

MEDIA RELEASE

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Teacher intuition still important as schools swamped with data

Using data in school decision-making does not have to be a mechanical or technical process that denigrates educators' intuition, teaching philosophy and personal experience, according to Dr Lorna Earl, Associate Professor and co-director of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

Dr Earl is speaking in Melbourne today at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) annual conference entitled *Using Data to Support Learning*.

"Having data is a beginning, but it is not enough. Schools need to move from being data-rich to being information-rich and knowledge-rich as well. Information becomes knowledge when it is shaped, organised and embedded in a context that gives it meaning and connectedness," Dr Earl says.

School leaders are the ones who are accountable for the work of the school. High-stakes accountability systems can create a sense of urgency and provide 'pressure' for change. However, real accountability is much more than accounting (providing information of justifications in an annual report or a press release or even student report cards). It is a moral and professional responsibility to be knowledgeable and fair in teaching and in interactions with students and their parents. It engenders respect, trust, shared understanding and mutual support.

Educators are trying to come to grips with the vast deluge of new and unfiltered information, and to find ways to transform this information into knowledge and ultimately into constructive action.

Educators need to use data in many different contexts – to establish their current status, to determine improvement plans, to chart effectiveness of their initiatives and to monitor their progress towards their goals.

There was a time when educational decisions were made with a combination of intimate and privileged knowledge of the context, political savvy, professional training and logical analysis. Very little data was available about schools. We are now in an era of informed professionalism, where leaders will need to: develop an inquiry habit of mind; become data literate; and create a culture of enquiry in their school community.

"Using data to make decisions is hard work. When schools engage in ongoing school improvement, they find themselves in a continuous cycle of change. It gets easier as they internalise and embed the technical skills, organisational processes and values into routines in the culture of the school," Dr Earl says.

Dr Lorna Earl is a teacher and researcher with a background in psychology and education and has a doctorate in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Her active involvement in executive positions with local, national and international organisations has brought her in close touch with educational issues throughout the world.

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