

MEDIA RELEASE

For release Monday 17 August 2009

Whatever the source - assessment data can inform teaching and learning

While some educators argue that information from system-wide tests is not useful for improving learning, good quality data from a range of sources can and should be used to inform teaching, according to a paper to be presented at the ACER Research Conference in Perth today.

“What matters is the *quality* rather than the source of information,” says Dr Margaret Forster, Research Director of the Assessment and Reporting Research Program at ACER. “And that means the diagnostic power of the assessment – the power of the assessment to illuminate strengths and weaknesses in students’ understandings. Informative assessment, assessment that can drive teaching and learning, bypasses the division between assessment *of* learning and *for* learning.”

From the teacher’s perspective, quality assessment reveals, at different levels of specificity, how students think as well as what they know; and this includes their pre-existing, sometimes incomplete understandings. This information assists teachers to identify appropriate starting points for personalised teaching.

“Research shows that effective teachers recognise that learning is most likely to occur when a student is challenged just beyond their current level of attainment. Effective teachers understand, therefore, the importance of first determining students’ current levels of attainment rather than working from what we expect them to know and understand given their age or year level.”

From the learner’s perspective, quality assessment assists the student to understand what is valued, to know where they are now in their learning and to know what to do next to move forward effectively in their learning. “When it comes to learning,” says Dr Forster, “research shows that learners learn best when they understand what they are trying to learn, and what is expected of them; and when they are given regular feedback about their work and how to make it better. If the feedback is to be effective, it must be focused on what the individual student needs to do to improve rather than performance relative to others.”

Students as well as teachers need to understand what it means to progress in an area of learning so they can see where they have come from and are going to in their learning journey. Since the 1990s, the monitoring of learning has been facilitated by well-constructed learning continua, known as progress maps or learning progressions. Informative assessment draws on these understandings of growth as well as the research that underpins assessment *for* learning, research on high performing school systems, and research on highly effective teaching. “Informative assessment,” argues Dr Forster, “uses quality assessment data, whatever its source, as a central driver for teaching and learning.”

The ACER Research Conference, *Assessment and Student Learning: Collecting, interpreting and using data to inform teaching* is being held in Perth from 16-18 August.

*****ENDS*****

Media enquiries:

Louise Reynolds, Corporate Publicity and Communications Manager, ACER
Phone: (03) 9277 5582 or 0419 340 058