



Round 4 School Based Research Project Update

Three schools were successful in receiving funding and support from AISNSW at the end of 2017 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

The AIS Education Research Council's School Based Research Project initiative, established in 2013, continues to attract a diverse range of high quality research project applications.

To date, sixteen projects have completed their AISNSW School Based Research projects, with five more currently in progress. The range of topics being investigated, and the variety of schools undertaking this work, reflect not only the diversity of interests within the independent sector but also the diversity of schools. At the heart of each project is the goal of improving educator practice and student outcomes.

Every project team is made up 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 helps to ensure a rigorous investigation and enables professional learning on topics of focus and the fundamentals of undertaking quality research. This model supports practitioner researchers to produce high quality, rigorous research that reflects their experience, perspectives and contexts.

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

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

Avondale School
Impact of faith development activities on school climate

Carinya Christian School
Music tuition and literacy achievement

Mater Dei School
Engineering for all

Impact of faith development activities on school climate

Avondale School

Project overview

The Avondale School research project is an exploration of the relationship between engagement in faith development activities and school climate. It investigates the unique factors within a faith-based school that may contribute to increased measures of school and classroom climate. As positive climates are associated with improved student outcomes, identifying specific interventions that impact climate and contribute to positive learning environments is of interest to faith-based schools.

The research focuses on the development and testing of a rigorous, evidence informed survey tool for the measurement of school climate and faith development. It will then be used to gather data on these aspects of the school and to evaluate the impact of faith development activities for the Avondale School community.

The research team

The research team is led by David McClintock. The team is supported by academic mentors Associate Professor Kevin Petrie and Associate Professor Phil Fitzsimmons from Avondale College of Higher Education.

Progress to date

The first year of this research project covered considerable ground in the development of their survey tool. The team engaged in in-depth research and evaluation of available school climate and faith engagement and development surveys. Although a suitable climate scale was identified and adapted to the school's context (for both students and staff), the lack of a faith engagement and development tool meant the research team had to develop their own. Once the climate and faith scales were finalised, they were tested with several student focus groups to ensure content and language were appropriate. These focus groups also provided data on the faith development activities in the school. The combined survey was then piloted with a sample of over 220 students from Years 5-9 from both Avondale School and an independent school on the Central Coast. Analyses were run to determine the validity and reliability of the scales it contained. The staff climate scale was also piloted, and data analysed. Results from the pilots indicate there are correlations between the school climate scales and faith engagement and development scales in the developed measure.

Where to next?

The second year of the project will see additional analyses undertaken on the pilot data. Findings, and additional focus groups to be conducted in early 2019 will contribute to the review and adjustment of faith engagement and building activities within the school, and these will again be measured using the survey. The research team will also work to construct a model to explain the relationship between engagement in faith building activities and school climate. The team will work to disseminate findings of their research throughout their school community, the Adventist Schools network, and the wider education sector.



“An assumption exists that faith-based education results in improved outcomes for students and that this is likely to impact the culture and climate of an institution. There is, however, a paucity of research that provides support for this assertion.”

“The project has experienced success in the development of scales to measure Faith Engagement and Development. The results from analysis of the survey data indicate there are correlations between the School Climate scales and Faith Engagement and Development Scales.”

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