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Indigenous Education UPDATE

Edition 3 October 2014

Creating opportunities for success

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Welcome to ACER's *Indigenous Education Update* – a window into the work that we undertake in research and development in Indigenous education.

In this issue we illustrate the notion of 'success' in remote school settings, through work undertaken in partnership with NintiOne and Dare to Lead that will be presented at a national conference later in the year. This research shares the views about student aspirations, expectations of schooling experiences and what educational success looks like in these settings. We reflect on our seven-year study of the literacy and numeracy achievements of Indigenous students, and share our lessons about the engagement of Indigenous students in higher education.

This issue profiles ACER's Principal Research Fellow, Indigenous Education, Tony Dreise, and his vision for improving Indigenous learning. We also highlight how ACER is continuing its contribution to Reconciliation and provide information about a new Indigenous Visiting Fellow initiative at ACER that will support Indigenous educators, early career researchers and community leaders in developing research skills.

We look forward to keeping you up to date with our work to improve Indigenous learning and research.

Gina Milgate

Research Fellow, Indigenous Education

To learn more about ACER's Indigenous Education services, visit <www.acer.edu.au/indigenous>



Latest research

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Defining success in remote schools

*Local and other stakeholders in remote schools hold quite different views about student aspirations, expectations of schooling experiences, and what educational success looks like, as **Gina Milgate** explains.*

Schools in very remote Australia, where many students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, are often characterised as failing or falling behind compared to the rest of the nation. But 'failure' and 'falling behind', 'success' and 'getting ahead', inevitably rest on the assumptions and values of those making such judgement that are not necessarily shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So what do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families themselves say about their vision and expectations of their future, how they see success and how they view their experiences of school?

In order to investigate the nature of educational experiences, aspirations and success in very remote schools, the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Dare to Lead Project of Principals Australia Institute (PAI) to analyse the relevant but de-identified data collected between 2009 and 2013 through the Dare to Lead Collegial Snapshots.

As reported in Edition 2 of *Indigenous Education Update*, each Collegial Snapshot collects point-in-time evidence-based and anecdotal data from the entire school community in

relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

ACER and the Dare to Lead Project analysed the perspectives of 672 school leaders, Aboriginal Assistants, classroom teachers, students, parents and carers, in 31 very remote schools that have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrolment rate of 80 per cent or higher.

The analysis sought to discover whether there is a difference between what local stakeholders say compared with those who come in to the school from elsewhere on three key issues: definitions of educational success, expectations of the school experience and young people's future orientation or aspirations.

The key finding of this analysis, essentially, is that what makes a successful remote school depends to a large extent on who is speaking.

Educational success

Significant differences between the perceptions of locals and non-locals on the definitions of success were found. Behaviour and behaviour management (in this context, referring to students' engagement, related school policies, the way the school deals with incidents and issues, etc) was the most common theme raised by locals and the second-most common theme raised by non-locals, while attendance was the most common theme for non-locals and the fourth-highest occurring theme for locals. Culture and language were dominant themes, ranking equal second for locals and fourth and fifth respectively for non-locals. Health and wellbeing issues were the third most common theme raised by non-locals, but ranked sixth for locals.

Of note was the limited number of comments about teachers, teaching or academic outcomes. English language competence, teacher continuity, extending kids, and teacher/parent relationships made up less than one-eighth of all comments.

.....
'What makes a successful remote school depends to a large extent on who is speaking.'
.....

School experiences

In terms of expectations of the school experience, academic outcomes were the most frequently discussed theme, but almost three-quarters of the responses came from non-locals, as did comments about choice and options. Students themselves were most concerned about the school experience being enjoyable. More than three-quarters of comments on the theme of language learning in schools came from locals. Complementing this theme are another 53 responses related to learning culture.

Parent and community engagement themes together made up about one in six of all responses. About one in seven of all responses related to boarding transitions or further education and training opportunities. Very few responses related to learning English and western culture.

Latest research

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Future orientation

Less than three per cent of all comments related to future orientation or aspirations. Local stakeholders were more likely than non-locals to raise the issue of jobs and careers, and discuss concerns about young people moving away from their home community. Responses about going to boarding schools were given equal weight by locals and non-locals, and suggested both positive and negative experiences.

The analysis shows that locals and non-locals hold quite different views about what they think student aspirations are and should be, what they think success looks like, and what their expectations

of schooling experiences should be. It also shows that non-locals ought not assume that their views of the world are shared by their students or the parents/carers they engage with.

The findings suggest an important role for local educators in translating the codes of power from the school to the community and vice versa. For non-locals, the importance of listening to and working with the community and families so they can show the way forward for young people is paramount. Further, there is an opportunity to take steps to engage in a bigger conversation with all stakeholders about what remote schools should be about.

This article is based on research that will be presented at The Joint Conference between Australian Association for Research in Education and New Zealand Association for Research in Education in December 2014.

Further information about the Dare to Lead Collegial Snapshot is available at www.daretolead.edu.au

Gina Milgate is a Research Fellow, Indigenous Education, at ACER and is ACER's Indigenous Liaison Officer.

Students from the Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School in the Kimberley region of Western Australia on campus at Wesley College in Melbourne. © ACER 2014





New initiatives to support Indigenous education

The ACER Foundation is supporting the development of an educational app for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early learners, and a mentoring program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education researchers and research assistants.

The ACER Foundation was established in 2013 as a vehicle for forming partnerships between ACER and other charitable organisations in order to undertake discretionary research and development to improve learning. In 2014 the ACER Foundation introduced the Innovation Fellowship – a new initiative to support ACER staff to develop solutions based on ideas that address educational disadvantage in the community.

Following a call for submissions, three projects have been selected as the recipients of the inaugural Innovation Fellowships. Two of these projects target Indigenous education.

Educational app for early learners

The development of an educational app for Aboriginal early learners is tailored specifically to meet the needs of disadvantaged Indigenous pre-schoolers, particularly those who speak English as a second language, in the Broome, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek belt in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Development of the app is being informed by ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Sacha DeVelle's experience

over many years working in developing contexts in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa as well as her experience in the development and launch of the first educational mobile phone project in Uganda.

'The current work addresses a top priority issue for the WA Minister for Education and Aboriginal Affairs, Peter Collier, namely early intervention tools in literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal three- and four-year olds living in remote areas of the state,' Dr DeVelle said.

The educational app under development addresses specific and universal aspects of Indigenous learning by embedding learning experiences within storytelling, community and cultural contexts. The app measures literacy and numeracy skills, and will also include a creativity measure that examines how three- and four-year-old Aboriginal children respond to simple and abstract tasks within authentic, cultural contexts.

Indigenous Visiting Fellow development program

A new mentoring project will match Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education researchers and research assistants with ACER researchers. The Indigenous Visiting Fellow Development Program also involves developing a research methods training program and maintaining a database of participants following calls for expressions of interest from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education researchers and research assistants.

'This project aims to increase capability in the area of Indigenous research, by supporting Indigenous researchers and research assistants, but just as importantly by increasing the

knowledge and skills of non-Indigenous education researchers as partners in Indigenous research,' said ACER Principal Research Fellow, Tony Dreise. 'In developing and implementing a research methods training program we are creating a guide to support Indigenous researchers and research assistants on the collection and analysis of data, and a mentor program to support our ACER mentors.'

The program will support Indigenous teachers, early career researchers and community leaders in developing research skills and working with an experienced professional mentor. Participants will complete a research methods training program and become an Indigenous Visiting Fellow at ACER. As Visiting Fellows, participants will join a pool of community based researchers and research assistants who could work on ACER-led educational research projects as opportunities arise.

The program is free of charge to participants, thanks to funding from the ACER Foundation.

To find out more about the ACER Foundation Innovation Fellowships, visit www.acer.edu.au/foundation/innovation-grants

Featured resources

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Research Conference 2014

Leading researchers and practitioners gathered in Adelaide in August for ACER's annual research conference, where they shared their evidence and experience on how to achieve quality and equity in education.

Research Conference 2014, addressing the theme, *Quality and Equity: What does research tell us?* included six presentations that focused on improving outcomes for Indigenous learners. The full conference papers are now available online.

Dr Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews from Macquarie University discussed findings from his studies of the impact of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student achievement, engagement and aspirations, and the factors that may limit or negate the effects of racism. His studies suggest that greater experiences of racism are significantly associated with lower self-perceptions of maths and English abilities, and increased feelings of hopelessness at school.

'Racism has a longstanding and negative impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, so it is critical not only to prevent it from occurring in the first place, but also to identify agents of resilience to help strengthen people against the negative impact of racism,' Dr Bodkin-Andrews said.

During his presentation on personalising education for Indigenous learners, ACER Principal Research Fellow Tony Dreise told delegates, 'With 40 per cent of the Indigenous Australian population under the age

of 17 years, it is vital that they are being prepared – and are preparing themselves – for the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

'If Australia wants to see more Indigenous young people complete Year 12 and go on to university, and participate fully in civic life, then complementary action is required both outside and inside the school gates,' Mr Dreise said.

Also at the conference, ACER Principal Research Fellow Dr Petra Lietz chaired a panel discussion based on insights from large-scale assessments into student- and school-level factors related to the performance of Aboriginal students, and students in rural and remote areas when compared with the performances of other students.

Responding to this research, Professor John Halsey from Flinders University said that, if a tree is not growing properly, we need to look deep within the roots to find the cause.

'Sometimes in education, we spend too long looking at the leaves,' Professor Halsey said.

Among the other presentations at the conference were Menzies School of Health Research Professor Sven Silburn's exploration of the socio-cultural, geographic and economic contexts of child rearing and school education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in the Northern Territory compared to elsewhere in Australia; a panel discussion by The University of South Australia's Professor Peter Buckskin, Queensland University of Technology's Associate

Professor Gary Thomas and Monash University's Dr Zane Ma Rhea on the need to remobilise the concept of 'both ways' educational choice to support greater Indigenous student engagement in higher education; and University of Waikato Associate Professor Mere Berryman's report on a program that has dramatically improved the attendance, retention, engagement and achievement of Maōri students in New Zealand secondary schools, and increased the number of Maōri students gaining university entrance by more than 80 per cent over four years.

To download the conference papers visit <research.acer.edu.au/research_conference/RC2014>. Further information about the conference is available from <www.acer.edu.au/rc>



Featured resources

LEARNING GROUND

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION RESEARCH DATABASE

Learning Ground is an Indigenous education research database, created and maintained by staff of ACER's Cunningham Library.

The database contains details of more than 8700 books, articles, conferences papers and reports, plus links to more than 116 journals and newsletters on Indigenous education, and to relevant organisations, publishers and websites.

Access to Learning Ground is free via <www.acer.edu.au/learningground>. New additions to the database can be followed via <twitter.com/LearningGround>

Recent additions

Osborne, Sam. **At the heart of learning : (series : paper 1 of 4) : putuna kulini : the trouble with 'hearing'**. *AlterNative* v.10 n.1 p.3-14, 2014. Refereed article. Includes bibliographical references. ISSN: 1177-1801 EISSN: 1174-1740

Abstract: Remote Indigenous school principals find themselves caught in the middle of system priorities and demands, the demands of running complex and busy local schools, and the expectations and needs of the local community. Remote communities often complain that they are not being listened to or 'heard', but the process of listening, hearing and understanding in the complex cultural context of remote Aboriginal communities is far more complex than a visit or a single conversation can achieve. This paper examines the clash between values, perspectives and worldviews that is played out on a daily basis as

schools go about their business of educating whilst also attempting to take account of what is important for the communities they work in. This work highlights the need for remote principals and educators to reposition themselves in the dialogue with communities in order to allow room for a new conversation that gets to the 'heart of learning'. [Author abstract]

Shipp, Cara. **Bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the classroom : why and how.** *Literacy Learning : the Middle Years* v.21 n.3 p.24-29, October 2013. Includes bibliographical references. ISSN: 1320-5692

Abstract: This article offers strategies for including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island perspectives in the classroom... In most cases, everything in classrooms and curriculum is the mainstream Anglo-Australian perspective. Indigenous students are negotiating that every day and are

either finding ways to fit into that or are not fitting and are disengaging. There is a need to redress that imbalance and bring something of Indigenous cultures into schools, which will enrich all students' understanding of Australia and its history. The article provides some basics in cross-cultural understanding of Indigenous issues, addresses the concerns of teachers about tokenism, and gives some examples of teaching strategies that provide an alignment with quality teaching. The article concludes with identifying useful resources and some strategies to begin. [Author abstract, ed]

Prior, Margot. **Language and literacy challenges for Indigenous children in Australia.** *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* v.18 n.2 p.123-137, November 2013. Refereed article. Includes bibliographical references. ISSN: 1940-4158 EISSN: 1940-4166

Abstract: ...In this article, the author identifies and emphasises the importance of proximal factors in understanding difficulties in learning to read competently. These are influences that are closer to the actual process of learning to read, since they reside within the child and family, and strongly influence the early pathways into success in reading... They include particularly a degree of competence in the English language and knowledge of the basic building blocks of successful reading skills... The author argues that collaboration with families and communities in attending to the need for building school readiness in their children is essential for better outcomes in Indigenous education. In addition, better training in teaching methods based on the science of reading is a basic necessity if teachers are to meet the challenges they find in their classrooms. [Author abstract, ed]

Revisiting the research

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Indigenous primary school experiences

At the beginning of the 21st century, ACER led a seven-year study of the literacy and numeracy achievement of Indigenous students, at a time when such longitudinal studies were comparatively rare.

The Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study for Indigenous Students (ILLANS) tracked the development of English literacy and numeracy skills in a group of Indigenous students from the beginning of primary school until the end of Year 6.

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 collected data over the first three years of school from Indigenous students who commenced their primary education in the year 2000, at 13 schools across Australia. The participating schools were nominated by education systems as examples of good practice in education for Indigenous students. For Phase 2, students from 11 of the original 13 schools, as well as 14 additional schools, were followed through Years 3 to 6, from 2003 to 2006.

The study revealed that on average, in the first year of primary school Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the study achieved similarly in literacy and numeracy. By the start of Year 3, however, there was a gap in average achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. While Indigenous students improved their literacy and numeracy skills over the last four years of primary school at a similar rate to their non-Indigenous peers, the gap in average achievement evident at the start of Year 3 remained until the end of primary school.

Looking beyond the averages, there was enormous variability in literacy and numeracy achievement within as well as between groups. Many Indigenous students achieved at a high level in literacy and numeracy relative to their peers and, in some schools, performed as well as, or better than, non-Indigenous students.

In order to identify the critical factors that support Indigenous students to achieve highly at school, the study collected data on student background, teacher-rated student achievement and attentiveness, and student ratings of their school's climate and themselves as learners. A number of school-level and student-level factors related to literacy and numeracy achievement emerged.

School climate was identified as an important predictor of student achievement in both literacy and numeracy. Students who provided favourable ratings of their school's climate, such as the learning environment and student-teacher relations, recorded higher literacy and numeracy achievement.

Of the student-level factors, attentiveness, language spoken at home, absenteeism and parental occupation were associated with both literacy and numeracy achievement. Students rated as more attentive by their teachers tended to record higher literacy and numeracy achievement, while students who spoke Standard Australian English at home also tended to achieve more highly than students who spoke other languages at home. Poorer literacy achievement was more common among students who had frequent absences from school and among students whose parents were in less skilled occupational categories.

Some enabling factors identified in the study included teaching that builds on students' strengths and adapts to their different learning styles. Having strong links between schools and Indigenous communities, promoting student attendance, and developing and maintaining a school culture in which Indigenous students feel included and supported to learn were also identified as factors enabling success.

The findings of Phase 1 of ILLANS were reported in ACER Research Monograph 57, *Supporting English Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Indigenous Students in the Early Years*, available at < research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/10 >.

The findings of Phase 2 of ILLANS were first presented at ACER's Research Conference 2011, on the theme Indigenous Education: Pathways to success, and were subsequently published as ACER Research Monograph 65, *Literacy and Numeracy Learning: Lessons from the Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study for Indigenous Students*, available at < research.acer.edu.au/acer_monographs/7 >.



Revisiting the research

University student engagement and retention

The finding that Indigenous university students report high levels of satisfaction and engagement with learning but are also more likely to consider dropping out is a 'somewhat unexpected anomaly,' according to an article in the Journal of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Published in July 2014, 'Exploring anomalies in Indigenous student engagement: findings from a national Australian survey of undergraduates' finds that while the majority of Indigenous university students do complete their studies, a 'burdensome overlap' of poor health, disability, financial stress, caring for dependents, studying off-campus and other factors has an impact on their non-completion.

Co-authors Dr Christine Asmar, Senior Lecturer at Murrup Barak, the Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development at the University of Melbourne, Associate Professor Susan Page, Director of Macquarie University's Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies, and Ali Radloff,

Research Fellow at ACER, review the findings from their 2011 analysis of more than 500 Indigenous student responses to the 2009 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE), which measured students' self-reported levels of engagement in effective learning practices as well as the extent to which universities are perceived to support students by facilitating their involvement in these activities.

Compared to all non-Indigenous Australian students in the survey, Indigenous students were more likely to be female, of lower socioeconomic status (SES), older, and first in their family to attend university; however, the AUSSE figures also indicate that nearly three-quarters of Indigenous students were not of low SES and that 44 per cent were not the first in their family to attend university.

'A focus on differences or "gaps" is important but should not lead us to overlook more positive emerging trends,' the authors note.

Survey responses revealed that Indigenous students experienced similar or higher levels of satisfaction and engagement with learning than their non-Indigenous peers, rated their relationships with other students just as positively and were significantly more likely to report positive relationships with administrative staff.

According to the authors, information on student engagement has been seen as a 'reliable proxy' in relation to student outcomes, with the amount of time students spend on academic study and educational activities one of the best predictors of student success.

Due to the link demonstrated between engagement and positive outcomes such as retention, one might expect Indigenous students to report similar levels of early departure intentions to other students; however, this was not the case.

Around 37 per cent of Indigenous students reported that they plan to, or have seriously considered, leaving before finishing their qualification, compared to 29 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous students who are older, male, have a self-reported disability, are from a non-metropolitan area, are studying externally or are receiving financial assistance all had higher early departure intentions.

The authors note that these attributes often co-occur among the subset of older students enrolled in Indigenous-specific programs – about one-third of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at university – rather than among younger 'school leavers' who are studying in a variety of disciplines.

'This, in turn, prompts us to question whether it is useful to treat "Indigenous students" as a homogeneous cohort, and also to consider the extent to which findings in relation to a particular sub-group may be influencing overall survey results,' the authors write.

'Knowing and understanding more about our students' engagement and experiences is a crucial step towards enhancing Indigenous outcomes everywhere.'

For further information, download the free AUSSE briefing paper, *Dispelling myths: Indigenous students' engagement with university*, at research.acer.edu.au/ausse/2/

In profile

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Tony Dreise

Principal Research Fellow

Tony Dreise, who descends from the Guumilroi people of north-west New South Wales and south-west Queensland, joined ACER in late 2013 and now leads ACER's Indigenous education research.

Tony comes to ACER with more than 20 years of high-level experience in public policy, research and education, and has served on a number of regional and national boards, including the Board of Adult Learning Australia and the National VET Equity Advisory Council.

Since joining ACER, Tony has led the development of an Indigenous strategic directions framework for educational research; a professional learning program to support Indigenous educators as researchers; a study of Indigenous community controlled schools; an evaluation of the PISA survey from an Indigenous perspective; and has contributed to research projects such as Indigenous school attendance strategies and the performance of Indigenous students in standardised testing.

Tony holds a Bachelor of Teaching and was one of the inaugural graduates of the Executive Masters of Public Administration with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government. He is now in the final stage of a PhD at Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, where he has been researching the relationship between Australian philanthropy and Indigenous education.

'During my PhD research, I discovered the story of a young Aboriginal man



Figure 1: Learning, Earning and Yearning

who, upon becoming the first in his community to finish high school said, "What for, I do this?". Rather than celebrating his achievement, he felt the need to ask one of the most profound questions in education – what for or why? This led me to question: how do we personalise education and make it meaningful for the individual?'

Tony sees the way forward as a synthesis of the 'back to basics' approach, which sees proficiency in literacy and numeracy as fundamental to successful economic and social participation later in life, and an 'expansive education' agenda, which aims for learners to become producers of learning by thinking critically and creatively, developing self-identity and expression, and becoming more entrepreneurial and culturally engaged in a globalised world.

'If education is to be meaningful, relevant and high impact for Indigenous Australians, we need to take an expansive and learner-centred approach,' says Tony.

At Research Conference 2014, Tony presented a model called 'Learning,

Earning, Yearning', illustrated in Figure 1. Inspired by a program from the United States that simultaneously embraces 'mainstream subjects' with Indigenous goals, the model responds to the quest by Indigenous young people for safety, connection to culture and place, jobs, inclusion and support measures aimed at reducing the stresses of schooling and life outside school.

'If Australia wants to see more Indigenous young people complete Year 12 and go onto university or participate fully in civic life, we need to take complementary action both outside the school gates – in overcoming the significant obstacles they face, such as poverty – and inside the school gates, including through the provision of learning experiences that truly engage,' says Tony.

'A customised yet intellectually rigorous curriculum that enables a learner-centred approach provides a way forward.'

The selected works of Tony Dreise can be viewed at works.bepress.com/tony_dreise/

Reconciliation at ACER

Reconciliation Action Plan

ACER's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was developed in 2012 and implemented in 2013 under the guidance of a working group including the Chair of ACER's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education. The focus of the RAP is on how ACER intends to work to create a culture of respect, to build more effective relationships and to create improved employment opportunities for Indigenous people. Consistent with Reconciliation Australia's template for development of a RAP, ACER's actions are identified in three broad areas:

- Respect
- Relationships
- Opportunities.

ACER has contributed in diverse ways towards reconciliation during the past 12 months. Of our 39 key actions, 25 were completed, four were exceeded and 10 remain in progress. We continue to implement processes and practices that help to develop and nurture a culture of reconciliation at ACER. The employment of a Principal Research Fellow in Indigenous Education has been a significant step in our contribution to reconciliation over the past 12 months.

Relationships

ACER's RAP has enabled Aboriginal employees to facilitate workshops with colleagues and develop priorities in Indigenous education. Furthermore, ACER's RAP has connected good intentions with actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. ACER's employees have had opportunities to participate in workshops to enhance their knowledge and perspectives about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. ACER's

Indigenous Employment Strategy has guided establishment of partnerships with external organisations that focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the workforce.

Respect

ACER's RAP has enabled employees to gather to reflect on and celebrate events which are significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, including Reconciliation Week and International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. These events have helped to build awareness across the organisation. ACER continues to embed cultural protocols within its day-to-day activities, and has provided employees with Acknowledgement of Country wallet cards to read from at the beginning of significant internal and external events and meetings. Over the past 12 months, ACER has increased the promotion of its work in the media, particularly through the Indigenous media, achieving the publication of two articles about ACER's work in the *Koori Mail* in 2014.

Opportunities

ACER's RAP has enabled Aboriginal employees to lead and participate in setting ACER's directions and policies in Indigenous education. Aboriginal employees have brought skills to projects unrelated to Indigenous education. Furthermore, ACER's Aboriginal employees have contributed to high-level conversations with senior government representatives. ACER supports its Aboriginal employees to participate in external events that relate to research and education. In May 2014, the Indigenous Liaison Officer was supported to promote ACER's work at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. ACER's recent accreditation as a Higher Education Provider will provide further opportunities for ACER to consider developing courses in Indigenous education.

A copy of ACER's RAP is available to download at www.acer.edu.au/indigenous/reconciliation-action-plan



ACER staff celebrate International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples with kangaroo and emu salads with native herb marinades, prepared by an Indigenous catering company.

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is an independent not-for-profit organisation. ACER's mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services that can be used to improve learning across the life span.

ACER is involved in the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of reliable information to assist educational decision makers – from individual teachers to system leaders and policy makers – in two ways: to help them help learners by identifying educational progress and challenges, and to help them identify and implement effective policies and practices on the basis of good evidence.

ACER was established in 1930 and has since built a strong reputation as a provider of reliable support and expertise to education policy makers and professional practitioners. As a not-for-profit organisation, independent of government, ACER receives no direct financial support and generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects and through products and services that it develops and distributes.

ACER has experienced significant growth in recent years and now has more than 370 staff located in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Dubai and New Delhi. In 2012, 122 of ACER's staff held Masters Degrees, 63 held Doctorates, and 120 held a teaching qualification.

Statement of Commitment

ACER is committed to improving learning across the life span and has identified the improvement of outcomes for Indigenous learners as an organisational priority. ACER recognises the importance of respecting Indigenous peoples and their cultures in its work in Indigenous education. ACER understands that this is an important part of developing a culturally conscious workplace for its employees.

Organisational Goals

ACER provides assistance in data gathering and action planning in four major areas of educational practice:

1. Learners and their Needs

Identifying, understanding and addressing the needs of Indigenous learners.

2. The Learning Profession

Enhancing and assessing the capacity of teachers and leaders to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners.

3. Places of Learning

Creating more supportive and effective places and modes of learning for Indigenous learners.

4. A Learning Society

Supporting and monitoring systemic and government efforts to close gaps in life expectancy and educational achievement for Indigenous learners.

The ACER *Indigenous Education Update* is published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Editorial support by Megan Robinson.

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