

Class Experimental Research Project

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The Class Experimental Research Project of the Science Talent Search is a unique section in that it is the only one that allows an entire class to work collaboratively on a common investigation topic. Through this section, students have the opportunity to become emerged in an investigation where they firstly develop and refine questions of an experimental nature. They then seek answers to their questions following an experimental research structure. On completion of their experimental work, they evaluate and reflect on the entire process and look at ways to extend their learning further. The culmination of the project is on Judging Day where they celebrate and communicate their learning to the wider community.

The criteria for this section is closely aligned with requirements of the Australian National Science Curriculum, in particular the Science Inquiry Strand. It also enables cross links between other areas of the curriculum, including Mathematics in collecting, recording and analysing data, English with report-writing and communication and some aspects of ICT where students may use spread-sheets to help create graphs of results. The Class Project Experimental Research also complements the programs of those primary schools using a PYP approach or an inquiry model.

Topics are not limited to the year's national science theme so a project can be chosen that integrates well with a class overarching learning. A Class Project can then be a starting point for students to try group or individual entries in following years.

The number of entries for this section increased this year, with new and returning schools from both the government and independent sectors, which was fantastic to see. The variety of topics presented to the judges, however, was not as varied as past years. A significant number came from the biological content strand, which can in Primary be a little limiting. Some of the investigations explored beyond the biology strand included robotics, paper gliders, alternative energy and air pollution. We would encourage teachers considering entering the competition to allow students a little more freedom with their choices. While it can be a little overwhelming to hand over control, the best projects were the ones that were truly developed and led by the students. Their understanding of concepts was at a deeper level than relying just on the boundaries of the formal curriculum.

A most satisfying aspect as Class Project Coordinators is having the opportunity to speak with the students as they wait to present their work and again as they exit the judging room. Aside from a few nerves, the students had obviously loved being part of the learning journey and were very excited and eager to share their science learning. It is clear from many of the returning students, that this is one of their more memorable experiences each year. We always enjoy catching up with past students who come back year after year.

For Primary Teachers who are thinking of entering the Science Talent Search next year, please consider the Class Experimental Research Project. It is an easy way to involve all students. Remember, Science is often inexact and messy but often problems and mistakes can teach far more than obtaining perfect answers. It is the mess and the clarity that comes out of the mess that produces some amazing Science Projects and Scientists! Remember also that the best learning comes from students when they can make links beyond the task or initial topic. Have fun, allow mess, be open to problems and discussions. Good luck and we look forward to seeing more fantastic Science being communicated to us next year!