

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

Music tuition and literacy achievement

Carinya Christian School

Project overview

This research project examines the effect of using music tuition – specifically instrumental music instruction in small groups – as an intervention to improve the literacy of an identified cohort of middle school students, whose reading age is significantly below stage outcomes. Despite the body of research connecting instrumental musical tuition with improved reading outcomes, few studies have focused on impacts for students who are low achievers in reading.

The project team is working with a small cohort of selected students, engaging them in small group and ensemble music lessons, each week. Students are tested at intervals throughout the year using rigorous reading assessment tools, and are interviewed about their learning experiences. Results are tracked longitudinally, and compared with students who are not participating in the intervention, acting as controls for the research.

The research team

The research team is led by Debra Batley. The team is supported by academic mentor Dr Anita Collins, founder of Muse Consulting and Associate Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

Progress to date

The first year of the project focused on engaging students in music tuition, and gathering data from both the intervention and non-intervention groups at the school. PAT and PROBE test data was collected to track student reading skills across the year, whilst interview data was used to identify student attitudes to learning. Parents were also surveyed to provide additional insight into their child's attitude and approach to learning a musical instrument.

Results to date suggest the intervention has had a positive impact on the reading development of the students receiving music tuition, with an average gain of nine months, with some students achieving or almost achieving their actual reading age. These results compare positively against the control group.

The intervention has been most effective with younger Middle School students, possibly due to their still maintaining a higher level of innate curiosity. Interview data reveal that participation in music lessons has positively impacted student sense of self-efficacy, confidence in reading, and their feelings of achievement.

Where to next?

The second year of the project will see the team continue with music tuition and data collection to validate their initial results. Research indicates that the longer students are involved in music tuition the better their test results will be. Consequently the team anticipate the results to show a greater impact across the cohort. Students will also be involved in a number of public performances, and for those who are progressing well, they will have the opportunity to complete their Grade 1 AMEB music examination – predicted to boost their sense of achievement and self-efficacy.



"Perhaps the most exciting development is that some students within the cohort have made significant progress - with a number now achieving within the "average" range - and some students achieving or almost achieving a reading age which reflects their actual age.."

"I feel really like royal because it feels like, when you finish you feel good about yourself, but it feels really good when you play it."
(Student)

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