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Slight improvement in students' civics and citizenship knowledge

The latest results from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship for Years 6 and 10 reveal a slight improvement in students' civic knowledge and understanding since the first administration of the assessment in 2004.

The assessment was completed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) under contract to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and released on 17 February.

The assessment was conducted in October 2007 involving 7059 Year 6 students from 349 schools and 5506 Year 10 students from 269 schools. Participating students were from both government and non-government schools. This was the second administration of the assessment, which first took place in 2004.

The report identifies a proficient standard representing a 'challenging but reasonable' expectations for typical Year 6 and 10 students to have reached by the end of each of those years of study. A proficient standard is not the same as a minimum benchmark.

Nationally, 54 per cent of Year 6 students achieved or bettered the Year 6 proficient standard and 41 per cent of Year 10 students achieved or bettered the Year 10 proficient standard.

This represents a slight improvement on 2004 results when 51 per cent of Year 6 and 39 per cent of Year 10 students met or bettered the proficient standard set for their year.

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ACER's Deputy CEO (Research) Dr John Ainley explained that the use of some repeated test questions – known as 'link items' allows researchers to compare results between students assessed in 2004 and 2007, revealing the slight increase in the percentage of students reaching the proficiency level set for their year level.

"The Assessments in 2004 and 2007 were conducted in a way to allow accurate comparison between the two sets of results," said ACER's Deputy CEO (Research) Dr John Ainley.

In general students whose parents worked in managerial and other skilled professional jobs achieved higher scores than students whose parents worked as machine operators. Hospitality staff, assistants or labourers. Girls performed slightly better than boys at both year levels.

Higher achieving students were more likely to attend a school that provided more opportunities for participation in either school governance or more general civics related activities outside of school.

"These results suggest that schools should be encouraged to provide students with opportunities to learn about how democracy works and to practise that knowledge," Dr Ainley said.

Further information and additional findings are available in the full report, National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship Years 6 & 10 Report 2007. It is available online from <http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/>

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Victorian bushfires claim leading educational researcher

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is mourning the loss of Dr Ken Rowe who died in Victoria's recent bushfires. Dr Rowe was alone at his family's property in Marysville when the town was devastated by fire.

"Ken's loss is being deeply felt not only by colleagues at ACER where he had worked for eight years, but across the entire education community," said ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters. "We are all simply devastated by this awful news."

"Ken was an outstanding leader, researcher and educational thinker. He was passionate about many things, including the importance of basing educational policies and practices on sound scientific evidence.

"He was a strong advocate for the wider use of quantitative methods in social science research and regularly conducted high-level methodological training for researchers. Ken also took every opportunity to highlight the fundamental importance of quality teaching to improved student learning," Professor Masters said.

Dr Ken Rowe joined ACER in February 2000 as a principal research fellow before becoming the Director of the Learning Processes and Contexts Research Program.

Prior to joining ACER, Dr Rowe was Principal Research Fellow and Associate Professor in the Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne (1993-99), Senior Research Officer in the Department of Education, Victoria (1986-92), Commonwealth Relations Trust Fellow at the University of London Institute of Education (1984-85), teacher and principal in Victorian government schools (1967-83).

Dr Rowe believed strongly in the importance of quality teachers and teaching. Throughout his time with ACER, Dr Rowe delivered many conference presentations in which he argued that nothing was more important to children's educational outcomes than the quality of their teacher.

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In 2004 Dr Rowe was appointed by the then Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, to head the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. The inquiry handed down its much anticipated report in December 2005. It stressed again that teachers are the most valuable resource available to schools and urged that they be equipped with evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in meeting the developmental and learning needs of all children.

With his wife Dr Kathy Rowe, a consultant physician in the Department of General Medicine at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, Dr Rowe investigated the overlap between education and health. They studied, for example, the link between children's auditory processing (the ability to hold, sequence and process accurately what is heard) and found it to be linked strongly to initial and subsequent literacy development, as well as to children's attentive behaviours in the classroom. Along with their colleague Jan Pollard, an Audiological Services Specialist from Sonic Innovations Pty Ltd, the Rowes received the Rue Wright Memorial Award from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in Wellington in May 2005.

Among his many other achievements Dr Rowe was a member of the Board of Directors for the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, a national training consultant and instructor (since 1991) for the summer and winter programs conducted by the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI) and a leading exponent of multilevel, structural equation modelling.

During his career Dr Rowe authored or co-authored 37 books or chapters in books, 55 monographs, 75 papers in peer-reviewed journals, 86 contract research/evaluation reports, 3 computer software application packages, and presented more than 250 conference papers and invited keynote addresses.

Professor Masters said that Dr Rowe had taken an active interest in the professional development of colleagues and had been a highly valued mentor to more junior researchers.

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“Ken was deeply committed to his work, was courageous in speaking out against education practices that had little or no support in research, and took a genuine interest in the lives and wellbeing of his colleagues.”

Dr Rowe had officially retired from ACER during 2008 for health reasons but continued to work with ACER on a consulting basis and maintained strong links with his colleagues.

At the time of his death he was busy conducting workshops on measurement and multilevel modelling in a number of universities and for Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), and had begun work on a book.

Dr Rowe was farewelled at a public memorial service held in Wattle Park, Melbourne on 17th February. The service was attended by hundreds of mourners including many of his colleagues from ACER. He will be deeply missed and the thoughts and prayers of all at ACER are with his family.

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Schools do matter, say ACER education experts

Education systems must overcome 'biological social determinism' to focus on student learning, Professor Steve Dinham of the Australian Council for Educational Research told education leaders in a series of seminars in late February.

"Many people today, including practicing teachers, still subscribe, consciously or subconsciously, to various forms of biological social determinism, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary," said Professor Dinham, Research Director of ACER's Teaching, Learning and Leadership research program.

"What students can achieve in their education is not predetermined by heredity, where they live, their socio-economic background or family circumstances. All students can benefit from quality education," he said. "Similarly, there is no such thing as a 'born teacher', and all teachers are capable of learning to be more effective."

"But it takes time for teachers to develop from novice to competent to expert, and the expectation that first-year teachers will immediately be capable is unrealistic."

According to Professor Dinham, student learning and achievement should be the focus of every school, educational system, and education department and faculty. Quality leadership should drive this focus.

Professor Brian Caldwell, Deputy Chair of the ACER Board of Directors, also spoke about the connection between student achievement, professional learning, quality teaching and leadership.

"A degree of artistry is required to ensure an optimal balance of autonomy, accountability and choice," Professor Caldwell said.

"Transformation is within the reach of every school that develops the four forms of capital and is governed well. Findings from international studies provide the foundation for a 10-point, 10-year strategy to enable all schools to become as good as those currently considered to be the best, here in Australia and in other nations," he said.

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Professor Dinham and Professor Caldwell presented a series of seminars in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane on 23, 24 and 25 February. The seminars were conducted by [ACER's Leadership Centre](#).

Professor Dinham's latest book, *How to Get Your School Moving and Improving*, and Professor Caldwell's latest book, *Why Not the Best Schools?* are published by [ACER Press](#).

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ACER UPDATE

ACER International Institute hosts Qatari education administrators

The ACER International Institute hosted a group of data administrators from Qatar in February. The group from the Qatar Supreme Education Council's Evaluation Institute attended a five-day training workshop in the ACER Melbourne office on the topics of data analysis and management and reporting skills. The main purposes of the Evaluation Institute are to evaluate schools, to assess students, to collect and manage data, to prepare and publish reports, and to manage the registration, licensing and accreditation for teaching and leadership. The workshop aimed to enhance the participants' skills in data analysis and reporting.

Research Developments issue 20 available online

Issue 20 of ACER's news magazine, *Research Developments* is now available online and in print. The articles in this edition describe some of the work that ACER is doing in the area of assessing and reporting on skills for the future. [Visit Research Developments web page.](#)

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