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Published June 2010

In this issue:

- [Student achievement is key to building genuine self-esteem](#)
- [Cunningham Library launches Connell Collection](#)
- [Good teaching and good schools can overcome disadvantage](#)
- [ACER UPDATE](#)

## Student achievement is key to building genuine self-esteem

The best way to build student self-esteem is to provide balanced feedback within responsive and demanding learning environments to enable them to achieve, according to ACER's [Professor Stephen Dinham](#).

"Achievement is the foundation of self-esteem," Professor Dinham said in an address to the . Smith Family Sydney Conversations Conference: How to create a sense of wellbeing in children earlier this month.

"Every student needs to experience success and feel that they are progressing in their learning and development," Professor Dinham said.

"However, some teachers and schools operate on the false belief that boosting self-esteem will somehow result in higher achievement."

Professor Dinham referred to a 2005 paper he co-authored with [Dr Catherine Scott](#), titled Parenting, teaching and self-esteem, in which Scott and Dinham argued that the four styles of parenting identified by US child psychologist Diana Baumrind can be readily applied to teaching, school leadership and schooling in general.

The four styles are: 'uninvolved' where responsiveness and demandingness shown to students are low; 'authoritarian' where responsiveness is low and demandingness is high; 'permissive' where responsiveness is high and demandingness is low; and 'authoritative' where responsiveness and demandingness to students are high.

Baumrind stated that responsiveness is the extent to which the adult intentionally fosters individuality, self-regulation and assertion by being attuned, supportive, and consenting to children's special needs and wants. Demandingness relates to the claims adults make on children to become integrated into the family or class, by the adult's maturity demands, supervision and disciplinary efforts.

"An authoritative teaching style where high responsiveness is accompanied with high demandingness provides the best model for enhancing both student achievement and self-esteem," Professor Dinham said. "In their relationships with students, authoritative teachers and schools give a lot and expect a lot."

Published June 2010

Dinham's research shows that the best teachers and schools have always been authoritative. He said that the combination of sensitivity, caring, high expectations and structure leads to academic achievement, good social skills, moral maturity, autonomy and high self-esteem in children.

According to Dinham, due to a misconception that saw responsiveness and demandingness as mutually exclusive, schooling in Australia shifted from the authoritarian style of the 1960s to a permissive style, rather than maintaining high demandingness and adopting an authoritative style.

"It was right that schooling became more responsive to the individual student, but to achieve this, it was incorrectly thought that schools needed to be less demanding," Professor Dinham said.

Dinham argues that the permissive style's avoidance of criticism and negative feedback and dependence on large amounts of positive reinforcement to build student self-esteem in the hope that this will translate into student achievement is counter-productive.

"Not making demands of students can lead to low expectations and 'dumbing down'," Professor Dinham said.

"Real achievement, no matter how small, is the best way to engender self-concept and self-esteem," he said. "This can then serve as a solid foundation for further achievement."

Dinham said when students have their self-esteem boosted artificially in non-authentic ways, they become deflated when they encounter real-life challenges.

"In some ways taking a blow to one's self-esteem is worse than never having much of it in the first place."

Research Director of the Teaching, Learning and Leadership program at ACER, Professor Stephen Dinham spoke at the Smith Family Sydney Conversations Conference, How to create a sense of wellbeing in children, on 9th June. The paper is available from the ACER research repository at [http://works.bepress.com/stephen\\_dinham/594/](http://works.bepress.com/stephen_dinham/594/) or from the [Smith Family website](#) where additional information about the Sydney Conversations 2010 event is also available.

Published June 2010

## Cunningham Library launches Connell Collection

ACER's [Cunningham Library](#) celebrated the opening of the W.F. and M.L. Connell Collection on 28 May.

Formerly the private collection of Emeritus Professor William Connell and his wife, Margaret Connell, the Collection of over 6000 items has been catalogued onto the Libraries Australia national database so that it is accessible to researchers Australia-wide.

The official opening of the collection was preceded with speeches by William and Margaret Connell's children, Helen, Raewyn and Patricia, themselves esteemed academics in the fields of education, sociology and biology respectively.

Speaking to special guests in attendance, the launch Master of Ceremonies, ACER's [Dr Phillip McKenzie](#), said "The Cunningham Library catalogue contains about 100 works by various members of the Connell family, aside from those in the Connell Collection."

ACER's Head of Library and Information Services, [Lance Deveson](#), said, "It was through the family's desire that the Collection not be broken up that the Library was donated to ACER and the Cunningham Library."

"My father had many links with ACER throughout his career so it's fitting that the collection ended up here," Helen Connell said. She described her father as a 'maggie' who assiduously kept copies of everything.

"I prepared the first catalogue of this collection aged 11 or 12 during the school holidays," Helen Connell said, reflecting on the enormity of the task. "It's good to know a thoroughly professional job has now been done."

ACER Library Technician Christopher Foot, began the massive task of cataloguing the Collection in 2006. Four years later, The Cunningham Library now boasts this new collection that focuses on teaching and learning in their historical, comparative, socio-cultural, institutional, personal and interpersonal settings. In addition to its core focus on education, the collection also covers the key subject fields of sociology, history, psychology and psychometric testing within Australia and internationally.

ACER Indigenous Liaison Officer, Gina Milgate, said of her first browse through the collection, "As an Aboriginal woman from the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri lands of New South Wales, I was empowered to see a book called *The Education of the Australian Aborigine* published in 1948."

"It is quite fitting that we are launching this collection in Reconciliation week,' Ms Milgate said. "I feel the spirits of the Wurundjeri people (the traditional owners of the land the Connell Collection now sits on) are keeping the resources protected in this special place."

**Published June 2010**

Also in attendance at the launch was former ACER librarian Chris Walker-Cook who worked with William Connell on the writing of the history of the first 50 years of ACER, *The Australian Council for Educational Research 1930-1980*, published in 1980 and available to view in the collection.

Prior to officially opening the Connell Collection, ACER CEO [Professor Geoff Masters](#), spoke of the launch's coincidence with [ACER's 80th Anniversary year](#).

"This is a period in which we've been reflecting on the history of our organisation," Masters said.

"William Connell has literally written our history and we reciprocate by providing a home to the collection."

For more information on the W.F. and M.L. Connell Collection please contact ACER's Cunningham Library on Ph. +61 3 9277 5553. To search the Connell Collection online please visit <http://opac.acer.edu.au:8080/>

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## Good teaching and good schools can overcome disadvantage

The biggest equity issue in Australian education today isn't computers, new buildings or equipment, according to ACER's [Professor Stephen Dinham](#). He told education graduands at the University of Southern Queensland last month that the biggest issue is each student having quality teachers and quality teaching in schools supported by effective leadership and professional learning.

"Life isn't fair, but good teaching and good schools are the best means we have of overcoming disadvantage and opening the doors of opportunity for the young people of Australia," Professor Dinham said at the graduation ceremony.

Professor Dinham referred to a 2008 report he co-authored, titled [Teaching Talent – the best teachers for Australia's classroom](#), in which the authors argued that previous attempts to drive improvement in teacher quality and to attract, retain, recognise and reward accomplished teachers had largely failed. They called for a new national approach involving national teaching standards, levels of voluntary certification above the mandatory 'competent' level and commensurate financial rewards.

Professor Dinham said "At present, more than three-quarters of Australia's teachers are at the top of incremental salary scales where they earn approximately one and a half times the salary of a beginning teacher. This difference is too small."

Professor Dinham offered advice to the aspiring teachers, including: continue professional learning; become better informed, critical consumers of educational research; question the evidence base for what is done and any alternative methods considered; gather and use data in more sophisticated ways; and focus on every student as a learner and a person.

"My own research with successful teachers and schools in a range of countries shows that the best teachers and schools are continually striving to be better," he said. "Maybe that's why they are successful."

Professor Dinham said this is one of the most significant eras in Australian education. "It is also a great time to be going into teaching, particularly if one is looking for a career rather than a job."

Research Director of the Teaching, Learning and Leadership program at ACER, Professor Stephen Dinham gave the occasional address at the University of Southern Queensland Faculty of Education graduation ceremony in May.

A copy of Professor Dinham's address is available from the ACER research repository at [http://works.bepress.com/stephen\\_dinham/611/](http://works.bepress.com/stephen_dinham/611/)

Teaching Talent – the best teachers for Australia's classroom, was prepared by ACER researchers for the Business Council of Australia in 2008. It is available from [http://works.bepress.com/stephen\\_dinham/47/](http://works.bepress.com/stephen_dinham/47/)

Published June 2010

## ACER UPDATE

### Staff in Australia's Schools Survey

ACER is conducting the second cycle of the Staff in Australia's Schools survey (SiAS) in 2010. SiAS is an Australia-wide survey to collect information directly from school teachers and leaders about their background and qualifications, their work, their career intentions, and school staffing issues. A large sample of primary and secondary schools in all sectors and states and territories will be randomly selected and invited to participate in SiAS.

The voluntary survey, which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, is intended to provide a snapshot of the Australian teacher workforce, including demographic information such as gender, age, qualifications and work roles. It will also gather information that may be used to assist in planning for the future, including data from current teachers and school leaders about their employment intentions and career plans, and staffing issues that schools are facing. This survey will also map key trends since the first SiAS in 2006-07.

SiAS has been commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The Advisory Committee includes representatives of government and non-government school authorities in all states and territories, national principals associations, teacher unions, teacher education institutions and the ABS. The online survey will be conducted in August and September. For further information visit [www.acer.edu.au/sias](http://www.acer.edu.au/sias)

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

The Winter 2010 edition of *Research Developments* – ACER's print magazine – is now available online from <http://research.acer.edu.au/resdev/vol23/iss23/>. Print copies will be distributed at the end of June. The articles in this issue cover the latest results from the National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy, ACER's evaluation of the One Laptop Per Child program in remote Indigenous communities, findings from a survey that examined the further study and work destinations of Victorian school leavers and details of the first Australian administration of the [Progress in International Reading Literacy Study \(PIRLS\)](#).

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