

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Keeping kids in school through experiential learning

To ensure that children of all abilities can learn in a safe and welcoming environment, Australian schools need to be using the most up-to-date and effective teaching models. Dr Chwee Beng Lee, along with Mr Mark Smith and Mr Paul Borodin from Lomandra School in NSW, has been granted funding through the UWS Research Partnerships program to investigate the benefits of using both experiential learning and an integrated curriculum in a school with unique challenges.

'Lomandra is a school which offers an integrated curriculum with emphasis on experiential learning for students – students who have been temporarily removed from mainstream schools due to emotional or behavioural issues', explains Dr Lee. 'This research aims to improve the teaching styles used for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties.' One such style, called experiential learning, and the use of integrated curriculums in schools have been studied separately from one another, but not together. Research shows that alienating experiences in schools can lead to emotional stress and depression and this effect is exacerbated for students with existing mental issues. To make the education process rewarding for these pupils, the contributions of the experiential learning style in an integrated environment must be analysed for their utility and long-term results.

Dr Lee will work with partner investigators Mr Smith and Mr Borodin within Lomandra School to create a case-based reasoning library of interviews with teachers, focus group interviews with students, and observation notes regarding the use of practical, experiential learning within Lomandra's integrated curriculum. The library will provide the basis of new theories and perspective for teaching in similar environments, and will highlight any improvements that can be made.



Photograph by Gina Glover, Lomandra School

Apart from improved outcomes for students of Lomandra School, this research will provide a definitive framework of best teaching practices for any student with challenging behaviour in Australia. By finding ways to keep children in school longer, something which correlates with higher employment prospects, it will also contribute to the overall health of the Australian economy.

Project Title: Capturing and assessing the experience of experiential learning: Understanding teaching and learning in a behaviourally challenging context

Funding has been set at: \$24,375

Contact Details: chwee.lee@uws.edu.au;
<http://www.uws.edu.au/cer>

June 2015

Supported by: Lomandra School