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Aptitude Test for International Secondary Students (ATISS)

There has been rapid growth in recent years in the numbers of international secondary school students studying in Australia and it seems likely that the visa application process for the sector will become increasingly regulated. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) recently commissioned ACER to develop a test which could be used in this process and provide an instrument that would be useful to schools. Click here to read more.

Aptitude Test for International Secondary Students (ATISS) aims to provide an indication of students' cognitive abilities by assessing general thinking and reasoning skills. The original brief was to develop the test items in English, and in low verbal contexts because of the EFL (English as Foreign Language) background of the intended users of the test. During development, DEST also asked for the test items to be translated into Chinese, as substantial numbers of international secondary students are now coming to Australia from China.

"ATISS is an exciting and innovative project, as ACER has developed and translated items designed to test a reasoning dimension in two languages," says project director Susan Nankervis.

A trial test was conducted in August with over a thousand Chinese secondary students already in Australian schools. The trial test papers were in both languages, so information has been gathered about the performance of each item in its English format and in its Chinese format.

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According to Ms Nankervis the final shape of ATISS has yet to be established. "It is entirely feasible to develop a test in two languages, with Chinese items in complex contexts and English items in low verbal contexts, offering two sets of scores which will give schools a clear indication of students' cognitive abilities (from the Chinese section), and their ability to read and reason in English (from the English section)," she said.

Analysis on the trial data is still being conducted, examining the item functioning and student performance, with a particular focus on the variables of age, gender and English language competence. Early results indicate that while the students understandably found the items in Chinese easier than the ones in English, large numbers of items have high correlations between the two languages, indicating that they are testing the same construct dimension.

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Cunningham Library introduces new services

ACER has one of the most comprehensive educational research libraries in Australia and this is becoming more accessible to the public, here and around the world. Cunningham Library has introduced a number of new membership services that allow researchers to access its extensive databases from their desktop.

The new services include:

- Members' portal with self serve information access for members
- Members' remote database with the latest 2 years of the Australian Education Index
- Access to 80 full text scholarly journals
- Education Research Theses database with free access for members to information on education theses items published in Australia since early 1900s

The Cunningham Library introduced remote access services during July 2003 in response to consumer demand.

According to Cunningham Library Manager, Ms Margaret Findlay the way researchers have accessed library collections has undergone major changes. "The web and electronic database facilitate access to recent research documents- access is now quick and can be delivered directly to the computer of the researcher," she said.

ACER has an objective of making research findings more accessible to the education community. In keeping with this objective, the Cunningham Library has embraced the use of new technology in developing a full virtual library online. Many of the library's extensive range of resources can now be accessed via the internet extending access to those unable to visit the library in person. Online visitors can conduct their own searches for books, reports and journals held in the library.

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Other online services offered by the Cunningham Library include EdResearch Online - an easily searchable database containing more than 16 000 research articles and documents - a complete article service and a personalised one-on-one library service designed to assist those who have limited time to conduct research.

"Through the new services that have been introduced, we are now able to offer a virtual library online. The library catalogue and a database of higher research theses are all there along with the ability to download journal articles on demand," says Ms Findlay.

"This new service will provide essential information for researchers of all kinds. Schools and corporate organisations could use the service to support their staff in professional development, or in completing higher degrees," Ms Findlay said.

For further information about the Cunningham Library and its range of services, including details of the Library Membership Services or EdResearch Online.

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Cambodia-Australia National Examinations Project (CANEP) completed

The Cambodia-Australia National Examinations Project (CANEP) was completed in September after six years. The project, managed jointly by ACER and IDP Education Australia, assisted the Cambodian government to reform the country's examinations system.

CANEP was conducted in partnership with the Examinations Office of the Secondary Education Department (SED) in the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport with funding from the Australian Government's overseas aid agency (AusAID).

The project began in 1997 following a request made by the Cambodian Government to the Australian Government for assistance in improving the reliability and validity of examinations in the education system, particularly at Grade 12, the final school-leaving exam. It was originally scheduled to run for five years, concluding in 2002 but additional funding was provided to extend the project until September 2003.

The specific objectives of the project were to provide infrastructure to support the efficient and secure handling and administration of the national examinations; improve the quality of the examination papers and marking processes of the grades 9 and 12 examinations and; facilitate the review and development of examinations and other educational policies on the basis of reliable data and research.

ACER provided reports to the Ministry that analysed and evaluated examination administration training, research method training, English language training, educational research and policy advice and infrastructure support and development.

According to ACER's project director for CANEP, Mr McCurry, the project has contributed greatly to capacity building in the Examinations Office.

"CANEP had a significant impact on the development of using grade 12 results for entry to higher education and giving the results of year 12 an increased status for both higher education institutions and prospective employers," he said. "The project has made a major contribution to the reform of the exam system in Cambodia."

CANEP initiatives included:

Development of an exam Item Bank at Grade 12

- The CANEP Item Bank is a sophisticated computer program which facilitates exam design and assists exam setters in the preparation of high quality exams.The program allows the user to add new exam questions (known as 'items') to the bank, to retrieve items from the bank in order to set an exam, and to archive previous exam papers. The program will format an examination paper with the appropriate headers, number the questions automatically and print the paper and marking scheme in a form which is ready for copyprinting. Items are stored and exam papers produced in secure conditions.

- There are currently over 1,000 Grade 12 exam items in the bank and the Item Bank was used to set 9 of the 10 Grade 12 exam papers in 2003 in secure conditions. CANEP's Item Bank legacy includes an item writing and quality review process, trained item writers and database operators, a fully functioning Item Bank for the Grade 9 and Grade 12 exams, and an Item Bank which was trialled during the 2002 exams and more fully utilised in setting the 2003 exams.

Trial of standards of performance for 2003 exams

- The introduction of standards of performance will move the examinations towards a more performance-based system of setting grades.   Until now, pass grades in the examinations have not been related to a published standard of performance.

- At a CANEP workshop on standards of performance held in February this year,   subject specialists in the Ministry developed standards of performance for every subject in the Grade 12 examination.   Mr John Ward, the former CEO of the New South Wales Board of Studies, was guest presenter at the CANEP workshop.   Among the outputs from the workshop was a set of performance descriptions for each pass grade in every Grade 12 exam subject, which have been revised, honed and presented in a common format. These standards of performance have been trialled for the Grade 12 examinations in 2003 and the Ministry will consider the implications of the trial to assist in making a decision on implementation for the 2004 exams.

- CANEP has already exceeded the project target in relation to standards of performance for 2003. The results of the 2003 trial of standards of performance will be critical in demonstrating that open and accessible standards will provide more objective criteria than the arbitrary determination of pass grades.

Use of Grade 12 results for entry to higher education

Until 2002, students sat separate entry tests to higher education after taking the Grade 12 exam. CANEP made a highly significant contribution to the policy debate within the Ministry of Education on using the Grade 12 examination for entry to higher education. As a result of this debate, in May 2002 the Council of Ministers approved the use of Grade 12 exam results for the selection of students to higher education institutions and specialised studies from 2002 onwards.

Certification

CANEP has promoted measures to strengthen the Grade 12 exam and to give the results increased status, not only in higher education institutions, but also to students and potential employers. The following changes to the Grade 12 certificate were introduced in 2002:

- individual subject results included on the Grade 12 Certificate in five Grades   (A - E)
- a change from three pass grades overall at Grade 12 (A, B and C) to five   (A - E)
- the overall percentile rank shown on the certificate
- a Certificate of Achievement awarded to students who fail the grade 12 exam overall but pass in one or more individual subjects
- overall grade descriptions printed on the back of the certificate in English and Khmer.

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ACER UPDATE

Social Outcomes 2003-2005

ACER is undertaking the third phase of a study designed to develop instruments to assess the social outcomes of schooling. The focus of the study is to map and describe growth. Previous work investigated the assessment of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This phase of the study will refine previous instruments and develop some new instruments for the assessment of intrapersonal understandings.

APERA Handbook on Educational Research in the Asia Pacific Region published

Kluwer has published the Handbook on Educational Research in the Asia Pacific Region on behalf of The Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association (APERA). The Handbook is edited by John P. Keeves of the Flinders University, South Australia and Ryo Watanabe of the National Institute for Educational Research (NIER) of Japan and is Kluwer International Handbooks of Education Volume 11.

The handbook consists of two volumes, more than 90 chapters and 1200 pages. Its aim is to present readily accessible, but scholarly sources of information about educational research in the Asia-Pacific region. Articles included in it provide substantive contributions to knowledge and understanding of education in the Asia region. In so doing, the articles present the problems and issues facing education in the region and the findings of research conducted within the region that contribute to the resolution of these problems and issues and indicate the likely directions of future developments.

For further information on the handbook visit Springer

APERA is a not for profit organisation founded in 2001 with the aim of promoting increased collaboration on educational research in the Asia-Pacific region. ACER is a founding member of APERA and the current secretariat. For further information on APERA visit the web site or email the secretariat

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ACER Select released

ACER Select is a quick and easily administered test of verbal and numerical reasoning, suitable for recruitment and selection for a variety of occupations from technical and trade to sales and clerical to junior management and graduate selection.

A major revision of the well established and best selling ACER Higher and Advanced Tests (ML-MQ, PL-PQ, AL-AQ, BL-BQ), ACER Select has two test forms - Professional and General - each with two separate sections - Verbal and Numerical.

ACER Select can be used for selecting: Accounts clerks; Call centre operators; Computer programmers; Customer service operators; Graduates; HR officers; Insurance investigators; Technical and trade; Workplace trainers; Market research interviewers; Personal assistants; and for other occupations where training is involved or there is a moderate to high level of demand on reasoning ability. (Starter Kit Product Code: 0864317298) For further information visit ACER Online Shop by phone on (03) 9837 5447 or email .(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address) .