

## An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project (ÆSOP)

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Project Title	Identifying and analysing processes in Years 7–10 schooling, exceptional outcomes to assist national renewal in junior secondary school education: An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project (ÆSOP)
Project Team	Professor John Pegg, Dr Paul Brock, Professor Steve Dinham, Dr David Laird, Professor Bill Green, Dr Ted Redden, Dr Wayne Sawyer (Mr Trevor Lynch project manager)
Period	2001 – 2004
Funding Agency	Australian Research Council's Strategic Partnerships with Industry – Research and Training Scheme and NSW Department of Education and Training
Organisational Base	SiMERR National Centre (formerly CRILT)

### Description

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The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) in conjunction with staff from the University of New England and the University of Western Sydney are undertaking in a research program funded through DET and the Australian Research Council. The project is referred to as ÆSOP (An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project). The purpose of this research was to identify and analyse those processes in NSW public schools producing outstanding educational outcomes for students in Years 7-10. The focus of the research was on the work of within-school groups or teams of teachers. These groupings of teachers may be in the form of subject departments, special programs or initiatives.

In the first year, the ÆSOP team identified 50 sites in which students are achieving exceptional outcomes. The sample of sites was restricted to 50 because of the purposes of the research. The sites are to cover a variety of educational areas (see The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century). In particular, the focus areas are those which: (1) develop fully the talents and capacities of all students; (2) Develop high “knowledge, skills and understanding” in terms of curriculum; and (3) encourage a “socially just” society. The sites are drawn from across a range of socioeconomic and geographic contexts.

The project team used DET qualitative and quantitative data-bases to assist with the identification of the special educational sites. However, the team also accessed the large body of information on this issue held by people working in schools as well as significant stakeholder groups. The process of identifying these within school groups or teams of teachers was undertaken by triangulating advice/evidence from a number of sources. The extensive list of sites found during this analysis was the basis from which the particular sites were derived.

The second and third year of the study is where sites were visited and studied in depth to identify principles, policies and practices that are most conducive to helping students achieve their potential. In the fourth year, this information obtained is being synthesised and evaluated leading to the preparation of professional development publications, processes and materials that will enable the research finding to be applied more broadly to Years 7-10 schooling.

### Overview of Initial Findings

In faculties achieving outstanding student outcomes you are likely to find:

- a strong sense of the faculty as a professional team;
- staff highly qualified in their subject areas and with high expectations of their students;
- experienced staff with deep pedagogical knowledge;
- solid, well structured and teacher-based lessons;
- lessons that maximise “time on task”;
- the use of testing and assessment as a catalyst for teacher cohesion;
- a clear mission of high expectations for students supported by parents and students as well as faculty members; and
- teachers who care for students as learners and individuals.

The ÆSOP findings to date raise the following challenges:

- the need to provide opportunities to help teachers develop the knowledge and skills necessary to exercise effective leadership in the role of Head Teacher;
- the need for early career teachers to work with and learn from experienced mid and later career teachers;
- the need to facilitate strong group interaction within faculties;

- the need for relevant professional development;
- the need for high subject-knowledge standards for new and current teachers;
- the need to create a culture in which teaching and learning, rather than behaviour management, dominates all classrooms; and
- the need to develop common goals among teachers, students and families.

Four additional issues require comment:

The problem for rural areas and difficult to staff school in metropolitan areas in attracting and retaining experienced, capable staff.

The study has found that outstanding faculties do normal/traditional things competently and well. It is possible that a too eager focus on being different and innovative does not necessarily deliver stronger learning outcomes.

Excellent faculties are often built on, and value, 'older' teachers with extensive subject knowledge and experience. There is a need to explore ways of retaining these people until the current crop of new and mid career teachers have developed the necessary experience to replace them.

The negative impact of the rapid growth in coaching colleges.

ÆSOP has provided substantial evidence of excellent teaching in NSW public secondary schools. The overriding challenge is to use the insights generated by this study to improve the educational achievement of students nationally and in particular, those in rural and regional Australia.

## Publications

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### The ÆESOP Series

*All books in the ÆESOP Series are available for purchase directly from [eContent Management](#).*

#### Exceptional Outcomes in English Education

Sawyer, W., Brock, P. & Baxter, D. (2007) [Exceptional Outcomes in English Education: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Exceptional Outcomes in ESL/Literacy Education

Sawyer, W., Brock, P. & Baxter, D. (2007) [Exceptional Outcomes in ESL/Literacy Education: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Exceptional Outcomes in Mathematics Education

Pegg, J., Lynch, Panizzon, D. (2007) [Exceptional Outcomes in Mathematics Education: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Exceptional Outcomes in Science Education

Panizzon, D. (2007) [Exceptional Outcomes in Science Education: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Exceptional Educational Equity Programs

Graham, L., Paterson, D. & Stevens, R. (2007) [Exceptional Educational Equity Programs: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Exceptional Student Welfare Programs

Paterson, D., Graham, L. & Stevens, R. (2007) [Exceptional Student Welfare Programs: Findings from ÆESOP](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

#### Leadership for Exceptional Educational Outcomes

Dinham, S. (2007) [Leadership for Exceptional Educational Outcomes](#), Teneriffe, QLD: Post Pressed.

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