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Fostering the development of self-directed learners

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Abstract

We will describe a project designed to document and improve educational practices developed at the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS) to foster the development of self-directed learners. The project also disseminated these practices to four secondary schools with a low ICSEA value. It included a *Professional Learning Program* for teachers who then designed a *Self-Directed Learners' Curriculum* for the participating students and the *Development of a Self-Directed Learner Plan* designed to help students reach a better understanding of themselves as learners and define their educational goals. The *Professional Learning Program* involved both face-to-face and on-line sessions and was designed to help teachers examine their beliefs about learning and teaching, and their impact on teacher practices and student learning. It also aimed to provide ideas, support and resources about how to design and implement a core *Self-Directed Learners' Curriculum* for a whole school approach. *The Self-directed Learner Plan* paired individual students with teachers who adopted a variety of practices to help their students set, reflect and take action to achieve their learning goals.

A questionnaire given to the students before the beginning of the program was instrumental in identifying areas in which students needed most help. Students' questionnaire responses indicated that there were important differences in their learning needs. Some students needed to work more on their beliefs about themselves as learners and on building their self-confidence while others had high self-confidence and achievement goals but needed to work more on their learning strategies. Feedback from the teachers and students who participated in the program indicated increased development of teacher capacity to lead and deliver the program at their school, increased student recognition of the areas they needed to improve most and understanding of the strategies that would help them do so. Results from the pre/post survey also indicated significant positive changes in teachers' and students' beliefs about learning and SRL strategies.