

## AIS school-based action learning project: Pedagogy



*The Association of Independent Schools (AIS) awarded twelve teacher librarians Australian funded AGQTP grants to explore Guided Inquiry as a process for pedagogical change. Alinda Sheerman, teacher librarian at Broughton Anglican School, shares her experience with us. We thank the AIS for their permission to share this project with ASLA (NSW).*

To collaborate on a project with eleven other like-minded teacher librarians presented an opportunity to investigate and gather evidence to support the learning and teaching process of Guided Inquiry as a way of bringing about pedagogical change. The grants were used to help us attend seminars, fund time to work on our projects and access support from the Association of Independent Schools NSW.

The group met on a number of occasions. We pooled our resources, allowing us to have personal tuition from Dr Ross Todd who presented us with the research base for his pedagogy, and, after some wonderful teaching sessions, inspired us all to just DO it!

Through our *Glresearchers* wiki, ably coordinated by Lee Fitzgerald, Dr Todd guided us through our research journey. We shared learning scaffolds and ideas; discussed our analyses and shared our reports. Researching as a community toward a shared goal made the journey so much richer.

### **Rationale for study**

At Broughton, after observation of assessments, student activities, and student attitudes to learning, as well as discussions with executive and teaching staff, we knew a pedagogical change was evident.

In considering the Y and Z Generations' learning styles, coupled with the critical integration of Web 2.0 learning technologies into teaching and learning, we identified several areas in which we could improve our students' response to learning as well as our teaching practice.

Firstly, and in particular, we needed to guide our students away from transportation of information, made even easier with digital learning technologies, toward transformation of information into new knowledge.

Acknowledging that transporting information has been an issue for decades, not helped by the way assessments were written, we recognised that the time had come to get into the trenches and get working—Students constructing their knowledge was the door we wished to unlock.

### **Into the action**

It is important in action research to consider your personal/ professional goals and then act!

I was passionate about Guided Inquiry after the foregrounding I received through participation in Dr Todd's workshops. I was also encouraged by the action research approach, having been a member of ASLA (NSW) CAR-TL and the nurturing experience it provided me.

My focus for this research was to investigate whether Guided Inquiry was engaging students in learning and changing the way students used information to develop deep knowledge. Plagiarism, at various levels, continued to be an issue with our students and Guided Inquiry promised a different level of engagement, encouraging students to enthusiastically create their own body of knowledge and share it with others. I was also keen to take full advantage of the social software in which to develop a culture of shared learning experiences.

Initially, discussion was held at the executive level to determine the direction we would take to bring about pedagogical change. It was decided our goal would be to collaboratively plan and teach a Guided Inquiry unit of work, initially with one Year 7 class.

Using a wiki for shared learning, we would closely monitor how our students were gathering, using and sharing resources, information and ideas. We felt that we would observe in the students what Todd described as transformation of information to knowledge. If we were right, then we would present this unit of work as an exemplar of good practice within our school and thus emphasise the need to change our pedagogy towards a more constructivist paradigm.

### **Staff training and research**

Foregrounding in the Guided Inquiry process is vital—reading, attending workshops, sharing ideas with others who have trialled the process. For me, I was privileged to have been a part of so many vibrant groups such as CAR-TL, Glresearchers and the Guided Inquiry Ning. It was important, therefore, that the teacher I was working with was given similar support. He read Kuhlthau's *Guided Inquiry*, attended a Guided Inquiry Seminar, as well as read several of the articles published by Dr Todd.

Without this foregrounding, the planning of the unit of work, including the interventions, would not have had the energy and creativity that we both experienced.

Keeping our Broughton community informed about the project was an important strategic move. Teacher discussions centred on the need for pedagogical change.

This was supported by evidence of ingrained practice of students' transferring information, with little new knowledge being formed.

### **Implementation**

After initial training in the use of wikis, the students were required to answer their first Guided Inquiry *SLIM Toolkit* questionnaire by which we gained information about their interest and knowledge level. Students were then immersed in the topic through videos and books, eventually selecting an area of interest. At that point, they composed a higher order question for themselves. Differentiation was achieved through student choice of topic area, level of question composed, and

mode of presentation. Information was initially stored and organised on the class wiki; each student having his / her own page.

Collaborative learning took place as students interacted with each other, sharing ideas and linking to each other's pages. They prepared a common knowledge base and learnt to constructively criticise through performing two peer reviews on allocated wiki pages – praising, asking questions and suggesting improvements to each other.

### **Achievements**

Engagement in learning and transformation of information was confirmed by the administering of the *SLIM toolkit* reflection sheets. Analysis of these reflections confirmed that there was a marked increase in new knowledge being created. The analysis also gave clear evidence of the positive effect of obtaining information at point of need.

It is also worth mentioning that the wiki provided an excellent tool for sharing and creating knowledge. Out of this experience, and through sharing it with a wider audience, colleagues have begun implementing this social technology as a valid learning and teaching tool in which to begin Guided Inquiry units with their classes.

### **The next cycle**

In 2009, Guided Inquiry began again as we look to improve on our experience and extend it to incorporate all classes in Year 7, and five teachers. Once again we have an AGQTP grant as part of the AIS School Based Action Learning Project. It will, again, be implemented using a team teaching approach between teacher librarian and class teacher, collaborating at all stages of the Guided Inquiry process.

The full project can be viewed at

[http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddf5mv6\\_2ctfj3&invite=1488388287](http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=ddf5mv6_2ctfj3&invite=1488388287)

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