THE BRIEF

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 Wolaroi 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

The development of an online assessment tool for Auslan

RIDBC Thomas Pattison School

Project overview

This research project focuses on the development of a valid and reliable formative assessment tool to support educators in assessing the learning needs of children who are born deaf and are learning Auslan. The intention is to create a rigorous online assessment tool that is simple enough for educators to use with minimal training.

This project is driven by the need to fill a vital gap in learning support for deaf students. At present no tool gives educators clear guidance on developmentally appropriate goals for their deaf, Auslan-signing students. Many of these young people have language and learning delays due to a lack of exposure to language (Auslan) prior to starting school. Delays can be exacerbated by difficulties assessing students in the classroom, and differentiating between delays and language impairment or disorders. It is critical their language skills are accurately assessed to enable educators to identify interventions most appropriate to encourage learning progression.

The research team

The research team is led by Dr Lou de Beuzeville, and supported by academic mentors Professor Greg Leigh and Dr Breda Carty from RIDBC Renwick and Dr Natasha Todorov from the Department of Psychology, Macquarie University. The project is further informed by advice from signed language assessment experts Dr Tobias Haug from Interkantonale Hochschule für Heilpädagogik and Dr Daan Hermans from Kentalis.

Progress to date

As this project is the first of its kind in Australia, significant foundational work for the development of the assessment tool needed to be undertaken during the first year. This comprised of:

- a comprehensive review of the research on language assessment tools, both for signing children and spoken language
- a comprehensive review of the structure of Auslan as described by recent corpus research
- conversations and consultations with overseas experts on assessment design for deaf students to guide tool development.

During this phase items for inclusion in the assessment tool were identified.

Where to next?

The second year of the project will see the development and testing of the online assessment tool. This will involve finalising the items that will form the core of the assessment framework. The tool will then be reviewed with a sample of signing adults for initial feedback on content and structure, as well as a comprehensive review of design elements for the tool illustrators, programmers and designers. When refined, it will be piloted with a small sample of students to identify assessment items that are valid and reliable, and therefore most effective. Once final revisions have been made the tool will be ready for use by educators, and further data collected on its effectiveness and ease of use in practical classroom settings.

"There is a near complete lack of formal assessment tools for [children who are born deaf]. As a result of this, for Auslan-signing deaf children, teachers are unable to formally and consistently target developmentally appropriate skills."

"The goal is to produce a tool that can be administered efficiently by staff without extensive training, and that can reliably give teachers useful information on a child's strengths and areas of need in Auslan."

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