

CATALYST

research and innovation
in independent schools

Research in Schools

Enabling research that can
impact the whole school

Finding the 'TEAM' in STEaM

Preparing for a future heavily
dependent on STEM

What's happening inside the Humanities Classroom?

Classroom walkthroughs provide
evidence of engagement

Quality Programs & Practice in Kindergarten

Equipping children to successfully
transition to school



How does peer academic mentoring affect high achieving secondary students?

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In the ISQ Teachers as
Researchers (TAR) Project in
2014–2015, teachers at
Northpine Christian College
(NCC) investigated and
implemented an Academic
Success Peer Mentoring (ASPM)
model with positive impact
on the academic performance
of high achieving students
(HAS). Results indicated
improved HAS student
confidence, metacognitive and
communication skills and raised
student profiles as role models
within the culture of the school.

In this article, a unique strategy
designed to help mentors as well as
mentees (academic peer mentoring)
to become consistently high achieving
students; together with a range of
methods for embedding this strategy
into their own school environment is
discussed. Though the initiative was
trials mainly with Year 9–12 students
in the context of core subjects (English,
Maths, Science), the findings of the
project strongly support the possibility
of using ASPM in a variety of subject
areas.

The research provided strong evidence
for including a solid and sustainable
program for high achieving students
and was voted for and included in
the school improvement plan at

NCC as a method for raising student
achievement. The research was also
a reflection – at student level – of
the implementation by the school of
Robert Marzano's first level of high
reliability schools (HRS): Creating a
safe and collaborative environment.
In this context, the ASPM teachers,
working with the student team at NCC,
demonstrated strong characteristics of a
viable professional learning team (PLT).

*"... it is this level of commitment to
the improvement of learning for each
individual student that sets NCC apart
from other schools... this Academic
Success Peer Mentor program is
precisely the type of initiative that I am
looking for in a school to support my
child's progress and growth."*

~ Observation of school culture during
after school session by NCC pre-
service teacher and parent of primary
students.

Overview

Members of the TAR project research
team identified too much in-class
time was being used to explain
simple and straightforward matters
and that feedback came exclusively
from the teacher in charge of the
learning environment. The research
team used the project to empower
carefully selected high achieving
students to initially deal with simpler
questions from peers in order to allow
the teacher to deal with complex
concepts and issues. The teacher
was responsible for overall lesson
structure and defined and described

roles, provided clear time frames
and explained the parameters for
discussion but then mentoring student
pairs had freedom of discussion to find
answers and solutions.

As a result, a student mentor-led
learning environment emerged, with
students or mentors taking initiative
and becoming responsible for their
own progress. The model progressed
from HA to LA pairings with the
purposes of checking homework,
bringing students up to date with
missed lessons and monitoring time
on task to HA to HA pairings in which
deep discussions and deconstructions
of advanced concepts took place with
clear development of metacognitive
skills and self-regulated learning. Thus
it was observed that not only mentees,
but also mentors benefited from the
program.

Background

The TAR team at NCC believed
that HAS could be recognised,
developed, supported or valued
more fully within the context of the
school and also believed there was a
misconception amongst NCC staff and
administration about the differences
between fostering cultural elitism and
empowering high achieving students
to use their skills to improve their own
learning and academic performance as
well as that of their peers.

Teachers felt overwhelmed by the high
number of requests for support and
help during in-class lessons as well
as after school and were looking for