

THE BIG PICTURE ACADEMY Research Project

MAP4U Murdoch University

RESEARCH BRIEF No. 1 Overview

Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of the Research Brief for the Big Picture Academy Research Project - the research component of the Big Picture Academy (BPA) Project. Our primary audience for this brief is staff involved in Big Picture Education in our participating project schools but we know it will be of interest to the wider Big Picture Education network.

The BPA Project involves five schools in a southern corridor region of Perth. Three large high schools are introducing a Big Picture Academy while two smaller schools are implementing a whole school orientation using the Big Picture Education design. Two other schools - not in this region - have been connected to the project because of their longer history with BPE and the leadership and influence they can provide.

The BPA Project and the associated BPA Research Project are part of a larger project funded by the federal government called MAP4U or Murdoch's Aspiration and Pathways for University project. MAP4U seeks to develop sustainable programs that will grow the number of eligible, willing and able students to attend university in this region.

This first issue of the Research Brief outlines the research questions and the key approaches being used in the research.

The Research Questions

We have identified our key research questions which orient the research process:

- A. How do school communities effectively implement a Big Picture Academy or Big Picture Education orientation within an established school?
- B. How does the Big Picture Education design influence student engagement and learning?
- C. How does the experience of being in a Big Picture Academy or Big Picture Education inspired school influence student aspirations and capacity to undertake further education?
- D. What are the teachers learning?

Each of these questions has a number of associated sub-questions. They are available on request.

Having identified what we want to know, it is still necessary to develop a research methodology, for how we are going to investigate these questions.

The Research Methodology

The approach we have chosen for the research includes both qualitative (e.g., interviews, conversations, observations, and journals) and quantitative (e.g., surveys and statistics) data.

1. *Ethnographic case studies* will be developed for each of the five schools involved. They will document the steps and the experience of the implementation of a Big Picture Academy (or the integration of the BP design) in a school. To develop these case studies members of the research team will spend a few days in schools twice each year. They will interview selected students, staff involved in the Big Picture Academy or program, relevant school leaders, parents of the selected students, Big Picture coaches and mentors of the selected students. Samples of student work will be collected and student exhibitions may be observed. Researchers will also observe the daily activities of the Big Picture Academy or program within the school setting.
2. *Surveys*: To help us answer research questions B and C we have developed some Surveys for students to fill in. This quantitative data will be supported by the in-depth qualitative data obtained through interviews. All students who commence in the Big Picture Academy/program in 2014 will complete an Enrolment Survey. At the end of the year they will complete an Annual Survey. On leaving the Big Picture Academy/program either through graduation or for other reasons, they will complete an Exit Survey. We will be discussing with school leaders and teachers how to administer these surveys.
3. *The Research Circle*: The final methodological approach uses action research to explore the professional learning of (some) teachers and school leaders involved in the Big Picture Academies/program. Teachers and school leaders are constantly

making decisions, taking action and learning from them. However, this learning is often left unsaid. Through the research circle we will be helping participants to describe their practice and their learning in a Research Circle that will be held 2-4 times a year.

Ethics

The research was approved by the Murdoch University Ethics committee (2013/77) and the WA Department of Education (2014).

What to do now

Of course what is happening now will be important to the research too. So just by supporting and using the Big Picture Design in your work you will be helping the research. For example,

- Weekly Reflection: as per the BP design journal weekly reflections of key events, surprises, challenges and joys connected to the Big Picture Academy/program.
- Student and staff narratives each term.
- Annual school review as per the BPE School Research Framework.
- Keeping key documents and different versions of them as they are developed.

We thank everyone involved for your commitment to this work. We seek a better understanding of what works best for students and their teachers in terms of engagement, deep learning, aspirations and success. We expect it will contribute valuable knowledge to our understanding of the conditions that need to be created and more widely sustained to support progressive school reform.

The Research Team

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This research is funded by the Australian Federal Government as a Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) Project Grant (2012 – 2016) administered by Murdoch University and entitled Murdoch's Aspirations and Pathways for University (MAP4U) Project.

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