

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 27 March 2003

International video study of mathematics teaching methods

A major international video study in seven countries including Australia has identified no single best method of teaching eighth-grade mathematics in high achieving countries.

Teaching Mathematics in Seven Countries: Results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 1999 Video Study was released in Washington on 26 March.

The study was conducted by LessonLab Inc., for the US National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES). The Australian component of the study was undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) with funding from the Commonwealth, states and territories.

The study included 638 randomly selected eighth-grade lessons in Australia, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States. Lessons were videotaped for analysis and comparison across the countries involved to investigate similarities and differences in teaching practices.

ACER's chief executive officer, Professor Geoff Masters said that the TIMSS Video study will make a valuable contribution to further research into features of teaching that most influence students' learning.

"The more educators and researchers can learn about teaching as it is actually practised, the more effectively educators can identify factors that might enhance student learning opportunities and, by extension, student achievement," Professor Masters said.

The report found that each country shared some general features of eighth-grade mathematics teaching. However, each country combined and emphasised instructional features in various ways, sometimes differently from all the other countries, and sometimes similarly to some countries.

A typical Australian lesson began with a review of previously learned content (an average of 36 per cent of lesson time), followed by the introduction of new content (30 per cent of lesson time), and the practising of this new content (26 per cent of lesson time).

Professor Masters said that although Australian students rank relatively highly in international achievement studies, the study findings suggest that we might do even better if we strengthened the mathematical content of our lessons and expected more of our students – in particular by setting more challenging problems.

ACER will release a national report focusing on the Australian findings in late June.

***** ENDS *****

For further information and arrangements to interview ACER spokespersons on the report, contact Ms Louise Reynolds, Corporate Publicity and Communications Manager, Phone (03) 9277 5582; mobile: 0419 340 058 or email: reynolds@acer.edu.au