

Round 3 School Based Research Project Update

Four schools were successful in receiving funding and support from AISNSW at the end of 2016 to undertake a school based research project. This issue of the Brief presents their progress at the half way mark of their two-year project.

School Based Research Projects

Now in its fourth year, the AIS Education Research Council's School Based Research Project Initiative continues to attract a diverse range of high quality research project applications.

Twelve projects have completed to date, with seven currently underway. Together they illustrate the broad range of timely topics of interest to independent schools across New South Wales. Common to all projects is a focus on improving educator practice and student outcomes.

Selected school research teams consist of practising educators and/or school leaders, who are mentored by at least one specialist academic from around the globe. This approach to supporting the research process ensures a robust investigation, and affords professional learning on topics and the fundamentals of undertaking quality research. As a result of this model, practitioner researchers are able to produce high quality, rigorous research that reflects their experience, perspectives and contexts.

In 2016, four schools were successful in being selected for AISNSW funding and support to undertake research in their school contexts.

This Brief summarises their progress to the mid-point of their research endeavours, and outlines what their second year will hold.

Kincoppal-Rose Bay School
Growing minds

Kinross Woleroi School
Collaborative approaches to programming and teaching primary science: Opportunities and impacts

MUSEC School
Schema-based instruction and maths problem solving

RIDBC Thomas Pattison School
The development of an online assessment tool for Auslan

Growing minds

Kincoppal-Rose Bay School

Project overview

This research project examines how educators can assess and report student growth in learning. A key focus is to enable teachers and students to better understand their current place on the learning continuum, and how students might best be supported to progress. Motivated by professional learning based on Visible Learning, Project Zero and Growth Mindset, the school has been examining assessment *as*, *of* and *for* learning, and how to move away from traditional grading systems. The school's two year action research project represents the school's commitment to rigorous, evidence-informed improvement in this area.

This research focuses on mapping the learning continuum (developing proficiency maps, as described by Geoff Masters), and developing and testing related assessment tools. The research team will then examine how this approach to assessment impacts educators' interpretation and identification of learning progress. By focusing on individualised growth, progress monitoring and reporting, educators should be able to implement more targeted interventions to better support all students along the learning continuum. The school anticipates that this will result in more personalised learning for students. This project centres on students in Years 5-8, in mathematics and English, and aims to extend the approach across all learning domains for K-10.

The research team

The research team is led by Nicola Dennis, Director Teaching and Learning. The team is supported by academic mentors Chris Freeman and Frances Eveleigh from Australian Council of Education Research (ACER).

Progress to date

Phase one of this research project entailed intensive professional learning focusing on quality assessment design, development and testing. The research team engaged in test item development to create a scale that linked assessments to outcomes for Year 6 students in English and mathematics. Data analysis from testing of the items that made up the scale resulted in adjustments that better reflected progress along the learning continuum. Further analysis indicated the efficacy of the trialled test items. Descriptors that mapped student performance on the scale were refined from these. The resulting rubrics include different level descriptors of student performance to enable differentiated assessment and support for students' progress.

The first year of research was a valuable process for the team. Not only have members increased their understanding of assessment and the nature of the learning continuum, but increased collaboration has positively affected the school's professional culture.

Where to next?

Phase two of the project will realise the development of assessment tools for Years 5-8 in English and mathematics, to extend the proficiency map developed for Year 6 students. PAT test data will be used to compare the team's scale to confirm its rigour, validity and reliability. Educators will also be surveyed on their confidence in using the developed rubrics to determine their students' position on the learning continuum. Their views on assessment and reporting will also be sought to support the development of possible models for reporting student growth.



“A grading system that reports a student’s achievement as a “D” in Semester 1 and a “D” in Semester 2 ... does not indicate or reflect the growth in learning.... It does not provide an incentive for the student to improve...”

The Research Project will create an “evidenced-based model of reporting that reports student learning growth on a scale or continuum.”

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