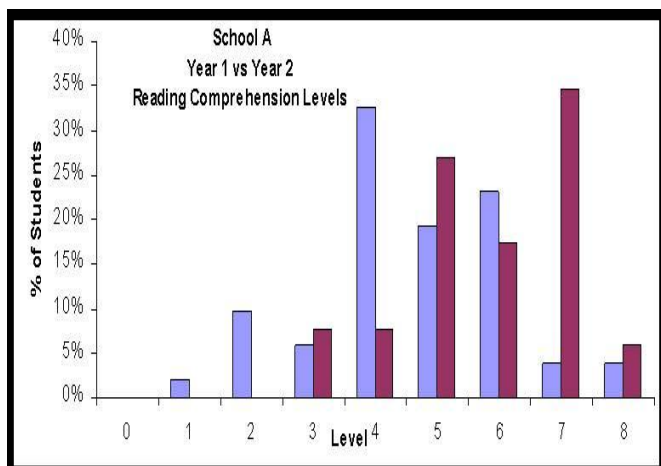


Assessment and Learning Partnerships

A joint project of
The University of Melbourne
The Catholic Education Office (Melbourne)
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

July 2011



This is the first of a series of newsletters that will keep you informed about the Assessment Learning Partnership Project. It is a partnership project between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Office (Melbourne) and the University Of Melbourne Graduate School Of Education – Assessment Research Centre. The project is supported by the Australian Research Council.

The project was initiated because some very interesting and compelling achievement results were obtained with a small number of Catholic primary schools since 2004. We noticed that when teachers used assessment data that was interpreted within the developmental framework and they targeted instruction in reading comprehension at a level where the students were declared to be ready to learn, students made rapid gains well in excess of expected learning development. We studied how the teachers were achieving these results and planned a professional development program for the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to capitalise on the idea of teachers working in teams and using data to make targeted and differentiated instructional decisions. Some schools have maintained the compelling results for more than five years. The

Catholic Education schools have been using commercial tests in the project.

As the results became more widely known more schools have requested to join the project. Government schools asked to join the program. A new online teaching program was developed addressing literacy, numeracy and problem solving. An online testing system was also developed and so far with that testing system more than 100,000 tests have been administered to over 40,000 students. The DEECD schools have focused mainly on the online testing - Assessment Research Centre Online Testing System – ARCOTS.

Both the program of professional development for the Catholic Education Office and the online program developed initially for the Department schools were offered as either formal University certificate awards or as professional development. One thing that differentiated the program from other professional development programs was our insistence that some form of monitoring teacher learning was built in to the professional development. Teachers undertaking formal University award courses had to meet the assessment requirements of such a course. Teachers undertaking the program as professional development also have had to provide evidence of learning through a system of exercises and reports entitled "Apply to Practice".

Over 400 schools have participated in the program. As the numbers have grown, it has become necessary to restrict entry into the program. As well as monitoring of the learning development of students' reading comprehension and mathematics, the change in teachers' approach to instruction and the way in which the professional development program is having an impact on teacher skills, knowledge and attitudes towards differentiated learning and teaching, is being tracked. The data collected through these processes will provide the information needed to identify the facilitating factors associated with increased student learning outcomes.

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The research project is designed to identify what leads to greater student achievement changes. In order to do that we are also examining changes in teacher knowledge, understanding and skills that are associated with larger gains in student achievement. In order to undertake the research we need teachers to agree to participate. It means an involvement for approximately 2 to 3 years. Teachers while involved in the research will continue to be able to use the program websites and gain access to additional readings, materials and the tests at no cost. It means that we ask teachers to complete a series of questionnaires each time the students are tested. This means that data collection will take place online twice a year. Our first data collection will take place in October of this year. In the next few weeks we will be contacting participants in the professional development program as well as other teachers not engaged directly in the professional development program to seek their participation. We will of course first approach the principal in the schools before contacting teachers direct.

We hope that you will join in this search for an understanding of how students reading and mathematics can be enhanced by the use of data and differentiated, targeted instruction. We look forward to working with large numbers of teachers.

A Steering Committee has been established for the project. The membership of the committee reflects the partnership program.

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