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2014

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP:  
A GUIDE FOR IMPROVING THE LITERACY  
PERFORMANCE OF BOYS AND GIRLS AT  
THE PRIMARY LEVEL



USAID/MOE Partnership for  
Improved  
Reading Outcomes  
June 2014



**CLOSING THE GENDER GAP:  
A GUIDE FOR IMPROVING THE LITERACY PERFORMANCE OF BOYS  
AND GIRLS AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL**



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## FOREWORD

The Ministry of Education has set a goal of 85% literacy by year 2015. In pursuit of this Goal, a National Comprehensive Literacy Program was initiated in September 2010 in all public schools offering primary education. Since that time, improvements have been made in students' performance in the Grade Four Literacy Test, and in GSAT Language Arts. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided invaluable support to this national effort.

The USAID/ Jamaica Basic Education Project (JBEP) has provided support to literacy development in Grades 1-3 and for the period September 2013 to March 2016, the MOE will continue to receive assistance from USAID/Jamaica through capacity building and technical assistance to the National Literacy Program.

As part of this effort, since September 2013 the Ministry of Education has collaborated with USAID/Jamaica in a Government to Government (G2G) initiative to implement a comprehensive reading program in 450 schools (including 172 schools that were funded under the former USAID Jamaica Basic Education Project from 2010- 2013). The Initiative – **USAID/MOE Partnership for Improved Reading Outcomes** has as its goal to:

*...improve the reading skills and performance of Grades 1-3 students in 450 schools*

One of the objectives of the program is to:

*Improve delivery of areas of the curriculum to support equity (parity) so that high proportions of both boys and girls read on or above grade level (Objective 6)*

The program seeks to support the efforts of Government of Jamaica to reduce and ultimately eliminate the gender gap in educational achievement among boys and girls.

This **guide**, developed by Gender Specialist, Carol Narcisse, is intended to be a working tool for Principals and teachers. It contains brief, background information on gender issues in education; tools for practical application in the planning and teaching-learning process; and handouts which may be used in training parents and other stakeholders.

We trust that the information and material provided will be helpful, and will assist schools to better meet the learning needs of boys and girls.

Claudette Carter  
Project Director  
May 2014



## SECTION 1:

### GETTING STARTED - HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The USAID/Ministry of Education Partnership for Improved Reading Outcomes is pleased to offer this guide for use by Principals, other members of schools' leadership teams and classroom teachers.

The guide provides information and practical tools to assist schools to:

- ❖ identify the gender related factors which may impact literacy and language arts learning;
- ❖ make adjustments in school and/or classroom planning to foster equity in the readiness, participation and achievement of boys and girls; and
- ❖ improve the educational outcomes of both boys and girls, with particular attention to improving literacy among boys.

For best results, an evidence-based approach is recommended for identifying and addressing gender disparities in schools, using this guide as a tool to aid the process.

**The following are suggested implementation steps:**

1. Principals and leadership team - review the Guide and discuss its applicability in the specific school context.
2. Leadership team – assess the gender situation of the school using the Situation Analysis Checklist. As much as possible use actual data, observation and discussion with teachers, students, parents and other relevant stakeholders. This will provide very valuable information for completing the checklist.
3. Convene a staff meeting. Share the information gleaned from the Situation Analysis Checklist. With the staff, brainstorm and discuss observations and concerns with respect to boys’ and girls’ performance and general development in school. List the areas of concern and together rank them in order of priority for attention/intervention. Introduce and review the Guide paying special attention to the sections dealing with the area/s that have been identified as priority for the school to address.
4. Encourage staff to use the Gender Monitoring Checklist to assess how they are doing in their classes to address the needs of boys and girls and to identify areas that they may need to improve. Agree on a deadline for completion
5. Agree on a designated person or persons to undertake the task of compiling any further gender differentiated data that may be needed on the top two areas of concern. He/she/they should use the questions and pointers given in the Guide to assist. Establish a deadline for completion.
6. At a staff meeting, have teachers share their experience using the Gender Monitoring Checklist to assess and guide their classroom interventions;

7. Review the gender differentiated data that has been compiled and plan interventions on a school-wide and classroom basis.
8. Discuss and agree on a schedule for, and approach to, monitoring the implementation of strategies and their effectiveness, based on evidence. Agree on how to track progress being made by boys and girls in the areas identified as needing support and improvement. Use the Gender Strategies' Monitoring Checklist given at the end of this Guide as a tool.





## SECTION 2:

### SITUATION ANALYSIS – ASSESSING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF BOYS AND GIRLS

The following is a **checklist** of areas in the learning experience of boys and girls where gender differences may be present. Significant challenges in any area can negatively affect the learning outcomes of boys and girls. The actual checklist follows on the next page. Before completing it, turn to page 11 and read the notes. They outline key issues specific to each area of the checklist and provide questions to guide your observations.

Complete the checklist, rating each area and noting where interventions may be needed at your school. In applying the checklist you will need to: observe, consult students' records (attendance, achievement etc.), and interview key persons including boys and girls themselves. The checklist covers the following areas.

#### Areas of Learning Experience of Boys and Girls:

- Learning readiness;
- School attendance;
- Teachers' expectations of boys' and girls' abilities and behaviors (do teachers communicate equally high, low or indifferent expectations of boys and girls?)
- In-seat and on-task behavior in the classroom;
- Experience of disciplining – the quality of verbal and physical communication to boys and girls; are boys or girls more frequently punished, shouted at or otherwise rebuked?
- Academic identity – do boys and girls equally see themselves as high or low achievers, trouble makers, smart or slow; and
- Reading achievement levels.



**SITUATION ANALYSIS**  
**CHECKLIST**

**Put an 'X' in the box that is true for your school's situation.**

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Boys and girls show similar readiness skills and behaviours for learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment:..... ..... .....			
Boys and girls have equally Regular attendance at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment: ..... ..... .....			
Teachers demonstrate equal expectations of boys' and girls' abilities and behaviors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment:..... ..... .....			

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Teachers give equally positive feedback on boys' and girls' abilities and behaviors (Do boys and girls get equal amounts of positive feedback?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment: .....			
.....			
.....			
Boys and girls demonstrate equal levels of in-seat and on-task behavior in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment: .....			
.....			
.....			
Boys and girls have similar experiences In terms of disciplining. (are boys or girls more frequently punished, shouted at or otherwise rebuked?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment: .....			
.....			
.....			
Boys and girls have equally positive opinions about their work/ability (do they equally see themselves as high or low achievers, trouble makers, smart or slow?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment: .....			
.....			

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Boys and girls perform on par and at grade level in reading achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment:.....			
.....			
.....			

## NOTES TO THE CHECKLIST

### Learning Readiness



#### (a) Child Readiness:

Research shows that males and females mature at a different pace. Research also suggests that differences in the early socialization experiences of boys and girls impact the pace at which they acquire behaviours needed for early school learning, for example, following directions, paying attention etc.

#### **Some questions you may ask:**

Do boys and girls seem equally ready in terms of their prior experiences, skills and knowledge, cognitive abilities, and attitudes needed to achieve success at grade level or in a specific lesson to be taught?

Do the boys and girls have what is required for school – books, adequate nutrition etc.?

What are the results for males and females on readiness and achievement tests administered by the school?

What do the tests show to be each group's strengths and weaknesses?

## **(b) School Readiness**

Schools too must be ready to receive learners and provide a conducive, child-friendly learning environment.

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Is the school or classroom welcoming and ready for fostering learning?

What can be done to?

- ❖ improve the physical plant/environment;
- ❖ ensure children have adequate access to needed materials/learning aids and manipulative;
- ❖ ensure teachers are well prepared and able to deliver in a creative and engaging way;
- ❖ ensure adequate time is allotted for learning tasks taking into account the time appropriate to children's ages, developmental levels and attention spans;
- ❖ recognize effort as well as achievement in order to motivate the boys and girls as learners; and
- ❖ promote encouraging and respectful relationships among staff and between staff and students.

## □ **School attendance**

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Does the school have gender specific data for attendance?

Are there differences in the rate and pattern of attendance of girls and boys?

What are the typical reasons for absences for each group?

In looking at attendance data it is important for schools to pay attention to such things as the following.

- ❖ The actual figures for attendance of boys and girls. Is there a noticeable difference? Are there patterns such as absence on specific days or from specific classes?
- ❖ The reasons for boys' and girls' absence - is it related to chores they are expected to do based on their gender or in general in their family; is it based on economics, illness?

These details give clues to the kinds of strategies that would be appropriate for schools to put in place to increase attendance and/or children's access to information and instruction.

## □ **Teacher expectations of boys and girls**

Teachers are subject to the same societal conditioning and gender socialization messages concerning what the capabilities are of boys and girls in different subjects and situations. As well they are subject to the same ideas about what is and isn't appropriate for boys and girls to do.

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Do teachers speak encouragingly to students?

Who is called upon more often to answer questions in class? Are girls called on more for answers in reading and language arts and boys in mathematics?

Do teachers say things such as child 'x' or 'y' is behaving "like a girl" or "like a boy"? Such statements reinforce gender stereotypes.

Do teachers set equal performance standards for boys and girls? Are there higher or lower standards for one or the other group?

Do teachers encourage boys and girls to participate in a wide range of activities both traditional and non-traditional for their gender?

Do teachers say to the children that there are things boys and girls are "naturally" good or bad at?

Are boys and girls given stereotypical duties in school or class?





Persistent differences in boys' and girls' academic performance or behaviours can lead teachers to have pre-conceptions about a particular group or individual. What teachers and school personnel communicate and how they communicate to students – to boys and girls, can have a profound effect on their sense of self, their self-perception and esteem and can result in a **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

### **A Note to Educators**

Become conscious of any negative and/or limiting thoughts you may have about students. Make every effort to consciously avoid making assumptions about and communicating negative ideas to learners. Avoid communicating or fostering stereotypes of who can or should do what types of activities.

*Limiting or harmful, hurtful talk and actions lead to poor results.*

Positive feedback, encouragement and guidance; consistent, fair rules and expectations go much further to bring about positive results.

## □ In-seat and on-task behavior in the classroom

It is possible that differences in gender socialization in Jamaica – (where girls have more household responsibilities than boys from an early age, and are given less freedom to roam and play); may have the effect of giving girls an advantage in responsible behaviours, in displaying obedience and focused attention, in following instructions and remaining on task.

It should also be borne in mind that girls mature more quickly than boys. There is significant research too about differences in the structure and functioning of the brain of males and females which may contribute to different learning styles.

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Are boys more or less likely than girls to be attentive and remain in their seats when required and be on task?

What things distract boys and girls?

Are there types of tasks that maintain boys' and girls' attention and on-task behaviour? What types of tasks are those?

The work of several researchers cited by Magon (2009, page 11) indicates that, among other things, *...in general, female brains process language activities more easily, earlier and faster than males, while males more readily excel at spatial-mechanical and gross motor skill tasks.*

These differences are not etched in stone however. Magon (2009) notes that the work of several scholars has shown that *...**training and practice can change the brain's ability (ease/speed) to process tasks.***

While differences exist therefore, they may or may not become ‘hard-wired’ as this depends on life experience, socialization and training over time.

It is important for educators to realize that despite the potential influences of nature and socialization on boys’ and girls’ readiness for formal learning, **both** groups are more likely to have and display positive learning behaviours and outcomes when:

- the learning environment is conducive;
- instructional time is well managed and structured;
- teaching and learning materials are interesting and interactive; and
- teaching and learning materials are at an appropriate level of difficulty.

*Both boys and girls are able to display positive learning behaviour and outcomes*

#### □ **Experience of disciplining**

There is ample research evidence that boys are disciplined more frequently and harshly and receive more negative feedback than girls at home, school and in the wider society. In part, this may be due to notions of masculinity whereby boys are expected to be ‘strong’ and able to ‘take’ such treatment. It may also be a consequence of boys’ behaviour (for example their higher levels of out-of-seat behaviour at school) which more readily attracts notice and negative response.

**Some questions you may ask:**

What is the quality of verbal and physical communication to boys and girls; are boys more frequently punished, shouted at, insulted than girls?

Is punishment of boys more likely to be physical?

To what extent are rewards and incentives used to encourage desired behaviours among boys and girls?



The harsher treatment of males can contribute to a vicious cycle of negative consequences. It behooves educators to interrupt this cycle by adopting new strategies for encouraging appropriate, desired behaviour for learning and achievement.

## □ **Academic identity**

Girls and boys receive different messages about what they are ‘naturally’ good at and not good at, for example math, science, literature, being neat, and being responsible.

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Do boys and girls equally see themselves as high or low achievers, trouble makers or well behaved, smart or slow?

Do boys and girls have the experience of being in different groups or are they permanently in one (‘slow’ or ‘fast’)?

How do boys and girls speak about themselves as learners?

Are there some subjects that boys and girls think they are better at than others?

Different expectations are held and communicated about how boys and girls will do academically as opposed to other pursuits for example, how they will do in sports or the arts.



These ideas are communicated in various ways such as:

The way each gender is depicted in school texts (e.g., do science texts show females as scientists as much as males are shown?)

- The pursuits or interests which are encouraged or discouraged among boys and girls (e.g., what happens when a boy or girl shows an interest in doing something that is not typical for their gender – are they encouraged or discouraged?)
- The achievement standards which are set for each group - is either group required or allowed to produce more or less than another? Is one group given more or less leeway (e.g., are assignments expected to be of an equal standard?)
- What is said to girls and boys about their learning ability and intelligence?
- How instructional groups are named and spoken of by teachers - for example, do the names or references reinforce students' self-perception of being 'bright' or 'slow'?

*Differences in expectations, if experienced often enough, are internalized by girls and boys and they will often perform to the expectations.*

**It is important for educators to:**

- avoid labeling students; and
- employ mixed-ability grouping as much as possible so that students have a chance to recognize that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses and each one can be of help to another.

## □ Reading achievement levels

### **Some questions you may ask:**

Are the majority of girls and boys reading at or below expected grade levels?

Are there differences in the reading grade level achieved by boys and girls on the national and/or classroom-based tests?

How wide apart are the differences in reading levels within and between the gender groups?

Are you able to determine precisely what weaknesses and strengths in reading there are within and between gender groups?

There is a national strategy for improving all students' achievement in literacy. There is a need to be precise in knowing and addressing differences in boys' and girls' readiness, actual knowledge (the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes which they do or do not have) and differences in learning styles.





## SECTION 3:

### PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF BOYS AND GIRLS

School and the classroom should be places where both boys and girls feel welcomed, supported, respected, encouraged, excited and actively engaged.

#### Interventions are needed to:

- Strengthen reading readiness skills at every grade level;
- Increase the interest level and relevance of reading experiences – for example, while all learners will benefit, boys tend to respond best to activity-based, teaching/learning strategies and materials that include topics with their typical interests;
- Manage or modify behaviour in a positive way through rewards, incentives and constant encouragement. As boys tend to be more harshly treated, a special effort must be made to change the approach towards them;
- Ensure reading material and experiences portray males and females in various contexts and roles that are not only stereotypical;
- Introduce role models of high reading achievement that can serve to inspire boys and girls; and
- Promote the relevance and benefits of reading to children’s hopes and dreams for themselves.

## IN GENERAL, SCHOOLS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY:

- Learning about and ensuring school-wide (all key stakeholders/players') understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and other issues impacting learners in order to be able to plan effectively to meet their needs;
- Paying attention and noticing when children have negative and/or limiting thoughts about themselves;
- Taking steps to ensure boys and girls have equal experiences of positive reinforcement and encouragement to bolster their self-esteem;
- Introducing boys and girls to varied experiences, images and options, including those that are non-traditional; introduce such varied exposure through books, posters, field trips, guest presenters, videos, on-line resources etc. Encourage children to try different things even those considered non-traditional for boys or girls;
- Paying attention to differences in performance of boys and girls, for example, their participation in class, their attainment in different subjects, the activities they are doing; their behaviour patterns etc.
- Taking steps to ensure equal opportunities are given for each group – boys and girls, to participate, contribute and succeed in various areas;
- providing role models who have broken stereotypes and are accomplishing things that others said they couldn't; and
- using rewards and incentives to encourage desired behaviours



**Is your school doing any of these? Which action/s could you improve upon or introduce?**

The following are some strategies that can be incorporated on a school-wide level.

- **Encourage equally good attendance of boys and girls**

### **Strategies could include:**

- Follow up visits to homes to enquire into and encourage attendance;
- Regular attendance awards at school or class levels;
- Creating an online space where teachers post lessons, assignments; etc. (This is especially possible in schools where students will be receiving tablet computers).
- Where there is limited Internet service, schools can establish a system of preparing work folders for students who will be, or are absent for an extended period.
- Partnerships with local cable companies and/or Jamaica Education Television (JET) could also create opportunities for children to learn at home as well as diversify the instructional media used in the classroom.

Getting the support of parents is crucial to the success of such strategies.

## □ Use gender-specific data to inform school and classroom planning

### Example

#### Principals -

Ensure there is data on boys' and girls'

- attendance,
- punctuality,
- subject-specific achievement,
- participation in school events, special or extra-curricular activities,
- preparation for school, and
- health/nutritional/welfare status and needs (e.g. boys and girls representation among PATH beneficiaries).

Discuss the data with teachers and parents, note trends in the data, work with teachers and parents to set specific, measurable goals to bring about parity in the desired outcomes among boys and girls.

#### Teachers –

Ensure you have gender specific information as indicated above. Ensure you have specific information about what boys and girls in your class know and don't know relative to the curriculum or topic being covered. In a sensitive and supportive way discuss the strengths and weaknesses with each individual/group and parents, set goals/targets together, plan learning materials and activities that are differentiated based on the gender-specific data and the plans. Be sure to address the needs of both boys **and** girls

□ **Look at learning materials with a critical eye to identify gaps and/or stereotypes in how males and females are represented.**

Text books, readers and supplementary aids such as pictures or posters may not have a balanced representation of males and females and may portray males and females in stereotypical ways.

Critically analyse materials looking for such things as:

- Whether or not males and females are depicted and how often;
- Whether or not the images depict males and females in traditional roles only or mostly, or whether non-traditional roles are portrayed. (e.g., what kind of occupations are males and females shown in?);
- Are males typically shown as the 'bad guy', the prankster, etc.?

Choose materials where possible that have a balanced and non-stereotypical representation of males and females. If changing the material isn't possible, then do discuss the images with the students to raise their awareness of alternative depictions.

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*Research has shown that primary level textbooks reflect gender bias and stereotyping in the following areas:*

- pictorial content;
- word content;
- central characters and number of times males/females speak; and roles carried out by males/females in the pictorial and word content of the text.

*It is therefore important to assess the extent to which books used in primary level classrooms portray these types of gender bias and take corrective measures where possible.*

*Clichéd images associated with either sex should always be avoided.*

*Teachers can deliberately select resources that present women and men in non-traditional roles; and they can seize opportunities to raise awareness of gender issues with the students.*

*(Source: **Gender Mini-Guide for Teachers; Gender Socialization**; Grace Christie & Prof. Barbara Bailey; USAID-MOE Expanding Educational Horizons Project; See: [http://www.expanding-educational-horizons.com/PDF/Gender/Gender\\_Mini-Guide\\_-\\_Final\\_Edition.pdf](http://www.expanding-educational-horizons.com/PDF/Gender/Gender_Mini-Guide_-_Final_Edition.pdf))*

## □ Vary the composition and activities of groups

Vary the composition of and the activities given to groups so that they are not static and do not reinforce a particular performance expectation. Avoid grouping students only according to ability. While such groups can assist in focusing instruction according to need/s common to the group, they can foster fixed achievement expectations among both students and teachers alike.

Mixed 'differentiated' groupings<sup>1</sup> allow for

- ✓ Collaborative learning through greater interaction across abilities
- ✓ A range of social skills to be learned as groups may reflect a range of differences such as age, gender, learning style, motivation, prior learning and experience - as well as specific learning difficulties.
- ✓ Motivation of students
- ✓ Greater opportunity for strengths as well as weaknesses to be brought out
- ✓ not just ability that could be mixed and that they had to cope with.

Ensure groups do not reinforce stereotypes about particular learners (e.g. specific learners always being in the 'slow' group) as these can soon become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Successful use of groups to support learning requires:

- ✓ Planning and preparation – 'mixed-ability teaching' requires good preparation to ensure students' varying needs are met.
- ✓ A mix of direct instruction and independent activities
- ✓ Rotation of the teacher among sub-groups within a group to ensure attention is spread as evenly as possible
- ✓ Differentiated materials and/or activities if necessary to meet varied needs and to keep high the interest of learners in a group.
- ✓ Skillful and effective time management

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<sup>1</sup> For additional reading on Mixed Ability Groupings see:  
[www.ea.gr/ep/muse/data/.../Mixed\\_Ability\\_Grouping\\_version1\\_5.doc](http://www.ea.gr/ep/muse/data/.../Mixed_Ability_Grouping_version1_5.doc)

□ **Use boys or girls only strategies as part of a mix of interventions if necessary**

Primary schools are increasingly trying single sex classes and groups as they seek to raise the literacy levels of students, especially of boys. This approach can be useful but is not a panacea and by itself, does not address the underlying causes of boys' or girls' underachievement within the general school population.

If attempting this strategy be sure to have the following.

- ✓ Accurate baseline data for each group's achievement in reading, behaviour etc.
- ✓ Instructional and individualized learning plans based on the specific, assessed needs of the students.
- ✓ On-going monitoring of progress relative to the baseline data for individual students.
- ✓ Appropriate provisions in, or adjustments to the learning environment based on known learning styles etc. For example, arrangement of the classroom space to allow for boys' greater levels of physical movement.

□ **Make allowances for differences in boys' and girls' learning styles.**

Magon (2009) offers the following strategies derived from research into differences in learning styles of boys and girls.



## Instructional Strategies for Boys

### Teacher Mannerisms:

- use a strong, loud voice when speaking to class;
- be directive, concise and brief with instructions;
- minimize verbal and written instructions; demonstrate;
- call on boys, rather than waiting for volunteers (slight pressure/stress enhances performance);
- question boys while they are doing an activity;
- avoid lots of transitions and give adequate time to transition between topics;
- when confronting a boy for a more serious talk, sit or stand beside them rather than in front of them (less intimidating) or use a physical activity, such as passing a ball to mediate discussion;
- foster ownership of learning by displaying boys' work and personalizing material; and
- provide opportunities for boys to relate to male role models.;

### Environment

- ensure boys have enough physical space to move freely in classroom (e.g. for arm swinging); and
- provide an environment with minimal external distractions.

### Activities

- provide learning opportunities that are physical in nature;
- provide activities that don't have too many things to focus on;
- use games and other ways to build competition into lessons;
- provide activities to build fine motor skills;
- provide visual means of learning material (maps, diagrams, charts, models, etc.) when possible; and
- provide activities that promote male bonding between students and with teacher.

## Instructional Strategies for Girls

### Teacher Mannerisms

- use body language that conveys openness and approachability including smiling and good eye contact (crucial for girls to trust and bond with teacher);
- allow girls to volunteer answers without pressure (stress/pressure situations lessen performance);
- avoid creating high stress situations in class when possible;
- be consistent and even-tempered;
- seek privacy when confronting girls for behavior;
- provide opportunities for girls to relate to female role models;
- provide connections between what girls are expected to learn and real life and/or their interests;
- scramble group compositions so girls become used to working outside their circle of friends and so have different opportunities for leadership and followership; and
- be particularly supportive and encouraging when teaching science and math (girls can lack confidence in these areas).

### Environment

- try to use materials that make the classroom more homely, such as plants and warm colours

### Activities

- provide lots of opportunities for girls to work in small groups (cooperative learning is particularly important for girls);
- make learning fun by providing girls an opportunity to join in non-competitive games and group tasks; and
- provide hands-on activities that reinforce real world applications.

Other useful, general strategies:

- **Introduce programmes that give children wide exposure and impact discipline and values**



Uniformed groups such as Cub scouts and Girl Guides provide valuable exposure, skills and values education for children. This aids in strengthening children’s overall learning readiness and builds self-esteem and confidence.

Schools can also introduce a **mentorship** programme. Boys and girls often lack interaction with, and the motivating influence of positive role models. Schools can help to fill this gap by introducing a structured, monitored, mentorship programme.

Care should be taken to ensure that mentors are of sound character and the highest integrity. Agencies such as Youth Opportunities Unlimited and RISE Life Management Services are able to assist schools in establishing a programme and can provide appropriate training of persons interested to be mentors.

- **Be success-oriented - Draw on a wide range of students’ strengths and talents**

Draw out and incorporate the widest range of strengths and talents of all students. It is important for schools and classrooms to have a culture in which achievement in many areas is encouraged, celebrated and expected.

Boys as well as girls are more likely to respond positively when they have ample opportunity to display and use their strengths and talents and to use these in learning new skills and concepts. They also respond to public recognition including displays of their work, recognition for ‘making progress’ for being ‘most improved’ or a ‘high achiever’. Such awards need not be solely for academic achievement.

## STRATEGIES BEING USED IN THE FIELD

*These strategies were shared by Principals who met in focus groups to provide feedback during the development of this Guide.*

### Rewards/Incentives

- Badges – “Yes I Can”, “I am on my way!”, “ I am a star”
- Achievement boards
- Literacy ‘King’ and ‘Queen’
- Honor roll
- Good citizenship awards
- Student of the month (not limited to academic performance)

### General Guidance/Motivation

- Motivational speakers/mentors – local pastor, business persons and others
- Father (father figure) -son cricket days
- Big brother programme involving neighbouring high school/s
- “Students In Action” – a day when students assume the role of teachers
- Male teachers being assigned a group of boys for once weekly, after school interaction.

### General Literacy – focused Activities

- A reading” buddy” system with the Principal
- “Operation Excellence” – a programme involving GSAT residential camps at school, behaviour modification residential camps, student referrals to external agencies, parenting seminars etc.<sup>2</sup>
- Establishment and use of an ‘enrichment room’ for pull-out sessions
- Reading instruction with physical activities (e.g. students kick a ball and read any word it lands on)
- Readers’ theatre – a regularly scheduled occasion for story-telling, reading and dramatization
- Kiwanis led Bring Up Grades (“BUG”) programme targeting students at the non-mastery level<sup>3</sup>
- “Drop everything and read” sessions
- Reading “Power Rangers” – students engage in book summaries and reviews; bi-weekly visit of the bookmobile

<sup>2</sup> Being implemented by Maverley primary & Junior High School, [maverleypjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:maverleypjhs@yahoo.com)

<sup>3</sup> Being implemented at Mount Salem Primary and Junior High School; Region 4; [mtsalemprjh@yahoo.com](mailto:mtsalemprjh@yahoo.com);

- Special projects with built-in literacy components e.g. farming, scheduled ‘project days’ involving craft, photography, sewing, art, cooking etc.; choir and/or choral speaking groups

### **Teacher development in literacy and gender strategies**

- Teacher training workshops on gender issues in Education and on differentiated instruction geared towards gender-based needs
- A staff Reading Committee headed by an experienced teacher who selects reading material<sup>4</sup>
- A behaviour plan for all levels of staff and for parents – sets out expectations and goals for improving interactions with and performance of students<sup>5</sup>
- Establishment of a teacher resource centre including print and audio-visual teaching aids and professional magazines, books, on-line resources lists etc.
- Required use and reporting of pre and posttests to guide teacher planning and foster teacher accountability.
- Required gender differentiated learning plans
- Required interactive strategies in each lesson plans – student-teacher, student-student, student-material strategies<sup>6</sup>

### **Specific strategies for boosting boys’ literacy**

- Boys’ reading clubs
- Weekly Principal’s hour with boys – Principal reads aloud for a fun-filled hour
- Boys’ section in the school’s library (in partnership with the local Parish library)
- Boys’ and Girls’ Days and/or devotions
- Single sex classes – in some cases these classes are painted in colours chosen by students and boys’ classes have pets, audio-visual equipment etc.
- High interest reading materials geared to boys
- Spelling and reading competitions
- Increased recruitment of male teachers for boys only classes and after school activities
- Boys’ Zone - a multi-purpose, designated, self-contained area with equipment for physical activities and learning aids.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Being implemented at Maverley Primary & Junior High School, region 1, [maverleypjhs@yahoo.com](mailto:maverleypjhs@yahoo.com)

<sup>5</sup> Being implemented at St. Alban’s Primary, Region 1; [stalbansprimary23@hotmail.com](mailto:stalbansprimary23@hotmail.com)

<sup>6</sup> Being implemented at Santa Cruz Primary & Junior High, Region 5, [santacruz.primary.seh@moey.gov.jm](mailto:santacruz.primary.seh@moey.gov.jm)

<sup>7</sup> Being implemented at Chester Primary, Region 3, [chester.primary.san@moey.gov.jm](mailto:chester.primary.san@moey.gov.jm)



## **SECTION 4:**

### **MONITORING CHECKLIST**

Monitoring is an important aspect of any successful programme. The aim of schools implementing 'gender responsive' strategies is to ensure that boys and girls make progress in their learning and overall development. It is also to ensure that there is parity in the performance of the two groups of learners.

The process needs on-going monitoring and there should be adjustment to strategies if necessary so that a positive impact may be made.

The checklist which follows will assist the school's leadership and teaching teams to assess and track the extent of responsiveness to the learning experience and needs of, and outcomes for, boys and girls.

## **GENDER STRATEGIES' MONITORING CHECKLIST**

*Use this checklist to assess and monitor the gender responsiveness of your school or classroom*

### **Gender Specific Data are available and consistently used by Administrators and teachers:**

- Data on reading levels of male and female students at each grade are available to the school's administrators and teachers and are actively used to guide school development planning;
- Data on reading levels of males and females are used by classroom teachers to guide lesson plans for Language Arts & Reading;
- Data on reading levels of males and females are used by classroom teachers to guide group formation and assignments;
- Data on the specific knowledge and skills of males and females guide the selection of learning materials; and
- Assessment and monitoring of performance reflects data for males and females.

### **Learning Materials Reflect Gender Balance**

- There is a balance in the number of times males and females are depicted in learning materials (pictures, books, stories).
- Males and Females are shown in non-stereotypical ways (stories, pictures show males and females in non-traditional roles as well as traditional).
- Materials reflect a variety of topics and themes which are of high interest to males and females.
- The content of materials and classroom discussions serve to broaden students' understanding of their roles, responsibilities and choices as males and females.



**Administrators' and teachers' communication to males and females serve to build their self-esteem equally**

- Attention is paid to what is said to males and females about their capabilities.
- Attention is paid to the balance in responding to positive behaviours of males and females.
- There is a system of rewards and recognition at a school-wide level.
- There is a system of rewards and recognition at the classroom level.
- Rewards and recognition are given for males' and females' effort not only achievement.

**Administrators and teachers communicate equal achievement expectations for males and females**

- There is balance in calling on males and females to contribute to discussions, demonstrations.
- Males and females are equally encouraged to achieve in all subject areas. Males and females are equally supported in the learning process (teacher attention, instructional time, learning materials).
- Quality standards are set for students' work and are equally applied.

**The Classroom space is arranged to take boys' and girls' learning needs into account**

- There is leg room and space between desks and chairs for moving about.
- There are mats for students, especially boys, to lie on and read.
- There are learning centres that promote activity-based learning.
- Desks and chairs are arranged to support cooperative learning.

**Instructional groups are mixed and instruction and activities are geared to different learning needs**

- Boys and girls are not confined to the same group always
- Mixed groups are used with learners of different strengths/abilities, genders etc.
- Instruction and/or activities are differentiated based on needs.

**Gender-Specific Interventions are used to motivate boys and girls**

- Motivational speakers and role models are brought in at least once per term.
- There are special boys and girls events (e.g. Boys/Girls Day, Mother-daughter/Father-Son days).
- There are uniformed boys' and girls' groups (e.g. Cubs, Girl Guides)
- There is information and/or discussion to expose boys and girls to non-traditional choices (e.g. careers)



## SECTION 5:

### BACKGROUND READING:

#### GENDER & EDUCATION – DOES IT MATTER?

##### What do we mean by GENDER?

As we grow up we learn and adopt values, ideas, expectations and beliefs which are common in the wider society. Personal experience and exposure through the family, community, media, school, books and, travel etc., may provide us with new information with which to modify our ideas and values or they may serve to reinforce them.

In Jamaica, as in other societies, it is often assumed that behaviours, attitudes and roles of men and women in society are so because of biology, are “natural”, are fixed from birth and cannot be changed. What is fixed at birth is **sex** (though medical science can change this after birth). **Sex** refers to the physical characteristics that make persons **male** or **female**. There are differences in the physical structure of males and females; in their hormones and other chemicals in their bodies. These contribute to differences in behavior but not entirely.

**Gender**, refers to those characteristics, roles and responsibilities which society says make persons **masculine** or **feminine**.

The different roles, responsibilities and choices ascribed to males and females are socially defined and so they can and do change over time and they differ from culture to culture. The **learning** process, in which behaviours deemed appropriate are rewarded and those deemed inappropriate are punished or frowned upon, is what constitutes **gender socialization**. This is carried out by various institutions of

society the main ones being the family, educational and religious institutions and the media.

Over time, the ideas about what males and females can or can't, should or shouldn't do become fixed and lead to **stereotypes**. The net result of **gender stereotypes** are the limitations which both groups – males and females, face in developing and expressing the full range of their human potential.

## GENDER ISSUES IN EDUCATION IN JAMAICA

Data from the Ministry of Education for 2011- 2012<sup>8</sup> show there are high rates of enrolment, attendance, retention and promotion of both males and females in the education system. Literacy levels have been trending upward however when national data are broken down by male and female, a significantly higher percentage of males are shown to be underachieving in literacy than the percentage of females.

The following are some details.

### Enrolment:

- There is near parity in enrolment of males and females at the pre-primary level with slightly more boys than girls enrolled – 55,481 boys; 54, 146 girls.
- There is a widening gap in favour of boys for enrolment at the primary level (except in preparatory schools) – 136, 875 boys; 131, 814 girls.
- A significantly larger number of boys than girls are enrolled in special schools – 2, 454 boys; 1, 242 girls.

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<sup>8</sup> Education Statistics 2011 – 2012; Annual Statistical Review of the Education Sector, Ministry of Education, Planning and Development Division. See: <http://www.moe.gov.jm/sites/default/files/Education%20Statistics%202011-12.pdf>

- There is a wide gap in enrolment at the secondary level with significantly more girls in **secondary high** schools than boys – 105, 129 girls; 93, 856 boys. However, significantly more boys than girls are enrolled in All-Age; Primary and Junior High, and Agricultural High schools. Nonetheless, the **overall enrollment** at the secondary level is greater for girls with 123,311 girls to 116, 936 boys.
- There is a far higher enrolment of females in all tertiary institutions except at the GC Foster College of Physical Education and Sports. Note should be made that tertiary enrolment represents 6.7% of persons in all educational institutions.

#### **Attendance:**

- National attendance data show over 80 % and near parity for males and females at the primary level.
- There is near parity in attendance at the secondary level with males having only slightly lower attendance than females 78.5% to 82.6%.

#### **Promotion, Repetition & Drop-out Rates**

- There is a high rate of retention and promotion of both boys and girls at the primary and secondary levels.
- Of the minority of children who repeat grades (average of 3%), there are more males than females (approximately 2:1).
- A very small minority, a little over 1%, of students at the secondary level are repeating classes. Of this group there are more boys than girls.

#### **Literacy**

- For 2010/2011 data for the Grade Four Literacy Test showed 71% of all students attaining Mastery. However the gender breakdown showed 61.5% of males and 81.6% of females performed at the Mastery level.

## Other Gender Issues in Education

Enrolment and attendance in school are important factors in the opportunities for learning for both males and females. However gender socialization has a strong impact on the teaching/ learning process, environment and outcomes.

### Summary of Research Findings on Other Gender Issues in Education<sup>9</sup> :

- Girls appear to be more ready for Grade 1 work than boys in the areas of cognitive skills and emotional maturity. More readiness for Grade 1 may give girls a head start which could serve them in good stead during the primary school years.
- Teachers' expectations for students have a powerful effect on student effort and achievement. There is evidence of gender stereotyping, which affects teachers' expectations for males and females in some subjects. Students are aware of such differential expectations.
- Girls in classes observed showed more interest, were more eager to answer questions, to spell words, to read and, in general, to carry out academic tasks.
- Girls were also more likely than boys to be settled and on task, and to do the work assigned in cases where the teacher was not in the room.
- The lessons in which the boys were involved and interested can be characterized as requiring action or active participation on the part of the students, or as activities which drew on students' experiences, knowledge, or skill, or the subject matter was of intrinsic appeal to boys.
- Boys, and not girls, were likely to be out of their seats, to walk around and chat with other students.
- (Perhaps as a consequence of the above) boys were more likely than girls to be exposed to negative evaluations and negative discourse. Boys were more frequently or more harshly punished. Negative school practices affect academic performance. Specifically, students who experience school practices such as being insulted or beaten achieve lower grades than those who do not.

<sup>9</sup> See: Gender Differences in Education in Jamaica, Hyacinth Evans; In: Education For All In The Caribbean: Assessment 2000; Monograph Series; Series Editor: Lynda Quamina-Aiyejina; 1999; Published in 1999 by the Office of the UNESCO Representative in the Caribbean. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001364/136430e.pdf>

## Schools Can Make a Difference

Like the family, religious groups, media and **educational institutions** play a central role in gender socialization and in the resulting life experiences and outcomes of males and females. Because boys and girls are socialized differently from birth onwards they come to school with ideas already formed about what they can and cannot, should or shouldn't do or be.

Schools are powerfully influential institutions and can introduce, reinforce and/or change stereotypes whether these are based on race, class, gender or other factors.

## Additional Reading/Resources:

- ❖ **School Readiness: a conceptual framework;** United Nations Children’s Fund, New York, 2012. see: [http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child\\_ConceptualFramework\\_FINAL\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf)
- ❖ **Gender, The Brain & Education – Do Boys and Girls Learn Differently?** Angela Jossette Magon; University of Victoria, British Columbia; British Columbia, 2009. See [http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/1411/magon\\_project\\_signatures\\_removed.pdf?sequence=1](http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/1411/magon_project_signatures_removed.pdf?sequence=1)
- ❖ **Positive Discipline**, see: <http://blog.positivediscipline.com/>
- ❖ **Multiple Resources**  
<https://www.google.com.jm/#q=Gender+in+Primary+Education+Manual>



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Gender Mini-Guide for Teachers; Gender Socialization; Grace Christie & Prof. Barbara Bailey; USAID-MOE Expanding Educational Horizons Project; See:

[http://www.expanding-educational-horizons.com/PDF/Gender/Gender\\_Mini-Guide\\_Final\\_Edition.pdf](http://www.expanding-educational-horizons.com/PDF/Gender/Gender_Mini-Guide_Final_Edition.pdf)