EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research Findings Related to the Implementation of The Australian Developmental Curriculum™

INTRODUCTION

Kathy Walker and Associates has an academic and research background in Education. The consultancy is committed to the implementation of high quality teaching and child centered learning.

The Australian Developmental Curriculum is based upon an interactionist theoretical construct using a mix of biological and neurological perspectives alongside a socio cultural perspective. It uses many constructs from the internationally renowned developmentally appropriate practice through the NAEYC based in the USA. It draws heavily from neurological studies emphasizing the need for relationships and active structured play for children in their early years of learning. The Australian Developmental Curriculum has an emphasis upon skill development and acquisition of understandings and skills through a balanced curriculum that seeks to actively engage children in investigations and play as well as explicit teaching.

The consultancy is aware that quality research (qualitative and quantitative) is required to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of any curriculum. In this context the consultancy has been committed to using a variety of empirical research over the past 10 years to monitor the effectiveness of the Australian Developmental Curriculum across all domains of learning.

In this document we provide an overview and compilation of data we have measured through both qualitative and quantitative measurement tools from a number of schools as well as data and quotes from specific schools. To ensure no school or research bias an external researcher was employed in four schools and in addition to data supplied by each school, additional diagnostic assessment, observation, surveys and focus group discussions were also used through the data collection process.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

A range of qualitative and quantitative tools assessed in both cross sectional and longitudinal study designs have been used and include the following:

- Diagnostic tools such as the SSRS (Gresham and Elliot 2002) have been used with a number of schools to measure student, parent and teacher perceptions of social and behavioral aspects of learning as well as a teacher measured academic scale.
- Two major oral language tools were used in addition to teacher/school measures for assessment of oral language. Peabody Picture Basic Vocabulary and The Hundred pictures naming Test (HPNT)
- An additional reading, oral language and comprehension tool, the Neale Analysis Reading Ability test was also used which measured:
    - Oral reading and comprehension
    - Discrimination of initial and final sounds
    - Names and sounds of the alphabet
    - Graded spelling
    - Auditory discrimination and blending
    - Word lists
    - Silent reading and writing
- Reading levels and data were collated through the data that teachers in both catholic and state schools must use for benchmarking. These results were compared with like cohorts from the previous 5 years before ADC had been implemented. Running records were also used. Results were also compared with like schools as provided by the state government
- In some schools focus groups with students, parents and teachers were also used along with surveys and questionnaires.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS FROM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Outcome Measure	Positive Change	No change detected
Literacy	• Higher levels of reading for a purpose and reading with meaning • Higher levels of writing, writing with meaning and less "reluctant writers". • Substantially higher oral language scores for boys and girls across prep grades.	• Across years p-2 in relation to reading, no significant difference between ADC or non ADC cohorts related to benchmark levels in prep. • Slightly higher for some boys in prep. • Same or higher reading levels in grades 1 and 2 but not statistically higher. Slightly higher in boys.
Social skills	• Substantially higher levels of engagement for boys • Higher levels of associative interactions • Higher levels of initiative • Higher levels of self regularity behaviors	
Behaviors problems	• Substantially less behavioral problems for boys	
General academic measures	• Higher levels of thinking and problem solving • Higher comprehension	• Same numeracy scores
General findings	• School attendance improvement in areas where it had a history of problems • Parent satisfaction with learning and happiness of children • Punctuality improved as children wishing to attend for investigation time • Enjoyment of children and eagerness to participate • Higher teacher satisfaction • Higher levels of deeper relationships between teacher and student • Higher understandings about children from teacher	• No significant improvement in reading scores but higher oral language

OUTCOMES AS IDENTIFIED BY FOUR SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING THE AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENTAL CURRICULUM ACROSS YEARS P-2

For the children:

- Significant increase in levels of engagement in learning
- Significant improvement in literacy levels for the boys was evident when data from pre-developmental curriculum was compared to similar cohort involved in developmental curriculum
- Significant improvement in pro-social skills including adaptability, self-initiation, working collaboratively with others
- Smoother transition through the junior school.

For the teachers:

- Higher levels of satisfaction that individual needs of children are being met more consistently
- Increased professional knowledge and confidence in themselves as educators
- Greater awareness of the children's development, maturation and learning styles
- Higher levels of awareness of specific needs of boys.

For the school:

- Creating a seamless curriculum
- Recognition by, and model for, other schools of Developmental Curriculum
- Visits by schools to view our practices and presentations by team members. (a number of schools)

For the parents:

- High levels of satisfaction in the program for their children
- Satisfaction with children's eagerness to attend school
- Satisfaction with literacy and other key learning areas through this approach
- Greater level of knowledge of children in relation to both learning and maturation, social and emotional maturity as well as motivation and engagement through teacher feedback.

SUMMARY OF LITERACY RESULTS FROM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This summary provides results from ten schools across 3 major demographic regions including regional and rural Victoria which have collated results from before and after the introduction of the Australian Developmental Curriculum. These results are presented for (i) prep; (ii) grades 1 and 2; and (iii) a summary of findings across levels prep-2

(i) Reading levels prep

Reading levels in prep reflected a general mean of no significant difference before and after implementation of the Australian Developmental Curriculum in actual benchmarking scores.

Higher interest level in reading and reading a wider range of material, particularly during investigation time and guided reading or small group reading groups was noted by all teachers.

Oral language scores were consistently above the mean for prep children including those who had English as a second language.

(ii) Reading levels Grades 1 and 2

Results continued to increase. In all schools despite what two schools described as a “low cohort”, reading levels and benchmarks were reached. In five schools, reading benchmark means were “above”. When compared to results of similar cohorts from years before the implementation of ADC whilst no statistical difference was noted, literacy for boys had increased.

Oral language scores were consistently above the mean for grade 2 children including those who had English as a second language.

(iii) Summary Reading Levels Prep to Grade 2

No schools have reported a decline in reading results since implementation of the Australian Developmental Curriculum. In fact, all schools reported either a maintenance of current reading scores or an increase (particularly for boys) and a significant increase in reading with meaning and writing with meaning with less “reluctant writers and readers amongst the boys”.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of the Australian Developmental Curriculum across years P-2 when appropriate ongoing mentoring and PD support is provided for teaching teams implementing the approach indicates strongly that as well as maintaining or enhancing literacy in the early years, it significantly increases oral language, pro social skills, life learning skills and eagerness to attend school.

Teachers report higher satisfaction and enjoyment of their own teaching in this approach.

Reading with meaning and writing with meaning appears also to be enhanced and further testing and analysis will be conducted during 2009-2011.

It has increased student engagement and built stronger links between home and school.

Anecdotally, teachers are reporting less of a drop in reading levels as children move through grade 3. This is an additional aspect of research that we will be undertaking over the next 3 years.

We are particularly pleased that one of the schools implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum was awarded the top award federally in 2006 for teaching and learning with the National Achievement award, 2006: *Quality Schooling* Excellence in School Improvement Best National Achievement (Princes Hill).

In conclusion, the Australian Developmental Curriculum is now being implemented in 100's of schools across Australian states and territories. The results of research (qualitative and quantitative) provide compelling evidence that demonstrates that the Australian Developmental Curriculum if implemented with rigor and integrity increases student engagement, enhances social skills and oral language and promotes numeracy and literary in a meaningful and relevant context which maintain and in many cases exceed appropriate benchmarking requirements.