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Building teacher quality: What does the research tell us?

Some 400 educational researchers, policy makers and practitioners from around Australia and overseas came together in Melbourne from 19-21 October to share knowledge and developments in building teacher quality as ACER hosted Research Conference 2003 , 'Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us?'

Research Conference 2003 aimed to enhance understanding of the significance of building teacher quality and ways in which efforts to improve teacher quality is best informed by research. The conference provided a state-of-the art review of:

- research on improving teacher education, teacher quality and recruitment;
- evidence of the effects of initial teacher education, induction and teacher professional development on teacher quality;
- the major directions in which Australian policy and practice on teacher quality are heading;
- how Australian developments compare with major trends overseas;
- what research tells us about policy-useful understandings of issues of supply, remuneration and funding; and
- what research tells us about the integral role of pedagogy in teacher quality

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Keynote speakers included Mr Ralph Tabberer of the Teacher Training Agency in England, Professor Lloyd Bond of the Carnegie Foundation and Professor Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor of Teaching and Teacher Education at Stanford University who delivered a plenary address by video link up.

ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said he expected the papers and discussions would make a major contribution to the international literature and debate on building teacher quality.

"One of the key lessons from research on teacher quality is that the issues are too complex and wide-ranging to be tackled by educators working in isolation. We hope that one of the main outcomes of the conference will be the sharing of knowledge about efforts to build teacher quality, and the research required to support work at the school, state and national levels," Professor Masters said.

[Download Conference Proceedings](#) for further information.

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Promoting teacher quality in the UK

A program of reform in England's Initial Teacher Training (ITT) led to measurable improvements in the quality of teaching and helped to build a stronger teaching sector according to the chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency, Mr Ralph Tabberer. Mr Tabberer gave a keynote address at Research Conference 2003 on the role of the Teacher Training Agency in promoting teacher quality in England.

Mr Tabberer presented a case study of the reform of England's Initial Teacher Training (ITT) program for which the TTA has been responsible since 1994 when it was given its defining powers to fund and allocate places for all initial teacher training in England, according to quality.

A framework of ITT reform has since been put in place. ITT providers are formally accredited, clear quality standards and course requirements are set out in regulations that specify standards that all trainees should achieve. In addition, a system has been established for inspecting ITT quality deploying Her Majesty's Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED).

Mr Tabberer said that measurable improvements followed the reforms. "OfSTED's inspection records now show that in 2001-2002, 93 per cent of newly qualified secondary teachers were judged to have given satisfactory or better lessons, compared with 95 per cent of experienced teachers. In the same year, 95 per cent of newly qualified primary teachers were judged satisfactory or better compared with 97 per cent of experienced teachers. In 2003, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector described the new teacher cohort as the best ever."

During the same period, TTA presided over a substantial, year-on-year upsurge in teacher recruitment. Mr Tabberer said the evidence from England indicates, that marked improvements are available to all of us concerned with teacher education, teacher quality and teacher numbers.

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"On the basis of stronger sanctions and incentives, through the 1990s, a better focused and more accountable sector was built.

"ITT quality in England has been improved by strengthening the partnership between all sides involved in training, by hard and focused work on everyone's part and, ultimately, by avoiding setting any one side against the other."

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Assessing teacher performance reliably and validly

Teacher performance can be assessed reliably and validly and the assessment process can be a powerful form of professional development for teachers, evidence from the United States shows. Dr Lloyd Bond, Senior Scholar with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States, demonstrated this during his keynote presentation at Research Conference 2003 .

Dr Bond reflected on his 12 years working closely with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the US body responsible for certifying teachers, and present evidence from a US study that showed certified teachers outperformed non-certified teachers against a number of criteria.

Dr Bond's presentation provided food for thought for the current debate in Australia on the value of teacher certification in this in country says Dr Lawrence Ingvarson, research director of ACER's Teaching and Leadership research program.

Dr Ingvarson is an advocate of teacher certification and performance-based salary increases and believes that the work done by the NBPTS shows that this could be done successfully in Australia.

"Many Australian educators and policy makers see processes such as teacher certification or performance-based salary increases in this country as being 'too hard'. Dr Bond's research and the work of the NBPTS in the United States shows not only that it could be done but it could have a positive impact on student learning outcomes and be a rewarding experience for the teachers involved."

The Accomplished Teaching Validation Study, led by Dr Bond, was conducted by a team of researchers based at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2000. The study found that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) scored higher on all of 13 dimensions of teaching expertise than did teachers who had sought but not obtained National Board Certification.

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The dimensions of teaching assessed included attributes such as: having an extensive knowledge of subject matter; the ability to adapt and improvise instruction; formulating lessons that are challenging and engaging; and promoting academic achievement by emphasising both personal accomplishment and intellectual engagement.

Dr Ingvarson presented a concurrent session at the conference in which he reviewed recent work undertaken by a team of ACER researchers into ways of improving evaluations and professional development programs for teachers.

Further information regarding the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards can be found at www.nbpts.org.

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Quality teaching matters most

Quality teachers and teaching, supported by strategic professional development, is what matters most in students' experiences and outcomes of schooling, ACER Research Director Dr Ken Rowe said at Research Conference 2003. Dr Rowe presented key findings from Australian and international evidence-based research on educational effectiveness.

According to Dr Rowe much of the research undertaken over the past 40 years has focused on identifying effective schools but many researchers have missed the most important point. "What makes some schools more effective than others is that they have better teachers."

"The magnitude of effects including literacy skills, general academic achievements, attitudes, behaviours and experience of schooling, pale into insignificance compared with class and teacher effects.

"The quality of teaching is by far the most important influence on cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling, regardless of a student's gender or background."

Dr Rowe said that in conducting his own research he has visited many schools and interviewed students who recognise themselves that their teachers play a critical role in their own educational achievements. He said many students are choosing their subjects based on which teachers will be teaching the course, as the students believe they will achieve better results with certain teachers.

Dr Rowe welcomed the recent renewed focus on research into teacher quality and instructional effectiveness.

Further information on Dr Rowe's research in this area can be found in ['What matters most: Evidence-based findings of key factors affecting the educational experiences and outcomes for girls and boys throughout their primary and secondary schooling'](#), a Supplementary submission to House of representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training: Inquiry Into the Education of Boys prepared by Dr Ken Rowe and Dr Katherine Rowe in May 2002.

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Young teachers face bright futures

Australian teachers currently beginning and in the early stages of their careers are likely to be given excellent opportunities to obtain leadership positions over the next 10-15 years according to a leading education consultant.

Speaking at Research Conference 2003, Barbara Preston, who has been investigating the teaching labour market at various times over more than two decades, presented a study of the career experiences and circumstances of three different cohorts of Australian teachers: cohort 1 consisting of teachers currently in the late stages of their careers and aged in their late 40s to early 50s; cohort 2 consisting of teachers currently in the middle stages of their careers and aged from the 30s to early 40s; and cohort 3 made up of teachers currently beginning and in the early stage of their careers and mostly aged to their late 20s.

Ms Preston said that, as a result of the changing age profile of the teaching profession, for many in the younger cohort of teachers there will be both opportunities and demands for responsibility and initiative and the group as a whole may be able to take on professional leadership while still quite young.

"Cohort 1 is the largest cohort and has numerically and professionally dominated teaching in this country since the 1970s and the second cohort has been in its shadow. Cohort 2 entered teacher education and teaching at the nadir of the profession's community esteem and received little support from school authorities. As cohort 1 moves into retirement, teachers from cohort 2 will be expected to take on leadership positions in schools, systems and teacher organisations.

"With the projected shortage of school principals and education faculty academics over the next decade, the cohort 2 teachers, who have been given so little support and attention will become the most precious and sought after group. Given the demands on this small cohort, those following after them (cohort 3) may be given great opportunities for career advancement at a relatively young age," Ms Preston said.

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The changing age profiles and different circumstances of cohorts have many policy implications for the teaching profession, school authorities and other stakeholders according to Ms Preston. She called for effective strategies to be developed to ensure that socio-cultural and professional gaps between the oldest and youngest cohorts of teachers are bridged.

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Conference Proceedings and papers online

The published [proceedings from Research Conference 2003](#) are available online at the ACER website. The paper by John Hattie of the University of Auckland - [Teachers make a difference what is the evidence?](#) Is also available for download from the ACER web site.

Follow the evidence

The conference paper, "Follow the evidence: What counts as quality literacy teaching in the early years?" by Professor William Loudon presented data that is part of a report to be released by the Commonwealth in 2004.

ACER International Test Users' Conference 2004

Call for papers

Submissions are invited to present a 90 minute workshop at the forthcoming International Test Users' Conference to be held in Melbourne, 19-20 July 2004. The title of the conference is Assessing intelligence, emotion and behaviour and the aim is to provide a forum for the dissemination and discussion of strategies used for measurement and assessment in these domains. [Download additional information](#) (PDF: 64kb)

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Research Conference 2004

Research Conference 2004 will take place in Adelaide from 24-26 October 2004. The conference, titled Supporting Student Wellbeing, will ask 'what does the research tell us about the social and emotional development of young people?' Further information available at [Research Conference](#) section.

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