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New research to investigate if millions are hitting the target

Professor Geoffrey Blainey AC launched a national first investigation of the links between philanthropy and education in Melbourne on 23 March 2011.

The three-year Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy (LLEAP) project will explore whether the full potential of funding and partnerships available to Australian schools is being achieved.

Project Leader, Dr Michelle Anderson of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) said, while there is a long history of philanthropy in Australian education, some mystery surrounds how schools access and use philanthropic grants.

"LLEAP aims to find ways to improve the quality of grant seeking and grant making in Australia and identify better ways for the philanthropy and education sectors to connect and collaborate," she said.

Dr Anderson pointed to a 2010 Philanthropy Australia members' survey that found education is a specific funding priority for 64 per cent of the survey's respondents. According to Philanthropy Australia there are approximately 5000 trusts and foundations in Australia. In the last year the combined total of their grants and donations was approximately \$1 billion, a significant proportion of which was directed to education.

During his launch opening speech, Professor Blainey said, "Australia has a long tradition of philanthropy, where people having made money decide that it belongs largely to the nation and to the people who enabled them to make that money."

Professor Blainey went on to recount numerous examples of philanthropy from Australia's history including Walter Powell's donations to establish Wesley College in the 1860s, Henry Reed providing money and advice in the formative years of the Salvation Army, also in the 1860s, and the predecessor of the Australian Football League giving all gate takings of football matches to help relieve the Indian famine of the 1870s.

Speaking ahead of the launch Professor Blainey said, "In philanthropy and education, as in everything, there are better ways of doing things. We should be hunting for them. We need to find ways to do the really important activities more effectively: education is one. By collaborating we may find a smarter path."

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In its first year the LLEAP project will collect information through interviews with leaders in both education and philanthropic sectors, followed by an online survey and focus groups, to help form a clearer picture of the impact of philanthropy on education projects.

“Education is a major priority for Australian philanthropy with hundreds of millions of dollars in funding being directed to the sector every year,” said The Ian Potter Foundation CEO Janet Hirst.

“It is vital that we understand the true impact of this investment. This research will give both educators and philanthropists the knowledge to ensure the funds are making the greatest difference possible.”

Mrs Hirst urged her fellow CEOs from the philanthropic organisations and school principals to get involved in the project by taking part in the forthcoming interviews, surveys, focus groups and case studies.

The LLEAP project is an initiative of the Tender Bridge in partnership with The Ian Potter Foundation. The Tender Bridge is a service of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) which seeks to direct funds into schools to support educational projects.

Professor Blainey concluded his opening speech with his hopes that the partnership between The Ian Potter Foundation and ACER produces seeds that lead to a bumper harvest.

The official launch of LLEAP took place at Melbourne Town Hall at 11.00am on Wednesday 23 March. For further information about LLEAP visit www.acer.edu.au/lleap

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US expert endorses teacher observation

Since the release of Australia's National Professional Standards Framework for Teachers on 9 February 2011, attention has turned to how the standards will be used for the assessment and certification of teachers at the four career stages of graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher.

According to an international expert on teacher evaluation, classroom observation will almost certainly be a part of any set of methods developed in Australia.

Speaking at an ACER Institute seminar, prominent US education consultant Charlotte Danielson said there are benefits to be derived from classroom observation, both for teachers and school systems.

"I've had a long experience with teacher assessment and in particular with using teacher observation as a source of evidence for teacher practice," said Danielson. "I think it's a good methodology; it can produce other benefits besides just simply establishing somebody's level of performance."

Danielson said teacher observation is a means of promoting teachers' own learning and encouraging teachers to be more reflective about their practice.

"A good way to introduce teacher observation into a school is to invite and in some cases even require that teachers observe each other for the purpose of learning from their colleagues," said Danielson.

In Danielson's experience, a culture of professional learning in which teachers realise that they can learn from one another tends to break down barriers to classroom observation such as teacher stress or anxiety. It is also a professionally responsible approach, suggesting that teachers, as other professionals, can always improve their practice; it's a career-long endeavour.

However, Danielson warns, that is not an easy culture to establish. "It can take a little bit of time but it's a very worthwhile one to establish because you can then take it another step and engage in something like lesson study," said Danielson.

Lesson study involves a group of teachers developing a lesson together, having one of the teachers teach the lesson while the others observe and then critiquing the lesson, revising the lesson and having another teacher teach it.

"The question that you're asking is not, 'Did that teacher do a good job of teaching it?', but 'Was the lesson itself well designed?'" said Danielson. "That produces very productive conversations that respect the professionalism of other teachers."

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If teacher observation is to be used as a source of evidence to inform accreditation or performance pay, Danielson urges that a moderation process is critical to the design of the evaluation.

Danielson, whose Framework of Teaching is one of the most widely used systems for classroom observation, professional learning and teacher evaluation in the USA, believes that Australia needs a nationally consistent model for teacher assessment and certification.

“Australia would have a better system if it would do only one because you could draw on the expertise of everyone from around the country,” said Danielson. “The challenge of that is that you get people in a room together from different jurisdictions who feel strongly about the value of the work they’ve done already and are reluctant to abandon it.”

The biggest advantage of having a single model for teacher assessment and certification, according to Danielson, is the economies of scale that it delivers. States are constantly looking to use their resources more efficiently and effectively and an Australia-wide model for teacher observation would carry economies of scale around investment and training, Danielson said.

Danielson visited Australia in March to present a one and a half-day workshop on classroom observation and the evaluation of teacher performance as part of the ACER Institute Leading Thinkers seminar series. Among those in attendance at Danielson’s workshop were the heads of teacher registration bodies, union representatives and leaders of teachers from within schools.

Charlotte Danielson is an internationally-recognized expert in the area of teacher effectiveness, specialising in the design of teacher evaluation systems that, while ensuring teacher quality, also promote professional learning. She advises State Education Departments and National Ministries and Departments of Education, both in the United States and overseas. She is in demand as a keynote speaker at national and international conferences, and as a policy consultant to legislatures and administrative bodies.

Ms Danielson’s many publications cover a range of topics including defining good teaching, organising schools for student success, teacher leadership and professional conversations to assist practitioners in implementing her ideas.

Further information about ACER Institute’s Leading Thinkers series is available from the [ACER Intitute website](#)

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Schools advised to plan 'sexting' response

Schools would do well to have a policy in place that addresses sexting, for the protection of staff and students, writes [ACER Research Fellow Paul Weldon](#).

We all know that teens can be impulsive and act without thought for consequences, which is why sexual experimentation among teens is hardly new, or news, in itself. What is new, though, is teen sexual experimentation online. The capacity for instant communications, and the ease with which text, pictures and video can now be created, widely disseminated and retained, continues to evolve at an astonishing pace.

The term 'sexting' is derived from 'texting' and refers to the sending of sexually provocative material from modern communications devices. A year or two ago, I would have said 'from mobile phones,' but the advent of portable smart technology such as the iPhone and iPad, netbooks and BlackBerries has blurred any such distinction.

As the derivation suggests, material with a sexual theme is not limited to images, but can also be suggestive or soliciting text. While the term could in theory encompass all such material created and sent in this way, its current use is commonly linked to teenagers, and more specifically to minors.

The sending of nude or sexually provocative images between peers who are minors is currently proscribed by laws that were originally designed to protect children from abusive adults. Regardless of the context of their creation, with occasional exemptions such as some medical images, nude images of minors are illegal and likely to be considered child pornography.

In a first for Australia, a 14-year-old boy in WA was charged late last year under Commonwealth law with possession of child pornography, after a video of a 14-year-old girl engaged in sex act with two boys was found on his mobile phone. The same footage had also been forwarded to other students.

Lucy Battersby in the Melbourne Age in 2008 reported that 32 Victorian teenagers were charged with child pornography offences as a result of sexting in 2007.

If that figure surprises you, that may be because, if we have to think about child pornography, we're unlikely to think of it in terms of a 15-year-old girl sending an image of herself to her 15-year-old boyfriend. The boy would be surprised, I think, to learn that he may be placed in the same category as adult sex offenders. And what happens if a 17-year-old girl, a minor, sends an image of herself to her 18-year-old, adult, boyfriend?

I think there is a case to be made that the law should take into account both the age of the perpetrators and the context in which the 'offence' was committed. While most parents and the wider community are likely to agree that there should be consequences, guidelines for the police and the courts as to how such matters should be handled would be very welcome.

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The law may need to be modified with respect to school staff, and a policy drawn up with clear guidelines for dealing with underage sexual images, should staff encounter them. Suppose, for example, a boy approaches a male teacher, having been sent an image of a girl in his class by another boy. The teacher views the image then downloads it onto this computer as evidence before telling the boy to delete the image from his phone.

A more experienced, or wary, teacher might take the boy immediately to the principal, with the phone still in his possession, and call the police, who would then be responsible for interviewing the child and viewing the contents of the phone.

The first teacher may fall foul of the current laws and potentially face a charge of possessing child pornography himself. The second teacher, by involving the principal and calling the police, may be on safer ground, but his actions may currently have heavy consequences for the children involved. My point here is that schools need to have a policy in place with guidelines that complement those of the police and social services, and that school staff need to be aware of the appropriate action to take should a case of sexting come to light.

Modern technology remains a tool to be used, and for the most part communication technologies and the social uses to which they are put provide relatively safe environments in which teens can explore relationships. Teen romance will no doubt remain a source of much angst and confusion, but if an awareness of the ramifications of sexting gives young people pause to think about their actions before acting on impulse, at least one area of potential heartache – and an inadvertent criminal record – might be avoided.

A longer version of this article first appeared in *Teacher*, Australia's award-winning national monthly education magazine for educators across all state, Catholic and independent schools. Subscribe by visiting <http://research.acer.edu.au/teacher>

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ACER Update

ACER Institute to host Dr. Howard Gardner seminar

In May 2011 ACER Institute will host seminars presented by Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education Dr. Howard Gardner, best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences.

The two-hour seminars are being held for one day only in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Singapore during May 2011.

During the morning seminar, titled 'Five Minds for the Future', Gardner will discuss the importance of developing five kinds of minds; the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind, and the ethical mind, both in school and in other educational environments.

During the afternoon seminar, titled 'Teaching for Understanding', Gardner will describe an education that preserves the strengths of traditional humane education while preparing younger generations for the challenges off the future.

For more information on each of these seminars or to register your attendance please visit www.acerinstitute.edu.au

New book provides key to Powerful Learning

ACER Press has launched a new book that details how educational reform was successfully implemented in 195 Victorian schools, resulting in massive improvement in student performance.

Co-written by pre-eminent educationalists Professor David Hopkins, Wayne Craig and John Munro, *Powerful Learning: A Strategy for systemic educational improvement* is a case study of the reform program carried out in Victoria's Northern Metropolitan Region between 2008 and 2010. It discusses teaching strategies, organisational structure and policy and how they can be changed to support improvement plans in schools. The book outlines how teachers from the region were selected for training focusing on literacy, numeracy, assessment and student management, which they could then use to coach their colleagues.

The book was launched on 24 March 2011 at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre by Prime Minister Julia Gillard's deputy chief of staff, Tom Bentley. The book is available for purchase from the [ACER online shop](#)

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ACER Award for Student Journalism 2011

ACER is offering an award for excellence in an article relating to education for the second time in 2011. Currently enrolled journalism and professional writing students across Australia are invited to enter. Applications are now open and may be submitted up until October 28 this year. In 2011 small cash prizes totalling \$600 are on offer. In addition the winning and short listed entries will be considered for publication in one of the magazines published by ACER Press – Teacher and Inside Teaching.

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