? Did some programmes and activities work for some boys and not others, and if this was the case, which boys and which programmes were successful? Were our class structures working for boys? ... Were our expectations for boys within these structures reasonable? Were any of our staff particularly skilled or unskilled in the motivating of boys in school and especially writing? Would this highlight any professional development needs for us, either in-house or from external sources?' In effect, all aspects of the school's operations were up for grabs to improve the engagement in writing of boys and the outcomes they achieved.

The subsequent evaluation of current practice, and baseline writing samples, along with professional development in such programmes as *Rock and Water* and *4MAT*, resulted in the implementation of specific practical approaches by teachers on a trial basis, including:

- drama and role-play projects;
- art and technology as stimulus for writing;
- mentors as supporters in the writing process;
- real experiences as motivators for writing;
- reflection on the products of writing and setting goals for future work;
- 10-minute writing blocks as motivators; and
- making audience and purpose very clear as a reason to write.

Taking the 10-minute block as an illustration, this simply involved 'ten minutes of uninterrupted, continuous writing of any kind on a given topic. The writing was not edited and drafted unless the child wants to publish a particular piece. The listing of these stages in the writing process seem to free up some children who get bogged down in the process, and create a barrier for beginning'.

At a more sophisticated level, students in the middle years focused on writing narratives about Ancient Egypt, which was a 'topic favoured by boys'. The theme was explored in depth through a cross-curricular, hands-on approach that saw 'explicit teaching of the parts of narrative, planning and organisation of ideas, etc in a structured way'. This enabled students to 'grasp the framework of narrative', with the result that all 25 students in the class have been 'highly motivated to produce a story for a class collection, to eventually be given to the library'.

Successful implementation of the approach has, however, required that leadership and staff are all 'united and consistent in their approach and agree on realistic expectations and an environment where risk taking is encouraged'. Beyond this, the school would recommend that 'it is imperative to include, involve and educate parents (or other mentors) ... (since) Children place immense value on seeing their parents involved'. In terms of the actual writing process itself, the school has found that 'boys respond better to concise instructions or lists and not too many at a time ... Large projects work better when timelines and tasks are clearly defined with each chunk having its own specific purpose within the big picture'. And a hands-on environment is 'a must, with ready access to tools and technology'.



A somewhat more holistic approach is being trialled with one Literacy and Social Behaviour Class (LSB) at **Lismore Public School** to nurture and reinforce 'the protective factors of developing support networks; understanding personal strengths; developing coping and behaviour management strategies; and minimising the risk factors of social isolation, self-control, parental hostility, negative self-image and possible school failure'.

The pilot LSB class, taught by a behaviour teacher and a teacher's aide, comprises two groups of seven students chosen on the basis of 'the three underlying problems of literacy, social behaviour and the parent-child relationships preventing each targeted child from realising their potential. Each of the students selected had needs in each area, although they varied in degree from one individual to the next'. The primary students were selected from Years 4 and 5, from four separate home classes, while the second group comprised five Year 1 and two Year 2 students from a composite class.

Students involved in the 20-week programme were withdrawn from class for the first two hours every day throughout term 2. A literacy session was conducted in the first hour, where they worked through individual contracts while some with special needs in literacy received intensive support with a strong foundation in phonemic awareness. The second hour was programmed for activities across HSIE, Creative and Practical Arts, and PDHPE, where students worked in pairs and then in groups to help develop their social skills. In term 3, the program followed this format for the first week, and then students returned to their home classes and a generalised programme introduced where the LSB teachers supported them within the mainstream class, team teaching with the classroom teacher.

This two-component programme, of designated literacy teaching (centred on the phono-linguistic programme *Sounds Write*, which incorporates phonics and a strong emphasis on phonemic awareness underpinned by a heavy emphasis on talking and listening through oracy), and an approach to classroom management that involves teaching of interpersonal and social skills, was supplemented by an individual parenting programme undertaken by volunteer parents in the school. The parent programme, introduced in term 3, ran for two sessions of half an hour a week and involved an introductory session of 10 minutes between the parent and the LSB teachers, followed by a 10-minute playtime between parent and child which was observed and recorded by the LSB teachers, and a final 10-minute interview between the parent and teachers where the play was reviewed and assessed. The purpose of the parent programme was to help the parents of boys with behaviour difficulties benefit from programmes that demonstrate how to regain control of their child, speak appropriately to him, play with him, set appropriate boundaries and offer labelled praise.

Overall, the pilot programme has proven effective in a variety of ways including: improved attendance at school for the duration of the programme by the students involved; improved literacy skills among most participants; improved self-monitoring of behaviours; reduced time spent in the time-out space; improved behaviour at home; more receptive approaches to learning both at home and at school; and increased parent involvement in the school as well as acceptance of the programme by other staff. Students themselves typically refer to the programme having 'helped me with my reading' and taught me that though you can be bad you can learn to be good', in part because, as one simply explained, 'I liked the rules, it made the classroom quieter'. Parents were arguably even more effusive, commenting that 'he just loves coming to school since he started in your class', 'he's happier with himself, not only at school but at home as well' and, with literacy more clearly in view, 'you've no idea of the relief watching your son go looking for a book to read when he's never ever done it before'.

Having trialled the programme in 2003, there is strong parental support for its continuation, including from the *Aboriginal Education Consultative Group* at local and regional levels, and the school intends to modify it according to the lessons learned; not least of which is to improve levels of communication with all members of staff to continue to broaden support. In this context, the school strongly recommends, on the basis of its experience, that 'a consistent approach to behaviour ... is used across the whole school; that schools be proactive in searching for solutions rather than dwelling on problems of educating boys; that each student is seen as an individual and not labelled inappropriately; ... (and) that early intervention takes place'.



The main additional lessons to emerge from this category of activity in the programme are:

- *Intervention to support boys 'at risk' should occur as early in the schooling process as possible; ie in the early years of primary, rather than secondary school.*
 - *Boys benefit from having both a purpose and audience for their writing, and the opportunity to reflect on their work.*
 - *Boys need to be encouraged to experiment and take risks, and then learn from the experience, rather than treating mistakes as evidence of failure.*
 - *Effective intervention for boys with special learning needs often involves one-to-one or other small group support.*
 - *Meeting the literacy needs of boys with special learning needs often requires the school to address issues of student engagement and behaviour as well.*
-

Student engagement and motivation

Programmes for at-risk boys in the mainstream classroom

These projects sought to provide special assistance to boys at risk of significant educational under-achievement while keeping them in the mainstream classroom. In several cases this involved programmes to track the educational performance of senior secondary students at risk of dropping out of school, especially boys, and provide them with appropriate support, such as tutorials and other individual assistance, while also reviewing teaching and learning approaches across the board. Others focused on the total school experience for students and interventions that might make learning more practical, experiential, relevant and engaging for boys in particular.

As with several schools and clusters in the programme, the **Oaks Flats High Cluster** spans the categories used to structure this report, focusing as it did on:

- developing peer reading tutors;
- accessing sporting activities as a way of harvesting responsibility, teamwork and fair play;
- using positive male role models from within and beyond the school; and
- developing alternative programmes in more traditional areas, such as numeracy.

The focus in this context was, however, very much on boys who presented with relatively low scores on State-wide assessments and whose attendance, suspension and referral rates indicated 'a need to think outside the circle and develop approaches to inculcating socially acceptable behaviours that were both meaningful and lasting'. With this in mind, the schools sought to develop these students' literacy, numeracy and social skills to reverse the situation whereby 'it was "cool" to be good on the sporting field, but not in the classroom'.

The approaches then adopted were driven by the cluster's view that 'boys need positive role models with high expectations for them as people and as learners ... (and) need to be given the opportunity to display their learning in a variety of ways, not just with pen and paper'. They included such activities as:

- special interest days in sport, visual arts and music where six or seven students from each site came together with staff and/or community experts to work cooperatively on designated projects;

- peer coaching where students from Stages 5 and 6 were deployed as sports coaches in primary schools in preparation for a cluster gala sporting day;
- new joint literacy planning and workshop activities to complement the special interest days, with particular attention given to students writing accounts in specific text types;
- off-site resilience-building programmes for boys such as a week-long Balarang–Mudgee trip for 17 targeted primary boys with suitable male role models;
- professional study trips to other best practice literacy schools and a shared school development day for the cluster; and
- professional development on boy-friendly schools for 12 cluster staff.

Implementation of this comprehensive array of activity, which builds on existing programmes already in place, has seen improved literacy outcomes on State-wide tests (with value added beyond anything the schools have previously seen), improved student engagement as evidenced by results on the Quality of School Life survey, improved social skills and community expectations, and enhanced social skills among the students involved. In addition, the cluster has formally been recognised as an example of best practice by the district superintendent, and as worthy of emulation by other schools in the area.

In analysing the reasons for its successes to date, the cluster points to the importance of several strategies for improving boys' learning, including:

- early diagnosis and intervention for students at risk;
- interest-based curriculum context and resources;
- greater emphasis on teacher-directed work in the classroom;
- short-term, challenging tasks with frequent changes of activity;
- phrases and techniques such as 'word attack skills', which appeal to boys' sense of competition;
- meaningful work experience informing students about changing roles in adult life; and
- involvement of parents in all aspects of the project.

Schools in the **Mirani State High School Cluster** sought to enhance student engagement and motivation through a more focused, highly experiential programme for targeted boys that would strengthen their literacy as well. The basis for the project was the cluster's belief that 'education and learning occur in a cycle where the students engage in a hands-on exploration, reflect upon the activity, analyse the usefulness of the experience and incorporate it into their daily lives'.

With this in mind, they introduced an experiential learning programme where six selected students from each school, with the consent of their parents, worked on disabled motors to establish faults, and repair and reassemble them under appropriate supervision. Students, it was explained, 'will get tuition from teachers and TAFE personnel and recognition of competencies will be given through certificates from TAFE'. Improvements in literacy will be supported by using



personalised CD-ROMs and learning support back at school, and build on the motivation and engagement that comes from the boys 'being placed in a real life workshop' where they had to behave exactly as if they were employed.

Apart from the fact that the boys 'willingly accepted, enjoyed and found this environment stimulating and rewarding', teachers have recorded 'a dramatic improvement in spelling and a marked improvement in the use of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure'. This may in part reflect the fact that the boys are 'purchasing motor mechanic and motor sports magazines' and an enjoyment of reading is being fostered and built.

The boys 'are happy to come to schools on lighthouse days (and) Their parents report it is easy to get them to school as they are already out of bed and waiting for the bus'. Staff too have commented on 'the general improvement in the boys, who seem to apply themselves more in school ... (and) can follow instructions and are becoming independent learners as their confidence grows'. The boys involved are becoming more connected to school, and some have articulated goals for future employment that require them to remain in education of some sort. They are willing to work on written activities and they willingly work together on projects without issues emerging between them. The cluster organised a culminating activity for the boys, including 'a special graduation ceremony with various surprises' for all involved.

The schools involved do see it as just a start. They would like to provide students with more regular access to the CD-ROMs and to improve the quality of the *Pit Crew Booklet* they developed and used so it is specifically designed to meet the reading levels of the students involved.

The project has, however, gained strong support from staff, parents and the community, not to mention a degree of media attention which, in the schools' view is (along with an individual to drive it all who is supported by a school/cluster team) an essential prerequisite for success. With that in place, 'you don't need a lot to run this project because it is the ability to organise the experiential learning using the skills and staff which already exist ... Therein lies the simplicity of our programme. It is fully transportable'.

The strong link between motivation and engagement of boys deemed at risk and issues of behaviour (discussed more expansively in the 'Behaviour management programmes' section of this report) is clearly evident in the experience of **Murwillumbah High School**. Having previously identified boys' education as an issue for concern, and put in place professional development, single-sex Year 8 classes and programmes such as *Rock and Water*, the school now sought to target its project to create a ripple effect from a single group to the school as a whole.

- The project began with 'dropping a stone in the water' of a small group of 15–20 Year 7–9 boys whose challenging behaviour was disrupting their own learning and that of other students. This group was supported with strategies from the *Rock and Water* programme, the use of a tutorial centre for withdrawal in extreme cases, and mentoring. Taken together, these strategies were designed to enhance self-esteem and social interaction, with the purpose of generating more engagement and less disruptive behaviour, while the peer tutoring and targeted teaching and learning support for these boys was expected to improve their learning outcomes.
- The second stage was a 'ripple out' to a second group of boys in Years 7–10 who were exposed to aspects of *Rock and Water* and leadership and responsibility activities to encourage more positive and autonomous behaviour. This involved the resourcing of boys' mentoring initiatives for 20 boys in Year 10 with the express purpose of creating a lift in school tone 'because more male leadership figures would be engaged in positive behaviour and would receive recognition in an appropriate way from school authorities for their efforts'.



- A further spreading of the effect was created as a result of the first and second elements flowing on to a much larger group via an altered climate over time – from a situation where ‘once it was “uncool” for males to be seen to be engaged’ to one where ‘the incidence of negative male behaviour would now decrease school-wide’. This last phase, however, requires a significant cultural change which extends well beyond the scope of this report.

To date, the most successful outcome of these activities has been ‘the sustained improvement in the communication skills and positive behaviour’ of the targeted boys in both the *Rock and Water* and Year 10 mentoring programmes. ‘Evidence collected over the last two years shows that the boys that have been targeted are less likely to be chronic behavioural problems in the later years of their schooling.’ The *Rock and Water* programme has received a positive response from parents and staff, and there have been fewer discipline referrals from the boys involved.

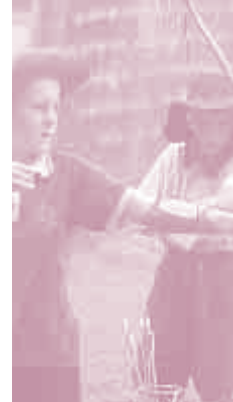
Teaching staff have, as a flow on from these activities and the range of supportive professional development provided by the school, changed their teaching practices, including their timing and type of assessment items used, behaviour management practices, use of audiovisual and other teaching aids, and rearrangement and reorganisation of teaching areas and classrooms. Research data suggests that this has contributed to less confrontation and stress in classrooms; though there still is some labelling of boys involved in the *Rock and Water* programme which, although primarily from other students, does extend to staff (eg ‘I’m just glad they’re not in my class today and they’re in yours’). This suggests to the school a need for ongoing professional development for staff on a range of boys’ education issues, but with a primary focus on practices used in mainstream classrooms. On a very encouraging note, feedback from parents has shown ‘there is a flow-on effect of their (ie the boys’) changed attitude and behaviour into their family circle. The boys are more ready and confident in conveying their views and opinions and listening to other members of the family’.

Overall, the school feels the ripple effect has worked, but recommends that adopting it to effect changes in boys’ education depends on targeting a small, high needs group of boys to start, in an attempt to ‘extinguish extreme behaviour’, and then targeting a larger group of ‘more moderate needs boys’ whose negative behaviour needs to be addressed.

Swinburne Secondary College structures its educational provision within a pathways programme constructed to meet individual needs and, perhaps as a consequence, enrolls students from beyond its neighbourhood who come for ‘flexible offerings’ and because they are at risk of dropping out of school.

The school implemented eight separate projects growing out of teacher interest and support, all united by the belief that ‘boys would benefit from teacher awareness of boys’ perceptions about the teaching–learning situation ... (and) would become more engaged in learning when teachers had demonstrated a more concerted effort to start from the boys’ point of entry to learning’. Each of the projects was, therefore, ultimately focused on gathering more data about the perceptions of targeted boys, so these could be taken into account in the teaching and learning strategies used.

Three of the projects focused on school-wide programmes already in place: boys’ use of the welfare coordinator’s services, boys’ perceptions and use of structured contact meetings, and a comparison of boys’ and girls’ use of study support. While the nature of the responses differed between the programmes, the clear conclusion across all three was that boys ‘would use the structures and processes at school that had been designed to foster connectedness where the boys perceived these to have an instrumental value’. This led the school to observe that teaching and learning initiatives ought be presented to students ‘in terms of their perceived advantage’ and its connection to future success within and beyond the school.



The other projects all focused on the perceptions of boys at risk within particular Year 11 and 12 subject areas and how best to respond to these. The projects covered:

- Perceptions related to Year 12 English, following one boy's comment that 'I only do things that I'm interested in'. The gathering of perceptions revealed the fact that four targeted boys 'were more involved and enthusiastic in completing an oral presentation assignment than their written work. They could use a PowerPoint™ demonstration, downloads from the Net, use "live" Internet sites to tap into and move around to interact with other students and generally "perform" '. This was data the teacher could then take into account.
- Perceptions related to Year 12 Legal Studies where a journal was kept on the engagement in learning of two particular students who 'often were disruptive in class'. Having identified that both students were weak in analytical and written skills, modifications were made to teaching methods with the result that the boys' 'attitudes to learning changed and learning outcomes improved'. This confirmed for the school the general research findings that 'teachers should "draw on a range of pedagogical strategies that will involve boys in an active, purposeful and democratic learning environment"'.¹⁹
- Boys' perceived preference for, and effectiveness in hands-on teaching and learning of, mathematics. Six months of teaching Unit 1 VCE Foundation Mathematics using hands-on activities based on real life problems demonstrated that 'students, and boys in particular, were engaging in the subject, and achieving success where they claimed to have failed to do so before'. The approach adopted contrasted with 'more traditional textbook-based teaching and learning approaches where acquiring mathematical skills and knowledge involves learning abstract, isolated concepts and then having to apply them. In other words, it appears that, when boys are provided with real life problems to solve, and the learning of mathematical skills and knowledge is contextualised and encountered in real time, problem-solving activities on a need-to-know basis, they perform better than when learning is textbook based'. The success of the approach is evident in the fact that all 11 boys who participated in the study successfully passed the subject and responded to a seven-point survey form by rating the effectiveness of the approach at 6.2, compared with a textbook-based rating of 3.4.
- The impact of changed methodologies on three Year 11 boys in Psychology, which responded to the boys' lack of confidence in class, and saw two of the boys attending more consistently, and engaging in class as a result.
- A broader project on boys' self-reflection about learning which was not able to be reported on due to the illness of the teacher involved.

While the separate projects have all experienced success to some degree, one of the most important outcomes from the perspective of the school is the fact that the teachers involved have 'learned a great deal about the teaching-learning dynamic ... (and) Students have benefited in respect to changed classroom practices'. Beyond this, an important unintended outcome of the project has been that several teachers have developed 'increased enthusiasm for their teaching as a result'.

Pathways was central to **Mt Barker High School's** arguably more expansive project still, which involved the establishment of Adelaide Hills Vocational College as 'another schooling option for young people who have either withdrawn from schooling through disinterest or disenchantment'. This 'school within a school' (as opposed to a withdrawal programme as such) currently caters for 38 young people (half are boys) aged 15 to 21 by offering a full-time programme using the senior schooling certificate in South Australia and relevant vocational education and training (VET) programmes on the Mt Barker TAFE campus adjacent to the school.

¹⁹ Quoted from Alloway, N, Freebody, P, Gilbert, P and Muspratt, S 2002, *Boys Literacy and Schooling: Expanding the Repertoires of Practice*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

The VET programmes are especially important as a source of 'immediate engagement' for many boys, which is supported by packaging the curriculum into larger blocks of delivery time to provide 'greater opportunities for boys to achieve readily verifiable outcomes ... rather than visiting seven different teachers in seven different subject areas in one day'. Such an approach also contributes to the development of better teacher–student relationships, which is only further enhanced by the use of a case management approach by the small number of staff (four) within the programme who all 'have highly developed skills in counselling, mediation, and who can demonstrate the flexibility to overcome challenges and deliver in a range of curriculum areas'.

The actual timetable structure employed involves three days a week of block-time delivery of five South Australian Certificate of Education subjects, one day a week of work placement, and one day a week of VET course involvement. Actual delivery then draws on the skills and expertise of other professionals in the community (eg police for community studies topics involving youth and the law), ensures that written work requirements are 'broken down into bits with scaffolding to help prompt and guide the writing process', and offers short-course opportunities for boys that have immediate rewards and respond to their learning styles (eg a two-day forklift certificate and a three-day senior first aid certificate). School resources are supplemented with the skills of final year social work students who are in classes to 'address individual needs that may arise'; and the two campuses used have 'no bells or sirens, no time-out rooms, no punishments for smoking and no uniform requirements'. Finally, the school uses the services and supports provided by a range of youth agencies on site, such as the Centrelink social worker and youth workers from Adelaide Hills Community Health, in a full service school-type approach.

Most students in the school undertook six Year 11 subjects in semester 1 including Australian Studies, English, Work in the Community, Personal Development Studies, Integrated Studies and Maths in the Community; and during semester 2 they are studying Year 12 Vocational Studies and Year 11 English, Mathematics, various VET programmes and modules from Certificate 1 Employment Skills. Assessment plans used have been modified significantly to cater for the students' learning needs and styles with 'much of the work requirements ... based on themes or issues that are relevant to youth and the community in which they live'.

At this early stage the 'new school' already has a waiting list of students and is planning to cater for increased enrolments as well as continuing enrolments in 2004. The culture of the school has, in this context, been significantly influenced by being co-located on the TAFE site and the adult learning environment it provides – 'a very powerful social change agent for all of our young people'. Retention in the programme currently stands at 95 per cent, 'with some boys currently hanging off the edge in relation to their attendance and involvement in the college'. Attendance is at 80 per cent for the whole year, but poorest on Fridays when an *Inter-Agency Community Education Programme* was run in terms 2 and 3. And, perhaps most important of all, school results have been 'very good', and when compared with the results of 'our students at other schools ... (are) absolutely magnificent'.

Several key messages complementing those already listed emerged from this set of project activities:

- *There is a need to track boys who are deemed at risk and provide them with appropriate support, while also reviewing teaching and learning approaches in the school.*
- *There is value in examining the total school experience for boys and interventions that might make learning more practical, experiential, relevant and engaging.*
- *There is a need to promote a whole school culture that learning is 'cool'.*
- *Improving the engagement and motivation of boys often involves the use of programmes and strategies to enhance their confidence and self-esteem.*
- *Boys are more likely to engage in programmes that cater to their interests, or where they see a direct connection to their own future.*

Withdrawal programmes for at-risk boys

These projects arguably dealt with more difficult and demanding educational situations than the previous category, and sometimes involved schools in rural or remote locations with limited access to resources. While schools adopted a variety of withdrawal programmes for boys, several sought to move beyond a simple deficit model that stereotyped boys as 'problems', and instead explored and adopted programmes designed to provide intellectual challenge, connect to the broader community, and ensure high levels of student support. Such programmes do, however, often require high staff–student ratios and can occasion difficulties of reintegration of students in the mainstream classroom.

The 'withdrawal' programme at **Ferny Grove State High School** catered for a small group of boys who the school identified as not being engaged in a learning process that would 'maximise their academic achievements, their participation in extra-curricular activities, their interpersonal skills and their commitment to learning, as well as their prospects for future careers and productive membership of society once they leave school'.

The programme, involving Year 9 boys, built on a Year 10 approach already in place (where a group of teachers voluntarily took a special and extra interest in some boys), but with extra resources so that a teacher could take on this group in a dedicated, timetabled way.

More specifically, a relief teacher was employed to enable a young and enthusiastic male member of staff to work with the target group of 15 boys, selected on the basis of form teacher input and parent agreement, every Friday for 19 weeks. The first three lessons of the school's four-period day saw students withdrawn from their normal classes in groups of five to work with the lighthouse teacher on such topics as setting goals, managing time, meeting homework obligations, improving behaviour, relating well to adults and peers, resolving conflicts, enjoying reading more, focusing on their strengths and celebrating their successes. The final Friday lesson was devoted to a whole group team-building exercise and outdoor activities.

In broad terms, the school has found that the project 'made a small group of boys who might otherwise have continued to feel under-valued within the school system feel that they were special, worthy of consideration, and deserving of teachers' time, interest, energy and enthusiasm. Given this sense of worth, some of the boys started to develop a sense of their own worth, to put greater emphasis on their own capacity to achieve, and to take responsibility for their own actions and their potential to achieve'. In addition, the project boys had fewer referrals to the deputy principal for behavioural issues and experienced fewer suspensions than in previous terms.

While these positive outcomes do not apply to all boys involved in the programme, surveys of students, teachers and parents, along with interviews undertaken, do suggest that an important foundation has been laid on which the subsequent Year 10 programme for these students can build. It was arguably summed up by the Year 9 coordinator who observed that the programme 'certainly sought to address a set of real concerns. While it would be overly optimistic to describe it as a roaring success, one could certainly discern small and, in some students, heartening progress in terms of focus and attitude. Certainly they have shown a way ahead, and I hope this programme will translate into a successful year-long Year 10 model'.

An important aspect of the success of the project in the school's view was being clear about which boys ought be involved, or as they consistently put it, 'Which boys?'. The school has in place many outlets for student participation that in turn can lead to recognition and success. The at-risk boys in the project were chosen because they rarely engaged in such activities and generally were only ever noticed for 'the wrong reasons – poor behaviour, disappointing report cards, cautionary counselling'. Through the programme, however, they would, every Friday, be 'treated as special', and in accordance with the school's research-based observations that:

- the factors supporting success are more to do with teachers and how well students' needs are analysed;
- students in smaller classes perform better on all achievement measures; and
- positive male role models are important, to convey that males value learning.



Such an approach is, of course, highly dependent on the role performed by the key teacher involved and their suitability for the task. Ferny Grove did lose the original teacher selected to another school appointment, which resulted in the cancellation of a couple of planned activities and the selection of a replacement who at the time of reporting was working to rebuild effective relationships with the students.

An interesting side-effect of the project to note is that Year 9 girls began to complain when the project was established, since they felt 'overlooked'. The school, in response, established a mentor system for the 'more vocal' of the girls which has since expanded into a social skills course for a group of Year 9 girls whose interactions with others 'were causing some concerns'.

Beyond this the school, on the basis of its experience, would strongly recommend that meeting the needs of such at-risk boys ultimately requires a combination of:

- early identification of boys who are likely to 'have difficulties achieving well, fitting in socially with their peers and relating well to their teachers';
- reinforcement of the role of all teachers, but especially form teachers, in 'establishing a good relationship with boys, taking an interest in their welfare and achievements, and making early contact with parents if problems seem likely to arise'; and
- building closer links with feeder primary schools to provide 'early guidance and support to boys whose primary school records are of concern'.

The *Young Men's Health Programme* at **Debney Park Secondary College** built on an existing successful programme for students in Years 8 through to 10, aimed at meeting the needs of boys who were highly disengaged from school. Many of the students at Debney Park are new arrivals from war-torn countries who have experienced significant trauma in their lives and severely disrupted schooling, as well as the usual issues that adolescence brings.

The *Young Men's Health Programme* for Year 9 and 10 boys considered at risk due to truancy, behaviour problems and general disconnectedness from school, provides the opportunity to 'discuss and learn in the area of adolescent health, both physical and mental, and to build teamwork and cooperation skills through the development and delivery of community-based programmes'. Nine boys, selected on the basis of advice from year level student managers, were withdrawn from classes to attend weekly group sessions under the leadership of the programme's coordinating teacher, with the support of the Year 10 student manager and a number of outside agencies and members of the school community. These sessions addressed such issues as health, connectedness, vocational exploration, risk-taking behaviours and anger management. The programme also gave the young men an opportunity to provide leadership in the community and guidance in cross-age tutoring.

Many of the sessions involved excursions outside the school (eg a visit to the Annexe Education Centre in the Ascot Vale Special School, rock climbing, a visit to the Oakleigh Fire Station and a soccer camp), reflecting the school's view that any boys' education programme ought include 'a component of adventure, sporting or outdoor activity'. The programme also culminated with the boys conducting a Young Person's Health Day for primary school students from neighbouring schools. This day in fact became a major focus of the latter weeks of the programme involving, as it did, a leadership workshop conducted by an external consultant in the field of adolescent leadership (Chris Daicos), and two sessions to develop the programme and lesson plans for the sessions they would deliver. An interesting, and unexpected, outcome of this day was the increased understanding the boys expressed about 'what it must be like for teachers when students are not focused on the task or "act smart" to their teacher'. As one boy, perhaps optimistically, vowed, 'I will never misbehave for my teachers again!'. This in turn was acknowledged by a staff member who observed that 'the students in the programme were more settled in class and more confident in attempting work that they once found difficult'.



Teacher observation and surveys completed by the boys point to increased levels of motivation to attend school and confidence among the students involved. The boys indicated that they enjoyed attending the sessions and found the information received and activities undertaken to be 'useful and relevant' to them. Perhaps the key in this regard has been the developing relationships between the facilitators of the programme and the boys involved, evidenced by 'the students seeking out and approaching the facilitators to discuss specific issues of concern, to discuss aspects of the project or for a general chat'. The development of such relationships was especially pleasing to the school since previously 'some of these students saw teachers as unapproachable and, as a result, would deal with their conflicts and problems by themselves rather than looking for outside help and intervention. It also confirms for the school the sheer importance 'for all students to be connected to their school and to have a positive relationship with at least one competent, caring adult'.

The *Special Children Offered Positive Experiences (SCOPE) Boys' Programme* at **Wagaman Primary School** was part of a total strategic plan (including a literacy and numeracy action plan and health-promoting school status) to 'make a difference' to what boys can achieve. SCOPE is based on the theoretical framework of William Glasser's Choice Theory, which is then grounded in the school's own conception of 'Nanna's Rules'.

The premise underpinning Glasser's theoretical framework is that, as the school itself explains, 'people choose their behaviour in an attempt to meet one or more of the five basic human needs which are the general motivation to everything they do' (ie survival, sense of belonging, power or recognition, freedom, and fun and enjoyment). It contrasts with External Control Psychology, which 'postulates that people, situations and things outside of us cause our behaviour'; readily evident in such typical comments from boys as 'I hit him because he stared at me' or 'I'm not going to ... you can't make me'.

When applied to boys at the school, it was clear that the first two levels should be the focus of interest and that, in particular, there was a need to meet the boys' need for a sense of belonging – especially boys who 'feel their teacher does not like them and/or they do not like the teacher; are "constantly" in trouble and in time-out; others say are trouble; are "outsiders" rejected by the general peer group; teachers complain about as "not willing to participate or comply"; and seek attention through inappropriate behaviour'. The SCOPE programme was designed by the school to equip boys to meet this need so they then 'will be able to progress through the other needs identified ... and be able to go on and gain recognition in the classroom for their achievements ... to actually enjoy the classroom and learning experience, and ultimately gain the freedom to learn'.

To provide further grounding for the approach, the implementation of Choice Theory was then supplemented by the explicit teaching of Nanna's Rules – 'the conceptualisation ... that boys (like girls) can live by different sets of rules and be successful within them, provided they understand what the rules are. The term "Nanna's Rules" came from a discussion of what boys knew they were able to do at their nanna's house that they couldn't do at home'. This was used to illustrate that, although the school may have a single set of classroom rules, 'different teachers have different codes (expectations, protocols and values they enact) and work within them'.

In this broad context, SCOPE is a locally developed and based withdrawal programme where selected boys attend sessions once a week for 20 weeks for 60–75 minutes, delivered by two or more facilitators, at least one of whom is male. Each session of the programme comprises:

- a 'quiet part', involving explicit teaching of social and school skills such as what are bullies, when a joke ceases to be funny, and how to say no (the latter half of the 20 weeks will include a focus on Nanna's Rules); and
- an 'active part' where boys are involved in physical activities that 'build leadership and team skills ... designed to build a sense of belonging for our participants'.

The programme is, it should be noted, multi-aged, so 'older and bigger boys are encouraged to work with younger and smaller boys', and multi-skilled, so 'boys with better literacy and numeracy are required to help their SCOPE mates'. SCOPE, it should be emphasised, 'is a privilege, not a right'. Boys have to earn the chance to participate, and misbehaviour in class can lead to exclusion. The programme consciously seeks to promote pride in membership of the group, and classroom teachers are kept informed of all that occurs in the programme.

Core beliefs that underpin the programme as a whole, which was developed by the assistant principal with the assistance of the Aboriginal Educational Support Worker and the Inclusion Support Assistant on the basis of substantial personal research, are that:

- clear differences exist between the way some boys and girls learn;
- generally boys do worse at school than girls in literacy and numeracy and get into trouble more often;
- some boys do not have any positive male role models in their lives;
- for some boys, effective learning can require higher levels of energy and movement and physical contact;
- for some boys, effective learning can require a sense of belonging and a sense of self that they currently do not have;
- some boys lack self-esteem and, together with their high energy, this can make them act in inappropriate ways;
- classroom teachers, who are working with large numbers of students at once, need support with appropriate strategies when teaching boys in their class; and
- building better behaviour in boys is not something that happens by chance – someone has to make it happen and explicit teaching of codes is essential.

In its final form the SCOPE programme will comprise a printed education package with teacher guidelines and 20 practical lesson plans which could also inform the work of other schools.

While the programme is clearly only in its infancy, it already has generated sufficient experience for the school to demonstrate to its own satisfaction that:

- it is both possible and desirable to establish an effective boys' education programme within existing school resources;
- programmes such as the *SCOPE Boys' Programme* engage teachers and all staff in professional reflection on the needs of boys;
- a programme that focuses on developing a sense of belonging in boys can lead to positive outcomes for boys in overcoming a sense of alienation in their classroom and playground;
- a boys' programme can provide the opportunity to engage boys in the explicit teaching of what is and is not acceptable behaviour;
- sessions in a boys' programme can have both an 'active' component and a 'quiet' component and still be effective (it does not all have to be exciting);
- older boys and younger boys can work well together in a boys' programme with the older boys taking on a 'caring' role that then extends into the playground; and
- the lesson plans implemented to date could be of benefit to others in a similar context.



Perhaps the main issue to emerge that needs serious addressing in future is the resistance of some to the programme on the basis that boys withdrawn from class in this way 'miss out on important work', or that it provides 'special treatment for some' and perhaps even rewards 'bad behaviour'. This in part reflects a need for the school to enhance its consultation with all teachers, and to adopt appropriate change management strategies as the programme progresses; especially since negotiations are underway to potentially broaden it to a cluster of schools. Beyond this, the school accepts a need to 'ensure that recognised "good" boys are selected as role models and peer leaders in the programme' to help ensure that it is not seen as something just for 'bad boys'.

Stromlo High School also drew on Glasser's Choice Theory for its pilot project undertaken with Year 8 boys who were some of their 'most difficult and disengaged young men'. Having determined that boys ought be treated as 'a diverse' rather than homogeneous group, where each individual has his own 'approach to the development of their masculinity and learning', the school provided a targeted group with a teacher and curriculum 'that limits class disruption and maximises learning'.

The teacher selected worked with the group on a curriculum designed to maximise 'physical, social, intrapersonal and interpersonal learning specifically to build up the boys' emotional, social, physical, cognitive and academic literacies'. A key focus of the programme was to develop 'strong and genuine relational links' between the teacher and the students backed up by an 'immediate natural and logical consequential disciplinary regime ... (where) problems were dealt with on the spot, forgiven and forgotten'.

The whole approach was driven by a range of research the school accessed including, in a highly influential way, Dr Peter West's work on 'tough love' which, to use the school's words is 'a methodology for most boys as they enjoy and are biologically predisposed to take risks and accept challenges. Keeping them safe ... requires beneficial interventions, and is an essential task for adults to perform for them. He recommends practical learning, mentoring, and giving them real responsibility for their own learning. West wants to see schools safe enough for boys to be able to open up their "hearts" without fear of ridicule or loss of belonging to the "herd". As a dictum he believes that boys often express their "maleness" by opposing and defying authority, and that an effective teacher will not lose this perspective when confronted with this circumstance, as will inevitably occur. It is how they impart their authority at this moment that will set the scene for the relationship; and thus the learning'. And this is why the school focused so much attention on the quality of the relationship between the students and the teacher and the consequent impact on behaviour.

Implementation of this focus on relationships and Choice Theory involved engaging the selected students in a semester of work which was highly active and engaging, and combined the *Rock and Water* programme, a *Response-Ability Training* (RAT) programme based on Choice Theory and embedding its precepts into boys' 'perceptual and behavioural system', some *Global Classroom* lessons, and a series of relevant outdoor experiential excursions used to promote learning in those areas (eg indoor rock wall climbing, an outward bound high ropes course, and horse play which drew some media interest).

Results noted by the school to date include increased academic performance for the boys involved, a general reduction in misbehaviour, increased school engagement and, according to the Year 8 advisor, an initial understanding among the boys of such concepts as choice, self-control, centring and consequences, even if they are still unable to fully put them into practice. Not surprisingly, parents were very supportive of the approach and positive about the behavioural changes they observed in their sons; commonly observing in telephone conversations initiated by the school that 'he is more thoughtful before he speaks and acts'. For all of that, the school feels that, in future, it would institute much more preparatory activity such as setting the potential applicants some entrance tasks to make getting into the programme a little more competitive, briefing and interviewing applicants to ensure that mandatory high standards of attendance and application are met, and so on.

Nevertheless, the experience has been sufficiently positive for the school to conclude that:

- 'setting aside time for boys to be able to play a game that is relevant to learning of the curriculum is a wise and prudent tactic to keep them engaged';
- 'effective experiential training in self-control and personal responsibility programmes that practise physical and social skills will initiate incremental behavioural change'; and
- 'programmes that are designed to increase self-control also need to affect other variables such as refusal and resilience skills, self-confidence and ethical behaviour'.

In this context, the school believes that single-sex classes are essential 'to offer certain types of boys a particular style of teacher leadership, relevant curriculum and relationship interaction that stimulates and motivates these boys to learn in a suitable "boy-friendly" learning environment'; though there needs to be an appropriate mix of students involved so that peer role modelling can occur.

Thursday Island State School, which comprises 95 per cent Indigenous students, already had a withdrawal programme in place for boys who were disengaged from the learning process. The *Students on the Rise* (SOTR) programme, on which this boys' education lighthouse project built, was developed four years ago to meet the needs of students with challenging behaviours, including poor attendance, difficulty keeping on task, frequent requests to leave the classroom under various pretexts, an interest in sport and computer games, a tendency to separate from the main group, low impulse control and running away from school.

The school essentially adopted a withdrawal model in response, with boys also in the care of two Islander tutors who were respected community 'uncles'. It was conducted outside the normal classroom venues and included a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, along with a substantial degree of practical activity such as growing vegetables and the construction of model outrigger sailing boats, which was the focus of this project.

The actual programme involved two groups of five students who were withdrawn for a 'literacy block' for the first two hours on four days a week – one from a Stage 2 (Year 3–5) class and the other from Stage 3 (Year 5–7). A typical set of tasks undertaken by the group on any one day would involve:

- addition;
- 'words on board' where students had the opportunity to construct words using graphemes related to a phonological reading and writing programme used at the school (*THRASS*) and then use them in context in imaginative ways;
- reading to an adult from a selection of books;
- *THRASS* words on computer;
- a simple science activity of some sort;
- a talent quest cloze that students could relate to; and
- a tape task.

The Islander tutors played a crucial role in the programme relating to students in ways not achievable by most non-Indigenous teachers, crossing the language barriers between English and local Kriol and linking the school to the community and vice versa.



The whole programme was underpinned by a rich task for students to complete relating to the whole school focus on a celebratory event that students were planning to present to parents and the local community. The specific task selected involved learning about traditional outrigger canoes, and then constructing and testing a model one. There is, it should be noted, a long tradition in the Torres Strait of racing model outrigger canoes and there has, therefore, been substantial community interest in and support for the project; reflected in the fact that students will participate in a public race late in 2003 as part of a broader boating festival.



While the literacy and numeracy outcomes, along with attendance figures, are somewhat mixed, with some students exhibiting significant gains and others only negligible results, there has been a significant decrease in the level of serious behaviour incidents in the school; though it is by inference, rather than specific data gathered, that this is attributed to the SOTR programme employed. That said, teachers believe a connection exists, with one typically observing that it is 'an essential programme that is made relevant to certain students on Thursday Island. It provides support to teachers and students. It positively and productively redirects student energies whereby self-worth and self-achievement is gained'.



The model boat construction in particular is seen as a successful practical and purposeful activity which has assisted in connecting students with members of the community and enhancing 'a personal sense of identity of the students'. Certainly teachers have observed, as one put it, that 'children are more ready to join in class activities or even to come in the class'. There is a better response from students 'when talking to or following rules ... (and) Better rapport with teachers'. Beyond this, 'good male role models have ensured boys are willing to increase practice of self-management skills'.

In developing its hands-on, community-oriented withdrawal programme for targeted middle year at-risk boys, the **Wynnum North State High School** two-school cluster consciously sought to involve the boys themselves to enhance 'their feelings of ownership and responsibility' for the approach. The selected boys met individually with a member of the project executive and discussed 'what goals they would like to achieve during this project and how they might reach them'. In this context, it is interesting to note that 'all the boys stated that they want to be able to "read and write better so I can do better at school" '. This reinforced the cluster decision to include a strong focus on literacy in whatever it did. The executive and the boys then met for some hours to discuss the project, which revealed a strong desire among them to actually make something that served a useful purpose. This led the schools to approach the local nursing home to see what they could do.

The actual programme then saw seven students withdrawn from general schooling for a day and a half a week on average to work at the Wynnum Gospel Chapel, where they had a 'very secluded base of operations'. The full day was spent on literacy activities, buying and making lunch, and assorted activities such as excursions, sports, and planning their project; the extra half day was spent on literacy activities. During this period, the boys decided to build six planter boxes for the nursing home residents to enable them to garden and cook with herbs as part of their diversional therapy.

Literacy activities in the programme centred on a reading comprehension booklet chosen by each group member with tasks they could work on for extended periods of time. The length of the sessions was progressively increased until the boys were working for approximately a full hour at a time. Pre- and post-programme literacy testing reveals that even in a relatively short time some students made 'stunning improvement' in their literacy levels, as illustrated by the following exchange when the project coordinator was helping one boy to write his speech for a celebratory presentation concert

at the nursing home: 'I was stunned when he wrote "during this project we have worked on our reading every day". I asked, "Do you think it may have helped some of the boys? Perhaps we could write that!" He responded by saying, "I don't know about them, but I know that it helped me", and added this comment to his speech'.

The project also improved the boys' engagement with their schooling and there have been no suspensions since the programme was introduced, a reduction in withdrawal from other classes and unexplained absences, a willingness 'to work consistently on literacy improving activities ... genuinely attempting tasks and seeking help when required', and positive feedback from parents. If there is a criticism of the approach in the cluster, it relates to difficulties the students experienced keeping up with their mainstream class work, even though modified programmes had been negotiated, prompting one boy to sensibly suggest 'next time, make it different days so we don't miss the same classes each week'. For all of that, the benefits clearly outweighed any problems of this sort, including 'an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment' because the boys 'made something tangible for which they received thanks beyond words'. This was sufficient for the schools to look for further opportunities which use the local community and reflect their findings that:

- a focus on effective pedagogy should underlie any initiative pertaining to improving outcomes for boys, and especially boys who are disengaged;
- programmes must allow for boys to participate fully in the learning process;
- programmes for boys must maintain an appropriate level of intellectual rigour and promote active learning opportunities;
- effective relationships should be prioritised and a link to the outside world developed; and
- schools must provide opportunities for all students to experience success.

While **East Maddington Primary School** operated a withdrawal programme for a targeted group of boys, in a very real sense it was trying to reverse the situation and bring the positives of the approach back into all mainstream classes in the school.

Boys' behaviour is, the school believes, often a 'response to the environment they were in. The negative, disruptive behaviours usually occurred when there was poor teaching and poor relationships between the boys and the teacher. In many cases, the boys' behaviour in classrooms is the result of them taking a defensive position in the class and in a group.

'It is the belief of many boys', the school recognised, 'that much of the attention they receive in the classroom is negative and critical. Many teachers go into the classrooms believing that they will have behaviour problems with boys, and hence behave in a defensive or negative manner. This attitude towards boys inhibits teachers from forming relationships with them and creates a distance between the teacher and the boys. In turn, this may alienate the boys further, causing resentment, frustration, anger and unresponsive attitude to learning in the classroom.' The key for the school in this context was to draw on the research, which showed that 'boys will demonstrate positive and constructive behaviours when there is effective teaching and a positive teacher-student relationship exists'.

A *Boys' Effective Education Programme* (BEEP) the school had been implementing for 20 at-risk boys over the past three years has succeeded not only in reducing behaviour issues and suspensions among the boys involved, but also resulting in improved outcomes and attitudes towards learning. Resulting as it did in an 'improvement in school tone and general standards of behaviour across the school', the focus of the project was to generalise it to the school as a whole. This would 'ensure when the boys returned to their classroom environment they would be able to make an easy transition ... (and it also would) empower all the students with these skills and hence reduce the need for the formation of a BEEP group'.

The priority was, therefore, to ensure that all teaching staff were provided with the knowledge and training needed 'to achieve cooperative learning environments across the whole school' and improve teacher–student relationships. Thus, a significant professional development programme was introduced with a focus on teaching and learning processes that will support boys to progress and achieve to their potential.

This programme specifically focused on the key components of:

- opportunity to learn – learning experiences that enable boys to observe and practise the actual processes, products, skills and values expected of them;
- connection and challenge – learning experiences that enable boys to connect their existing knowledge, skills and values, and extend and challenge their current ways of thinking and acting;
- action and reflection – learning experiences that are meaningful to boys and that encourage both action and reflection on their part;
- motivation and purpose – learning experiences should be motivating and their purposes clear;
- inclusivity and difference – learning experiences need to be respectful and accommodate difference between boys;
- independence and collaboration – learning experiences need to have an element where students are required to learn both independently, and from and with others; and
- supportive environment – the school and classroom must be safe and conducive to effective learning and students must be skilled in the processes of conflict resolution, active listening and an acceptance and valuing of difference of opinions.



Implementation of such an approach can, according to the school's experience with the initial BEEP groups, respond to the difficult dilemma that boys face whereby they are 'driven to succeed and beat all other students ... through whatever means ... and be accepted by the masculine culture'; yet at the same time, demonstrating commitment to school is seen as 'effeminate and in direct contradiction to their masculinity'. It involves the school in, according to its research, developing 'sophisticated and empathic understandings of how boys and men make sense of the world and how the masculine culture and social paradigms affect male participation and retention at school'. This has been the school's approach to preparing boys for life. 'We view the skilling of boys in the academic, emotional and the interpersonal as being critical to achieving this end. For this to be achieved, it requires a school to fully embrace the change and for the whole school to be focused on self-reflection, embracing a cooperative approach and the establishment of a collaborative environment where teachers are supported and resourced.'

In this context, the school has strongly recommended that each school needs to 'review teacher practices in the classroom to identify the extent to which those practices support or inhibit boys' education ... Boys have the same needs as all people: respect, to feel comfortable and to feel valued. Additionally, teachers need to take an interest in boys as individuals and learn a little about their hopes, dreams, friends and outside school interests, and then demonstrate this through behaviours in the classroom that indicate they want the boys in their classroom'. And further training may be needed in this regard.

Lakes Creek State School also adopted a withdrawal approach that has a strong focus back into the school as a whole. The school is located on the outskirts of Rockhampton in a low socioeconomic area where unemployment is a major factor, and it enrolls a significant number of Indigenous and South Sea Islander students and students from complex family situations. The school has identified 47 per cent of its population as at risk, a majority of whom are boys.

The school has, in this context, implemented a distinct *Learning Support and Guidance Programme* over the last two and a half years which includes a *Buddying Boys Reading Programme* and a counselling programme drawing on identified practices that best meet the needs of boys in school. The third, and arguably most substantial part of the programme, which also was the subject of the school's lighthouse project, is a programme known as *LINKS*.

LINKS, which the school developed itself, is based on the teaching strategy of 'listen, organise, plan, pay attention and set yourself a goal'. Central to the programme is the belief that enriching relationships between staff, parents and boys is critical and can assist boys to 'become motivated ... (and) have a real chance at minimising the behaviour problems associated with unsuccessful school experiences and enhancing the level of literacy engagement of boys'. The programme consists of 'a unique counselling approach delivered by the guidance officer, a distinct Learning Support Programme based on building connections between students, their literacy learning needs and their school life, delivered by the Support Teacher Learning Difficulties, and a differentiated curriculum component incorporating woodwork, sewing and gardening. This third component is delivered by a hub of professionals from within our school community'.

Boys targeted for the programme are those achieving minimal levels in all four components of school life: 'presence, access, participation and achievement' – boys it was felt would benefit from a curriculum approach which is 'strengths based' and responds to the fact that 'boys were good at using their hands, they felt comfortable learning outside the traditional classroom setting and their parents were supportive of the school'.

A workshop was established with the minimum needed equipment, and 10 targeted students were inducted to 'the safety of rules workshop, behaviour expectations and how knowledge and skills were to be transferred back into the classroom'. Over time the equipment available has been expanded, parent helpers have been involved, and learning from the programme has been integrated into the regular classroom, 'with requests for support in various projects, for example, helping to establish a butterfly garden for Year 4–5 SOSE'.

Other projects undertaken by students through the *LINKS* programme include the establishment of an outdoor learning area in the lower school years area (involving building a garden and cultivating flowers and vegetables, and costing and designing seating arrangements for reading groups), and providing a catering service to the school community each Friday with a cooking class for boys. Sitting behind all this were projects to strengthen literacy and numeracy such as designing, developing, delivering and launching a *Lads and Learning at Lakes Creek SS* newspaper about what boys are doing with their learning.

Data collection and subsequent discussion undertaken at the school point to an improvement in staff awareness and understanding of diverse learning needs, especially among boys, and enriched levels of access, presence, participation and achievement for the boys involved in *LINKS*. One thing that has emerged through the experience as a significant learning for the school is the value of 'service learning' in connecting boys' academic learning to practical activities they undertake, and to enhance their general involvement in the school community.

The school certainly intends to maintain and extend the programme in future, though recognises a need to coach others in the school to take it on so it is not vulnerable to being 'synonymous with particular people rather than a way of thinking and a best practice that can be shared with, and shaped by, others'.



The additional lessons learned by the schools and clusters that pursued withdrawal programmes for at-risk boys were:

- *Enhancing engagement and positive behaviour of boys does not happen by chance, but rather requires schools to consciously seek to bring it about.*
 - *For some boys, effective learning requires a sense of belonging and self they currently do not have.*
 - *It is necessary, in dealing with disengaged at-risk boys, to focus and build on their strengths, rather than merely adopting a deficit model of boys as a problem.*
 - *Schools must provide opportunities for all students to experience success.*
 - *There is a need to ensure that each boy has at least one adult in the school who they feel really cares for and has an interest in him as an individual.*
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Adventure and outdoor challenge

These projects had, as their major focus, adventure activities, camps or other events that contribute to boys' personal development, self-esteem and confidence as well as overall mental and physical health. Such projects specifically sought to provide boys with the opportunity to demonstrate such important personal characteristics as responsibility, accountability, commitment, creativity, courage and generosity, and to generally broaden concepts of masculinity and how it is enacted. The best of these projects also consciously sought to ensure significant intellectual challenge as a core focus and hence demonstrate educational outcomes for participants as well as the more obvious behavioural results.

The wilderness treks implemented by both **Melville** and **Merredin Senior High Schools** proceeded from a shared recognition that although some boys cope very well in mainstream classroom education, there are others who are 'so disenchanted with formal education that undertaking post-compulsory education is either not seen as a viable option or their post-compulsory choice was unlikely to prove successful'.

By increasing the range of activities available to such boys, beyond just the *Bridging/LINKZ* literacy and numeracy support programme already provided, the schools sought to 'promote low risk but high enjoyment' opportunities where boys could 'showcase their strengths and build upon them in a cooperative environment', and generally experience success. This shifts the emphasis from 'what boys are lacking to what they are competent at as a starting point'. The whole activity was then supplemented by the involvement of positive male role models to provide designated expertise and assist the students to gain new understanding and skills.

The actual activity was a five-day trek which included as a prelude team-building activities to promote group cohesion and develop students' social skills. All participants were 'set up for success in that the trek was manageable by all and students were given the opportunity to meet National Training Competencies (NTCs), thus adding further relevance to the exercise'.

Students were selected from among those experiencing difficulty in Year 10 and demonstrating 'literacy and/or numeracy issues that would make success in mainstream post-compulsory education courses difficult'. The targeted students participated in individual interviews to determine their suitability, and their parents' permission was gained. Staff too were selected on the basis of their appropriateness for the role, their desire to forge effective relationships and 'according to their rapport with boys, their willingness to adhere to the ethos of the project and their intention to remain on staff in the near future so that positive relationships can be maintained'.

Students then were trained in setting up tents, navigation, what to bring and first aid, before embarking on their trek. Other male role models also were involved according to their expertise, such as the three 'end to enders' who 'have walked the entire Bibbulmun Track (and) possessed skills in map and compass reading, knowledge of the bush environment and camp cooking which was shared with the participants'.

An important aspect of the project which ought not be neglected is the inclusion of the NTCs. 'This is what separates this trek from the traditional Wilderness Intervention Programmes designed for and undertaken by younger students in both schools. Once students attain the competencies, this information can be recorded on their Curriculum Council (of Western Australia) documentation upon enrolment as a post-compulsory student.'

Students from both schools did successfully complete the trek and observations made during it formed the basis of assessment of NTCs related to bushwalking skills, working in teams and communication in the workplace. Eighty-eight per cent of students achieved at least one NTC as a result of the trek, and students indicated 'a huge sense of achievement in completing the wilderness experience (69 km Merredin and 91 km Melville)'. Journals kept by the students 'clearly indicated the building of strong positive relationships among students involved in the trek, which has potential to transfer into the school environment. Staff-student relationships have been forged through this experience. A teacher reflected, "I learned more about each student on the trek than I could learn in a whole year in the classroom".'

Teamwork too, was developed, especially when sharing the load was required to deal with cooking, tents and other equipment. 'Many of the students initially demonstrated self-centred behaviours, with little consideration for others. During the trek they became more prepared to listen to others and aware of their rights and needs. The challenge is to build on these understandings within other contexts.'

Because the pre- and post-tests were administered on either side of the trek, there wasn't really time for any changes to emerge or be observed. Teachers have observed, however, that one trait common to many boys in this targeted group, 'their propensity to speak out in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times', has changed markedly; and 'the group dynamics shifted to accommodate the individuals who formed the team'.

Wilderness treks also were used by the **Nerang State High School Cluster** in its efforts to engage an increasing number of boys who are 'disenchanted with traditional classroom learning'. The basic approach was to provide a programme that would increase the ability of targeted boys to 'feel good about themselves' by removing them from the traditional school setting and allowing them to experience 'some success and achievement in an experiential learning activity', which also is designed to develop 'cognitive processes to deal with adversity through setting goals, demonstrating persistence and resilience and seeking assistance from others when needed'.

More specifically, 32 at-risk boys participated (approximately 10 at a time) in a four-day trek in the Numinbah Valley, supported by male role models who provided a 'more balanced view of masculinity than often was received', where they carried their own gear, food and equipment over 17 kilometres of rugged, isolated terrain; camped out for three nights and took responsibility for their own meals in small groups under the supervision of facilitators and accompanying teachers; and had a 'peak experience' on the last day involving a caving activity and abseil return to the campsite. The trek was book-ended by workshops to introduce and orient participants at the start, and, about two weeks after the event, reunite and discuss the experience and what had been learned.



The whole experience, according to the cluster schools, initially was based on, but then actually confirmed, the purposes of adventure-based learning, described by Sullivan²⁰ in terms of taking students 'outside their comfort zones, to challenge them to develop new attitudes and behaviours for better interpersonal and intrapersonal relations ... These situations are unfamiliar and unknown, and involve a sense of risk and disequilibrium. In these settings, the students learn to appreciate support, cooperation and trust. They are also challenged to use their problem-solving skills to accomplish the tasks they are set ... to be more reflective and to understand better how they can use their skills in other situations'. They also saw the development of a 'real sense of camaraderie' among the boys involved.

Definite 'positive changes were observed among the boys as a result of the trek programme'. This is despite the fact that the schools now feel it is better suited to the older boys from Year 9 who were involved than the younger group from primary school who, although benefiting in some ways, were not sufficiently developed cognitively and hence tended, as one teacher put it, 'to treat the whole thing as a game'. The boys demonstrated 'positive changes in attitude and behaviour on all treks, without any individual exception'. In particular, they became 'more team oriented, with a greater tendency to tolerate others, help others and make individual contributions without being forced'. By the end of the experience, most participants' self-esteem had improved as 'they started to realise they were capable of achieving their goals if they persisted at the task' – and when surveyed, 90 per cent of the boys indicated that they believed their behaviour and attitude at school had improved as a result, with 60 per cent also indicating an improvement at home. For all of that, the cluster now feels there would be value in extending the experience beyond just students with behavioural problems to include other successful students who also might benefit from the experience, while contributing to group discussions and modelling desirable learning behaviours.

Orienteering was the means by which **Kinross Primary School** sought to increase the 'motivation, self-confidence, appreciation of outdoor pursuits and physical activity, literacy, organisational skills, goal setting and self-management, resiliency and social skill development' of boys in the school. More specifically, orienteering was seen as 'new, interesting, challenging yet achievable' for a target group of boys who are reluctant participants in physical education classes, 'are overweight and unfit, and have underdeveloped hand-eye coordination skills'. The skills learned had a physical component, which did not require particular strengths or talents, and incorporated some literacy-based tasks in reading, writing, speaking and listening, including the keeping of a journal by the students involved.

Over a number of weeks, the targeted boys were introduced to the basic skills of map reading, scales and keys, and how to use a compass, with the opportunity to practise using CD-ROM and computer-generated tasks. They were then put into teams and given outdoor tasks to test their skills, initially starting with activities around the school oval and then venturing into the surrounding bushland. This was all designed to prepare them for a camp in the Landcare Environment Centre in Tammin (two and a half hours east of Perth), which was organised with input from the boys themselves. Activities undertaken at the camp, which included a focus on team building, effective communication, self-respect and respect for others and the environment, were supplemented by guest speakers on surf lifesaving, fire and rescue services, and first aid training. These sessions proved important in helping the boys to realise the need for long-term goals and a plan to gain the knowledge and skills needed for particular activities and to achieve desired outcomes.

The project proved particularly effective in terms of building the organisational capacity and personal responsibility of a number of boys who needed confidence in learning to take initiative and being more independent. The boys enjoyed 'being able to navigate their way around using compasses ... (and) learned skills to overcome problems and to share the responsibility of errors and the feelings of success'. The camp, in particular, also provided an opportunity to communicate openly with adults in the school and their peers, and 'many were prepared to discuss problems and to consider strategies they might be able to adopt to overcome them'. Relationships within the school have improved since the project occurred, and there even has been some changed pedagogy as a result of greater teacher awareness

²⁰ Sullivan, K 2002, 'The Choices Program: an educational opportunity for "at risk" students as they enter high school', *McGill Journal of Education*, 37: 1.

of different learning styles. That said, in the next and ongoing phase of this type of project, the school is keen to involve more teachers from the outset to make more significant changes in the culture of the school. This will mean, among other things, securing a place on the formal school timetable rather than working outside school hours where there is less imperative for the gains made to carry over into 'the day-to-day classroom activities'.

In its efforts to address the needs of a group of students, primarily boys, who disengage from school during the middle years, **Murray Bridge High School** instituted a *Boys Reconnect* class in 2003, which emphasises a hands-on, collaborative approach where course content is 'derived from daily life and ... has a vocational basis'.

The two key focuses of the school's project in this context were:

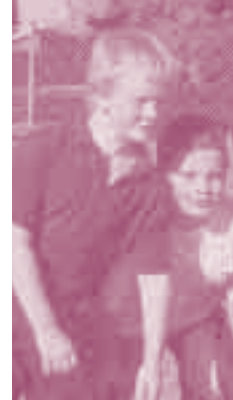
- a six-day adventure camp exploring remote areas of the Eyre Peninsula which was arranged in cooperation with Blue Light Police (Youth at Risk), and included such activities as bush camping and cooking, walking in conservation parks, beach and surf fishing, historical sights, boat charter, and fish and farm production; and
- a pre-vocational, accredited metal fabrication course conducted through the Ongkapinga Institute of TAFE each Wednesday morning of the year.

Materials related to a range of curriculum areas were developed for the students prior to the camp, such as a society and environment and literacy activity related to regional history and geography, a numeracy activity based on planning and budgeting for the camp, and social skills activities to develop teamwork, compromise and agreement. As a result, the adventure camp provided 'a relevant context for linking classroom learning with real experience'. In particular, 'many of the reading, writing, listening and research activities undertaken prior to the camp had immediate relevance when visiting actual locations and literally following the trail of the early explorer'. Similarly, budget planning assumed 'new significance' and social skills became 'essential considerations during the course of the camp'.

While the TAFE course is still continuing, student attendance rates on Wednesdays have been high, suggesting that the students 'see relevance in the course and are motivated to remain involved and engaged'. The boys also have 'come to understand in practical and relevant ways various issues relating to behavioural expectations in the workshop (eg occupational health and safety requirements) ... (and) Significant work routines have been established and practised ... Students have gradually learned behaviours congruent with an adult learning environment ... and what to expect in the workplace'. It is worth noting that all students received a certificate acknowledging and recording their competencies at the end of semester 1, which arguably was 'a unique experience for most of them'. Perhaps the main issue to emerge for the school out of the whole programme, aside from the high cost (which it is covering itself), is the need for some in-service training of TAFE personnel about the needs and circumstances of the boys they taught prior to the course.

Perhaps the most important outcomes from this boys' class, and the camp in particular, has been the development of stronger relationships between the boys and the teachers and Aboriginal Education Worker who attended; not to mention the sergeant from the local police station who drove the bus. The school has, in this context, noted that 'a spontaneous (and somewhat natural) division occurred within the group whereby the younger and older students formed separate "camps" based on friendship and common interests'; with the result that it will consider more age-appropriate activities and group work in future.

The **Woolsthorpe Primary School Cluster** (also known as the Moyne Cluster) is at the start of a three-year process of implementing proposals that will 'result in cutting-edge teaching and learning programmes' in the middle years of school. A key focus in this regard will be providing, where possible, 'differentiated learning and teaching opportunities' to cater for the individual needs of the cluster's middle years cohort.



The cluster project sought, in this context, to trial a range of 'adventure–experiential arts programmes as feasibly as possible, as well as providing for the trialling of both gender inclusive and all-boys activities'. In effect, providing boys with 'tasks that were challenging, but ultimately able to be successfully completed by all'.

The centrepiece of the project for the secondary school in the cluster was a 12-day 'extreme camp wilderness therapy programme' for five Year 8 and 9 boys who were becoming disconnected from their school education. The primary aim of the experience was to assist them with goal setting, improve their interpersonal communication and social skills, and help them to develop a positive self-image. This was achieved in 'an environment that would provide real rather than virtual challenges ... (through a programme) conducted in an atmosphere of adventure, exploration and fun where effort would bring rewards and actions would have consequences'.

All five primary schools in the cluster provided students with a programme of 'creative arts experiential therapy activities' that were 'gender inclusive' and taught new skills in a non-sequential two-day framework. More specifically, one very small school took its entire nine students for two days of screenprinting techniques training and application at South West TAFE in Warrnambool, and the other four primary schools took selected Year 5–6 students to participate in two days of silk painting and 2-D sculpture workshops at the Port Fairy studio of professional artist Kathryn Weatherly.

The three larger primary schools in the cluster were allocated resources to develop in-school programmes for targeted Year 4–6 boys: 'the shed' project at **Koroit and District Primary School** whereby Year 5 boys displaying major behavioural issues worked with a contracted carpenter to equip a former storage shed (though initial behaviour problems did require a restructuring of the group to involve more engaged boys); woodwork with Max and Ted at **Port Fairy Consolidated School** which saw Year 4 boys at risk of disengagement from school participating in a school-based carpentry project with two senior community mentor/tutors; and a 'Groundforce' project at Woolsthorpe Primary whereby three Year 6 boys led other Year 5–6 students in a major school-based landscaping and grounds improvement activity.

Overall the project has, despite a range of logistical difficulties that needed to be overcome and would be avoided in future, been effective in reducing absenteeism for participants; boosting self-confidence and improving self-image; modelling behavioural change; providing a time and space to discuss personal issues with teachers and thereby providing more of a connection to school; improving interpersonal relationships between students and teachers and with each other; and generally increasing happiness. One particularly 'telling' piece of evidence in this regard actually came from the girls who noted, in response to a question about the boys' behaviour, that the boys were now 'paying better attention to the explanations of activities, concentrating better on set tasks, and easier to work with'.

The two key additional factors to emerge from adventure and outdoor challenge programmes that have informed the guiding principles are:

- *Adventure activities, including camps, can contribute to boys' personal development and self-esteem, along with desirable characteristics and behaviours conducive to learning and engagement at school.*
 - *Adventure activities of various sorts can provide a relevant context for linking classroom learning to real experiences.*
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Personal development programmes for boys

A number of schools identified that self-esteem is a fragile commodity for some boys, requiring nurturing through the development of supportive as well as challenging classroom environments that enhance student engagement at school. These schools are using a range of personal development strategies to assist boys to break the bonds of stereotypical masculine cultures and behaviours. These strategies include the development of emotional intelligence to build more caring, confident and resilient young people. The well-known *Rock and Water* programme was particularly popular in this regard.

St Clair High School, for instance, had a number of 'concerns about boys in the middle' at the school – 'their flagging interest and general ambivalence to school'; their sense of identity within school; and the need for positive male role models to show boys 'pathways of endeavour into the future'.

The school believed, however, that boys' self-esteem and enjoyment of education could be increased by providing 'opportunities, positive role models, teaching of gender construction (appropriately shaping their image of what it is to be male) and through providing exciting experiences they may not have or may never otherwise experience'. Sitting behind this view were conscious efforts to make boys aware that 'principal adults in their lives do care about them and ... value their learning and development', and a strong belief that 'boys' needs must be nourished and nurtured through an extended programme of challenge, engagement and interaction'. This in turn involved a recognition and celebration of their maleness as a core component of the approach.

The actual approach is founded on a Year 7–10 unitised vertical curriculum which, in the school's view, 'allows for broad and genuine student choice' where boys can control their own curriculum direction and try a diversity of subjects, including non-traditional male studies such as food technology, in a non-threatening way and without becoming locked in a particular pattern of subject choice. It also provides for a mix of ability levels irrespective of year cohort, and some single-sex classes to cater for boys' needs, interests and abilities, as occurs with English in the school.

The school's efforts to broaden boys' experiences built on an existing *Rock and Water* programme and curriculum initiatives related to Years 8–9 and Year 12, and included the provision of:

- a range of activities to engage and enhance the personal development of boys such as a boys' guest speaker day, high ropes course, Manly Surf School visit, Sydney cultural visit, and a highly successful fathers' day barbecue breakfast which attracted substantial participation from fathers in the school; and
- a number of recognition ceremonies for boys to celebrate their achievements in various domains, and gender-based assemblies.

In addition, boys in the school have been involved in opportunities they initiated themselves, such as fundraising activities of various sorts, a lighting and technical team for school productions, and devising a PowerPoint™ presentation for the lighthouse programme.

Perhaps the main outcomes to date from the school's perspective have been the relationships developed at various levels, and ultimately embracing boys, the staff and the students' dads. These were 'at the heart' of all other benefits gained, and have been reflected in boys who are 'happier and more connected to school ... (because) they feel wanted, valued and are making a more positive outlook work for them' at school.





The Year 12 boys' High School Certificate (HSC) English class, for example, received, in Martin's terms (2002: 5)²¹ 'positive feedback' and the chance to 'make choices'. They had a teacher who, as the school explains, 'engaged them, cared for them and who made the work interesting and relevant for them', with the result that they 'most certainly did their best work'. As a group they were 'notable improvers on school assessment tasks rising up the final HSC submitted ranked list to heights they would previously not have come near'. The view of the boys themselves is that 'they would have been floundering in senior English but for this class'.

The Year 8–9 Boys to Men English class similarly observed they were 'really mature', were able 'to state our opinions', all participated, and 'could talk about stuff without being embarrassed'. The work of this class, and others in Year 8, was underpinned by the *Rock and Water* programme for Year 8 boys which assisted them to 'handle tough situations ... (and) defend themselves' while dealing with conflict situations more successfully. Students involved in the programme, and for that matter many of the additional initiatives referred to above, particularly enjoyed its physical nature. This, together with the opportunities related to students' use of ICTs, was part of the school's response to Trent et al.'s (2001: 6) 'paradox of achievement', whereby boys may not relate favourably to the formal curriculum, preferring to draw links to their lives and their futures.

'Through our project', the school explained, 'we are opening other social and interest opportunities through which to involve and engage our boys. We have consciously explored ways to bring boys' lives, their technology interests, their ambitions and career directions into greater meaning and definition of self ... The physicality and practical application of *Rock and Water* principles are certainly great examples of skilling and equipping our boys for life. The physical representation of limits and barriers being exceeded was powerfully explored through the high ropes course. Boys excelling in life, being more aware of individual differences and their own areas for growth have been powerfully reinforced'.

It is interesting to note, in this context, that the *Rock and Water* coordinator was a 'dynamic' female member of staff, who the school feels provided an important female authority figure for boys and 'an outstanding example ... to shape their perceptions and reactions to females in life'. And the warm, affectionate, yet consistent leadership she provided 'has shaped young boys' lives positively at St Clair High School'.

Having instituted what clearly is a successful programme to enhance the engagement of boys, the school now wants to take the next step and invest in 'quality teaching practices to better engage boys in classrooms' as advocated by Lingard and others (2003: 2), and, from the school's perspective, embodied in 'productive pedagogies now and into the future'. This shift more directly into the classroom which, in hindsight, the school feels it may have neglected to some extent, will ensure that the benefits of better relationships and student engagement will 'become more embedded in the school's operations' and occasion better management and inspiration of boys as a result. Critical in this regard is, however, the professional development and training needed to bring it about which, the school acknowledges, will take a more 'extended time frame' than the project covered to date.

Focused as it was on literacy and encouraging appropriate male role models for students in an area where there is a large number of sole female parent families, the **Doonside Technology High School** Cluster project could easily have been categorised elsewhere, but is included here because of its efforts to promote the personal efficacy of boys.

²¹ Note that Martin, Trent et al. and Lingard et al. (cited by the school) are all reports referenced on the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme website and can be accessed through this means. (See also the bibliography in this report.)

Having noted the poor retention rates of male students through the high school years, the high incidence of boys among the suspension figures, and the reluctance of boys on literacy tasks, the two schools built on existing programmes in place to develop a multi-strand approach encompassing the following strategies.

- An all-boys high school class was established to provide direct assistance to Year 8 and 9 students with low levels of literacy skills and a lack of confidence to attempt literacy tasks. Students in this class worked through basic literacy tasks to give them some confidence in reading, writing and spoken skills and many also were part of a peer tutoring programme that operates in the 20-minute daily roll class where 'higher functioning senior students read with them'. A similar boys' group was established in the primary school with kindergarten-aged boys and each week the high school students visited and worked with these 'little dudes' in pairs or small groups on pre-determined literacy tasks the kindergarten teacher had briefed them on.
- A part-time youth worker (funded by local churches) provided a self-esteem programme to groups of 8 to 10 students referred by staff for two 50-minute sessions a week. While the format of sessions varied according to group needs, it generally comprised physical games, discussions, thought-provoking activities, personal workbooks and a warm, supportive atmosphere.
- Classroom activities were developed that would better cater for the learning needs of boys and 'therefore lead to greater academic success for all students'. Selected teachers worked together over two days with the assistance of consultants in boys' education to develop learning materials and activities relevant to boys' learning styles. This component of the project is seen as 'crucial if longer term changes are to be made'.

The project primarily is directed at improving academic performance and initial observations and discussions point to positive changes in attitude and even literacy performance in the short term. Many of the high school students who had experienced difficulty engaging in learning tasks, and especially a reluctance to complete written work, are becoming more positive about literacy, and especially their engagement with students in the kindergarten. This in part reflects the opportunity afforded by the all-boys class to, as the teacher involved explained, 'tailor the learning activities more towards this group ... (and) use reading material more likely to be appropriate to all of the students, to be very explicit and structured in the approach to tasks, and often this has involved tasks being more teacher directed than may be the case in other class groups'.

The high school teacher also reports that the interaction with the primary students is especially important and 'their demeanour without exception is very caring and nurturing of the younger boys'. This aspect of the programme appears to be enhancing their progress on in-class tasks despite an ostensible reduction in class time as a result. It is equally positive for the younger boys who seem keen to 'please the older students with their work', and this has impacted positively on their approach to school and literacy in particular.

On a somewhat smaller scale **Toowoomba Preparatory School**, which enrolls a substantial number of boarders from geographically isolated and remote homes, trialled a case management approach to overcome the social and educational isolation they bring with them to school. In many cases, the students have undertaken distance education prior to enrolling at Toowoomba, with the result that they may be 'deficient in basic academic skills; ... often have low levels of self-confidence particularly in peer group settings; ... (and) have not had the opportunity to develop social skills, cultural interests and sporting/recreation skills'.

In its efforts to support every boy to develop his 'academic, social, emotional, recreational and spiritual dimensions and skills which will enable him to reach his fullest potential', the school targeted boys commencing at the start of term 3 to trial a case management approach. In effect, detailed data was collected on each boy relevant to his schooling, including parental interviews conducted by the headmaster, and an individualised learning programme developed for each. Central to the programmes was regular monitoring and analysis of each student's performance at school, and close liaison between teachers (especially the individual needs teacher, the class teachers and the head of house) as



well as the boys' families. In addition, a 'boarding buddy' was briefed and assigned to assist each boy with the routines of boarding life and ensure some connection on entry to the school.

While it is too early to really assess academic and social progress, the boys are participating in the formal and informal educational programme and have expressed an increase in confidence and self-esteem, as noted by one of the parents in a letter to the school. The boys also have 'become aware of alternatives to the stereotypes of male behaviour they initially exhibited, such as employing bravado in conflict situations, using coarse language and not showing their true feelings. They have begun to appreciate the characteristics of a more rounded male model promoted by the school, including sound educational skills, courteous behaviour, the ability to communicate effectively, an interest in cultural activities, enjoying engaging in sport and other appropriate recreational activities and respect for others'.

Important in this regard was the fact that:

- the boys have had a male class teacher and male head of house who have 'played a significant role in offering a different male role model ... characterised by a more academic perspective, teaching the ability to negotiate rather than seeking to directly impose their will'; and
- 'individual problems were addressed immediately they presented' through approaches adopted by people who knew the students well.

Whitford Catholic Primary School instituted a dance class programme for boys as part of its broader efforts to consider 'whether being male was affecting academic achievement, and if so why? Was there a difficulty for boys to identify as males if they behaved differently to peers: had male identity become unrecognisable? Was our curriculum providing opportunities for males to learn in an environment that nurtured their self-esteem?'

Drawing on evidence that suggests that boys 'need to express emotion and that they benefit from a single gender learning environment', as well as Lilloco's²² suggestion that, as the school put it, 'boys convert feelings to movement and that movement can rekindle feelings', the school set out to establish an environment and avenue for expression where 'boys are given the opportunity to satisfy these needs without fear of being labelled with terms that compromise their masculinity'. The Boys in Dance programme was the school's vehicle for achieving this while also giving them a healthy recreational outlet.

The programme, delivered to boys in single-sex settings, comprised a timetabled 30-minute weekly dance lesson for each class from kindergarten to Year 7 for 20 weeks; while girls engaged in other social interaction programmes such as visiting a nearby retirement home. A dance teacher was employed and given guidelines for lesson content that included warm-ups and stretching exercises as well as developing specific dance skills. Boys were introduced to the programme by learning short sequences of movement to various different types of music, including current trends such as break dancing and rap, and thereby experienced 'a wide range of movements from various cultural and historic backgrounds'. The programme also included a guest speaker from a martial arts academy to show boys relevant techniques and serve as a positive role model for developing self-discipline.

Performance was an important component of the programme, giving boys 'a reason for producing a high standard of work', recognising their potential in positive ways, and satisfying their need for attention. By developing skills in dance which they can exhibit in a confident way, it is hoped by the school that this will flow on into improved participation and motivation at school, and hence achievement in the academic domain.

Surveys of samples of students involved reveal that 'aspects of dance ... were well accepted and positively received by male students; that creating a boys-only hands-on learning environment ... was enjoyed by boys in junior and middle

²² Lilloco, I 2000, *Boys and Their Schooling*, Tranton Enterprises, Duncraig, WA.

primary classes in particular; and that this project endorsed (the fact) that boys need to enjoy converting their feelings into movement'. Probably the main adjustments the school feels it needs to make as the programme moves forward is to formally link what has been found to the classroom environment, perhaps by taking it into account when selecting literacy texts for boys, and seeking to engage a male dance teacher as a dancer in residence and positive role model in 2004.

Carwatha P-12 College developed its own Year 9 *Guys in Life and Leadership* (GILL) programme to supplement the single-sex classes already in place for English at that year level. The programme, which was trialled with eight at-risk boys, was developed in partnership with Visy Cares Youth Centre (Youth Assist Inc), which has more than 20 different youth-specific agencies in one location, and delivered over 10 weeks by a youth worker employed for the task: one day a week for the programme and one day a week for other appropriate support and involvement.

The programme, which ran each Monday during one school term, used community resources to complement those of the school, and included:

- an initial session on getting to know one another, establishing a group code of conduct, outlining expectations, providing an overview of the programme and introducing basic leadership skills;
- a range of outdoor activities and challenges such as a ropes course at the Heathmont Student Development Centre;
- communications and leadership games, exercises and role-plays;
- training in conflict and anger management strategies;
- martial arts and basketball clinics;
- careers and work education; and
- community visits.

All students successfully completed the programme and data collected from evaluation questionnaires, observations and feedback from teachers and participants suggests it achieved its prime objective of fostering personal development among participants, building resilience and generally enhancing engagement in learning and connection to school. Attendance was 'extremely high' throughout the programme; behaviour and attitudes towards the programme were 'exceptionally good'; all participants were 'totally committed' to the activities and participated enthusiastically; and all students indicated 'they had personally grown as a result of the experience'.

Despite this very positive set of outcomes, the school recognises it will just be an add-on activity with minimal impact unless other teachers beyond the trial are engaged. With this in mind, professional development already has been conducted to provide information to staff on the whole experience, and offer insights into effective, research-based practices in boys' education that link well to other middle years initiatives of the school. In addition, dialogue is underway in relation to 'changing the shape of the Year 9 curriculum to incorporate more student-centred and active learning ... (and) It is likely that Carwatha will introduce a range of action-focused programmes across the year level', guided by the GILL experience. In this context the school has, it should be noted, commented on the importance of both the role of the youth worker employed, including as a positive role model for the boys, and the value of the Visy partnership and the access to services it provides.

Seeking, as it was, 'comprehensive regional capacity building ... (to) enhance the successful attainment of educational and personal development outcomes by the maximum number of students', the **Margaret River Senior High School Cluster** identified two programmes in particular on which to build – *Rock and Water*, and *Aussie Optimism* for students in the primary years. These two programmes were seen as extremely complementary because:

- *Rock and Water* 'promotes self-confidence, self-control and self-respect through a series of carefully planned and presented physical activities as well as discussion of related social issues ... (and) Our objective in presenting this programme to students is to promote a positive learning environment for students and to develop possible strategies for effective communication and interaction with others'; and
- the *Aussie Optimism* programme 'aims to prevent the development of mental health problems and promote the development of life skills and resiliency in children and adolescents, and to prevent the occurrence of emotional problems such as anxiety and depression in the future'.

The focus of the cluster project then was to develop more of a common cluster-wide approach resulting in Year 7 *Rock and Water* in all primary schools, *Aussie Optimism* training and implementation in all primary schools at Year 6, and *Rock and Water* through the Health Education Programme for all Year 8 and 9 high school students. This would mean that all students would have the opportunity to develop their personal skills by participating twice in *Rock and Water* and once in *Aussie Optimism* during their K–12 education.

The cluster's efforts to cement these programmes in place was a direct response to enrolment trends over the past three years that saw an 'increasing tail of under-achieving and socially inept students, particularly boys' who needed support in developing their personal, social and behavioural skills. Self-sufficiency across the cluster in the two targeted programmes, by training enough staff to minimise the need for outside experts and building the links between the cluster schools, was designed to create a more 'caring, nurturing school environment across all years, all schools and community sub-groups'. This in turn will assist the transition of students from primary to high school and ensure a more 'coherent approach to hitherto disparate programmes'.

While the real impact of the approach will emerge over the longer term, teachers involved in *Aussie Optimism* already have noticed that children 'see the benefits and have enthusiastically embraced the programme ... (They) have more frequently displayed the ability to resolve conflict in the playground through the increased use of conflict resolution skills', and the programme is providing more opportunities for 'quieter children to develop confidence and participate in class activities'. Similarly, evidence from the *Rock and Water* programme points to 'an improved culture of care in students exposed to the course and reduced ... effects of bullying'. Students experiencing the programme are gaining 'a working awareness of self-control, self-confidence and self-reflection, the full benefits of which may not be seen until far into the future taking into account the sleeper effect'. Perhaps above all, though, in terms of the original objectives of the schools involved, the project is seeing the 'formation of the infrastructure of the cluster providing ... a long-term basis for the project which is not individual-dependent' and the development of a whole cluster culture, manifest in 'consistency of vision, language, format and understanding for staff, parents, students and relevant community groups'.

Rock and Water was also central to the **Holy Family Primary School Cluster's** efforts to develop 'appropriate social skills and positive self-concepts as essential elements of resilience in boys'. Implementation of the *Rock and Water* programme, already in place in some schools in the cluster, was seen as 'a step towards the development of a unified and consistent approach to boys' education across the schools'. Apart from the experience of the schools already using it (which was the subject of evaluation through this project), the design of *Rock and Water* was of interest because 'it supports the need for boys to interact and learn through physical activities and contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, resilience, personal direction and connectedness with peers'; and the teacher training component reinforces 'the need to recognise gender differences as they affect how students learn as well as the importance of a psycho-physical approach to teaching boys'.



Developing the programme across the cluster then involved:

- teacher training to ensure that there were sufficient teachers in place to implement the *Rock and Water* programme in all schools in the cluster;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme to inform its implementation on a broader scale; and
- development of an audiovisual resource as a tool for introducing the programme to school communities, including an outline of key concepts and a visual representation of the physical aspects of the programme using demonstrations by students from one of the cluster schools.

The programme evaluation was quite extensive and included surveys of 154 Year 5 and 6 students, 77 students who originally were interviewed on completion of the programme in 2001 and 254 students across Years 7–10 – 50 per cent of this sample were male, with all of the data in the final project report from the cluster relating to boys. In addition, 45 teachers who had completed *Rock and Water* training since its inception in 2000 evaluated the outcomes for themselves and their students using a common survey form.

In snapshot form, it is clear that more than half the students surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that their participation in the programme had 'enhanced' their self-control, self-confidence, social skills, awareness of self and others, and skills to respond to difficult situations – with responses ranging from 61 per cent agreement/strong agreement that the programme enhanced their social skills to 84 per cent for the development of specific skills to support positive responses to difficult situations. There is, in this context, a noticeable difference between primary and secondary student responses (with the secondary students proving less favourable), as to any decline in engagement as students get older – and this is something the project manager of the programme will seek to address in the near future. Teachers readily acknowledged a significant personal impact from the training they received, with 81 per cent judging the programme as 'very relevant' to teaching boys social skills. Most also noted the same positive changes for students as the boys noted themselves, though again there is the primary and secondary mismatch because the opportunities to reinforce the skills learned are arguably not as great.

An interesting side-effect of the whole project is that although the focus was boys, the data collected also indicates that girls enjoyed the *Rock and Water* programme and experienced a positive impact; which 'bodes well for schools considering a whole school level of participation in the *Rock and Water* programme as a proactive approach to personal development'.

In what amounts to a comprehensive case management programme for students in the senior years of school, **La Salle Catholic College** introduced a *High Support Higher School Certificate* programme (HSHSC) which involved 'setting individual targets for each student, selection of relevant courses in step with plans through matching aptitude to interest and career interests, self-direction and reinforcement through regular contact in interviews with pastoral/home room teachers'.

In a context where a significant number of boys had 'negative perceptions ... of their own capacity to succeed', which in turn are reflected in negative attitudes to school and study, each Year 10 student entering Year 11 has a simple case management plan developed to assist them academically and socially through to the completion of Stage 6 (ie Year 12). This is, in effect, 'an individual learning programme for each student (which) would provide the best opportunity to reverse the perceived negatives for boys' outcomes'.

The case management plan matches subject selection, including VET, New Apprenticeships and other TAFE options to identified goals and aptitudes, and uses existing initiatives such as Jobs Pathways. It incorporates data collection and performance records and is reviewed on a regular basis by means of structured, home class teacher interviews that address emerging strengths and weaknesses as well as factors impeding progress. This enables the school to



select from available internal and external resources, opportunities that fit the student's needs and aspirations such as remediation, counselling and coaching programmes, tertiary access schemes, job opportunities through Jobs Pathways, work placement and so on.

An analysis of qualitative data collected by the college showed that HSHSC was 'effective in students' achievement, their motivation for learning and level of confidence regarding future opportunities. The analysis of the quantitative data showed that HSHSC was accompanied by an improvement in students' academic capacity'. Certainly students involved in focus group interviews demonstrated 'an explicit awareness of their progress to becoming independent learners which was related to their "own personal commitment"; being "more responsible for your own learning"; understanding "yourself as a learner"; and being conscious of the need "to work to get good marks" and "how much time you put in" '. The students also reported that the approach had provided them with 'extensive and relevant information about pathways to university and TAFE, including pathways from school through TAFE to university. They realised the importance of their individual choices regarding careers and pathways and that "you always have something to aim for". They also became conscious of "the level of work needed to get into uni" and that "even with different abilities, study pays off". Perhaps, above all, the students indicated 'they had an increased sense of hope and control over their own future'.

The college is sufficiently pleased with the outcomes achieved to date that it intends looking at the possibility of extending the case management approach right down to Year 7 as part of its work with its feeder schools. In doing so, however, it recognises, and intends to address, both difficulties experienced in terms of finding time for teachers to conduct the review interviews with students, and ensuring the right match between the home class teacher and students, since the programme relies heavily on the relationship that exists.

A pathways approach also was evident in **Kuranda State High School's** efforts to give boys 'a wide range of opportunities which will assist them to be more engaged with school and their own learning'. And similar to La Salle College, adults within the school community are providing 'individual, as well as group, school and work activities, both on site and within the local and wider Cairns economy', which are 'noticeably changing attitudes and behaviours of boys at the school'.

The school's *Future Pathways* project involves a mix of existing and new initiatives including:

- the provision of seven motivational self-esteem sessions with selected Year 8–10 students known as 'the Deadly Dozen', identified as at risk, and which explore employment pathways and options through visits to local business centres to experience employment trends and possibilities first hand;
- the establishment by the local TAFE of a tour guiding course at the school which will draw on the expertise of local Indigenous rangers through shadowing and mentoring and which involves Year 11 and 12 students in a mix of school-based English and maths as well as work experience on a weekly basis;
- attendance by Year 10–12 students at the two-day Cairns Career Expo where they were able to access people and information about a range of training and employment from education and vocational education providers which they then could use in specific school-based tasks that were set; and
- the conduct of a Boys to Men Panel for Year 11 and 12 boys to share experiences with adult men from the school and wider community, which proved both 'interesting and powerful' and which has received 'wide acclaim from students, men on the panel, teachers and parents' and will be repeated and extended through further such sessions in future.

All of this activity was underpinned by a range of professional development for staff, but most notably workshop activities provided by the Indigenous Education Training Alliance (IETA) related to literacy and self-esteem, and sessions on boys' education conducted by Richard Fletcher from the University of Newcastle. Through the *Language – How English Works* IETA programme, teachers focused on 'grammatical frameworks and language structures' and in small group KLA workshops specifically examined literacy outcomes to be achieved, resulting in more detailed work and trialling of approaches in English, Mathematics, Science and SOSE commencing in term 4.

Perhaps the most significant outcome from all this activity to date has been the raising of awareness that has occurred in the school community of the boys' education 'agenda' and the 'need to adopt inclusive strategies within the curriculum to engage boys in the learning process'. This, together with the focus on mentoring, goal setting and self-esteem, has already resulted in 'students being more focused and on task, and realistically beginning to take their own learning pathway more seriously'. It also has helped generate 'more meaningful and genuine interaction and dialogues ... with the local community, with a focus on establishing better, purposeful networks between the school, businesses, government and non-government agencies and other educational facilities'.

The focus at **Dana Street Primary School** was not strictly on personal development as such, but rather values clarification and implementation in response to survey findings at the end of 2002 that Year 4–6 boys' feeling of self-esteem and connectedness to peers, teachers and school were noticeably below those of girls. This in turn was reflected in girls' greater motivation to learn than boys at each of the three year levels.

With the support of a clinical psychologist and his partner (Andrew Fuller and Karen McGraw), the school instituted a targeted programme for senior boys in the school to develop their resilience, connectedness and motivation to learn. This programme, undertaken with small groups of boys, was designed to sit beside the school's broader efforts to develop thinking skills in the middle years curriculum, and centred on the identification of a purpose for being at school. Essentially, the boys in the programme received training in the methods of values clarification and then used this, along with ICT resources, to deliver programmes to other classes in the school as well as the school council and the wider community.

Training for the students was provided in eight to 10 two-hour sessions and involved the use of thinking skills employed elsewhere in the curriculum such as Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* and force field analysis. Through this process, the students identified five core values – fun, diversity, learning, trust and friendship – which they then defined and agreed in writing to uphold. As well as doing homework on the values with their families, the boys were put into five groups and allocated one value each to promote. Projects identified by the groups were running a multicultural day (diversity); a puppet play (friendship); a patchwork quilt display in the foyer, each patch of which has a poem, picture, statement, etc about the values (trust); making a video illustrating the value in practice in the school (fun); and a play depicting optimal learning (learning). Staff will follow the whole exercise up by ensuring that these values are upheld in the classroom after the boys have outlined the process for other grades.

While the project will continue on through and beyond 2003, a repeat of the 2002 survey with Year 4 and 5 boys has produced encouraging results – most notably in the fact that the mean score for student safety has risen from 3.9 in 2002 for the Year 4 boys, to 4.2 now they are in Year 5; and the connectedness to school score has gone from 3.3 to 4.0. The school attributes this almost entirely to this project and the fact that time was being spent on these boys and a programme was developed to meet their needs. The other important factors noted for the success of the approach are that the programme is based on building leadership skills, and hence confidence and self-esteem, and the actual team projects were practical and hands on. The boys also 'were excited ... that they got to work together, without girls' and felt confident in expressing their opinions and debating reasons for their choices. Not surprisingly, therefore, this *Learning for a Purpose* programme will become an ongoing feature of the school curriculum, which is 'audited every year and adapted to suit the needs of the different cohorts of children ... (and) the most recent research and its findings'.

There were two key messages to emerge from this set of activities which add to the developing list of points taken into account in preparing the guiding principles for ongoing activity to improve boys' education in schools:

- *Personal development programmes and strategies can assist boys to move beyond stereotypical masculine images and behaviours, to become more rounded young men.*
 - *A case management approach can help schools to tailor personal development strategies to individual circumstances and needs.*
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Behaviour management programmes

Managing challenging behaviours

Schools in this category worked below the surface of merely fixing up 'bad boys' and sought to understand the impact of such factors as peer pressure and masculine sub-cultures, and provide strategies to generate more positive attitudes to school. This often involved gathering data on student attitudes towards school and schooling and the subsequent development of strategies to help students to experience success, such as the development of a language for more effective interpersonal communication or challenging negative thinking among boys.

Inner city Canberra's **North Ainslie Primary School** has a 'complex clientele'. At the beginning of the year, '30 per cent of male students were disruptive to other students and were not reaching their potential'.

In this context, the school sought to develop a common understanding and a shared language around what works in relationship management, since 'children who develop healthy relationships with others are more likely to be connected to their learning'. Central to this have been efforts to improve student learning and social outcomes by building social capital and using restorative practices.

Building social capital at the school involves 'building of trust and sharing of resources (residing) within members of our community' and generally strengthening 'connectedness'. Restorative practices to support this consist of 'a range of practices from the formal to the informal that assist in the development of social capital at three levels':

- informal preventative strategies and practices that build relationships;
- informal and some formal problem solving around day-to-day issues, difficulties and conflicts, with a focus on repairing relationships and accepting responsibilities; and
- formal interventions to deal with significant issues of harm or conflict, with a focus on repairing relationships in the community.

A key component of this overall approach is the training of some staff in, and the introduction of, Restorative Justice, which focuses on solving problems and repairing harm rather than concentrating on blame or guilt. This is then supplemented by:

- teachers' efforts in the classroom to incorporate relevant curricula, productive pedagogies and embedded assessment and reporting to improve academic outcomes; and



- various programmes at different times to meet the specific needs of students, including *Rock and Water*, learning assistance and extension programmes, the *Alternatives to Violence* social skills programme, selected gender streaming, playground mediators, sports leaders, improved ICT facilities for student use, introduction of an effective Student Representative Council, and opening of the sports store at lunchtime for students to access in a responsible way.

It is, in effect, a whole school approach to developing good relationships predicated on the school's understanding of the research that 'the quality of relationships between students, teachers and parents is crucial to achieving optimal educational outcomes for all students'. Relationships are, according to the school, 'the most critical factors influencing students' engagement, behaviour and achievement at school. Boys, in our school data, emphasised the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships of trust and respect'.

And the efforts to date appear to be producing a positive effect. There has been 'a marked improvement of students' behaviour, both in the classroom and in the playground ... evidenced by a decrease of the number of students in time-out at lunchtime'. In addition, 'students are beginning to feel connected to their learning and enjoy coming to school'. Teachers have been most supportive of the programme as a whole and those teachers who have not been trained in Restorative Justice would like to undertake it next year. What teachers particularly appreciate is the development of a 'uniform approach' to behaviour management which they already can see is resulting in 'a noticeable improvement in the children's classroom behaviour'.

Cowandilla Primary School also focused on language, but this time the language of the boys themselves. Having discovered that 93 per cent of behavioural incidents in the school involved boys, the school analysed its counselling process and found that 'many boys often felt that they were misunderstood or misconstrued by their peers and by a range of adults they have contact with'. In response, the school decided to trial an approach to student behaviour management that focused somewhat less on the traditional psychological and physical elements of behaviour, and rather more on the 'crucial role that language plays ... particularly at the semantic (meaning making) level'. The school's aim, in this context, was to support students to develop their own understanding of 'how meanings are constructed and construed through language' and thereby enable them to 'be critical users in choosing language to achieve different social purposes, ... negotiate and solve problems and develop positive relationships within the school community, (and) be happy and successful in their learning'.

To enable this to occur, the school:

- provided a range of professional development for staff, so they could respond to these aims 'through the development of a theoretical framework for approaching language and behaviour' – primarily the *Language and Behaviour Course* being provided to South Australian schools by Giuseppe Mammone, which focuses on explicit teaching of and about language using a 'tenor (interpersonal meanings)' framework; and
- engaged students in Years 4–7 across the school in action research in their classrooms and other contexts, where they collected and analysed data and presented their findings to their peers.

Data indicates a positive shift among boys, and especially those most active in the research process, though the school intends to collect more comprehensive data over time to clarify the ongoing impact of the approach. Certainly it appears as if boys involved in the research have 'had a marked decrease in behavioural incidents involving peers and staff, are engaging in their learning in a more positive manner, and are keenly taking up opportunities to continue with their research and presentations'. And when behavioural incidents have occurred, they generally have been dealt with in a more productive manner as the focus of the problem is shifted 'from the personal level to the language and non-language choices' that were made. As one parent encouragingly observed, '(he) has changed the way he reacts and talks to me. He is a much happier boy, he smiles a lot more and is much happier about being at school'.



The school is now following up its project by developing support materials aligned to the various learning areas, teaching contexts and support personnel, which it believes will be of use to teachers in other schools. It also has taken a role in providing professional development to other schools on its new language-based approach.

While not having sought to focus on boys in their own right, **Isabella Plains Primary School** found that its efforts to cater for the needs of all students as individuals, and broaden its social skills programme for all grades with an alternative play programme in the yard, inevitably dealt primarily with boys.

Since 2002, the school has run a social skills programme whereby all teachers coordinate a K–6 multi-age group, with a student–teacher ratio of 1:17, for weekly sessions that involve the set format of an ice breaker activity; explicit teaching of a previously negotiated social skill; an activity that provides an opportunity to rehearse the skill based on cooperative learning; and reflection to the students about positive examples of social skills noted during the activity. Every group and hence each student is taught exactly the same lesson across the school at the same time and teachers work together to ensure consistency of approach and feedback across the school. The only change that has occurred of late to the programme (which includes the awarding of tickets to students who demonstrate appropriate skills for raffles drawn at school assemblies with the winner recognised for their positive play), is to shift the sessions from Friday afternoon to Monday morning so the progress of the targeted skill can be monitored through the week.

More recently, with the support of a consultant (John Joseph) the school has instituted an *Alternative Play* programme for students 'having difficulty with their social skills in the playground'. The programme involves coordinating a small group of no more than 20 students (both those experiencing the difficulties noted but also students who are successful with the skills so there is modelling of good behaviour) in structured and scaffolded play sessions where there is 'a great deal of teacher talk ... (the) teacher articulates the successful strategies that are being used ... (and encourages) the students with difficulty to reflect on these positive models'. As students exit the sessions, they are provided with a Playground Passport, which outlines 'the goal for the student during their play session, which area/s of the playground they are able to enjoy, and requires teacher signatures so that the student is encouraged to come back to the supervising teacher for feedback on how they have managed their goal'.

The combined social skills and alternative play approach is, for the school, a more positive option than the deficit model that often applies, and already is seeing improvements in playground behaviour from boys who make up 80–90 per cent of the alternative play sessions. The school has moved from having six to eight playground slips passed to the executive for follow up each day, to an average of zero to two, and teachers have noted that 'the language of students as they were working in their cooperative teams (in a school Doing Things Together Day) was incorporating the strategies that were being explicitly taught during the social skills sessions'.

Perhaps the only real shortcoming, which the school intends to address as the whole approach proceeds into next year, is the failure to adequately engage parents to ensure consistency of approach at home and at school. While regular reporting has occurred, newsletters often are not read, and a range of different strategies to address this is under consideration.

An analysis of boys in the school compared with girls, which revealed some quite 'startling results', such as the fact that 70 per cent of students in the learning difficulties programme were boys and that all students in behaviour support programmes were male, led **Inverell Public School** to set improvement targets from 2003 to:

- review the schools' student welfare policy;
- improve literacy levels for Indigenous students which, in the case of boys, were significantly lower than non-Indigenous boys, which in turn were lower than those of non-Indigenous girls; and
- develop boys' social interaction skills to enable more effective participation in the playground and organised sport.

In this context, the school's lighthouse project involved a nine-week social skills programme to assist a targeted group of 16 (compared with an intended 20–25) Year 4–6 boys 'whose behaviour was inhibiting their learning in class, their participation in organised sport and informal playground activities', and more than half of whom were Indigenous students.

Instead of attending normal sports classes each Friday, this group participated in a programme that comprised:

- 25 minutes of self-esteem activities focused on building each student's self-confidence, self-control and self-respect, primarily drawn from the *Rock and Water* programme in which three teachers had been trained;
- 25 minutes of tai chi instruction from a qualified instructor to develop self-discipline and control (which in hindsight the school would have conducted in a more private room where the boys could not be observed as this occasioned them some embarrassment); and
- 25 minutes of team-building activities with cooperation as the common goal.

Fifteen of the 16 students finished the programme, and the other moved interstate. Observations of students by an itinerant behaviour support teacher, a school counsellor and the school principal point to demonstrated gains in self-respect (46 per cent), self-discipline (60 per cent), self-confidence (60 per cent) and self-control (80 per cent). Attendance rates were high for the first two weeks (93 per cent), dipped away for the following three (68, 56 and 60 per cent), and returned to high levels afterwards, when a chocolate bar incentive for achieving points during each afternoon was initiated (resulting in 100 per cent attendance on the final Friday). The development of teamwork and cooperation skills was 'clearly evident towards the latter part of the programme', and six of the students achieved 'significant improved behaviour' with no reports of inappropriate behaviour at all.

The approach has been sufficiently successful that two staff members now want to include these strategies as part of their personal development lessons, and the school intends to work on implementing it on a whole class basis to the extent it can. Among other things, this would enable the initial group of participants to serve as role models and thereby further develop their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

Batchelor Area School's approach to improving the engagement and behaviour of boys was based on an appreciation of the fact that many of the boys were needing to foster relationships with positive adult male role models who would demonstrate 'alternative ways of being male ...'. Sitting behind this approach was the view that 'if boys' behaviour, and the consequence of inappropriate behaviour is explored and made explicit, then they have an opportunity to make choices to change those behaviours'. This is, of course, a longer term task than this project allowed, but it did provide an opportunity for the seeds to 'be sown so that the boys know that they have the power to make choices that benefit their lives'.

The approach adopted in this context comprised:

- Men's Business, whereby secondary boys and their teachers negotiated activities that would interest them, such as pottery, finishing a concrete slab and sex education and health (including substance abuse and its consequences), which were undertaken for one day a week;
- the employment of two Indigenous male role models to assist in classes, have input to discussions and other activities for eight hours a week in upper primary and 10 hours in secondary with a focus on important aspects of class work such as literacy, numeracy, Men's Business, and a disco production; and
- the employment of a male teacher for most upper primary boys to 'ensure consistent behaviour management practices and a supportive learning environment'.



Student survey responses to this three-pronged approach have been extraordinarily positive, with unanimous endorsement of the work of the two male role models, and boys making such comments as 'he got me on task' and 'X is not afraid of talking about his experiences as a young man. I learned lots of things about growing up and the paths you can take and what happens when you take the wrong path'. Equally important, but less obvious to the boys themselves, was the male upper primary teacher's observation that 'it was as useful to see Y (the role model) actually sitting and learning maths with the students, as it was for him to be instructing/assisting. The lesson they got was that "you're never too old to be a learner" '.

Eighty-five per cent of the secondary boys found the Men's Business worthwhile and would like it to continue, typically commenting that 'Men's Business helps us prepare for the real world we will be entering soon'; and responses from the upper primary boys about their class teacher were 'very supportive of his mentoring role within the class'. Teachers and administrators have certainly observed 'a definite improved use of anger management strategies by middle school boys ... (and a) more settled and calm approach to school'; which the school intends to build on by training some teachers in the *Rock and Water* programme as well.

The school did point out, however, that 'the choice and placement of staff is vitally important' and that teachers 'need to be interested in, caring and respectful of students, as well as being explicit in their teaching and in their behavioural expectations'. Beyond this, it is important that students have 'the opportunity to become involved in "non-core" activities, eg discos and concreting. Teachers need to "think outside of the square" to be creative in their programming, and welcome others into their classrooms who may have skills/expertise that they do not have'.

Having noted the time that boys can take in the classroom 'with little measurable learning apparent', the frustration experienced by school leaders and counsellors who were finding behaviour management and discipline practices unsuccessful for some boys at risk, and parental concerns that their children were 'restricting their options', the **Lonsdale Heights Primary School Cluster** agreed they had to focus on engaging boys more so they have the greatest opportunity to succeed. This required them to build on existing social learning, relationships and behaviour development approaches, by providing programmes on a pilot basis at least, based on 'forming positive student-adult relationships and enhancing peer relationships through explicit social learning pedagogy'.

Drawing on a range of professional development provided across the cluster, the staff identified a target group of students at risk who had 'a history of behavioural and relationship difficulties'. The four sites then implemented their own contextually appropriate response, while meeting together regularly, and collecting common data to discuss the experience as it proceeded.

More specifically:

- **Lonsdale Heights Primary School** worked with eight boys using 'virtues' (character strengths) that students need to make amends or restore a relationship after a behavioural issue in the classroom or yard. Staff reviewed disciplinary procedures to incorporate opportunities for boys (and girls) to experience what is, in effect, a Restorative Justice approach along the lines outlined earlier.
- **Morphett Vale West School** developed identity maps 'detailing learning styles and background information vital to the development of student-staff relationships and the provision of suitable content delivery'. An environmental studies programme was developed for a group of boys that involved planting and propagating activities undertaken by seven boys with mentoring from a school service officer for three-hour sessions over five weeks.
- **O'Sullivan Beach School** interviewed targeted students to identify their learning styles and strengths and generally establish stronger rapport between the students and their teachers. A group of seven students then worked closely with a teacher and a school service officer planning and developing woodwork projects and maintaining a workshop established on site for three hours a week over eight weeks.

- **Reynella South Primary School** used School Entry Assessment, behaviour management and other records to identify Reception to Year 2 students at risk in terms of literacy outcomes, and then adopted a hands-on approach to work with this group – using visual aids, involving games with a challenge and keeping score, using computers, having choice as to how to present their work, and students teaching other students. The work was done in short bursts, interspersed with some physical activity. The boys took part once a week for six weeks in activities on developing self-esteem, relaxation techniques and hand–eye coordination through music and dance.

Each of these programmes has been sufficiently successful that the school concerned will maintain it into 2004. Although each was unique, they have in common that they tend to confirm the advice the cluster drew from research it analysed, that ‘improving outcomes for boys is about increasing engagement with the people and structures that exist in their places of learning’. In turn, ‘engagement is supported through interactive pedagogy that enables learners to share their learning experiences’. Beyond this, ‘explicit structure was developed early on in the programmes with boys discussing rules and expectations for their behaviour in their groups ... This scaffolding was integral to the programmes. Stopping the students and showing good working skills ... was a very powerful tool for these boys’.

One further aspect of each programme which ought not be neglected was the use of movement, which proved a ‘critical component for boys to express their feelings, especially anger ... Once the boys have the keys to communicate what they are experiencing they can begin to deal with it and help themselves’. Certainly the boys themselves are observing the benefits when they report that ‘I am learning more because I have fewer suspensions this year; I am writing more and doing more homework’ (Year 3 boy) and ‘I can talk to the teacher honestly without getting a time-out’ (Year 5). There has, according to one teacher, been a ‘huge growth in behaviours and understanding by these boys ... (but) It is of transitory nature at the moment, so the programme has to continue to facilitate longer term growth’.

Karingal Heights Primary School's project, which dates from 1999, focused on boys who, despite the best efforts of the school, still ‘were disengaged with school, found school a totally negative experience, were not achieving to their full potential and were becoming increasingly difficult to handle’. The boys’ education programme involves a group of boys, selected on the basis of such factors as frequency of detentions and suspensions, to participate in small group games and activities for one or two 40-minute sessions a week. The groups, of no more than eight, contain two ‘role models’ selected from among ‘cooperative and responsible Grade 5 and 6 students’, and are supervised by a male physical education teacher during timetabled physical education time; a change from previous years, when the programme required classroom release.

Games and activities required boys to:

- cooperate with and rely on others;
- participate as a member of a team;
- accept game and team rules;
- learn to manage their frustration and anger when things go wrong;
- discuss issues involving school; and
- discuss what it means to be a boy.

Data collated from all years of the programme, as a result of this lighthouse project, revealed an improvement in school attendance for a significant number of participants ‘during and since their involvement in the project’; with 12 of the boys reducing their absences from school ‘by over 200 per cent’. Half of the boys examined in the data-gathering exercise showed a decrease in the number of detentions during and after their involvement in the programme; and it is interesting to note that ‘three boys who had previously been part of the programme over two or three years, but were



unable to be accommodated ... this year, showed an increase in the number of detentions over the course of 2003'. The student achievement data proved inconclusive, however, largely because the school was unable to isolate how much of any improvement or progress was due to participation in the programme as opposed to natural progression that may have occurred in any case.

Perhaps the most significant indicator of the success of the programme to date is the views of the boys themselves. A student survey found that all 51 responding boys enjoyed being in the programme because they (in order of rating): have fun; learn new skills and games; get out of work; play good/fun games; and have time out from classmates who are annoying. At a somewhat more positive level than some of these reasons might suggest, the boys indicated that the main things they learned from the programme were (in order again): to work as a team; how to make friends; to control their temper; cooperation; new games; how to defend themselves/self-defence; how to play with people; that they don't have to fight to solve things; and to be a good sport.

Parents were similarly positive, unanimously agreeing that the programme was a good idea, and that it (in order): improved social behaviour; increased ability to work in a group/cooperation; saw their children happier at school than previously; was enjoyed by children for its fun aspects; resulted in controlling his temper; and increased self-confidence. And very encouragingly indeed, 86 per cent of parent respondents indicated that their son talks to them about the programme and activities at home. In a similar vein, staff observed that the programme led students 'to feel good about themselves', to experience improved self-esteem, and to develop 'a more distinct trend to self-discipline', with the result that 'over the past years I have noticed a great improvement in behaviour'.

The school now wishes to build on the whole approach, subject to staffing levels in the context of declining enrolments, and, at the very least, provide more professional development so all staff can familiarise themselves with games and activities they can use with their grades that will benefit boys as well as girls. Certainly one aspect of the approach the school strongly believes must be maintained is 'access to a male mentor to talk over problems, discipline issues, peer pressure, etc as a vital link in maintaining a positive connection with the school for boys'.

Morwell Park Primary School, located in an area that has been particularly affected by economic restructuring and change, and which has a significant transient student population, has long identified social competencies as an important component of its overall efforts to improve students' basic skills through 'high expectations, focused teaching and engaged learning'. The school had, for some time, been addressing: students' basic needs through nutrition programmes (a breakfast programme, and fruit for students while a serial story was being read and at recess) supported by local government services and businesses, and staffed by teachers and parent volunteers; student attendance and punctuality, in part by changing the times of the school day; and social competencies through a values programme, peer mediation, civics and citizenship programmes and, more recently for students who had not responded to these, mentoring and targeted lunchtime activities.

Having made significant inroads into literacy outcomes in the early years as a result of implementing the *Early Years Literacy Programme*, and seen some improvement in the social domains, the school was concerned that literacy outcomes had not really improved as expected in Years 3–6, and 'there were continued concerns about disruptions to classroom teaching and learning by a cohort of boys' (around 12 per cent of the total enrolment at the school). This project provided the opportunity to set in place the beginnings of an approach to social competencies and problem-solving strategies for these students that built on the positive programmes outlined.

The key, in this context, was to start with the teachers and provide them with professional learning and strategies they could employ in working more successfully with these boys. Thus, the school arranged for:

- eleven staff (including the literacy coordinator, Koori educator and aides, and mentors) to be trained in the additional assistance programme, *Bridges*, to supplement assistance already in place such as speech programmes, *Reading Recovery* for Year 1 students, living skills and a perceptual motor programme;

- consultancy and professional development support (Chris Daicos), albeit later than originally desired, delivered on site to extend understanding of social competencies and resilience, and provide strategies that teachers can use;
- access to Helen McGrath and Toni Noble's *Bounce Back! A Classroom Resiliency Programme* which also extended teachers' repertoires in this regard; and
- training for two staff in Michael Bernard's *You Can Do It!* programme which fits well with the school's approach as it is based on getting along, organisation, persistence, confidence and emotional resilience – a whole school professional development day also will be run to introduce teachers to the programme and its explicit instruction in relation to the concepts of accepting myself, taking risks, being independent, I can do it, giving effort, working tough, setting goals, planning my time, being tolerant of others, thinking first and playing by the rules.

The school is in a development phase, and it already has seen some improvement in the areas of student behaviour and attendance. Teachers have spoken positively about the outcomes achieved and there has been 'a considerable improvement in the number of misconduct, detention and suspension incidents over the period, particularly in Years 3–6'. Interestingly enough, with the deliberate focus on boys, the improvements in attendance noted in Years 2–6 in the school do not appear as evident among girls.



Braitling Primary School adopted a two-fold focus to improve student learning and behaviour, comprising:

- professional development for teachers in response to research that shows 'the single most important factor in providing a positive experience for boys' is the quality of teaching, and hence there is a need to provide teachers with 'opportunities to identify the strengths in their practice and learn new ways of adding to their repertoire of skills'; and
- trialling of a *Peaceful Playground* programme, in response to teacher observations on duty that 'there were a number of children who were loners (and) chose not to participate in either the usual playground games or use the library at lunchtime'. Such a trial was, if possible, to involve males from the community to 'help in part address an enormous gender imbalance in the school'.

These two broad areas of activity were then supplemented by the inclusion of 'top tips' on boys' education in the fortnightly newsletter to provide parents with accessible information on what has been learned from research into boys' education and the school's dual focus response.

Three professional development activities formed the core of the school's approach:

- attendance at a broader, systemic day with Professor Bob Lingard on what makes a difference in the classroom;
- an in-house session by Dr Bob Smith on a programme he runs which is based on the premise that boys' performance across the curriculum is enhanced when they engage with music and the arts; and
- involvement of the teacher who manages the Students At Risk Centre in training for the *Tribes* programme which has a strong school environment focus aimed at building a positive learning community, preventing racism, achieving academic standards and supporting students in developing values.



As a result of these professional development opportunities, all teachers tried 'one new boy-friendly teaching strategy' and all seven early childhood teachers have continued to include these in their ongoing work. Strategies included such things as groups split by gender where appropriate; increasing the amount of time spent talking prior to having boys write; increasing the number of daily activity choices allowed to enable more movement between tasks during a lesson; and adjusting learning tasks to allow for more flexibility in the final product.

Technical Lego was used by the school for the *Peaceful Playground* trial and 10 boys were targeted to help set it up over the first week. The equipment then was made available at lunchtimes and students were invited to come and use it over a five-week period. During this time some hands-on science activities also were set up in the same venue and boys and girls were both able to join in. The children worked in pairs on the equipment provided, constructing a variety of gadgets outlined on accompanying task cards and the boys worked independently of the girls.

Attendance data indicated that four of the 10 targeted boys attended the programme on a consistent basis, and there was considerable interest from many other students as well. While the equipment used was directed specifically at upper primary students, the most enthusiastic users turned out to be early childhood boys, who also engaged avidly in the hands-on science activities. Only one male volunteered to assist with the programme, and even sought access to the equipment so he could prepare in advance; the school is looking at different ways to attract males in future.

The programme will be modified to reflect feedback from the boys involved, such as the idea of siting it in a more convenient location, close to where they play at lunchtime, to serve as a reminder that it exists. One unintended positive outcome has been its benefit in 'settling boys requiring time out from their classrooms. Behaviour Management Team members have found that boys become quickly absorbed in following instructions to build something and discuss the issues about their classroom behaviour in a much more relaxed manner. The equipment has been included by the teachers of two boys in the target group as a positive reinforcement for good behaviour'. This in part no doubt reflects the feelings of the boys involved that, as two put it, 'Can we come every lunchtime?' and 'Is lunchtime short today, the bell doesn't usually go that quickly?'

The two additional lessons from activities related to managing challenging behaviours are:

- *The school and classroom must be safe and conducive to effective learning, and boys must be taught and encouraged to practise appropriate social skills such as conflict management, active listening and valuing differences.*
 - *There is a need to gather data on boys' attitudes to school and schooling, to inform the development of strategies to improve their relationships and behaviours at school.*
-

Peer mediation and peer support

Much already is known about the implementation of peer mediation and support programmes in schools, which was documented in relation to boys in particular by schools in this category of the programme. One particularly interesting feature of school and cluster activity in this regard was involving secondary students in mentoring and supporting primary students or younger students in their own school; with consequent advantages for both the supporter and the student in receipt of support, as well as smoothing the transition process from primary to secondary school.

Noting that 'most of the problems in school both in the academic and affective domains relate to boys', **Jasper Road Public School** implemented three interlinked programmes to provide boys with 'the opportunity to develop (their) interpersonal and leadership skills, and build on existing school programmes to address academic achievement in English, such as the use of male role models in class:

- peer mediation to teach boys to resolve conflict through peaceful means and to strengthen empathy with one another;
- classroom meetings aimed at developing decision making, problem solving and critical thinking, and conflict resolution skills, which also provided an additional means for teachers to assess students' talking and listening skills; and
- a *Buddy Support Programme* using Year 6 students as group leaders who carried out cooperative tasks, with the assistance of teachers, and generally developed their social skills. Activities undertaken by students included outdoor games and scenarios involving 'real life, age-appropriate social problems requiring solutions'.

Peer mediation was arguably the centrepiece of the programme operating initially in the kindergarten area, and then slowly spreading to Years 3–6, thereby effectively 'covering all playground areas in the school'. Staff were given in-service training on the benefits of peer mediation and the processes involved, and then Year 6 students were trained in practical approaches to apply.

This combination of programmes enabled the school to challenge the stereotype that 'boys must be rough and tough, and not encouraged to show feelings' by providing experiences that enabled boys to see themselves as contributing to a 'caring happy place'. And the use of peer pressure, along with allocated leadership roles, was seen by the school as 'a driving force' to develop such change.

Surveys completed by boys aged 8 to 12 in the school, and interviews with younger boys, found that peer mediation was beginning to provide a valid option for boys to obtain assistance with their problems; though more so for younger students (where 45 per cent of boys preferred going to peer mediation ahead of a teacher), than older ones who 'did not feel comfortable having peers of equal standing deal with issues deemed private'.

On a particularly positive note, the school's behaviour records for 2003 boys from kindergarten to Year 2 show a reduction in recorded misdemeanours of 17 per cent during the term when peer mediation was introduced. Teachers confirmed this trend in their survey returns: 85 per cent judged the programme as valuable and worthy of continuation, and evidence pointed to 'a significant improvement' in the playground behaviour of boys. An interesting outcome of the project noted by the school was a 'change in teaching pedagogy by some teachers who have begun to allow a more open classroom structure to be adopted' and are more actively engaging students in the learning process, with greater input of student feedback and ideas.

Some of the flavour of the positive feedback received to the entire project at Jasper Road is evident in the student comments that 'it made people cooperative and work things out in class' (Year 5 boy), and 'teachers are paying attention to me' and 'it has helped me because the bad people have kind of stopped it and that's better' (two boys in Year 4).



Looked at overall, the school's experience is that programmes of this sort 'can address the needs of male and female genders at the same time, but are designed in a way that targets boys indirectly and "raises the bar" for them ... (to) achieve results more in line with their abilities'. Achieving this requires, however, that the content within any teaching programme 'include issues pertinent to real life ... (because) boys 'tend to relate closely to real life issues and displayed a desire to probe these matters to a greater depth'. It also is advantageous to provide boys with opportunities to influence other boys so that positive behaviours are replicated and a 'domino effect' will ensue.

The success to date means that the school will maintain all three components of its project, even though more time is required to really assess the impact on behaviour in the school, and will now proceed to review other school programmes to determine 'whether they are catering for the learning needs of boys'. This will include further investigation of the pedagogy that is used so that classrooms can become more 'boy friendly' over time.

Newtown Public School deliberately focused its peer mediation on 'the most important site for most students' – the playground. They particularly sought to give students, and especially boys, the chance to experience 'different ways of behaving and the benefits of success'.

In particular, staff and students in Years 4 and 5 were trained in peer mediation as a way of resolving small conflicts in the classroom, with a focus on boys being able to:

- use negotiation, conflict resolution, refusal and assertiveness skills effectively in a range of situations;
- build positive, responsible relationships;
- be able to express needs, wants, feelings, ideas and opinions;
- be able to listen attentively and respond appropriately; and
- work cooperatively as a member of a group.

To ground the whole experience in the day-to-day life of boys at school, Newtown made use of a range of game kits for lunchtime (high interest and novelty games such as soccer ball targets, tennis with portable nets and Frisbee nets), identified areas in the playground for particular games, and established a borrowing system for classes in the school. The principal also is training some Year 5 boys to run games for younger students using the equipment and exercise responsibility in their role.

In analysing the experience at Newtown, it is interesting to note that, although the playground project has confirmed their reading about strategies for boys, the feedback from students suggested they were 'underestimating the quality of interactions occurring during some classroom activities'. Negotiation skills used in maths and science, for example, 'needed to be transferred to the playground rather than learned in the playground and then transferred to the classroom'. This has led the school back to a stronger focus on good teaching practice and the importance of teacher talk.

As a result, the staff have agreed on a set of guiding principles for teaching and learning along with the management of student welfare that comprises:

- clear understanding by participants of what is expected of them and the consequences actions have;
- school life as predictable as possible for students;
- an emphasis on positive responses to student behaviour;
- the importance of student self-assessment;

²⁴ Rowe, HJ and Rowe, KS 2002, *What Matters Most: Evidence-based Findings on Key Factors Affecting the Educational Experiences and Outcomes for Girls and Boys throughout Their Primary and Secondary Schooling*, ACER, Camberwell.

- provision of rich tasks with comprehensive aims;
- the importance of physical activity on an almost daily basis;
- an emphasis on active learning and cooperative activities; and
- an emphasis on mentoring programmes.

This in turn led the school to recommend to others that their programmes 'highlight the importance of physical activity and games for building social relationships and developing skills for dealing with conflict and difficult power relationships'. In this context, the school feels it cannot 'overemphasise the importance of the playground as a site where power relationships are played out in a very real way for our students'.

The **Riverside High School Cluster** already had a number of programmes in place to cater specifically for boys at risk, and boys who are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities that provide leadership opportunities involving feeder primary schools. In this context the cluster recognised that, although it was identifying boys at risk in the primary years, it had no real programme in place targeted to meet their needs; especially one that builds on research findings that many boys respond to practical and real life challenges, and that acknowledges the fact that many of 'our targeted boys lack a significant relationship with an older male'.

With all this in mind, the cluster established a mentor programme involving older secondary students that was aimed at increasing the attendance, motivation and engagement of the targeted group and reducing the poor behaviours they exhibited. The senior mentors were selected by the participating high school teachers on the basis of being 'models of gender equitable behaviour and, as such ... positive role models for the primary cohort of boys'.



After an orientation day for all participants, and a cluster professional development day with Dr Wayne Martino²³, primary students were integrated into regular secondary classroom programmes on a weekly basis with their mentors in the areas of science, cooking, physical education, computing, electronics, soccer, music and drama. These were all, deliberately, practical areas of the curriculum to reflect the cluster schools' awareness that 'many boys respond to practical and real life challenges and ... in the mainstream classrooms this was not as evident as we believed was necessary to make a difference in the boys identified'. This core project activity was supplemented by a reciprocal interschool visit where the secondary mentors were invited into the primary boys' classrooms, and a final celebration day where certificates of achievement and participation were presented to all participants.

Pre- and post-activity surveys undertaken by the cluster schools showed 'a significant increase in the number of students who identified that they were enjoying school ... a strong swing from not really enjoying group work to a unanimous enjoyment of working with other students on tasks ... (and) a strong shift to accepting and wanting assistance in class'. Primary students involved typically observed that, as two of them stated, 'it helped me with reading, writing and maths' and 'just built up my confidence a bit and helped me with my skills'. From the other side of the activity, mentors commonly referred to the fact that 'it was fun helping a little kid' and 'we'll miss them'.

²³ A co-author with Lingard, B, Mills, M and Bahr, M of *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys: Strategies for Schools and Teachers* 2002, DEST, Canberra, which influenced the cluster in its overall approach, through its suggestion that strategies such as peer support, mentoring and cross-age tutoring ought be developed within the context of a school professional learning community to help meet the educational needs of boys, and especially boys at risk.



Beyond this, teachers observed that the primary school boys 'arrived back in their normal classes settled and ready for work ... (and) the older boys had fun with the younger students and vice versa ... (and) one primary school boy cried when he had to leave his mentor and return to primary school'.

In this context, the actual selection of the senior mentor proved very important (and in future 'a more rigorous process could be put into place'), especially when they were challenged by the fact that the primary boy 'didn't cooperate or behave as expected'; requiring them to put in place strategies to help solve the problem.

Overall, though, the cluster schools are convinced that 'mentoring is a successful tool to engage and excite primary school children to learn ... (and) leads to feelings of success and raised self-esteem for all involved'; and the Riverside Cluster already is discussing 'the possibility and viability of a programme that is strongly embedded into the curriculum in 2004'.

The **Trinity Bay State High School Cluster** also adopted an older student mentoring process, but this time focused on science. The *Boys Mentoring Boys in Science* (BOMBS) programme built on initiatives that had been developed for several years, such as a peer-reading programme, and trialled peer mentoring in science with a subsidiary focus on literacy and a public performance at the end.

BOMBS involved 25 male secondary students, primarily from Year 8 and 9, being trained in mentoring and then sharing their skills in astronomy (especially the use of Starlab) with identified boys at the two primary schools for a period of six weeks. In addition, all Year 7–9 boys in the cluster got to experience the *Success with Attitude* motivational programme at the cluster's expense.

In some ways, the most important component of the programme, from the evaluation perspective at least, was the public presentations by the primary students to their own communities. Apart from a short introduction in each case, the evenings were entirely hosted and presented by the boys themselves and the performances were 'outstanding'. Students presented as 'knowledgeable and ... confident', they used the technology proficiently and their speaking was 'clear, meaningful and delivered with enthusiasm'. As two Indigenous students involved in presentations explained, 'I liked doing my speech for everyone, especially my mum' and 'the BOMBS programme was special to me because it made me more confident and taught me stuff that I didn't even know'; the first of these students also indicated that 'I would like to be involved in another science project'.

Critical to the success of the project was the fact that the schools not only set out to make the boys 'feel special', but also 'expected a high standard and they delivered'. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that every student attended every session as well as the public performances. This reflects the fact that 'the enthusiasm was electric and the cooperative effort outstanding'. Not surprisingly, the schools report 'noticeable improvements throughout the project – kids seemed to rise up to the expectations'.

The programme, which was enjoyed by primary and secondary students alike, was, it must be acknowledged, somewhat demanding on staff time and resources, but the cluster believes that with more lead time it can 'streamline the programme and still deliver similar positive outcomes'. That this is justified is evidenced by the fact that 'most of the primary school boys made comments about wanting to continue learning in the area of science and were looking forward to high school', and the cluster has been 'inundated by high school boys asking to take part in any follow-up programme'.

The mentoring programme in the **St Mary's College Cluster** (also known as Cairns Catholic School Cluster) focused on teachers providing the mentoring, rather than students of equivalent or older age.

Having identified a 'widening gap between literacy and numeracy outcomes for boys and girls', along with escalating behaviour management issues among boys, the schools implemented a mentor programme on a trial basis, extending out of the *You Can Do It!* programme already in place in the cluster, to address these concerns. The approach adopted specifically drew on Rowe and Rowe's²⁴ research findings and the cluster's own experience of the barriers to success impacting on boys – 'reluctance to engage meaningfully with learning, inability to persevere with learning challenges and problem solv(ing), low levels of resilience to setbacks or conflict situations, high levels of frustration, anti-academic attitudes to schooling ("It's cool to be a fool"), anti-social and uncooperative behaviour, poor self-worth, self-perpetuating cycles of failure, and conflict with peers/teachers/parents/caregivers' – and the consequent need to tackle these not just in terms of academic programmes, but at the social and emotional level as well.

Seventy students from a range of year levels were identified as mentees in the trial and were supported by 23 teacher mentors who received up to two days training for their role. Mentors met with students individually or in small groups at least once a week for an hour, usually outside school time, precluded by an afternoon tea where the boys were brought together 'for acknowledgement and comradeship'. In the sessions, the mentors and students worked through a highly structured programme which used a pre-test to identify the student's 'weakest foundation' and then taught him skills in relation to just one of the qualities of 'persistence, confidence, cooperation or organisation' and showed him how to put these into practice to address real issues in his own life. Students then trialled these skills in a range of home and school contexts, and reported the outcome to their mentors for reinforcement or modification as required. Mentors also liaised between the students, parents and teachers, facilitating 'open dialogue on how current problems could be collaboratively addressed, and learning and behaviour goals achieved'. The 23 mentors met regularly at school and cluster level to share progress and clarify emerging issues, with the support of the *You Can Do It!* coordinator.

The cluster feels that the pilot programme has demonstrated that:

- 'the interior life of male students is a powerful contributor to students' overall wellbeing, their satisfaction with school, capacity to engage effectively with others, solve problems and develop resilience when faced with failures'; and
- 'basic coping skills, especially those with a high social/emotional content, can be explicitly taught and coached in a reasonably short period of time', though they do require ongoing reinforcement within and beyond the school.

Projects related to peer mediation and peer support can enhance the set of guiding principles by demonstrating that:

- *Older student mentors can provide positive male role models for young boys.*
- *Mentoring arrangements provide positive experiences and outcomes both for the students being mentored and the boys providing it.*

²⁴ Rowe, HJ and Rowe, KS 2002, *What Matters Most: Evidence-based Findings on Key Factors Affecting the Educational Experiences and Outcomes for Girls and Boys throughout Their Primary and Secondary Schooling*, ACER, Camberwell.



Positive role models for students

Community-based projects using male mentors

Many of the schools and clusters selected for the programme specifically referred in their submissions to the need for male role models, and projects in this category directly sought to develop effective school and community links to address this. In particular, efforts were made to link students to community mentors so they could develop a better understanding of how the community perceives success, and identify clear personal goals and aspirations, along with an understanding of how school can support these. In addition, a number of literacy programmes in schools included role modelling by fathers and other adult males as a key element for developing positive attitudes towards the acquisition of literacy skills.

Having identified a mix of achievement and behaviour issues related to boys (referenced earlier in 'Reasons for involvement in the programme'), **Latrobe High School** sought to connect Year 9 boys with 'mates' in the community 'to provide a support network for young males, to increase interaction within the community between generations and males, to use the community as a resource (in this case older males), and to provide students with the opportunity to see greater relevance with what was being offered at Latrobe High'.

The programme was designed to respond to the fact that 15 year old boys commonly are keen to form relationships with significant males in the community, see the world of work and the completion of tasks (including community projects) as 'a visual representation of the young man's ability and effort', and more readily understand the need for literacy and numeracy skills when they are related to job outcomes. Beyond this, the school felt it could strengthen boys' capacity to develop self-directed goals if it tapped into their energy and enthusiasm, which in turn could lead to a more satisfying and worthwhile work experience placement in Year 10.

Basically the programme involved 20 boys in the first instance having a full-day block of time for six to eight weeks with a 'mate' in a variety of non-school learning environments – work, recreation, home, sport and so on. Students involved in the programme kept a reflective diary, completed as part of their English work, and their mates were asked to complete similar forms. Prior to the programme starting the students received a formal briefing session and training in occupational health and safety, and the programme was officially launched for all involved. Each student who participated received a certificate of his involvement which is to be presented at a concluding celebratory event.

While it has not yet been possible to develop objective indicators for the programme (and the school sees this as an area for improvement in the future), feedback from the mates and students was 'extremely complimentary of the time and was reflected in journals of the boys'. The majority of parents also spoke highly of the programme, especially 'one single parent (mum) who was so exceptionally grateful that the school was able to provide a "male mate" for her son. It appears that this significant older male is able to continue with this relationship and mum is just over the moon ... (and) The good thing is that this is not an isolated occurrence'.

Arguably the most positive feedback of all, however, is the fact that all 23 boys unable to participate in the first phase, because of the lack of sufficient 'mates' to cater for them all, wish to take part in term 3; the school is currently negotiating with 'mates' to ensure this can occur.

Beyond the obvious engagement observed by the school, and the fact that none of the 20 boys was suspended or even put in time-out in term 2, two important unintended outcomes observed by the school were:

- the strong support of staff and the fact that it allowed them to have more time to create stronger bonds with the students left in the class as well as enabling the creation of a separate Year 9 girls programme; and
- the interest generated, which resulted in staff discussions around boys' education in general and the subsequent use by the Year 9 coordinator of resources to supplement the programme across the year level as a whole.

The **Riverside Primary Schools Cluster** (WA) also targeted boys in a single year level, but this time students in Year 4, where boys had been exhibiting high levels of inappropriate behaviour, low levels of engagement with school, and a lack of motivation to learn. A significant proportion of these boys had language difficulties in relation to reading and spelling, and there was a shortage of male role models both from within and outside the school.

The schools, in this context, initiated a range of interconnected activities – perhaps even too much given that the experience did occasion feelings of overwork in some staff – with access to male role models forming the core. Specific activities were:

- involvement of all Year 4 students in clubs sessions once a week where 50 per cent of the adult leaders were male, in contrast to a totally female teaching force at Year 4 – the clubs included orienteering, construction kits, cooking, board games, computer skills, Aboriginal dance, games construction and art, all of which incorporated a focus on social skills and appropriate behaviour during the club;
- literacy and numeracy support in the classroom for students experiencing difficulties in these domains;
- a circus skills programme delivered by 15 Year 10 boys from Coodanup Community College in one and a half hour sessions for four weeks (though the total programme for Year 4 lasted nine weeks), with a final session where certificates and thank you cards were presented;
- a *Let's Have a Story Dad* programme being trialled in one class where, on a rotating basis, two fathers take four to five students two or three times a week to the library and read them a story. The books chosen are 'high interest, low ability' and the fathers have a session with the administrator at the start to discuss appropriate strategies;
- a focus on male role models in other contexts such as an 'inspirational talk' from the local Member of Parliament who was a teacher and has a long-standing involvement with the school.

The whole integrated programme was underpinned by the two schools' belief that 'learning outcomes are best achieved when learning activities are practical and hands-on with a clear target or product'. This should, they advise, involve 'content that is relevant to the students' and learning activities and assessments that cater for a range of different learning styles. Students should, in addition, 'have some input and choice in the selection of topics or activities, although these choices at times will need to be limited by the teacher'.

Implementation of the range of activities outlined has resulted in a significant improvement in student behaviour, as evidenced by the fact that in the first seven weeks of term 1, 100 per cent of Year 4 lunchtime detentions were for boys, but in the first seven weeks of term 3 this had reduced to 66 per cent. As well as this positive quantitative result, data gathered from teachers and others suggests an improvement in students' motivation to learn, and the students themselves have been very positive about the experience.

Students across different year levels were involved in the mentoring programme at **Port Lincoln Primary School**, which proceeded on the basis that 'positive modelling for boys plays a lasting role in their development, and ... successful transitions through life are dependent on a strong actualised identity and belief in self'. Thus, the school devised a programme to link students with a variety of community agencies and enterprises, such as National Parks and Wildlife, the local police station and a Jeans 'N' Gear store in the town, negotiated according to their own learning interests and passions. The students then brokered a 'readiness programme' to engage in with the community outside the school environment.

The 25 to 30 Year 5–7 at-risk boys selected for the programme visited their community placements weekly to engage in the business of the agency and learn about how it worked and, perhaps even more importantly, to 'link meaningfully with the mentors and the general public'. This reflected the school's view that the programme ought extend beyond the

students themselves, to also 'challenge community perceptions about youth, and in particular male Indigenous boys ... (to help) change the context in which these students learn and live'; so there is greater awareness of 'the potential and worth of each boy as a citizen and carer who can make a difference to the lives of others'.

Students involved in this visiting programme, which spanned eight hours a week for 24 weeks, recorded their experiences, learning and feelings in a journal and engaged in regular discussion sessions with the programme coordinators. In addition, the work they undertook was promoted to the school community through newsletters, school assemblies and the local media.

The outcome has been very positive indeed for the boys involved. Attendance has improved and the boys 'look forward to Community Links days'. There has been a reduction in the number of detentions and teachers report 'improved learning attitude in class time'. This reflects the growth in participants' confidence and self-esteem, which among other things has seen Indigenous boys taking on leadership roles and speaking and presenting at school assemblies, as a result of being engaged with 'something special'. Beyond this, the students have made significant and lasting friendships with mentors outside the school and mentors report that students are visiting them after school hours. An examination of the boys' journals and reports suggests that the quality of their written work has 'developed, with explicit references to the skills they have learned, the understandings they have about their community placement, and the feelings and dispositions they experienced'.

Unlike most schools included in this section, *Project Lookout* at **Berri Primary School** applied to all boys in Years 3–7, rather than just a targeted group, reflecting the school's view that 'strong role models and mentors are important for boys' and the development of a culture 'where students discipline themselves, set learning goals and are trusted to set plans and achieve their goals'.

Project Lookout, which was developed to address the preferred learning styles of boys and generally 'expand their horizons' comprised:

- A project with the Riverland Youth Theatre where seven boys with 'artistic flair' worked for more than 60 hours over 16 weeks with a playwright, artistic director and skills coaches to develop a script based on the boys' lives, keeping a significant male role model in mind. The play, entitled *Boys Will Be Boys* was performed at the Berri Town Hall on 24 and 25 September and was 'a hit'.
- A 'significant adult and hands-on' component whereby 10 activities were provided over 10 weeks by trained volunteer mentors from the community for the 70 boys from Years 3–7. These small group activities, designed to enable boys to 'relate well, communicate their feelings and increase their confidence' included camping, taekwondo, golf, fishing, construction, woodwork, volleyball, wire craft, boomerang making and fencing. In each case, they were activities that met the school requirement that they occur outside the 'normal four walls of the classroom' and have a physical dimension requiring 'self-discipline and areas of self-expression', while being 'empowering and hands on, conducive to boys communicating with their peers, more "doing" than "instructing", and "something different" '. It is interesting to note, in this context, that initially the sessions were scheduled for 90 minutes, but the mentors subsequently observed that, although the boys' engagement with the learning was high, 'it waned after about 40–45 minutes', so the sessions were cut back to one hour.

Attendance data reveals that more girls than boys were absent on the day of the project, and the attendance rate for boys on that day was 95.7 per cent, compared with 90.5 per cent in the junior classes which were not involved, and an annual rate of 89 per cent. This confirms the data from a sample of boys who were interviewed by parents which points to an increase in self-esteem as a result of these activities, with boys commenting that 'they felt valued, enjoyed taking risks and doing new things, loved being outside and working in small groups of boys' and, as one observed, 'working without the girls as I didn't have to show off'. Boys working with the Riverland Youth Theatre indicated that they particularly appreciated the fact the theatre staff 'let us talk first and discuss our opinions without judging us; were



down to earth; shared humour ... (and) were "cool"; ..."relaxed" '. It was, in sum, that 'they communicated to us, they listened and looked at us'. The small groups involved in each aspect of the project were important in this regard as 'it was easy to get to know each boy and hold a conversation'.

The success to date means that the school definitely intends to build on this project in future but, in hindsight, feels it may have 'stretched the programme too thin' and caused 'stressful organisational problems', and in future perhaps should 'go smaller, but go deeper'.

The *Ten Good Men* project at **Kormilda College** grew out of broader school community efforts to create 'a pedagogy that considers the total learning environment of its young men'. More specifically, the project was designed to simultaneously analyse and then change 'bias' in the school which may limit boys' horizons and reduce their self-esteem on the one hand, and assist boys to 'live in a world where sex stereotypes need no longer dictate life patterns' on the other. In particular, the school perceived a need to counter myths of masculinity that suggest to boys they ought 'be ashamed of weakness, vulnerability, fear and despair', and challenge 'outmoded views of what it means to be male'. This was especially the case in a situation where numbers of the boys are boarding and hence have only the teachers as role models, good as they are, rather than tribal elders in the case of Indigenous boys and family members and, in the case of other boys, others such as pastoralists and miners.

The project was an attempt to bring boys more into the educational mainstream by helping them to re-evaluate their roles, beliefs and values in the context of a connection with positive male role models from the Darwin community. To achieve this, the school advertised within its community for potential male participants and received 35 nominations. Ten were selected on the basis of such criteria as their ability to communicate, success or potential success in relation to discipline, availability, and capacity to respond honestly to questions about 'trials, tribulations and benchmarks of their journey through manhood'. Support was gained from the men's employers where relevant and the participants briefed to inform them of their role, prepare them for what they were about to experience, and ensure that they were at ease with the task.

Workshops then were conducted with college students whereby, in a Boys' Day Out, each of the 'ten good men' conducted a workshop for around 20 students, outlining their life journey and responding to students' questions. Male staff from the college facilitated the groups and ensured that appropriate duty of care was observed. Later in the year, the men returned to address students and staff at a full assembly and, together with the college, organised worksite visits for the boys as part of an ongoing approach to boys' education in the college.

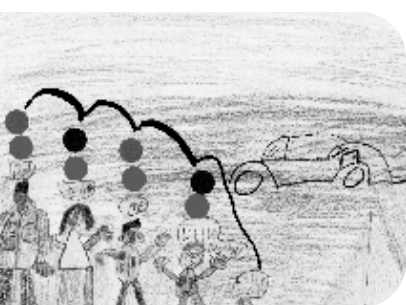
The key success of the project to date, from the college's perspective, is to have opened up levels of discussion for all stakeholders, but especially the boys and men involved. Key areas of discussion to emerge include the relevance of school, stereotypes and issues related to academic achievement and success, classroom climate and teacher attitudes, and life beyond school. Of particular value to many boys was the increased relevance they saw for their schooling after they heard from the men. One 14 year old boy, for example, who had stated prior to the programme that 'perhaps if the curriculum was more relevant, less academic and more skill based we may be able to stick with it', observed afterwards that it 'was fun. I liked the stories they told. I think I'd like to run my own business. Do you think I'd need to finish Year 12, yeah I probably would'. This was similar to the views of another 15 year old who pointed to the fact 'we got to talk to real fellas who had been through what we're going through right now. They know what it's all about', and, in a sort of request for more, indicated, 'it was too short and I didn't really get time to ask them what I really wanted to'.

The boys particularly responded to the approachability of the men, and the message that came across 'loud and clear' to the college from the boys was that 'they want their teachers to be more humane and approachable – not far off authority figures'. And in that sense, the whole programme was seen as 'planting a seed for future long-term advantage'; especially since the students indicated that what they learned from the programme and the men included 'self-respect,



discipline, control, responsibility and loyalty, stay in school, tolerance, that everyone is good at something'. Above all, around two-thirds of the boys involved said that 'the men had taught them values and life skills'. Through the Ten Good Men project the boys were, the college concluded, 'encouraged to recognise and express emotions and behaviours that are generally hidden from public view and to take off their masks of masculinity. Further projects of similar nature should be encouraged so that boys are challenged to modify traditional stereotyped patterns of behaviour in order to build relationships that do not require them to resort to rigid, masculine role models'.

Having come to 'the realisation that we need a philosophy and framework for boys' education in our school', **Myrniong Primary School** identified reading as the focus for its improvement efforts, with particular emphasis on the engagement of fathers, or more specifically 'significant male role models' (SMRs) reading at home with their sons. To give the project added impetus and meaning, however, the school first surveyed and interviewed its boys to find out their views on reading so it could inform the male mentors about their boys' feelings in relation to literacy and, through an information evening it conducted, give them some practical ways to help at home.



The boy's literacy information evening, and follow-up sessions with SMRs who could not attend, was particularly successful involving as it did more than half the families of boys at the school. It also spurred staff at the school to work on a statement of philosophy on boys' education and to generally raise its awareness of issues related to boys' education and how they might best be addressed.

At the information evening, males were encouraged to read in front of their boys, model reading themselves, and talk to their boys about reading to demonstrate that they see it as a valuable activity. In general terms data gathered along the way suggests the degree of male involvement in literacy activities has increased, though there still are a number of males who convey the message to boys that they do not like reading and prefer other joint activities such as sport. Nevertheless, there were plenty of instances of boys indicating that 'dad tells me things that he reads

about', 'dad reads my reader with me' and 'it makes me feel good to read with dad/big brother/step dad', to suggest a positive outcome for these boys. With this as a starting point, the school now wants to gather more substantial data on the approach and, if possible, even track students over time and assess whether a long-term difference is made. But the school has little doubt, as the principal put it, that 'boys have enjoyed the daily interaction with their fathers and the feeling is reciprocated. This programme has been very successful and will continue to operate'.

One positive unintended outcome noted by the school is an improvement in the behaviour of some boys whose fathers have been involved in the programme. 'We are not sure if it is because the father has formed a relationship with teachers and is supporting us more from home, or if the students' confidence is growing due to more attention from their SMR, but it is welcome.'

The *Heads, Hearts and Hands On* (H3O) project at **Kingston Primary School** focused simultaneously on literacy and hands-on activities involving community mentors.

In an effort to increase each student's reading and writing ability, the literacy teacher collected initial data about each child's strengths and weaknesses using Marie Clay assessment strategies and other diagnostic tests, and then provided literacy sessions four times a week which involved explicit teaching of sound/letter relationships; teaching phonic knowledge skills to help decode words; sight word recognition; practising these skills through reading texts appropriate for the student's age and reading level; reading quality texts to the students; discussing these texts together to challenge thinking and develop oral language skills and comprehension; and supported daily writing. Running records were maintained throughout and the teacher met regularly with the students' other teachers and parents to communicate about progress and strategies to be used, both in class and at home.

At the same time, community mentors (along with peer buddies) managed weekly hands-on projects that 'added value to the physical or social aspects of our school community'. Projects were negotiated with the students, the project manager, school principal and grounds committee, and also provided 'the experience and stimulus for the creation of meaningful and relevant functional texts in the daily literacy learning sessions'. The sorts of activities provided included cooking and selling food to raise funds to purchase native plants for the grounds; planting of native plants; establishing and maintaining a garden bed; planning and making healthy lunches for staff and class mates; making fruit juice as a fundraiser to purchase Health and PE equipment; designing and creating an historical mural for the school foyer; designing and creating an indoor soccer game; and designing and making an indoor car track.

After only a relatively short period, the literacy teacher reports, students' beliefs about 'their own capacity to learn', as well as their 'willingness to engage in new literacy tasks, participation in classroom activities and discussions at home about learning all increased as students were involved in individualised, strategic literacy learning opportunities'. Students indicated that 'the relationships they were forging with the literacy teacher and mentors were significant relationships for them at school'; which also was evidenced by the levels of time on-task observed and their desire to maintain the relationships through continued structured programmes of this sort.

While the literacy attainment in particular was 'very impressive', the school is aware that the development of these skills in other settings has not been as marked; and hence needs to be addressed in the next phase of the project (through stronger links with classroom learning and relevant educational outcomes) for which planning already is underway. There were no such doubts about the impact of the mentoring approach which resulted in students commonly observing that 'it was good to be with people you wouldn't normally be with in the playground' and 'it was great to do something different that really helped other people'; parents typically commenting that 'my child really looked forward to every session (and) it helped with his self-esteem and made him feel very happy'; mentors expressing their thorough enjoyment of their role and the fact 'I have learnt a lot about how to manage, motivate and communicate with children'; and teachers indicating that 'it provided a wonderful, positive opportunity for students to work with great role models on an authentic task'.

Literacy was both a focus and a motivator for the trial of a mentoring programme at the **Catholic College Bendigo** whose reading of the research had led it to conclude that 'some boys require a quite different learning experience than we were currently offering in order to realise their potential'. English and Special Education staff identified in particular boys who were under-achieving in the literacy area who, when looked at in detail, included 'an identifiable sub-set who appeared to have some level of family disruption involving loss of regular contact with their natural father and grandfather(s), or a strained relationship with a new male in the household'. Drawing again on research that links boys' performance in literacy to 'the degree to which they are engaged in reading from an early age by males in their lives', the school felt there would be considerable benefit if these boys could receive 'some individual contact with a significant male who might act as their personal mentor over a period of time'. While never envisaged as a 'panacea' for their problems, a mentoring programme could become a 'useful adjunct' to other programmes already in place especially focused on the middle years of school.

Having initially considered using senior students or university students, the college was overwhelmed by community interest from retired and older men engaged in part-time employment, and so established its pilot with this group as its base. Ten students from Years 7–9 were selected using a range of criteria (eg not having a male role model at home, being particularly weak in literacy and at risk of leaving school) and then matched to 10 volunteer mentors who had undergone police checks and received training for their role. Once matched, the pairs met informally prior to an official launch of the programme (*Boy/Mentor Approach to Literacy Education*, or bMALE), and then participated in facilitated weekly contacts of about 80 minutes at school. Initial contacts involved a variety of initiatives and learning activities the school organised and, as they got to know each other, they became more autonomous and planned their own activities. These comprised activities initiated by the mentor, those initiated by the student (where the student taught the mentor something), and those tackled with an equal contribution from both.



Some of the activities initiated by mentors included making wooden toys for disadvantaged children for Christmas, flying a paraglider and public speaking. Some of the skills the students shared with their mentors were how to use a computer, how to use a digital camera, and playing a musical instrument. And projects undertaken together, where neither may have had any particular skill, included cooking an Asian meal and designing a pop-up book for presentation of a school project. Students maintained reflective journals throughout, and the mentors modelled an interest in literature by reading as the boys wrote their journals, reading together, sharing literature, communicating through letters and emails, swapping books and so on.

Early indications are that, as one mentor put it, the programme is 'hitting the mark', despite some logistical issues which will be ironed out in future incarnations of the approach. The pilot programme has provided a solid basis for the school to extend the programme into next year and another round of mentors currently is in training for this to occur. Certainly the boys reported 'looking forward to their mentor sessions each week' and that they found the activities 'interesting and fun'. They particularly seemed to enjoy the opportunity to 'sit and chat' with an older man as they worked, and 'valued the interest shown in them ... (and) working hands-on and having skills passed on to them'. The mentors too appeared to enjoy the experience, 'though felt they were only just getting to know their partner well as the pilot period came to an end'. Most significantly, perhaps, the boys indicated 'greater interest in school, albeit to varying degrees, since the programme began'. The whole experience not only provided an important base on which to build, but brought home to the college the value of enlisting 'the wealth of talent and life experiences that exists among retired men and men who are unemployed or partly employed. They have the capacity to contribute in many ways to your school and in particular to boys who need to see good male role models'.

The **Upper Yarra Secondary College Cluster** of schools implemented a *Boys and Dads: Making Better Men* programme as a collaborative project which involved:

- three Boys and Dads mornings (and one evening) with the psychologist Andrew Fuller where dads came to the schools to participate with their boys in some workshop activities, a school activity and a talk/discussion about adolescence, fatherhood, masculinity and education;
- nine Boys' Health Programme Workshops (three series of three sessions at three schools) delivered by two health workers, to facilitate discussion between boys and dads, within and beyond the workshops themselves, about issues of puberty including sexual and physical development, relationships, and alcohol and other drugs; and
- Boys and Dads adventure camps for two boys nominated from each campus in the cluster (selected according to 'varying needs of the boys') where, following an introductory information night, the boys and dads spent two nights at the camp participating in getting to know each other games, a low ropes course, rock wall climbing and abseiling, a commando course, a night walk, white water rafting and a high ropes course.

Taken together, it is a programme that the schools believe tackles 'issues specific to boys' education at the level of the social determinants of health ... (which) underlie the reasons for boys' poor performance at school'; and provides a 'model of active learning' which also involved 'positive male role models in boys' lives and the need for a clear and responsible role for men in their family and in society'.

Certainly involving fathers in the teaching of boys' health contributed to 'a completely different dynamic in teaching this subject ... (with the result) the boys' attention and participation are affected in a very positive way; not to mention how much more holistic this type of education becomes with the paternal input and presence at home'. It is part of broader evidence the cluster is collecting that 'having a more engaged father will improve overall performance at school, as well as motivation to learn'. Beyond this, the whole programme dovetailed very neatly with the cluster's existing focus on the *You Can Do It!* programme (currently being extended into *We Can Do It!*) which aims to provide shared beliefs and values across the cluster in relation to students' emotional wellbeing.

One of the most important outcomes from the whole project has arguably been to stimulate informed and open-ended dialogue between boys and their dads, and an 'exploration of masculinity', which proved important to both groups. This especially is important in the middle years of school as these are the 'landmark times in terms of development for young men, and hence an optimal time to facilitate this communication'. The camp in particular provided 'an opportunity for fathers to dedicate special time to one of their children ... The activities expanded the self-belief of all participants ... (and) left them all motivated. An important aspect here was exposure to examples of positive models for the young men'. Fathers involved observed that the whole experience was 'very team building and bonding with my son' and 'thanks for pushing us to do things and take risks I would never have done'. Longer term effects will now be assessed using ACER Wellbeing Surveys across the cluster.

The final two lessons to emerge from project schools and clusters, which informed the set of guiding principles outlined below, are that:

- *Boys need regular contact with adult male mentors in the community (including, of course, their fathers and teachers) to provide models of effective adult behaviour in the community to which young people can aspire.*
 - *Adult mentors not only provide access to particular knowledge and skills, but also inspire and support boys to plan for the future and seek to enhance their own academic and social development.*
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LESSONS From Stage One

The basic intention of Stage One of the programme was to establish an understanding of good practices in action in schools and classrooms across Australia. Of particular interest in this regard, was the congruence or otherwise between the accepted body of knowledge about successful practices in boys' education from recent reports and research, and what teachers themselves found to be worth doing to help boys learn.

Stage Two of the programme takes this intention to another level by funding self-directed, cluster-based innovation and professional development that builds on the lessons of Stage One, and clearly links to a common set of guiding principles for improving the learning engagement and outcomes of boys. This will involve the identification of lighthouse schools which will support the professional learning of teachers in an associated cluster of schools, with the objective of enhancing teacher understanding and skills.

Guiding principles for success in educating boys

Stage One of the programme resulted in a wide range of activity to advance the educational achievement of boys. What is clear from this stage of the programme is that school-based initiatives can be enhanced by:

- developing an even stronger relationship between local school or cluster activities and the research evidence of what works;
- creating more coherent programmes of activity to improve the education of boys by linking the various categories of school-based activity outlined in this report; and
- focusing on professional development for teachers as a priority to enable them to confidently expand the range of teaching and learning experiences in their classrooms.

A common set of guiding principles has been identified from good educational practices which has emerged from this programme and key research in the area of boys' education.

The following set comprises 10 interrelated core propositions which ought inform the development and implementation of ongoing programmes to improve the education of boys in schools.

1 Collect evidence and undertake ongoing inquiry on the issue, recognising that schools can do something about it.

Boys' education is an issue of concern within schools in Australia as evidenced by a significant body of research and the experience of the 110 project schools and clusters. It also is an issue that schools can do something to address. This requires each school to gather and analyse its own student achievement and other data (eg attendance, behaviour incidents, student opinion survey data) on a gender basis and identify the needs of specific boys and students 'at risk'. Such inquiry should involve sustained data collection, reflection and evaluation at the local level, informed by research in this area. The school then can develop, implement and continue to evaluate and amend appropriate strategies and targets tailored to the unique and specific needs of students.

2 Adopt a flexible, whole school approach with a person and team responsible.

Improving the educational outcomes of boys requires a whole school approach based on a common vision and a coherent, integrated set of programmes across the broad range of activities noted in

this report (ie pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; literacy and communication skills; student engagement and motivation; behaviour management programmes; and positive role models for students). Such a whole school approach is more effective with the identification of a leader in the school who is responsible for its implementation, and the establishment of an appropriate team to support the leader. It also requires a degree of flexibility on the part of the school when needed in relation to structural and other arrangements to support the programmes adopted (eg single-sex classes and activities, withdrawal programmes). This approach should be integrated with existing school improvement strategies and should engage the broader school community.

3 Ensure good teaching for boys, and all students in all classes.

Improved education for boys depends, just as it does for girls, upon good teaching of all students in all classes. While there are many recipes for good teaching in schools, teachers demonstrating good practices all have the following features in common.

- Having high expectations for all students, knowing their students well and listening to their students.
- Reflecting on current teaching practice in terms of the information collected by the school and an informed evidence base of research.
- Using a range of teaching techniques – if all a teacher does is talk at the students and writes things on a board, they are unlikely to learn very much. All learners require variety and teachers need to vary the ways in which they pass on information to, and engage, students.
- Structuring their teaching so it supports student learning – the teacher is the trained, professional adult in the class, so must ensure that the key messages and lessons are learned. This means they need to make sure that students understand the main points as they proceed, make connections to other things that have been learned, build on what students already know and keep reinforcing key messages.
- Involving students in learning activities and encouraging their participation – learning requires that students do things, as well as having them explained or shown to them. Teachers need to actively involve students in solving problems for themselves and get students working together in groups so they learn social and cooperative skills.
- Providing positive feedback and praise – an important part of teaching young people is providing them with feedback on their work. Teachers need to let students know how they are going in general, what their strengths and weaknesses are and how they can continue to improve.
- Being open, flexible, fair and consistent in dealing with students, having a ready sense of humour and being prepared to negotiate and discuss teaching and learning with students.
- Making connections with the community – involving the students' parents and other important community members helps demonstrate to students the importance the teacher attaches to the programme and their work.

4 Be clear about the kinds of support particular boys require.

Boys are not a homogeneous group and not all boys can be treated the same. Gender intersects with a range of other factors, including developmental and sub-cultural factors, to affect each student's experience of school. Some boys may experience a tension between being masculine and engaging with and being good at school; with the result that demonstrating their masculinity can inhibit participation and performance in class, making school a negative experience. Not all boys, however, experience or identify with aspects of masculinity that conflict with educational engagement, and there are many boys who do successfully integrate success in schooling and growing up as adult males. Hence the school needs to clarify how best to support each boy in his learning at school.

5 Cater for different learning styles preferred by boys.

Students learn in different ways. There is, in this context, substantial research as well as school and cluster experience through these projects to suggest that boys (as well as many girls, of course) commonly respond more positively to learning experiences that:

- have a practical focus and physical or hands-on dimension;
- they see as relevant and having a real world connection;
- use thinking skills focused on actual problems;
- challenge them by requiring higher order and conceptual thinking;
- have clear instructions and structured sessions in manageable chunks;
- enable them to work with others as well as individually;
- provide for a range of ways in which work can be presented; and
- provide them with a degree of involvement in decisions about content and opportunities to negotiate their learning as a valued stakeholder.

That said, good practice in boys' education also seeks to broaden the range of ways in which boys view themselves as learners and the strategies they adopt, while strengthening their capacity to develop responsibility and self-awareness, and to value success at school.

6 Recognise that gender matters and stereotypes should be challenged.

Acceptance of gender identity is important for all students. Boys should be encouraged to value being male and the positive virtues this entails. Equally, the negative aspects of stereotypical views of masculinity, often manifest in bullying, aggressive and physical responses to conflict and difference, or a conscious disengagement from school, need to be challenged. Schools and teachers are well placed to promote and model values and behaviours that are fundamental to people learning and working together. Schools can enable boys to broaden the ways in which they relate to others as they develop and grow, and exercise power, control, competition, cooperation, freedom, responsibility and choice; thereby enhancing their development as adult males in modern Australian society. Schools should, in this context, seek to establish a culture where achievement is seen as 'cool' and desirable for all students and is accepted as something to be celebrated.



7 Develop positive relationships, as they are critical to success.

Relationships are crucial in any young person's schooling, especially the teacher–student relationship within the classroom and in the broader learning environment of the school. Particularly important for success at school is that each and every boy should know and feel that there are people in the school who care about him and his development. Beyond this, boys will benefit where there is consistency of approach between the home and the school, and parents are actively engaged in the education of their children and in developing 'shared values' with the school. The experience of clusters in this programme also has demonstrated the benefits to be gained from increased cooperation between schools and, in particular, sharing of strategies and resources to improve the education of boys.

8 Provide opportunities for boys to benefit from positive male role models from within and beyond the school.

Boys in school want and need to develop positive relationships with significant males within and beyond the school, most obviously their fathers and teachers, but also older male students and members of the wider community. Such role models provide inspiration and support for young boys seeking to develop their own understanding of how to become an effective adult male in the community, and also can assist in the development of clear goals and pathways to future learning and personal development.

9 Focus on literacy in particular.

There is little doubt that boys' relatively weaker performance in literacy than girls has been one of the threshold factors leading to the focus on improving education for boys. Literacy, especially in the early years of school, is critical for educational success at school and subsequent successful participation in the community and its economy. There is substantial evidence to show that effective literacy for boys requires a balanced approach which includes some whole language teaching, but also direct instruction of phonics and phonemic awareness to improve outcomes across the board. Effective teaching and assessment should incorporate a recognition of the range of literacies students require today, including multimedia and emerging literacies in which young people, and particularly boys, are achieving success. This is a strength that can be built on. Beyond this, there is a clear need to ensure that processes are in place to identify students at risk of under-performance (primarily but not only in literacy) as early as possible, so they can be provided with appropriate, targeted support (eg one-to-one or small group tutoring).

10 Use information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a valuable tool.

It is well documented that boys, and especially boys who are under-achieving at school, respond favourably to the use of ICTs as a means of engaging them in learning activities. Many of the schools and clusters involved in this programme have drawn on the motivational and educational powers of ICTs. The interactive nature of many new technologies helps create learning environments where boys can learn by doing, receive immediate feedback and continually build new knowledge and enhance their level of understanding. This enables students to develop a richer and deeper understanding of core knowledge and skills and to lead their teachers in an area where they are often experts and adults are learners. ICTs that include an emphasis on application and tailoring education to the needs of individual learners are also supportive of a shift in practice to more learner-centred approaches, which encourage the active participation of boys in the learning process, rather than the passive absorption of knowledge.

Working in clusters

One very significant benefit identified from Stage One of the programme has been the value of working together in clusters of schools. Many schools involved in clusters specifically pointed to the fact that it was one of the few opportunities they get to work together with other schools, with some funding provided to focus their efforts. This has, for many participants in the programme, proved both professionally rewarding and exciting, while providing links that ordinarily may not exist between primary and secondary schools, between the various school sectors, and on occasions with TAFE, tertiary institutions and the broader community.

Some of the advantages of working in this way cited by schools from the Sunbury West cluster, for example, include that it:

- helped us maintain focus;
- provided a springboard for ideas;
- shared the workload;
- was supportive and conducive to trying new ideas; and
- kept us on schedule.

This is similar to the advantages nominated by the Riverside High Cluster which pointed to:

- shared responsibility for the operation of the programme;
- clustering enabling the schools to access human as well as physical resources that would normally be beyond our capabilities;
- sharing of expertise and knowledge among cluster colleagues which 'has been tremendous';
- opening up of teachers' perspectives on how the other sectors (ie primary and secondary) operate and hence contributing to smoother student transition;
- shared professional learning, which enabled the establishment of 'a common understanding of current boys' issues and how to best address these'; and
- enthusiasm engendered through working closely in a cluster with the result that project momentum is maintained.

As the Mitchelton Cluster simply observed, 'the lighthouse project provided an ideal stepping stone to foster strong working relationships'. At a more personal level, a teacher in the Bucasia Cluster of schools found the whole experience of working in a cluster to be 'inspiring ... As teachers collectively we have a vast repertoire of classroom skills and we don't share them often enough'.

These advantages do not, of course, come without work, and schools in the Oak Flats High School Cluster were quick to recommend that 'regular planning and evaluation meetings take place'; describing how they set aside two Wednesdays a term to enable them to 'align instructionally (and) debrief and evaluate the logistics of what has become a very substantial project'. To this, the Trinity Gardens Primary School Cluster would add the need to have 'someone to manage it and set timelines for things and ensure communication is effective' – a point reiterated by the Trinity Bay Cluster which suggested the need for a 'coordinator/liaison/gofer to oversee the logistical arrangements and facilitate communication'.

Cluster representatives at the St Kieran's Primary School Cluster met regularly during their 12-week project to share ideas, discuss issues and report on successes and problems as they arose. As a result they found that 'a sense of teamwork' developed, along with 'a definite sense of relationship and commonality among the cluster schools', which the people involved feel 'can only work to enhance future collaborative projects and especially with regard to boys'. That said, the schools did observe that substantial time was needed to foster the cluster relationship and they particularly could benefit from more time in future spent at each other's schools, 'either absorbing information and strategies, or assisting the other school to develop and strengthen their project'.

This issue of time surfaced at Pretty Beach and Wamberal Public Schools as well where, although the schools benefited from their cluster arrangement – especially 'as we have had the resources of two schools to draw on to assemble our unit' – there were problems in arranging 'mutual time off class when two schools were involved, especially as we have had a shortage of casuals during term 3'.

This also was the one cluster difficulty cited by the Riverside High Cluster (whose extensive list of cluster pluses is listed in the section 'Community-based projects using male mentors'), which had trouble being able to 'coordinate times to suit both primary and secondary schools', which was only compounded by the travel and distance involved. Not all schools, of course, suffered the same sort of logistical difficulties, especially where they weren't as geographically dispersed. This was the case with the Mirani Cluster of schools which simply explained that 'the feeder schools are in close proximity (to the secondary school) which facilitates the collaborative nature of our planning, implementation and resourcing of our literacy strategies'.

Given that many of the clusters included primary schools and one or more secondary schools, they often provided the potential to develop more coherent educational development over the full span of schooling for students, especially boys in the geographic area. The West Wallsend High School Cluster, for example, found that the 'joint identification of shared beliefs about our boys' strengths, concerns for them, and our vision for what we want for them between teachers from the primary schools and secondary schools in the cluster has cemented a stronger feeling of being a community of schools working together in a K-12 continuum'. Somewhat more expansively, the development of close working links between schools in the Margaret River Senior High Cluster, 'which enhances sequential delivery of programmes', resulted in 'a community need being met by the cohesive efforts of that same community'.

Certainly teachers involved in this project 'expressed the view that one of the biggest benefits they have gained from their involvement in the training and development has been the opportunity to work jointly with primary and secondary teachers'; thereby helping to 'break down the barriers between the two levels of schooling'. That said, the schools involved did feel that the added resources provided were essential to bring teachers together in this way to 'decide on a common aspect of boys' education' to work through and learn from each other's approach.

In a somewhat similar vein, several clusters involving both primary and secondary schools found that the whole experience contributed to better transition between the two. The Goondiwindi Cluster, for example, noted that the cluster approach has, for the first time, allowed the schools 'to share ideas, knowledge and resources' with the result that 'communication channels are well established, and networking/collaboration is firmly entrenched'. There is regular contact between the schools and 'newly established Year 7-8 transition programmes (are) being conducted in both of the feeder primary schools by high school staff'.

In sum, the experience of all clusters involved in Stage One of this programme was that working together provided significant advantages which outweighed any logistical problems involved. Furthermore, these problems can be managed successfully through the identification of an appropriate lead school within the cluster to manage the operations of the cluster as a whole.

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