

Niamh Watkins, Ireland  
Lecturer Literacy Studies, Dublin City University Institute of  
Education  
[niamh.watkins@dcu.ie](mailto:niamh.watkins@dcu.ie)

**"Slugs and snails, and puppy dogs' tails, that's what little boys are made of." Exploring stereotypes: Motivating and engaging boys as writers**

Over the past two decades there has been much research into 'underachievement' and boys in literacy (Brozo, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This research, in line with international reading studies such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), is consistent in identifying what is referred to as a 'gender gap' in literacy attainment between male and female students, both at primary and secondary school level. However, it is argued that much research into developing boys as writers rarely extends beyond habits and preferences. It is necessary to consider the social context in the field of research into boys as writers who are engaged in writing, so that pedagogy can be improved (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

This oral presentation presents a small-scale study that investigated the efficacy of a writing workshop approach incorporating modelled and peer feedback on boys' narrative writing and academic language register. The study also compared 'free writing' as an approach to teaching writing versus a 'writing workshop' approach. The results of the study emphasise the critical role of choice, collaboration and discussion as motivating factors in writing.