

**EDUCATION QUEENSLAND SUBMISSION TO THE FEDERAL INQUIRY
INTO BOYS' EDUCATION**

Prepared by the EQ Boys' Education Reference Group

Boys and Education in Queensland State Schools

Education Queensland (EQ) reviewed its approach to gender equity in 1991, when it developed its *Gender Equity in Education Policy* for Queensland schools. Since then, projects have focused on identifying pressures arising for male and female students in relation to gendered expectations in both schooling and the wider society. EQ's focus is not on gender wars and victim debates, but rather on effective school reform that improves educational outcomes for all students and prepares them for productive work and positive relationships in a global society. Such reform is central to the effective implementation of EQ's statewide *Boys' Education Strategy*.

Issues of concern raised by Queensland school communities in relation to boys' education include: performance in literacy and across a range of subject areas; behaviour (disruption, suspension and exclusions); school completion to Year 12 or equivalent; and social and relationship skills. It is much easier to access data on test outcomes, retention, suspensions and exclusions than data on social and relationship skills and thus the frequent focus of school community concerns are quantitative measures indicating that:

- In Queensland primary schools, girls' performance in literacy (Year 2 – Reading and Writing, Years 3, 5 and 7 – Reading, Viewing, Writing and Spelling) is substantially better than boys' and this is especially true with regards to Writing.
- In Years 10 and 12 achievement, girls outperformed boys in most subject areas, particularly in English.
- Retention rates are better for girls than for boys - 78% of girls in Year 8 in 1994 appear to have completed Year 12, compared with 66% of boys.
- In 1999 significantly more girls than boys participated in the arts and humanities while there was a significant under-participation of girls in Maths B, Maths C, Physics and Information Technology.
- 80% of incidents of suspension or exclusion involve boys.

Data such as the above have fuelled much debate in terms of boys as victims of schooling, but systemic data from EQ (1999) indicate that the incidence of students at educational risk is not confined to particular student groups or school contexts. Such a focus on a particular influence on educational performance, while perceived to be important by a certain cohort or type of school, may well mask emerging patterns of students at risk within the system. The data indicate, for example, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls are substantially more at risk than boys as a whole. A multivariate analysis enables more specific provision rather than the current 'broad-banded' approaches in place, many of which assume the homogeneity of target groups.

Education Queensland has encouraged schools to move away from notions of 'target groups' towards understandings that take into account the impact on student learning of complex interactions of cultural, economic, geographic and social factors. The assumption that second language status, location or gender can act in and of themselves as free-standing, self-contained categories does not reflect the data or offer productive ways forward. It is clear that the single strongest indicator of under-provision appears to be socio-economic status, and that poverty interacts in complex ways with these other categorisations. For example, in its recent Literacy Review and Strategy, *Literate Futures*, EQ recognises that students who are at educational risk in terms of literacy are boys from lower socio-economic groups and this includes many Indigenous boys. The importance of a consideration of intersecting factors as they impact on both boys and girls in diverse school communities is obvious in developing programs that meet the needs Indigenous students.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students intersecting contextual factors, such as poverty, geographical isolation in addition to historical, language and cultural factors impinge on educational outcomes. Additional factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include conditions of systemic underprovision such as non-inclusive curriculum materials and programs, ineffective pedagogy and lack of inclusive student support processes. Within some

contexts, these factors are further exacerbated by racism, be it institutionalised or personal in nature. The impact of these intersecting factors is evidenced in systemic data that indicate high levels of underachievement by groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys. The general trend shows that Indigenous students perform well below non-Indigenous students in most aspects of educational achievement, particularly literacy and numeracy. Further analysis reveals that a combination of conditions, particularly socio-economic and rurality/remoteness, create Indigenous student cohorts that experience minimal success which ultimately reinforces a cycle of despair characterised by long-term unemployment, overrepresentation in crime and domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse, and other elements of social exclusion.

The issues that impinge on non-Indigenous boys, e.g. identity, masculinity, gender roles, etc. are further exacerbated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys when a cultural overlay presents another dimension. In focussing on the issue of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys in education, there is a critical need to develop an understanding of the above factors and their implications. Such awareness will inform the process of educational reform and serve to improve the outcomes for all students.

Much of the hard data collected on boys' education are framed in terms of 'achievement' and 'education' and do not deal with broader and significant issues about boys' identity and alienation. The vast social changes that have taken place since the 1970s have left several generations struggling to reconceptualize their roles and identities. These changes have had profound effects upon the lives of both men and women, as well as having impacted upon 'the family'. Many men have been confused as their expectations of a life as breadwinner and head of the family were overturned by changing patterns of employment and increases in divorce and one-parent families. Simultaneously, many women who grew up with the belief that as women they would fill the role of mother and full-time homemaker have had to re-conceptualise their parenting and work responsibilities. In 2000, it is no longer productive to continue to assume that the traditional gender roles of the twentieth century will provide children with the personal skills and resources adequate for leading fulfilling personal and professional lives in the future. Looking primarily at issues of participation, achievement and retention can mask other potential forms of disadvantage. Such statistics are silent about significant experiences of schooling such as sex-based and race-based harassment and schooling's impact on post-school pathways. All students deserve an experience of schooling that facilitates the development of diverse knowledges and skills including interpersonal and civic skills, and that enhances their social and cultural capacities. Students, parents, and teachers need opportunities to explore how family, work and social relationships can be affected by gender and other factors.

Education Queensland strategies to improve the outcomes of students at educational risk, including the newly introduced *Boys' Education Strategy*, are based on sound national and international research on effective school reform and on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that improves the social and the educational outcomes of all students. Moreover, they acknowledge that risk is increasingly manifested in different ways in different locations requiring localised solutions supported by all stakeholders.

These programs seek to involve schools in examining the social, cultural, geographic and economic impacts on students in their communities, rather than taking a unidimensional target groups approach. The programs can be divided into two broad categories – those that advocate for and support school reform to improve the learning outcomes of all students; and those that provide specific insight into gender as it intersects with factors such as race, socio-economic status, location and cultural and linguistic diversity. The platform for these initiatives is *Queensland State Education - 2010 (QSE – 2010)*.

Queensland State Education - 2010

QSE - 2010 was formulated after a major consultation (approximately 10,000 people across the state) to identify the needs of state school communities for the next decade. It is a

response to the wishes of parents to maximise the life chances of their children in a knowledge-based society and to the needs of community and business for an educated workforce to support economic and social development. The *QSE - 2010* document outlines some of the emerging social and economic factors resulting from a globalised society: new family and work pressures; greater mobility; unemployment and underemployment; the widening poverty gap, with a parallel gap in access to new technologies; and a widening gap in services and cultural opportunities between urban and rural areas. These new divides have far-reaching impacts on students, beyond those that can be explained by gender or linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Central to the strategic directions outlined in the document is the recognition of the need to build social networks that are committed to local problem solving and the development of new forms of local collaboration and civic education. This focus on social capital emphasises the need for schools to be active in building trust across different interests. This has implications for how schools might handle the boys' debate since, in many communities, the debate has polarised teachers and parents. Furthermore, polarised approaches to gender issues are likely to result in responses predisposed to simple oppositional solutions, solutions that disregard differences and ambiguities and that do not result in improved learning outcomes for students but which are work intensive for teachers and their school communities. The recently released DETYA report (2000, p.26) notes:

The 1996 UNESCO Report on education for the twenty-first century (Delors 1996) argues that worldwide we are experiencing 'an acute crisis in social cohesion' in large part a result of 'growing inequality due to rising poverty and exclusion' (p. 54). Moreover, this phenomenon 'is not just a question of the disparities between nations or regions of the world, but of deep divides between social groups in both developed and developing countries' (Delors 1996, p. 54). The development of research and policy in the gender equity field cannot proceed as if oblivious of this social crisis. Its effects clearly cut across both genders, and have a profound and fundamental impact on educational participation, performance and outcomes (Rizvi 1994, Delors 1996). Just as schools and education systems have a responsibility to ensure that gender differences do not convert to disadvantages, so too do they have a responsibility to work against the risk of material differences and inequalities converting into educational disadvantages. The challenge is to devise a way forward that acknowledges the many interrelated elements of 'equity' and disadvantage and yet, at the same time remains sufficiently focused to target priority areas for reform.

Schooling is a key process for developing the skills for building the social trust, inclusiveness and cohesion that maintains the well being of our own diverse communities, and develops respectful relations with others. *QSE - 2010* provides an unequivocal commitment to:

- equity for all students;
- making full use of the talents of the workforce by removing gender and any form of cultural and generational discrimination;
- providing students with the skills for productive family, work and civic lives;
- actively addressing divisiveness to generate inclusiveness and emphasising the things that unite us as people; and
- building trust and social capital across communities.

Because human and social capital develop within families and through wider networks, Queensland state schools will be reconceptualized as part of that learning society and become embedded in communities – local and global – in new ways. This will transform the means and ends of teaching and learning in schools – those involved, the way it occurs, and the principles on which the curriculum is constructed. It regards the teacher student relationship as the central element in building successful experiences for all students. It therefore focuses system support on meeting teachers' needs for improved pedagogical and curriculum strategies, responsive to the diverse needs of students.

A major emphasis in *QSE – 2010* is that effective school reform occurs with ownership, leadership, responsibility and accountability at the grassroots level. It includes an appreciation of:

- the importance of positive community school relationships, partnerships and alliances;
- the need for community profile information/data to inform school programs;
- the importance of building effective school and local industry partnerships;
- different repertoires of practice for diverse groups of students rather than one pedagogical method;
- the need to provide principled research-based frameworks for guiding the development of whole-school plans; and
- whole-school plans that are based on close analysis of local and community resources and needs.

Major EQ initiatives which embrace these directions include: the *New Basics Framework*; the *IDEAS Project*; *Partners for Success*; the *Literacy Review/Strategy* and the *Framework for Students at Educational Risk*. Furthermore, a number of these initiatives are able to provide exemplars of effective practice that have led to improvement in outcomes for students deemed to be at educational risk. Education Queensland's *Boys' Education Strategy* is directed and informed by managers from these key initiatives.

Boys' Education Strategy

The *Boys' Education Strategy* has two complementary key dimensions: 1) leadership, coordination and research and 2) communication and teacher development. The major element of the leadership arm of the strategy is an initiative which coordinates and foregrounds activities to address the under-performance and learning problems of boys within major departmental programs. A Boys' Education Reference Group has been formed as part of this element and consists of managers of these key programs who aim to ensure that:

- strategies to improve outcomes for boys are informed by cutting edge research and practice on school reform and on effective pedagogy and curriculum;
- recommended strategies for the improvement of learning outcomes for boys are aligned with and informed by key departmental activities;
- strategies are seen as integral to the broader agenda for reform of education in Queensland state schools to meet the challenges of work and family cultures of new times;
- outcomes of the activities are monitored regularly with reports to the Director-General;
- core business activities are informed by the major Australian Research Council/SPIRT research project in which James Cook University and Education Queensland are partners, "Factors affecting boys' engagement with schooling at the secondary level".

The Communication and Teacher Development arm of the Strategy recognises that teachers need access to cutting-edge research and that they need professional space to examine their values and practices in relation to desired educational outcomes for boys. It also acknowledges the importance of building strong community relationships when developing strategies in diverse communities. Activities include:

- state-wide Boys and Schooling workshops that draw on the expertise of school practitioners and researchers across Queensland;
- the development of a CD-based information kit to be distributed to all school communities – this package will assist school communities to deal proactively with the economic and social changes that impact on the personal and working lives of men and boys; and

- the development of a discussion list and website so that schools can share concerns and exchange effective strategies in order to improve learning outcomes for diverse groups of boys.

The School Planning and Accountability processes in place for Queensland state schools enables the *Boys' Education Strategy* to be integrated into the planning and accountability process of schools, i.e. schools can assemble data and reflect on their performance to date, set new goals, identify strategies such as professional development, and report on achievement. Through this process schools are accountable to the Department and to their community for their efforts.

Education Queensland and School Reform

Key elements of successful school reform as recognised by national and international research include: internal school development; local capacity building; and, supportive external infrastructure. Fullan (2000) describes critical aspects of these three elements -

- **Teachers and administrators who:**
 - 1) form a professional learning community;
 - 2) focus on curriculum and students' work (through assessment)
 - 3) change their instructional practice accordingly to get better results.
- **Using their internal collaborative strength to build relationships with their communities.** Successful schools deal with and turn to their advantage: parents and community; technology; corporate connections; government policy; and the wider teaching profession.
- **A supportive external infrastructure** is critical for successful reform including: policies focusing on decentralization, local capacity building, rigorous external accountability and stimulation of innovation.

These elements are foregrounded in the following core EQ initiatives and activities that have as their prime focus the improvement of educational outcomes for all students.

The New Basics Framework

This Framework has been informed by the University of Queensland's School Reform Longitudinal Study that was initiated by EQ in 1998. This is the largest observational study of classroom pedagogy and student outcomes to date in Australian education. The aim of the SRLS was to show which pedagogies make a difference for which groups (lower socio-economic, Indigenous etc) in which community contexts. It was designed to examine how systemic and organisational aspects of Queensland school reform might support multiple forms of pedagogy that work to improve outcomes for all students especially those considered to be at educational risk. As a result of the Framework, learning will extend beyond the confines of the classroom into the broader community.

The Framework is based on five fundamental educational premises:

1. **The pedagogy premise:** Improved student outcomes require a systematic, principled and practical coordination of the message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment;
2. **The futures premise:** Outcomes should be futures-oriented, based on a philosophy of education committed to the preparation of students for new workplaces, technologies and cultures;
3. **The equity premise:** A principled selection of important, common learnings should address the economic and cultural aspirations of the most at risk and culturally diverse communities;

4. **The research premise:** Reconstruction of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment needs to be explicitly guided by documented analysis and rigorous discussion of current school practices; and
5. **The professional learning community premise:** Improved, equitable student outcomes and effective reforms in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment require high levels of teacher professionalism, sustained intellectual work and shared 'ownership' of reform within dynamic school communities focused on learning.

The New Basics Project involves the design of a curriculum, pedagogy and assessment framework that deals with new student identities, new technologies, diverse communities and complex cultures. The Project includes a four-year trial with 38 volunteer schools. It will be supported by a strong research program that will provide qualitative and quantitative data on student outcomes, classroom pedagogy, organisational capacity of schools, and the external support needed for pedagogic change.

Curriculum delivery will focus on the New Basics, four clusters of practices that are essential for survival in the worlds that students have to deal with. These four areas of transdisciplinary learning include: Life Pathways and Social Futures; Communications Media; Active Citizenship; and, Environments and Technologies. These clusters will engage students with the ongoing change that characterises social, technological and economic conditions. Rich Tasks (informed by the New Basics) are specific activities that students 'do' that have real-world value and use, for example, Year 3 Rich Task – No 2, Web Page: *Students will show that they are able to create an interactive web page in order to communicate with students from other schools about themselves, their school and their community. They gather and organise information, present it in imaginative formats and respond in appropriate ways to questions and requests from other students.*

The activities associated with the Rich Tasks in the New Basics Framework will require both males and females to undertake tasks that have the potential to challenge their preconceptions of sex-role appropriate activities. Potential for change also exists in the Life Pathways and Social Futures area that will incorporate the dynamic relationships within and between categories of self, and social and cultural contexts. This category will provide opportunities for students to consider positive gender identities in a rapidly changing global society.

The New Basics necessitate rich and authentic assessment tasks and an important component of the trial is the development and implementation of Rich Tasks – specific activities that students undertake that have real-world value and use and that are significant in terms of students' local communities. Rich Tasks require all students to extend their repertoires of practice to encompass those that are often treated as being more appropriate to one gender or the other. Rich Tasks are considered to suit boys better than do contrived tasks. The Rich Tasks also offer opportunities for more equitable forms of assessment that can cater for a more diverse range of learning styles benefiting both boys and girls.

***IDEAS* (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools) Project**

This project has its conceptual origins in systematic reform efforts that have been documented as contributing to enhanced student achievement in literacy, numeracy, science and social studies across variables of age, gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic position. School communities involved in the *IDEAS* Project have been guided by the following principles: successful school achievement occurs when the school's vision is clearly focused on a specific and concrete ideal; when the organisational structures of teachers' work support that ideal; when pedagogy is directed at that ideal; and when system supports are available to facilitate that ideal. The Project, which focuses on the development of strong professional communities to achieve a shared vision, involves over 50 schools in clusters in diverse communities throughout Queensland.

Literacy Review and Strategy

A futures-oriented approach to literacy is to be launched by EQ. This is the result of the Literacy Review commissioned by Education Queensland that reviewed national and international research and current policies, school practices and resources. One of the terms of reference of the Literacy Review was a consideration of literacies that meet the needs of students at educational risk. As a result of an analysis of the research concerned with the literacy needs of boys, the report of the Literacy Review notes that measures specifically directed towards boys' interests and preferences can be helpful, but they are likely to be inadequate in the absence of overarching policies concerned with teaching quality across the school.

The strategies that will be implemented as a result of the Literacy Review are based on an understanding and appreciation of diverse Queensland communities, and a principled commitment to community improvement and innovation through education. Central to the approach provided in the Literacy Review Report is the belief that no community is in deficit - linguistically, culturally or intellectually. At the same time, there is recognition that there are many Queensland communities struggling to come to terms with new economic patterns and flows. Through improved literacy outcomes for students, Education Queensland seeks to assist schools *to graduate young people who have a broad repertoire of experiences with purposeful tasks, and thus who can enrich community experience, open and expand their life pathways, and contribute to the social and economic fabric of communities.* (Report of the Literacy Review for Queensland State Schools, p121.)

The Literacy Review Report focuses on local innovation and school community links and describes effective literacy education as reliant on teachers' professionalism, local flexibility and innovation in program development at the school level. It emphasises the need for teachers to have the skills and professional space to enable them to read and analyse community and student cultural change, and the necessity to modulate their programs on that basis, selecting and developing approaches that show demonstrable changes in outcomes for diverse groups of students.

The Literacy Review Report emphasises and provides avenues for the provision of a strong research-based and practical framework for the construction of whole-school programs. Furthermore, it focuses on the provision of essential conditions for the consolidation, expansion and development of what amounts to the social capital of schools and literacy educators: their professional development networks and links with each other, with professional associations, with teacher education institutions, and with other clearinghouses and stakeholders at the state, national and international levels.

Middle Schooling Initiative

Research findings indicate that there is a prevalence of under-achievement and disengagement from productive learning among students in the middle-years, but particularly for some groups of boys and this is reflected in exclusion and suspension data.

Plans are in place for some new schools to provide for the entire P-12 age range. The development of these schools will provide opportunities for the exercise of a high degree of flexibility in organisation. This will enable an integrated implementation of curriculum in a local community. Where feasible, existing primary/secondary schools may also apply to become P-12 schools. Although P-12 schools will facilitate a high degree of organisational and structural flexibility, EQ is aware that a middle-years philosophy is not dependent upon bricks and mortar but is about education that is outcomes based, learner centred, collaboratively organised, flexibly constructed, ethically aware, community oriented and adequately resourced.

Specific Initiatives Addressing Needs of Students at Educational Risk

Framework for Students and Educational Risk

The *Framework for Students at Educational Risk* is identified in the *QSE - 2010* document as one of the strategies central to improving learning in state schools. The Framework acknowledges that in recent times, a new map of educational risk is evolving as significant gaps in opportunity, services, education and lifestyle divide the affluent from the poor, and rural communities from urban communities resulting in fragmentation within communities. In some communities, optimism for the future is low, capacity to organise for collective goals has diminished, and young people are alienated from schooling and communities. The Framework emphasises that single-dimensional target group strategies are no longer enough to explain the inter-related and cumulative social, cultural, geographic and economic impacts on communities, particularly in localised settings.

The purpose of the framework is to:

- increase significantly the number of students completing a full 12 years of schooling or its equivalent;
- ensure that all students achieve educational outcomes to a level acceptable across the community, and so that they are able, according to their potential, to participate in employment, lead fulfilling personal lives, and practise active citizenship in their communities, local, national and global.

The key elements of the Framework are:

- A set of Assurances for the Queensland community about the quality and intent of services provided in Queensland schools; and
- A Policy that sets out the roles and responsibilities for EQ staff at all levels.

The Framework supports the school reform agenda outlined in *QSE - 2010*. It endorses the freedom of schools to develop distinctive, innovative approaches to schooling in local community contexts while simultaneously recognising the need to support teachers in the development of professional learning opportunities for developing a repertoire of pedagogical and curriculum skills relevant to teaching diverse groups of students.

Boys' Education Strategy

(as described above)

SPIRT Research Project

Education Queensland is an industry partner with James Cook University in a major three-year Australian Research Council/Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs SPIRT (Strategic Partnerships with Industry – Research and Training Scheme) research project. The Project, entitled “Factors affecting boys’ engagement with schooling at the secondary level”, will examine the decision-making by which boys determine their engagement with school, including their beliefs about the labour market, and how the construction of masculinity influences their imagined futures. Interviews and survey data will provide important understandings of boys’ limited engagement with school, and a contribution to educational policy and practice on these issues.

The Boys, Gender and Schooling Project

There is continued need for gender reforms in education for both boys and girls in order to broaden options for all students. In particular, there is a need to challenge dominant versions of masculinity and femininity that reduce the life options for boys, while also making life in schools difficult for many. This Project has provided professional development and support to 10 schools in diverse communities throughout Queensland. The school communities are engaged in action research to improve educational outcomes for boys and to promote gender equitable behaviours and attitudes. Associated with the project is the development of self-paced professional development modules entitled *Boys, Gender and Schooling* that are available on the EQ Internet. Both the project and the modules draw on current research that identifies critical gender issues such as violence and risk-taking behaviours as well as poverty, geographical location and culture, factors related to unequal educational outcomes for diverse groups of boys. Information from project schools has informed the year 2000 phase of the project that involves the development of an on-line learning module for pre-service and in-service teachers to assist them to develop whole school programs to meet the literacy needs of students in diverse communities.

Partners for Success – Strategy for Continuous Improvement of Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland

The Strategy was developed in response to the findings of a comprehensive review conducted in 1999. The review identified the need for a new policy to drive systemic and school-based change, for a responsive and strategic approach which empowered schools in partnership with their indigenous communities to develop solutions to local issues. The principle underpinning the Strategy is recognition that the achievement of continuous improvement is a responsibility shared between EQ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Strategy sees partnerships between schools and communities based on a shared vision of the role of education in the lives of students and high expectations of them, as being fundamental to improving student outcomes.

Anti-Racism – Under the Skin Project

This Project involves the development and trial of the package “Under the Skin: Combating Racism in Queensland Schools Professional Development Package”. The Project aims to develop good-practice exemplars of curriculum that involve effective pedagogies for dealing with cultural diversity in a contemporary context. This resource is designed to support whole schools and individual teachers in creating an environment that can engage all members of the school community in creating a culture that counters racism.

Two units of work have been developed as exemplars of good practice for addressing issues of racism. These units focus on the Key Learning Areas of Study of Society and the Environment and English, and on the draft New Basics Rich Task No. 6, National Identity, War and Migration. Some of the trial schools are also involved in the New Basics Project and the Ideas Project. Countering racism throughout the curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of learning outcomes for all students.

Bullying No Way

In 1999, state schools were required to review their Behaviour Management Plans, particularly focusing on anti-violence and anti-bullying strategies. The *Bullying – No Way* resource was developed and sent to schools in 1998 to help support this process. This is a professional development resource aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding about the issues of bullying so that staff are able to develop preventive responses to bullying issues. A core component of the resource is the presentation of frameworks to assist school communities to understand the gendered dimension of much bullying.

Queensland Government Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (QGYSPPS)

EQ is one of the main stakeholders in the QGYSPPS, which is a whole-of-government initiative aimed at addressing the issue of youth suicide. The goal of the Strategy is to prevent deliberate self-harming behaviour, particularly suicide, and to reduce the impact of youth suicide on individuals, families and communities through coordinated and integrated life-affirming strategies that enhance the quality of life for young people, their families and their communities.

A major focus of the Strategy has been the establishment of effective community networks that work towards a coordinated approach to youth suicide prevention, and EQ plays an important role in these networks. School staff have also been encouraged to access quality training programs in suicide awareness and prevention, such as *Living Works*.

Concluding Comments

Education Queensland initiatives introduced to improve the educational outcomes of boys are informed by national and international research on effective school reform and on the knowledge and concerns of practitioners and parents in school communities. Furthermore, the strategies have substance; they are long-term and far-reaching. They are designed to enhance students' experiences of schooling and to facilitate the development of the social, cultural and economic capital necessary for productive and positive post-school pathways in a global networked society. Finally and importantly, they encourage schools to develop professional learning communities in which teachers develop a repertoire of pedagogical and curriculum skills relevant to teaching diverse groups of students. They are mindful, therefore, of the needs of diverse groups of boys - of rural boys, of indigenous boys, of boys from diverse cultural backgrounds, and of boys from professional and working-class backgrounds. The following case studies illustrate how whole-school community programs incorporating effective principles of school reform have been able to improve learning outcomes for diverse groups of students including boys.

Exemplars of effective practice

Garbutt State School

The Garbutt Indigenous Literacy Program is part of the highly innovative holistic language initiative that targets all 119 indigenous students in Years 1-7. To facilitate the program, student literacy strengths and weaknesses are documented and addressed. Individual needs are catered for through innovative detailed and flexible planning and timetabling.

The program utilises three broad strategies to improve student literacy:

1. Improving basic literacy skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening through:
 - DETYA tutoring;
 - the Garbutt Reading Improvement Program (GRIPP);
 - implementation of "The Sound Way" - a phonemic awareness program.

2. Community involvement with relevant cultural emphasis through:
 - a cultural studies program;
 - community volunteers and projects;
 - concentrated language encounters;
 - NAIDOC week celebrations;
 - Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Committee;
 - parent liaison officers;
 - community/school gardens.

3. Appropriate resources and IT through:
 - a variety of resources with an emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture;
 - eight new computers and specialised software;
 - student access to the internet.

In the last year the literacy outcomes of the program have far surpassed expectations. The outcomes of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature are excellent:

- students have demonstrated an outstanding improvement in basic literacy skills in the last year. Testing has tracked an improvement in reading word recognition, reading accuracy and reading comprehension of up to two to four years in reading age level in just one term. The average improvement by indigenous students in spelling age in Semester 1 was 1.5 years;
- community liaising has virtually eliminated chronic absenteeism and truancy;
- in the past year, indigenous students' school reports have recorded significant academic improvement in all areas of literacy;
- 58 percent of tutored students improved from limited or very limited achievement in all areas of literacy to sound achievement or better.

St Paul's State Primary School

St Paul's State Primary School at Moa Island in the Torres Straits has implemented a "Whole School Community Living Education Partnership" strategy that has resulted in improved literacy and numeracy for students across the school population. St Paul's is one of two communities situated on Moa Island in the Torres Strait. As well as being a relatively young school, it is also geographically isolated. Adding to its complexity is the fact that of the 65 students enrolled, 61 are Torres Strait Islanders who are learning to speak English as a foreign and/or second language.

When tested on age-based running records in March 1998, 67% of students from Years 3 - 7 were reading below age. Additionally, the number of students caught in the Year 2 Diagnostic Net in 1997 were 70% Reading, 90% Writing, 50% Numeracy.

The Principal notes that previously many stop-gap measures had been trialled to improve literacy and numeracy with varying degrees of short-term success. The schools whole-school community plan includes three major goals: to ensure smooth, productive transition from home to school; to provide an appropriate and supportive environment for every student; to provide parents/community with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support student learning both at home and through involvement at all levels within the school. Strategies were implemented at all levels of the school community and include strategies such as: community-based K - P program; P - 1 transition program; structured homework program; bedtime story program; English as a Foreign Language program; community-school

behaviour program; comprehensive professional development program including traineeships; parent education programs; regular dialogue with community councillors/elders.

Gains in the Year 2 results 1998/9/2000 since this program was initiated are shown below as the percentage of students *caught*:

Year	Reading	Writing	Numeracy
1995	90%	90%	90%
1996	60%	20%	40%
1997	70%	90%	50%
1998	50%	20%	20%
1999	0%	0%	0%
2000	0%	0%	0%

Thabeban State School

The following quote is foregrounded in Thabeban State School's documentation of a whole-school program introduced to improve learning outcomes for students in 1999:

The solution is not to view some families as somehow deficient and hence to institute 'remedial' action. Rather, there seems a strong case for the development of closer partnerships between home and school which enable teachers to gain an insight into the literacy practices of their children's families and hence change their practices at school to optimise all children's chance of success... (Cairney et al, 1995: 31-32).

Central to Thabeban's whole-school community approach to improve educational outcomes for their students is the Parent/School Partnership Program the objectives of which include:

- Enable the community to help improve student learning outcomes through knowledge of successful parenting techniques and inservicing in best practice reading, writing and numeracy programs.
- Support student learning in the classroom by direct community participation with classroom teachers.
- Enhance the relationship between parents and students.
- Enhance the school - community relationship.

Year 2 Diagnostic Net performance data for the school in 1997 indicate that students at Thabeban SS were considerably below performance in terms of the state mean and performance in 'Like Schools'. Data from 1999 indicate that the school is above the state mean and the 'Like School' mean.

Rockville State School

At Rockville SS, 60 % of the school population are indigenous students. The school has introduced a whole-school literacy program that has ensured the improvement of children's literacy outcomes and teachers' ability to teach substantially. The Year 2 Diagnostic Net results indicate a reduction in the number of children requiring support from 60% to less than 20% while at the same time supporting most other children to achieve beyond age appropriate expectations. Students in the upper school with significant literacy problems have been supported effectively to read well. Intervention data suggest that prior to specific intervention, failed readers were able to decode/encode more than 5% but less than 40% of pre-test activities. After intervention almost one quarter of participants were achieving in the 90-100% range of post-test activities with no one achieving less than 50%.

Some of the factors contributing to school success include:

- The development of a professional learning community including: principal providing leadership in terms of five part planning and various approaches to literacy; focus on teacher release to plan inclusively to meet the needs of a range of children; teachers who lead development and present workshops in sharing effective practice; hosting visits for various experts and professional colleagues; incorporating the University of Southern Queensland research into good practice; links with the University of Queensland;
- Staff identification of professional needs and support to meet these within the goals of the Annual Operations Plan;
- Support for Aboriginal literacy through metalinguistics;
- Involvement of all teaching staff in school time in professional development about the principles of Effective Learning and Teaching as they pertain to Aboriginal children;
- Parents, teachers and support staff involved in 10-day metalinguistics intervention course;
- Linking the writing of genre models to indigenous issues.
- School involved in the Gendered and Racist Violence Project (1998).

Buranda State School

Buranda State School is a small, inner-city Brisbane school that has experienced a dramatic increase in enrolments over the past four years. Up to 150 students attend the school, travelling from thirty-three different suburbs. Buranda implements a whole-school philosophy program which, when combined with cooperative learning and problem-solving approaches, is designed to achieve:

- Improved literacy and numeracy skills;
- Development of higher-order thinking skills;
- Greater capacity for students to engage in meta-cognitive processes;
- Increased ability to apply knowledge more effectively to make better judgements;
- Improved social skills, particularly valuing the ideas of others.

Through a classroom community of inquiry, respect and reason are developed and practised. By using a range of explicitly taught strategies, students learn to be fair and open-minded, intellectually cooperative and mutually respectful. By reflecting on beliefs, exploring alternatives and the giving and accepting of reasons, students learn to be reflective, sensitive to meaning, divergent thinkers and tolerant people. The school has found that teaching students philosophy positively influences their learning and social behaviour. Improvement in Year 2, Year 5 and Year 7 literacy results and a range of other school data demonstrate significant gains in literacy outcomes of students at the school over the years of implementation of the philosophy program.

Technology also plays an important role at Buranda State School as part of a futures-oriented curriculum. Technology is used as a tool to support the learning occurring as part of the integrated units of work. Students use a range of hardware and software to achieve the

student learning outcomes identified as part of the share with the school community related to their local area study of Stones Corner shopping centre. Buranda is organised around such multi-age groupings – based on the specific needs of the students – and such groupings vary each year according to individual student requirements.

The curriculum offered to students at Buranda also has a futures orientation and is based on the concept of 'Real Life Learning'. Students are engaged in tasks with relevance beyond the classroom – that is, real learning with real people for real purposes. An example of this can be found in a whole-school focus on the school permaculture garden. Each class completes an integrated unit of work that focuses on an aspect of the garden. The students take responsibility for the vegetables and chickens that make up the area. Students have germinated, planted and picked vegetables. They have weighed and measured them, cooked and eaten them. The literacy events that occur as part of this work are authentic, purposeful and obvious.

The school also focuses heavily on the cooperative and problem-solving skills students will require as lifelong learners. Units of work are negotiated with students, who are engaged in constructing their own knowledge through participation in a range of group tasks and solving of problems. Students negotiate and plan, investigate and solve problems, organise and communicate actions in a wide range of contexts. The futures-oriented curriculum apparent at Buranda State School is facilitated by a culture of collaboration and mutual sharing and respect amongst the whole-school community.