

School Based Research Project 2017 Interim Report All Saints Grammar

Project overview

This project aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of assessment *for* learning as a framework for teaching and learning across Pre-kindergarten to Year 12. The strategies that underpin this approach are widely accepted as highly effective in enhancing student engagement and learning. The project's focus is on deepening teacher competencies relating to each dimension of the framework and their capacity to implement assessment *for* learning strategies in the manner suggested by Davison (2008, adapted from Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003, pp. 2-3):

“Assessment *for* learning is any assessment (including summative assessment) for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning...An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.”

At All Saints Grammar, teacher professional learning focuses upon the development of expertise in:

- developing clear learning intentions and success criteria
- engineering effective tasks, discussions and strategies to elicit student learning
- providing feedback that moves the learner forward
- activating students as resources for one another
- activating students as owners of their own learning (William, 2011).

This research project evaluates the impact of implementing assessment *for* learning on the development of teacher professional capacity and student engagement.

The research team

The research team is led by Jaime Rodriguez, Head of Secondary, and supported by academic mentor Professor Chris Davison (University of New South Wales).

Project design

The first step in this project was for the team to conduct a thorough literature review of assessment *for* learning and inquiry based approaches to professional learning. As a result of this review, the research team identified and

confirmed the appropriateness of an action research methodology utilising a mixed methods approach for the project.

The following methods were used to collect data:

- observations
- staff surveys
- analysis of in-school assessment design and student results
- teacher self-reflection surveys based on the Assessment *for* Learning Teacher Competence Framework (Alonzo & Davison, 2013)
- Open to Learning Conversations — a process of colleagues observing one another teach to assess teacher impact on students (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

Qualitative and quantitative data collected and analysed were then used as a source for professional learning. All staff were invited to contribute their insights about the information gathered.

During the first year, every effort was made to ensure that teachers were able to see the research project as part of the normal operation of the school. With this in mind, the research team made the implementation of assessment *for* learning a key goal in the school's strategic improvement plan. In this way, meeting times at various levels (such as faculties and stages) were guided by assessment for learning principles, and geared towards the continuous evaluation of teacher approaches.

Progress to date

The initial stage of the research project involved refining the research aim, questions and methods. Situating the project's direction in the context of the school's strategic improvement plan was achieved by adopting Fullan's (2016) Coherence Framework. It was important for the school to ensure that every action taken would make sense to the school community, especially the teachers. The Coherence Framework provided a strategic foundation which underpins the research project.

The school began the process of cultivating a collaborative culture amongst teachers to deepen learning on effective ways to implement the focus of the project. It was determined that securing accountability at all levels could be best achieved by developing this coherent approach. As such, assessment *for* learning was placed at the core of the school's focus during 2016.

Training and developing the skills and knowledge of research team members was and continues to be a significant priority as this team has taken a major role in leading teachers' professional learning throughout 2016.

Assessment for learning

Professional learning sessions were introduced across the school, with teachers from Pre-kindergarten to Year 12 taking part in workshops four times a term. These were organised and delivered by members of the research team, and focused on leading learning discussions and activities about the principles of assessment *for* learning. Reviewing understanding about assessment in light of relevant BOSTES (now NES) documents was a useful starting point for the school and the research team.



Once the initial stage of familiarisation with assessment *for* learning was completed, the research team introduced the Assessment *for* Learning Teacher Competence Framework to all staff. This Framework is an evaluation tool developed by Alonzo and Davison (2013). Permission from the authors was obtained, enabling the research team to adapt and use the survey as a self-evaluation tool to ascertain teachers' impressions of their own competence across the Framework domains.

To date, three of the six domains of the Framework have been introduced to teachers, and self-evaluation survey data collected. These data have been analysed by the research team and teachers during professional learning sessions. This analysis identified the need to improve teachers' levels of competence in implementing assessment *for* learning strategies. Continued effort will help to clarify concepts and develop a more consistent approach to the design of assessment tasks as well as methods used for measuring student learning. The professional learning sessions addressed some of these issues and similar work will continue during 2017.

In response to the data collected, the research team has begun discussions about developing a process of evaluating lesson and assessment task design. For this purpose, and after a review of the literature, a series of formative questions have been developed to guide the improvement of classroom and assessment practice. While these questions have been introduced to teachers at a professional learning session, this process of evaluation and reflection will be implemented formally during the next stage of the project.

Where to next?

In 2017 the project will focus on evaluating the implementation of assessment *for* learning into classroom practice. This evaluation will be used as a tool to support continuous teacher professional learning through Open to Learning Conversations (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). These conversations create opportunities for teachers to provide feedback to one another about possible modifications to improve student engagement and learning.

Professional learning sessions will continue with the next three domains of the Assessment *for* Learning Teacher Competence Framework introduced, and self-evaluation data gathered on these. Student surveys aimed at assessing student engagement will be developed and further analysis of student performance data will take place.

It is anticipated that All Saints Grammar will continue to see improvement in teacher knowledge and skills with regards to the use of assessment for learning as a framework for teaching and learning in 2017.

References

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