Aims

Why QuickSmart?
Students who experience ongoing failure in upper–primary and lower–secondary school face a myriad of difficulties in pursuing post–school options and contributing to society through employment and aware citizenship. Those who exhibit consistent weaknesses in basic skills, such as the recall of number facts, or who experience difficulty with reading and comprehension are particularly vulnerable. There is well documented evidence in Australia of a substantial systemic decline in achievement for these vulnerable students in terms of reaching National Benchmarks from Year 3 to Year 5 and on to Year 7.

Data from national assessments (NAPLAN summary report, 2008) underpin a compelling case for the need to develop instructional programs that improve the numeracy outcomes for Australian students performing in the lowest 30% of the achievement spectrum. This includes students performing around or below the national numeracy benchmarks. Many indigenous and geographically isolated students, as well as those in low–socio economic areas, are particularly in need of such a program.

Purpose of QuickSmart
The prime purpose of the QuickSmart program is to reverse the trend of ongoing poor academic performance for students who have been struggling at school for several years and who are caught in a cycle of continued failure. These targeted students experience significant and sustained learning difficulties in basic mathematics and/or Literacy, and have shown themselves to be resistant to improvement despite attempts to overcome their learning problems. For a variety of reasons these students have been unable to draw lasting benefits from other in–class and withdrawal instructional activities.

In addition, the QuickSmart professional learning program is designed for classroom teachers, special needs support teachers, and teacher support staff to learn how to work with, and significantly
improve, the learning outcomes in basic mathematics and literacy skills of under–achieving students in the middle years of schooling. The program offers professional learning and support for teachers to work in a small class instructional setting with two students using a specially constructed teaching program supported by extensive material and computer–based resources.

Overall, the QuickSmart intervention and research program attempts to fill some of the identified gaps in research and practice regarding middle–school students with persistent learning difficulties.

Specifically, QuickSmart aims to provide an intense intervention focused on basic knowledge and understandings that can equip students with the skills necessary to engage more successfully with classroom instruction. The QuickSmart intervention is designed as a relatively long–term (30 week), yet cost–effective, program for students in middle–school who need to improve their basic mathematics, and/or reading, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

The QuickSmart program thus has both pedagogical and research aims, with the research intended to inform the development of sound pedagogical practices. The pedagogical aim of the QuickSmart program is to narrow the gap between the learning achievements of the targeted QuickSmart students and their average–achieving peers.

The research aims of the QuickSmart program are to fill some of the identified gaps in research and practice for middle–school students with learning difficulties. Accordingly, the two main research aims of the QuickSmart program are to:

- investigate the effectiveness of the QuickSmart instructional program in improving students' fluency with basic academic skills; and
- observe the effect of improved fluency with the basics on students' performance on more demanding academic tasks, such as their performance on state–wide basic skills tests or standardized achievement tests.