The Year so far ..... 

We are in the final months of 2009 and what a year it has been! Further growth in the take up of the QuickSmart program means the program is now implemented in over 200 schools.

2009 has seen clusters of QuickSmart schools begin in South Australia, Victoria, and the ACT. We are also continuing our support of many more schools across the Northern Territory and New South Wales. It is inspiring to work with so many teachers, support officers, assistant teachers and principals who believe, like us, that fast and accurate basic skills are vital foundations for academic achievement.

QuickSmart is set to grow further in 2010. The numeracy programs inclusion as an option for schools in NSW to choose under National Partnerships funding has increased the numbers of QuickSmart schools in the New England and North Coast regions of the state. More clusters of schools from South Australia and Victoria are also ready to start in 2010. We are also looking forward to offering the professional development program to interested principals, teachers and assistant teachers in Tasmania and Western Australia next year.

As the school year finishes we are looking forward to receiving your data and continuing the important research into the effectiveness of QuickSmart. We will continue to be busy into December, as I am sure you will be.

Fortunately we have a new member of the team. Shirley Cooke joins Jenny Thomas, Noelene Raymond and Eve Croeser as a member of the QuickSmart team at SiMERR National Centre. Shirley has already had a notable career as a...
Mathematics teacher, head teacher and senior administrator. She has been driving the push to document the roles and contributions of *QuickSmart* coordinators and instructors. This is certainly important work.

If you have any queries, question or comments please do not hesitate to get into contact with us.

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STUDENTS WITH PROFESSOR JOHN PEGG, PROFESSOR MARGARET SHEIL (CEO OF THE ARC) AND LORRAINE GRAHAM ARE KHYE SMITH, GEORGIA SIROTKA AND LATICIA ARGUS FROM KINGSFORDSMITH SCHOOL


Research which is positively supported by long term follow up reviews of effect and sustainability of project outcomes is very powerful. Since the initial *QuickSmart* pilot research project was conducted at two schools in 2001, the *QuickSmart* team has set itself the goal of conducting long term follow up research with *QuickSmart* students in and around Armidale and its base at the University of New England.

As early as 2002, follow up testing on the CAAS computer program was conducted with students from the initial group of *QuickSmart* students. Similar testing was again carried out at the end of 2004 and 2005 with students from local Armidale schools who
had received \textit{QuickSmart} instruction throughout 2003 and 2004. For students who had been involved in the \textit{QuickSmart} program in 2003, this meant that they provided follow-up data in two consecutive years. Overall the results of this testing showed that students retained their skills of automaticity in either or both literacy or numeracy.

In 2006, funding was acquired to conduct follow-up interviews with students and parents of students in local Armidale schools who had been involved in \textit{QuickSmart} throughout the years 2001 – 2005. These interviews focused on the value of the \textit{QuickSmart} program to these students in their learning and in their lives since \textit{QuickSmart}. Responses from students and parents indicated lasting positive benefits and were very affirming of \textit{QuickSmart} as an effective intervention.

To broaden and support our data in this area of \textit{QuickSmart} research, it was decided to work in collaboration with Orara High school to gather interview responses from their initial \textit{QuickSmart} cohort of 2005 – 2006. These students were now in Year 10, having been involved in the \textit{QuickSmart} program for six months during Years 7/8. Late in October 2008 two of the \textit{QuickSmart} team spent three days in Coffs Harbour interviewing thirteen students and conducting telephone interviews with parents. All the students who were interviewed gave positive feedback about the \textit{QuickSmart} program and were able to identify benefits such as making it easier to do class work, moving up classes, doing better in tests, and being more confident as learners.

For the QS Team it was a most enjoyable and valuable experience and we are extremely grateful for the assistance afforded us by Lyn Alder [\textit{QuickSmart Co-ordinator}] and Graham Reeves [\textit{QuickSmart Instructor}] in organising these interviews.

Any schools who would like to conduct this type of medium-term follow-up research are welcome to contact us for copies of the questions we have developed. (This will help maintain consistency in data gathering.)

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THE VALUE OF CRITICAL FRIENDS AND EXTERNAL EVALUATORS:

In some of our recent research grants, the funding body has required the *QuickSmart* program to appoint personnel to carry out external evaluations of the *QuickSmart* research project.

This was a requirement of a recent research project carried out in 10 New England schools during 2008 - 2009. SiMERR utilised the services of two retired educators, one with a school systems background and another from the tertiary school education field. These officers visited the participating schools together and separately on one or two occasions to observe *QuickSmart* in operation and to speak with *QuickSmart* instructors, students, principals and *QuickSmart* co-ordinators. Their final report has been invaluable in supporting the outcome of this project and has been included in the most recent comprehensive report to government.

One of the most powerful and valued observations contained in this report concerned the commitment and professionalism of the *QuickSmart* Instructors

‘Most noticeable to the evaluators is the importance of the tutors in the QS program. The QS team at University of New England has devoted and continues to devote attention to the elevation of tutors’ standards. Of particular satisfaction to the evaluators has been the observation of so many Indigenous tutors conducting QS lessons. These tutors are enthusiastic and devoted and with few, if any, exceptions, keen to expand their knowledge of QS in future professional development workshops’. (L. Murphy & A.R. Thomas, 2008).

CONFERENCES AND PUBLICATIONS:

**ISFIRE 2009**

*QuickSmart* Literacy

The Literacy strand of *QuickSmart* is being revised and revamped. The Resource Folder is almost completed and ready for the next step of design and production. It includes several new pieces of graded text with teaching materials for each one. We have been fortunate to have the services of Katie Kilner who has expertise in both primary education and visual arts and whose illustrations have added interest and meaning to the texts.
The teaching materials include a greater emphasis on reading fluently for understanding, and a section with more explicit discussion about how words are constructed. We look forward to a Literacy Kit that looks as professional as the Numeracy Kit!

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM FOR INNOVATION IN RURAL EDUCATION

This international conference was held at the University of New England in February 2009. It provided an international forum for sharing research findings, innovative ideas and evaluated approaches linked to positive, practical action in improving equity in rural education.

Through the insightful and informative presentations of three of our QuickSmart colleagues in the Northern Territory, the success of the QuickSmart program in such remote locations was acclaimed.

- Participants were blown away by Sally Mackender’s video-conferenced presentation titled: “Katherine School of the Air QuickSmart Trial 2008” and the three methods utilised to deliver the QuickSmart Numeracy program to students in isolated situations.

- Mark Monaghan’s session “Freeing Working Memory to Enhance Student Growth” conclusively demonstrated the long term value of automaticity in the learning of basic numeracy and literacy skills. Mark used many powerful examples of how freeing up working memory can allow students to once more participate successfully in their regular classroom.

- Jo Jefferson’s paper “QuickSmart Numeracy: Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory” highlighted the continuing success and achievements of the QuickSmart program in the Northern Territory over the period 2005 to 2008. With the program now being delivered in over 60 schools, including some in very remote locations. Quicksmart is regarded as influential in improving the National Numeracy Benchmarks of students in the Northern Territory.
VISITS TO QUICKSMART PROGRAMS AT WEE WAA AND COLLARENEBRI

QuickSmart had a real taste of what it means by rural and remote when it visited the QuickSmart programs at Wee Waa Primary and Secondary Schools and Collarenebri Central School in early November 2008. Wee Waa is 326kms north west of Armidale and Collarenebri another 143 kms further west than Wee Waa. With populations of 2000 and 500 respectively, these communities are probably typical of many of the schools in which the QuickSmart program thrives and flourishes.

In all three schools, we met with committed Principals, organised and efficient QuickSmart co-ordinators, dedicated and enthusiastic QuickSmart instructors as well as some very quick and smart QuickSmart students.

We returned with some good ideas from Wee Waa Primary school about using teleconferencing for follow-up workshop sessions, and encouragement for the QuickSmart team to travel and deliver the introductory workshop sessions in central but remote towns in order to cut down travel and to involve more personnel in the training days.

At Wee Waa High school, where QuickSmart has only been introduced in the second half of 2008, great efforts have been made to involve and inform the whole school community. Efforts are being made at Collarenebri Central, another new school to QuickSmart, to bring the parents of the QuickSmart students into the school to observe their child in a QuickSmart lesson.
Overall the QS travellers were very impressed to see so many Indigenous Teacher’s Aides providing the instruction in these remote schools. They are delivering QuickSmart instruction with such an enthusiastic and professional approach that it is providing their QuickSmart students with great role models in their community. This was one of the truly inspirational highlights of the four day journey into the north west of New South Wales.

QUICKSMART ONLINE LEARNING SPACE

The QuickSmart Online Learning Space was developed in November 2009 with the aim of providing QuickSmart tutors and coordinators an opportunity to discuss their work and share ideas about their tutoring. This Learning Space offers many possible ways to enhance and support work with students doing the QuickSmart program. It provides forums for interaction with others from schools within a cluster as well as shared spaces that encourage discussion and troubleshooting around the sorts of situations that frequently arise in teaching the QuickSmart programs.

Access to this website is restricted, and to begin with only two clusters of QuickSmart schools (in the Lismore Diocese and Western Sydney) have been provided with access. These schools were chosen to trial the idea of creating a QuickSmart online learning community because they were funded partly on the basis that they would have access to such an online professional learning and collaboration tool. The aim is, however, to eventually provide relevant staff in all QuickSmart schools with access to this learning space.

Since the QuickSmart program is now operating in over 200 schools (with more schools due to offer the program in 2010), it may take a while to provide access to everyone; the QuickSmart team based at UNE will do its best to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.
Below is a list of the contact details of the QuickSmart Co-ordinators in all the QuickSmart School Clusters. The value of these people to the ongoing strength and success of the QuickSmart programs in schools is immeasurable. They are critical in the organization and communication required for all QuickSmart workshops, they act as the first point of contact in providing solutions and support for many QuickSmart issues, they visit QuickSmart schools and they maintain consistent and valuable contact with the QuickSmart team at SiMERR. For all of this, the QuickSmart Team is very grateful.

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