

MEDIA RELEASE

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Culture-fair assessment issues examined

A greater emphasis on more 'culturally inclusive' assessment and teaching methods for Indigenous students may help to address their pattern of under-achievement in national benchmark data and international testing programs according to a paper to be presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conference in Perth.

The presentation, by Professor Val Klenowski from Queensland University of Technology and Ms Thelma Gertz of the Catholic Education Office Townsville, is based on an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage research project examining equity issues as they relate to the validity and fairness of assessment practices.

"There is consistent data across all levels – school, state, national and international – to conclude that Australian schools are not addressing equity issues effectively with Indigenous children scoring significantly lower than non-Indigenous children," Professor Klenowski says.

"The differential performance of students from different cultures may not be due to bias in the choice of test content or design alone, but may be attributable to real differences in performance because of these students' differing access to learning, different social and cultural contexts, or real differences in their attainment in the topic under consideration due to their experiences and socio-cultural background."

According to Senior Indigenous Education Officer of Townsville Catholic Education, Ms Thelma Gertz, the real issue is language understanding and use. "For most Indigenous children, Standard Australian English is an additional language, which presents a real challenge in the everyday classroom and even more so in a testing situation such as NAPLAN," Ms Gertz said.

"Current standardised assessments significantly underestimate the abilities of our children.

"Put simply, it is not our children failing the tests; rather it is the testing procedure that is failing our students."

"I call on the Rudd Government to take up the challenge of addressing this in line with their overall Indigenous health and education strategy."

Professor Klenowski and Ms Gertz will present a case study of mathematics learning involving a group of Indigenous students from Queensland to illustrate that the learning experience can be modified by teachers for particular students to achieve engagement, participation and improvement in learning.

The teacher and Indigenous support staff development program began four years ago with specialist maths teacher Eva Devries. The research, which began in February of this year, involves regular visits to schools by visiting mathematics specialists and researchers. The specialists give classes on effective strategies for teaching maths to Year 4 and Year 6 students.

The ACER Research Conference 2009, *Assessment and Student Learning: Collecting, interpreting and using data to inform teaching*, takes place in Perth from 16-18 August 2009 at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

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