Meaningful student involvement was kept in the forefront of minds throughout the project and opportunities to exercise this were abundant. After evaluation of the students’ presentations and analytical reflection, it was clear that the transfer of power to the students was not only empowering, but also led to a significantly deeper understanding of the content. As their teachers, it was satisfying to witness the students meeting achievement standards and showing interest and accountability for the outcome.

The Action

Where were they at?
Our first step was to deliver an online survey, which gave us some information about the students and their attitudes towards learning and the Key Learning Area of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Where were they going?
Students and teachers followed their learning plans, conferencing weekly, to check on progression, facilitate learning and goal setting.

Where are they now?
This stage was essentially the presentation of their work, the medium for the majority of the data collection. We viewed the boys’ presentations, considered their work during moderation, and marked against a rubric.

Key Findings and Discussion

• Meaningful student involvement prompted a shift in mindset, building confidence in students to believe that their personal knowledge was valuable
• Noticeable improvement in drafting higher-order thinking
• Students’ ability to control mode and method of presentation heightened engagement
• Growth in overall understanding of topics and confidence in own ability
• Dynamics of group work lead to a vested interest to learn from other participating groups … students teaching students.

Meaningful student involvement was satisfying to witness the students meeting a significantly deeper understanding of the content. As their teachers, it was satisfying to witness the students meeting achievement standards and showing interest and accountability for the outcome.

Conclusion

Embracing the concept of complete release of responsibility through a gradual process for students so young offered extremely pleasing results. The change of mindset of both students and teachers created an atmosphere of equality, substantially improving the delivery and acquisition of knowledge.

Adopting meaningful student involvement to enhance deeper understanding helped students to understand the value of investing in their own learning. The more invested they became the better the results were. Helping the students realise that they needed to be more than just passengers in the classroom during this project had a flow on effect with other subjects.

Research Context and Participants

The Southport School was established in 1901. It is an independent Anglican, day and boarding school for boys in Queensland, Australia. It is a non-selective school for all boys from Pre-school to Year 12. The school’s mission is to “challenge each boy to achieve excellence” through the balance of academics, pastoral care, and co-curricular opportunities.

The Southport Preparatory School has approximately 600 students ranging from Pre-prep to Year 6. The participants in our study were 25 Year 5 students following the National Australian Curriculum.