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## Call to embed Arts in all curriculum areas

As Australia moves towards the implementation of a national curriculum in the Arts a new review of research, released by ACER in January, calls for the Arts to be embedded in all academic disciplines and fields as a way of cultivating creativity and imagination.

Australian Education Review 58, The Arts and Australian Education: Realising potential by University of Sydney academic Professor Robyn Ewing stresses that the Arts (dance, drama, literature, media arts, music and visual arts) must not be seen as servants to other curriculum areas.

The review aims to demonstrate that the Arts offer both a lens into historical and contemporary social issues, as well as simultaneously challenging them. It argues that arts processes can provide the potential to reshape the way learning is conceived and organised in schools and other educational contexts. The Arts can also act as a catalyst for personal and social transformation in schools and the community more generally.

The review in part builds on earlier propositions made by Joanna Wyn in Australian Education Review number 55, Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work, that current approaches to schooling and education (including entrenched inequalities and the privileging of the competitive academic curriculum) cannot equip our students for the flexibility and creativity needed for 21st century living.

AER 58 highlights international and national research that shows those students whose learning is embedded in the Arts achieve better grades and overall test scores, are less likely to leave school early, rarely report boredom and have more positive self concept than those students who are deprived of arts experiences.

Examples from education and community education programs that embed quality arts processes and experiences demonstrate the potential of the Arts to change the lives of children and young people, particularly those experiencing difficulties.

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“Many children opt out of formal learning activities because they cannot see the relevance for them for their own lives, currently as well as potentially,” Professor Ewing writes. “Too often, learning in schools is very different from the learning that happens in children’s everyday worlds. “Ewing argues in the review that research indicates ensuring that the arts experiences are at the centre of the curriculum can:

- Facilitate students’ active involvement in learning, help them make links with their own knowledge and experiences
- Enable a range of possible meanings to be explored and represented
- Challenge stereotypical assumptions
- Encourage creativity, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect and dialogue collaboratively
- Take risks and try again when something is unsuccessful – understand that getting things wrong is part of effective learning
- Apply understanding to their own personal context or other contexts.

Engagement in Arts can also have serious social benefits including transforming habits of thinking, seeing and behaving and produce new ways of seeing, knowing and acting in the world. Critical engagement through Arts processes can help us to see things from a different perspective and suggest connections between different phenomena that we did not previously recognise.

“Despite the growing body of evidence pointing to educational and wider social benefits of the Arts, to date equitable provision and resourcing of the Arts and monitoring teaching quality in arts education has received insufficient attention in Australia,” Professor Ewing writes.

Many successful arts programs have been established by philanthropic groups. Professor Ewing argues that such initiatives should be the province of government through both educational and broader social policy. She calls upon Australian governments to invest in high-quality arts education initiatives as well as high-quality research and evaluation of these initiatives.

According to Professor Ewing achieving the demonstrated educational and social benefits of Arts in education will require a change in thinking by policy makers to ensure that cultivating imagination and creativity become the priorities rather than ‘add-ons’.

Professor Ewing claims that “provision of quality teacher preparation in the Arts and ongoing professional learning has been almost nonexistent.”

It will also be necessary to invest in ongoing professional development for early career and experienced teachers to help them develop expertise and confidence to use arts processes and experiences in their teaching.

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Professor Ewing notes that up until the last five years, systematic, large-scale longitudinal research studies about the impact of learning about and through the Arts have been lacking in Australia. She argues that longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research methods are needed to develop a rich understanding of the effects of a teaching and learning program on participants. This is even more so with understanding the type and depth of social impacts such programs have on individuals and communities.

There are workforce, funding and resource implications that will also need close attention if the Arts are to be a core curriculum component in schools. Learning in, through and about the Arts must become a priority for both pre-service courses and ongoing professional learning for in-service teachers.

Both governments and tertiary institutions must re-consider the initial preparation of all teachers to give them confidence to embed the Arts in their teaching and learning practices. Funding and other systemic arrangements for ongoing professional development to enable both generalist and arts teachers to continue to update their knowledge and develop their expertise and skills must therefore be prioritised.

"It will be important for policy-makers and those developing the new national curriculum to seriously consider the evidence and stances adopted in this review," Professor Ewing concludes.

Robyn Ewing is Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts at the University of Sydney. Her teaching, research, publications and extensive work in schools include the use of drama with literature to enhance students' English and literacy outcomes.

Australian Education Review number 58, *The Arts and Australian Education: Realising potential*, by Robyn Ewing with a foreword by John O'Toole, Foundation Chair of Arts Education at the University of Melbourne and currently lead writer for *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* is available for download from the ACER website at <http://www.acer.edu.au/aer>. Print copies can be purchased from ACER Press. Contact customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on [.\(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](#).

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## ACER and CBSE conduct international assessment conference

ACER collaborated with the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to conduct an international conference on 'Development in Assessment: Scope of Assessment in Teaching and Learning' in Delhi earlier in January. Mr Kapil Sibal, Union Minister Human Resource Development and Communication and Information Technology, Government of India inaugurated the conference.

From 24-25 January around 1000 delegates from India, UAE and neighboring countries came together to hear from a range of speakers who are internationally renowned in the field of educational assessment.

ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters and Principal Research Fellow Professor Gabrielle Matters were among the keynote speakers. Other conference speakers were:

- Dr Kapil Kapoor, Professor of English, Centre for Linguistics and English and Concurrent Professor, Centre for Sanskrit Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- Dr Subhash Chander Khuntia, IAS, Jt Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and Chairman of Central Tibetan Schools Administration, Delhi
- Mr Vineet Joshi, IAS, Chairman CBSE
- Professor Patrik Scheinin, Professor of Education and the Dean of the Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, University of Helsinki
- Professor Dinesh Singh, Vice Chancellor, Delhi University
- Professor R Govida, Vice Chancellor, National University for Educational Planning and Administration
- Professor A B L Srivastava, Chief Consultant, CBSE and Educational Consultants India Ltd
- Professor Avtar Singh, Head of Department of educational Measurement and Evaluation, NCERT
- Dr Gavin Brown, Associate Professor, The Hong Kong Institute of Education
- Professor Jennifer Fedricks, Chair, Human Development Department, Connecticut College

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- Professor Margaret Heritage, Assistant Director for Professional Development at the national Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA
- Dr Susan M Brookhart, educational consultant and author based in Helena, Montana
- Mr Kevin Bartlett, Director International School of Brussels
- Professor Heidi Andrade, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the School of Education, Albany- State University of New York
- Lady Shruti Rana, educationist, Managing Trustee of Shruti Foundation
- Ms Anshu Vaish, Secretary Department of School Education and Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India

The conference addressed issues related to student assessment and student learning including developmental assessments and what can be learned from research; understanding best practice in assessment; using assessment to monitor teacher effectiveness and encourage school improvement; developing support systems for using assessments in the classroom; and policy changes in the new educational framework for improved assessments.

Manager of ACER's Indian subsidiary, Ms Ratna Dhamija, explained the conference was undertaken as part of CBSE's agenda to strengthen school-based assessment and implement continuous and comprehensive evaluation in schools at the primary, middle and secondary level.

"CBSE is in the midst of reforms, particularly in the areas of assessment," Ms Dhamija said.

"The Board has, through its various interventions, brought about many initiatives in the area of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Its endeavour is to enable learning around the different aspects of assessment and proven best practices."

Ms Dhamija said the conference had been very successful. Initial feedback from delegates has been positive and further feedback is being collected.

Organisers hope the conference will become a yearly event.

The conference follows the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between CBSE and ACER in Melbourne in April 2010 to collaborate on programs and initiatives that apply international best practices in educational research and assessment to support educational development.

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## AHELO moves forward

Content and assessment experts from 14 countries around the world have made significant progress towards investigating the feasibility of an international Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO).

The AHELO Feasibility Study is determining whether it is possible to measure at the international level what undergraduate degree students know and can do. The assessment aims to provide better information than is currently available to higher education institutions, governments, and other stakeholders including students and employers.

ACER is leading a consortium of international organisations in the design and implementation of the feasibility study on behalf of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Chair of the AHELO Feasibility Study Technical Advisory Group and Vice President at the USA National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), Dr Peter Ewell, believes AHELO is significant because it is the first time anyone has tried to compare tertiary outcomes internationally.

"If institutions see a similar institution achieving better outcomes they want to know 'what are we doing differently and how can we do things like them?'," said Dr Ewell. "Through AHELO we can start finding out what works."

The AHELO Feasibility Study focuses on Economics, Engineering and Generic Skills. Progress is occurring at a rapid pace in each of the modules, with enormous interest and goodwill among both academic experts and countries, including those who are not directly participating.

In early 2011 the test instruments will be translated into the languages of participating countries and shown to focus groups. The feedback gained from students and faculty from a range of institutions in participating countries will be used to refine and improve the instruments.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton New Jersey has developed an Economics instrument which tests the skills and knowledge of final-year bachelor degree students. The framework and items are being revised in preparation for adaptation, translation and validation in 2011.

AHELO's Economics Expert Group is chaired by Cecilia A. Conrad, Vice President and Dean of Pomona College in California, where she is also the Stedman-Sumner Professor of Economics.

Professor Conrad said she is happy that the Economics Expert Group was able to work out what questions would work across borders.

"With AHELO, we can learn what students need to gain a better understanding about so they will be able to compete with and work with graduates from other institutions around the world," said Professor Conrad.

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ACER has been working with colleagues from Japan's National Institute for Educational Policy Research and the University of Florence to develop a framework and test for the field of Engineering.

AHELO's Engineering Expert Group has reviewed 12 draft test units; each developed around a key engineering problem with a range of multiple choice and written response items. The best four items were selected and revised. The Expert Group also analysed a large set of items from the licensing exam for civil engineers in Japan and selected those most suitable to include in AHELO's engineering test.

ACER worked with partner organisations to refine and validate the items in preparation for adaptation, translation and validation in 2011.

The AHELO Feasibility Study Engineering Expert Group is chaired by Robin King, Emeritus Professor of Engineering at the University of Technology, Sydney, and Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Engineering Deans.

In developing instruments for the assessment test in Civil Engineering, Professor King stresses the need for instruments that can measure both technical knowledge and how graduating civil engineers look at problems.

"We need to measure their technical capability to solve them and their understanding of the broader impacts of civil engineering in society, such as the social and environmental impacts of locating a dam," said Professor King.

Despite the challenge of developing instruments which acknowledge the differing philosophies of engineering education around the world, and the need to ensure that all questions are appropriate to students in all countries, Professor King is optimistic about the potential for the AHELO Feasibility Study.

"Measuring the outcomes of education is very difficult but it's really important," said Professor King.

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## ACER Update

### Summer edition of *Research Developments* now available

The Summer 2010-11 edition of *Research Developments* is now available online at <http://research.acer.edu.au/resdev/> and in print. This edition includes articles on mathematical competencies, a Victorian initiative to encourage children to walk or cycle to school, a new secondary school diploma aimed at meeting students' workplace needs and a study that investigated post school outcomes of students who had struggled academically at school.

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