n contrast with concerns elsewhere that many boys in the earliest of school experiences lose their way with literacy, those at one school in Queensland, Australia, have consistently performed well. In comparison with Statewide average scores on tests (The Year 2 Diagnostic Net), designed to identify those children with need for additional attention in their early reading, writing or numeracy, boys of Camp Hill State Infants School have been outstanding. In this presentation, educators from the school and a critical friend speak to the phenomenon of gender-different achievement in early phase education, and to their beliefs about what is happening in their school.

**The setting**

Situated in the eastern suburbs of Brisbane, Camp Hill Infants is the last Infants school in Queensland. Parents choose to send their children to the school because of its Early Childhood focus and nurturing environment. Approximately 250 students are spread between four Preschool units, a Preparatory class, three Year 1 classes and three Year 2 classes.

The staff consists of the Principal, administration staff, 14 teachers and visiting music, library and physical education teachers many of whom have been here for ten or more years. Our school links and shares teachers from the neighbouring Primary Special Education Unit as our special needs students are mainstreamed into classrooms throughout the school. Teacher aides and parents also help with the daily organization of every aspect of the classrooms. Finally, an active Parent and Citizen Association work tirelessly to raise money to facilitate learning in numerous ways, such as automating the library, purchasing equipment such as the fort, the sandpit trucks etc. and numerous balls, skipping ropes and safety mats for ongoing physical programs.

Over the years the school has equipped each classroom with a bank of computers while at the same time setting up a pod of computers where larger groups can create interesting power point presentations. Parents groups also are in-serviced in the use of computers using these resources.
The inquiry
In 2002 our new Principal, Mrs Bev Fluckiger, reviewed the results of the Queensland Education Department Diagnostic Net results and noticed that there had been a steady improvement of both boys and girls over the past few years. The results for the past five years show the steady improvement in the performances of boys in comparison with girls. Boys have out-performed girls in literacy over the last three years.

Table 1
Camp Hill Infants State School Year 2 Diagnostic Net results (Percentage of students not requiring support)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>READING</th>
<th></th>
<th>WRITING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question was asked, "What was happening in our school to get these results?"
For the staff, they were unaware that they were doing anything different from all other Early Childhood teachers. Diligently going about their business of planning and delivering child focussed, interesting lessons which appealed to all students in the class, the teachers did not really know how others staff members operate in their classrooms as only one double teaching space exists in the school.

For many years teachers have planned units together and shared resources wherever possible, but in most cases they did not teach in front of their colleagues.

We enlisted the support of our critical friend, Professor Brendan Bartlett from Griffith University to help us answer the question everyone was asking and The Boys Flying High project was initiated.

The project investigated two aspects of boys' education
- teaching strategies that contribute to the improvement in boys' literacy.
- home/school connections that enhance boys' performance

The project involved gathering information from three kinds of sources:
(a) School and classroom pedagogy
  - Teachers observed each other’s practices in their classrooms, using both anecdotal records about the connection between teaching and management strategies and outcomes (noting the positive accommodations to include special needs students) and a specially devised observation sheet to note teachers’ pedagogy.
  - School practices (e.g., intervention practices) were documented.
(b) Students' Perspectives
- Students were interviewed about the activities and interactions they enjoy at school, home, and other places; activities and interactions they enjoy with parents, teachers and friends.

(c) School community
- Parents completed a questionnaire documenting out-of-school learning experiences of their children.

How do you find out what goes on in the classroom? The obvious answer was to go and look. This made many teachers nervous and quite anxious.

The Project employed the following Education Queensland initiative: Productive Pedagogies, a balanced theoretical framework enabling teachers to reflect critically on their practice and the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) instrument as reflective and data gathering tools.

Teachers' professional development of the elements of the Productive Pedagogies were fast tracked during 2002 and Term 1 2003. Then, using a QSRLS scoring manual designed to allow teachers to observe the Productive and personal pedagogy of their colleagues during three Literacy lessons and three Numeracy lessons, the teachers set forth into each others classrooms in Term 2, 2003. The teachers were given time to reflect on this data with their colleague. Griffith University analysed the data.

In the meantime, teachers from Camp Hill Infants have their ideas about the successes. The case studies from two teachers and the Literacy Coordinator illustrate what they see as happening in their classrooms that contribute to the Literacy development in the school.

Staff responses

Gina Irwin – Year 1 Teacher
We believe that one of the reasons that our boys at Camp Hill Infants School achieve well in contrast to other schools is the nature of our school environment.

Camp Hill Infants is a small school where it is likely that staff will know the name of each child by the end of the year. This means that the school is a close community. The idea of community that exists at Camp Hill Infants engenders a feeling of being safe. When children feel comfortable and safe in their environment they are able to be more adventurous and take more risks. It allows the children to explore and experiment within academic and social situations, try new things, succeed and fail, without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

The way the school community operates means that there are opportunities for children from Pre-school, Prep, year one and year two to interact and share their stories. The children provide each other with role models for learning. This is continued with parental involvement and interaction with the community outside of the school.

Children are individuals and the individual is valued at Camp Hill Infants. Our teachers work hard to ensure that the programs that they present encompass difference and encourage tolerance. Teachers encourage the children to be accepting and supportive
of others. They foster cooperation and understanding. Not only their teachers but also their peers encourage those children that have difficulty and success is celebrated. Teachers encourage the children to be proud not only of their own successes but also when their friends or classmates achieve personal milestones. The children are willing to cheer on their classmates as they strive toward their goals, regardless of whether it a winning entry in a competition or something as simple as remembering to put in a full stop. This has a very positive impact on self-esteem and helps children develop the confidence to "have-a-go". This works particularly well with boys as they are encouraged by their friends and praised by their peers.

The boys at Camp Hill Infants are free from the influence of older children who often hold very strict ideas about what boys can/cannot do, what boys are best at and how they should behave. Often boys abandon some forms of play early in their school career because they hear older boys making fun of their game. This does not happen at Camp Hill Infants School. The boys at our school can sing, dance, dress up, play skipping or be Mother in Home Corner without worrying that 'boys don't do that'. They can express themselves creatively through play in various situations and through this play develop the confidence to take risks and explore their imagination. They are free to develop and maintain close relationships with their friends, both male and female, without feeling that it is inappropriate. It is not uncommon for a boy to list one or more girls as their friend, invite a girl to his party or choose a girl as a partner or as a member of his group.

In our classroom we use a variety of ideas to encourage our boys to become literate. Reading and writing is a regular part of our day. It has been a since the first moment our children entered our room on the first day of term one. There is no such thing as "I don't know how to...", we just do. Reading and writing is modelled in small groups, with the whole class and with individuals. We try to show that reading and writing are purposeful. We read and write a variety of texts for a variety of purposes.

Reading and writing happen in many different ways throughout the day. We use play-based activities to achieve this purpose. We use Lego letters, magna doodles, play dough and magnetic letters etc. to write words or make sentences. We have a variety of media for the children to use when writing ranging from various textures of paper, felt pens, whiteboards, chalk boards and paint or sand trays. The children's attempts at writing are valued regardless of accuracy or ability. The first story ever written that consists of a line of scribble and a picture is celebrated, praised, shared with others and displayed with pride. Each small step forward toward mastering writing is acknowledged and encouraged.

One of the most effective ways of fostering this self-belief is the use of a "Star Writer" cape. The cape is bright red velvet with glittery writing on the back. We use the cape to reward children for their attempts at writing and to encourage them to take more risks or have a go next time. What began as a simple alternative to stickers or stamps has had a significant impact on all children but particularly on boys. Dressing up like a super hero is always a popular pastime with young boys as evidenced by the number of Spidermen, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Harry Potters at our Book Parade. Being a Star Writer means that they are super heroes. The super power that they possess,
however, does not involve flying or spinning webs but thinking, writing and engaging in literacy. The reading and writing that occurs when children compose stories and compose these stories with joyful ease, is certainly heroic. The chance to declare their acts of heroism to the world is a not to be missed opportunity. This approach seems to give the children the strong belief that they are writers and that writing is easy. With this positive self-belief it is easy then, as each child gradually develops personal competency, to guide them and assist them with the conventions of written language.

Using a variety of tools, equipment and strategies in this way makes it easy for some boys to access reading and writing in a familiar and comfortable way. When a child is playing with the play dough, magna doodle or sand tray, making letters, words or sentences, it is easy to forget to feel inhibited, overwhelmed or inadequate. They are just enjoying the experience of learning.

When a child shows an excellent effort in reading or writing that demonstrates a personal triumph or gain, they are praised and rewarded by giving them a star on a string to wear. These stars are simply a rectangle of cardboard with a star and a piece of string to wear it around their neck. This allows the children to show that they have achieved super star success with some aspect of learning and allows them the opportunity to tell others what they have achieved. People notice a large coloured, cardboard necklace and invariably ask, "What did you get that for?" or "What did you do that made you a star?" You get to tell everyone what a clever learner you are!

Regular tracking and assessment of children is essential. Reading with the children individually or as a part of small group activities, discussion with the whole class or individuals about what needs to happen or what is happening in their writing as well as working with small groups to target particular difficulties and monitor their progress allows teachers and also children to find out what is happening with their learning.

Karyn Noble – Year 2 Teacher

What happens at Camp Hill Infants State School?

The teachers at Camp Hill Infants use numerous strategies in their everyday teaching to encourage both boys and girls in their quest for literacy success.

Through child focused curriculum planning we cater for the individual needs of the children in our classes and use our knowledge of both male and female interests to develop real life units in which all children will be willing and eager to participate.

Units are all conducive to both boys and girls’ interests and involvement. These include titles such as

- "What is Fantasy?"
- "What’s in our Backyard?"
- "How do toys move?"

For example – within the unit "What is Fantasy?" children’s individual interests are explicitly sought and accommodated. If girls are interested in fairies and princesses then their reading and writing can follow this path while boys may be more interested in monsters, dragons and ogres and so therefore their literacy will differ, but at the same time come under the one umbrella. These male interest areas are discovered through
class discussion as well as via a 'most borrowed books by boys' list from the school library.

Teachers at Camp Hill Infants assess children continually. We use different tools. Running records for reading are done early in the year in order to identify children requiring help, rather than waiting for the Year 2 Net results. This knowledge is also used to develop groups in which the children work within the literacy block and throughout their school day. Teachers have high expectations that children will learn. We make this obvious and that demands success from each child — and virtually ensures it.

Each day begins with free time in the classroom that is spent with parents, grandparents and friends. Children are encouraged to choose activities that interest them and a great variety of experiences are provided. Children enjoy time on the computers, building wonderful towers in the block area, drawing pictures, reading books, writing stories or constructing creations from cardboard boxes and containers. This promotes the use of children's imagination and the sharing time at the conclusion of these activities gives children an opportunity for ownership and positive peer praise for their creations.

Classes within the school environment involve children in the day-to-day planning of timetables, weekly plans and unit plans. This co-construction of the day enables them. They have some prior knowledge of the day's agenda and develop ownership for what happens with their learning. This particularly aids in reassuring autistic boys who are often anxious about the day's events. Through this collaborative construction of aspects of the curriculum the children develop and maintain a commitment to their class tasks and a willingness to strive for success.

Noela Rogers – Literacy Coordinator

Curriculum coordination
Teachers at Camp Hill Infants co-operatively develop child-focussed Curriculum Plans, ensuring to cater for the individual needs of all students — especially boys. The focus in Literacy as well as the inquiries developed for the Integrated Units are particularly interesting for boys.

As part of our internal monitoring of students' progress, targets and standards are set realistically. For example, in this school the target for all children in reading on completion of Year 1 is Reading Recovery Level 10. At the end of Year 2 it is expected that students will attain Level 20. A variety of genres are included in these reading levels as students begin to experience the lifelong reading journey in their multiliterate worlds.

Classroom monitoring informs the teachers of learning gains achieved by students. This monitoring also helps the planning at classroom level, as well as at whole-of-school level. Internal monitoring ensures that the curriculum programming focuses on each student's development. Assessment helps to identify those students requiring early intervention.

Intervention may come in the form of Speech Therapy, Motor programs, Guidance assessment, and referrals to outside agencies — all of which are discussed through an active Student Welfare Committee. Early intervention in literacy is a point in time response to the development of the children. During Year 1, classroom teachers monitor students and those identified as needing support are referred to the Literacy Coordinator for further assessment.
Tools used may include
- Reading Recovery Identification sheets
- Waddington diagnostic Reading and Spelling Tests
- SPIOL (Speech Patterns in Oral Language).

Programs are arranged for these students. This may take the form of a one-on-one lesson over a period of time or working with groups within the classroom literacy block. Over the weeks, success comes at different rates. It is delightful to see a child gradually realise that he is now a "reader" and his appetite for books and knowledge is boundless.

Parent helpers and aides are another valuable help to teachers in their classrooms. By reading with students when changing home readers, supervising small groups, helping with resources and supporting students in social interactions, they ensure that students have contact in many different forms with a variety of adults. This allows them to gain confidence and success in their learning.

Behaviour management
Camp Hill Infants Behaviour Management Policy has been constructed through consultation with all stakeholders, namely, students, parents and teachers.

These programs are proactive. At the beginning of each year a classroom teacher discusses with the class a set of class rules that set out roles and responsibilities of the teacher and students, allowing each student to learn to his/her capacity. Explicitly teaching skills through modelling, role-play and the Stop, Think and Do strategy fosters and encourages students' positive and successful interactions with their peers.

For students who require special attention, time is arranged with a teacher who discusses appropriate behaviours, models the required behaviours and then supports them when returning to the playground. Respecting others and the valuable time and space assist in the management of students and classrooms.

Enrichment activities
Whole school enrichment activities ensure learning is fun and provides yet another forum for success. Each week all children in years one and two are involved in a variety of activities including art, music, computers, robotics, religion and sport to encourage and foster a diversity of skills. The child-focused, interesting lessons appeal to all children and promote enjoyment and fun at school.

Home – school connection
Camp Hill Infants School operates on an open door policy where parents are encouraged to participate in all forms of their children's school activities. For some this may mean coming into the classroom before school and viewing the children's work each day or playing games. For others, it may be that they are able to participate on a regular basis in daily reading and other literacy activities.

During the year, special days such as Grandparents Day, Fun-day Monday, Book Parade Day and Sports Day welcome parents, grandparents and friends to join with the children in many the diverse range of activities arranged for them by the teachers.
Only a few of the many interrelated elements that go into making Camp Hill Infants State School what it is have been mentioned. The hard work and dedication of staff to build a warm and supportive environment for children and to ensure their successes in all areas combine to enhance literacy achievements by both boys and girls.

Boys succeed in Literacy At Camp Hill Infants because LEARNING IS FUN.

**Conclusion**

The case studies provide important perspective for answers to the question raised at the beginning of this paper. Students at this school continue to achieve at levels of excellence and the first three authors have attempted to align their knowledge of this success with the observations they have made as working professionals. It is an alignment dependent on the reflective nature of the exercise in asking them as colleagues to bring to consciousness – and to language – thoughts, words and deeds that are so automatised in their professional routines. One described the intimacy of a small-school environment and the confidence for a youngster that springs from it – confidence in exploring learning free of inhibiting factors on a timely evolution of gendered notions of identity and success. Of course, children nurtured by such freedoms and guidance will succeed; and succeed they do.

A second assigned great store to curriculum planning at the school. She informed us that careful and clever attention by teachers to choosing evocative themes was a procedure that clued them into eliciting children's interests at informing rather than generic levels. In turn this brought children into active roles in timetabling and in building deliberate prior knowledge of content domains as they gained agency in the construction of their learning. Her account reminds us of the intimacy perspective, too, as we image the deliberate linking of school and home with free time in the classroom spent with parents, grandparents and friends. Also we see an affirmation of the idea that children are encouraged to stretch through intellectual effort. Her proposition is that children at the school are not only urged, "to maintain a commitment to their class tasks and a willingness to strive for success", but also that they are shown how to do this.

The third of my colleagues spoke also of child-centered curriculum, and close, nurturing environment as features of what happens at this school. She noted that the former is especially important for boys with teachers being particularly attentive to the significance of "interests" and deliberate in incorporating these into literacy and learning activities. She emphatically see "fun" at the centre of the interactions and built environments of learning. Her account of managed behaviour indicates a major application where teachers are explicit in teaching "how to" skills – another thematic aspect of the three stories. Her view that such skills foster and encourage positive and successful interactions amongst children reflect similar attention to children's "striving" and "intellectual stretching" that we had seen in the previous accounts.

In summary, the three cases provide individual perspectives with broad differences and some interestingly similar themes. This is a pattern that may represent the culture of the school; one in which development of individuality is planned and celebrated along with growth in key areas of social and intellectual development. If the question is to be answered from these accounts alone, it is that at Camp Hill Infants State School teachers
know that children’s worth appreciates with success and that the complex elements that underpin it need to be actioned as well as theorised. This assessment makes for interesting comparison with that reached in the second and related paper (Bartlett, Fluckiger & Grimbeek, 2004) in volume 1 of these conference proceedings where a somewhat different research is reported.

Reference