



## Improving curriculum delivery through REAL

### School Based Research Project 2015 Interim Report Oakhill College

#### Project overview

The *Improving curriculum delivery through REAL* project examines how the College's REAL—Relevant Engaged, Active Learning — program has impacted teacher curriculum delivery. The REAL program is a working model of a whole-of-school pedagogical change, based on research and best practice in pedagogy and research processes, with the purpose of improving learning outcomes for students. It is informed by John Hattie's Visible Learning, Understanding by Design frameworks and curriculum mapping processes.

The program was developed and piloted by Oakhill's Innovative Learning Team in 2014, with the intention of changing teacher practice and shifting it to a student-centred learning approach, focussing on critical thinking, problem-solving and reflective thinking. REAL is being delivered in conjunction with the College's shift to online curriculum delivery for Year 7 students, which promotes a climate of transparency in line with a Visible Thinking focus.

The aim of this research project is to identify pedagogical development in the teaching faculty that is in accordance with the objectives of the REAL program, and to see its impact on student academic outcomes.

#### The research team

The research team is being led by Melissa Carson, Coordinator of the Innovative Learning Team. The team is being supported by academic mentor Professor John Albright (University of Newcastle).

#### Project design

A mixed methods approach is being undertaken to assess the impact of REAL on Year 7 student outcomes. Data collection is undertaken every semester, beginning in Term 1 of 2015 and continuing through to Term 3 of 2016. Data is being gathered from students, teachers and parents by way of:

- Surveys targeting critical thinking, resilience, and engagement
- Classroom observations of teacher performance, and related feedback
- Teacher reflections
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Quality Teaching Framework-based analyses of student assessments
- Evaluation of NAPLAN, CAT and other student performance data.

The focus is to gather information on the impact of the two core agendas of the research project: a highly transparent online learning environment driven by a visible thinking ethos, and the shift to a student-centred, relevant and engaging pedagogical approach.

#### Progress to date

Preliminary analyses of the 2015 data are underway, and have already yielded findings that are informing the project focus. This data is being used to structure professional development days for staff (the project's primary intervention) in order to help staff more closely align their teaching with the REAL framework.

Results to date suggest that professional learning interventions have begun to have positive impacts in the classroom, but they also indicate the need for



continued professional development and support to ensure that the REAL program is being implemented with fidelity and consistency across the year.

Key areas of redress for ongoing professional learning days include:

- Ensuring learning intentions and success criteria for each lesson are clearly articulated
- Communicating success criteria that reflect high expectations
- Engaging in explicit teaching of learning strategies, embedded in a visible learning pedagogy
- The creation of quality assessments and programs by teachers.

The research team has also identified a number of factors that appeared to have impeded positive changes to pedagogy and other school based initiatives in the past. These include issues of accountability, transparency, institutional structures such as workload and timetable challenges, and school culture—all of which impact on educators' ability to produce quality learning.

A number of contextual factors have also been discovered which may challenge the team's ability to draw conclusive results from the research. Many of these variables reflect the challenges of conducting research with people in an education setting, namely the considerable heterogeneity of student and teacher abilities, capacities and skills, personalities and experiences. These differences are reflected in, for example, the variety of student transition experiences and related impacts on learning, differing levels of pedagogical skills exercised by teachers, varying levels of collaborative planning occurring across school faculties, and varying degrees of program fidelity demonstrated by teachers.

### Where to next?

In 2016, the research team aims to tackle the factors identified above to reduce their impact on program delivery fidelity.

Strategies include:

- Increased pastoral care for students to help all students manage the transition into Year 7 more effectively
- The implementation of a Year 7 cross-curricular program combining English, RE and PDHPE in order to reduce student workloads and challenging transition experiences
- Implementation of the Oakhill Learning Framework (BOSTES endorsed) in order to deliver more systemic and coherent staff professional development opportunities
- Providing teachers with more time to collaborate and design high quality learning opportunities for students
- Targeted professional development interventions to support teaching staff where they need it most (data-driven)
- Redesign of the REAL website for easier teacher, student and parent engagement and increased transparency
- Workshops for students and parents on the REAL program, and what the program means for them.

Although results to date indicate positive impacts of the REAL program, the research team recognises the need to continue the research beyond the 2016 AISNSW support period to best measure the effects of the program on student learning outcomes over the long-term.

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