



Pursuing Quality and Equity through Evidence

The work of the Australian Council for Educational Research



Improving Learning

MISSION

ACER's mission is to create and promote research-based knowledge, products and services to improve learning across the life span

Data Gathering

Educational decision making – whether by teachers, school leaders, system managers, governments, parents or learners themselves – depends on reliable information about prevailing circumstances. Teachers and educational leaders require dependable information about the situations they confront to design tailored programs, interventions and solutions. For example, classroom teachers require good information about where individuals are up to in their learning, including information about special needs, learning gaps and student misunderstandings. School leaders require dependable information about whole-school performances and areas of school practice that require additional attention. System leaders and governments require dependable information about underperforming student populations, areas of special need, progress in closing gaps and meeting achievement targets, and trends in achievement levels over time.

A major aspect of ACER's work is to assist educational decision makers at all levels in their collection, analysis, interpretation and use of reliable data. Our purpose is to assist in the development of clearer pictures and understandings of educational challenges, opportunities and progress over time.

Action Planning

Beyond having a good understanding of the situations they confront, educational decision makers require quality information about the most effective ways of achieving desired changes and improvements. Historically, many initiatives and programs in education have been based not on sound evidence about effective practices, but on passing fashions and personal beliefs about what 'should' work. Within the education profession there is now a deeper appreciation of the importance of grounding programs and interventions in evidence, whether from research or systematic practice. This focus on evidence-based policies and practices includes a new level of appreciation for the profession's knowledge base – our growing understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions. It also is reflected in an increased interest on the part of schools, education systems and governments in learning from international research, experience and best practice.

A second major aspect of ACER's work is to assist educational decision makers at all levels in their identification and implementation of evidence-based policies and practices. Our purpose is to promote better outcomes for all learners through the use of approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective in practice.



OVERVIEW

ACER provides assistance in data gathering and action planning in four major areas of educational practice

		Data Gathering the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of reliable data	Action Planning the identification and implementation of evidence- based policies and practices
1	Learners and their Needs	Exploring Individual Needs	Addressing Individual Needs
2	The Learning Profession	Assessing Professional Capabilities	Developing Professional Capabilities
3	Places of Learning	Evaluating Organisational Performances	Enhancing Organisational Performances
4	A Learning Society	Monitoring Educational Outcomes	Improving Educational Outcomes



1 Learners and their Needs

GOAL

every learner engaged in challenging learning opportunities appropriate to their readiness and needs

Exploring Individual Needs

Successful learning depends on the provision of learning opportunities appropriate to the readiness and needs of individual learners. Students differ significantly in their interests, motivations, knowledge, understandings and skills. To maximise learning, educators require reliable information about individuals' learning difficulties, special needs, current levels of attainment, gaps and misunderstandings. For some learners, specialist diagnostic testing may be required to provide more detailed pictures of individual needs and difficulties. Assessments of students against age norms and year-level performance expectations can be useful in evaluating student learning and progress, particularly in areas such as reading, writing, verbal communication and numeracy – the foundations for many other areas of learning. And measures of student progress over time can be valuable in identifying learners who are not making adequate progress and are in need of special assistance.

ACER provides a range of assessments and professional resource materials to assist educators at all levels in their exploration and identification of individual learning needs. These assessments have varying degrees of diagnostic power and may provide information about progress against age norms, curriculum standards and over time.

Addressing Individual Needs

A sound understanding of the learning progress and needs of individuals and groups of learners is a prerequisite for the identification and design of effective interventions, programs and teaching strategies to promote successful learning. Particularly important here are evidence-based interventions and strategies that have been shown to make a difference in practice. Much is now known from research about effective ways of addressing specific learning difficulties, supporting early learning and development, and motivating and engaging students at risk of dropping out. There is also considerable evidence to support particular pedagogical approaches, including direct instruction and the systematic development of skills that underpin early literacy learning. Expert teachers draw on this body of knowledge but also understand that there are few strategies that work for every learner and so use their knowledge of individuals to design tailored learning solutions.

ACER undertakes research and provides teaching resources to assist educators at all levels in their implementation of evidence-based interventions and strategies. This work includes studies of teaching methods, research reviews and program evaluations to enhance professional knowledge about effective programs and approaches.



2 The Learning Profession

GOAL

every learning professional highly skilled, knowledgeable and engaged in excellent practice

Assessing Professional Capabilities

It is now well understood that high quality teaching is a key to improving student learning and outcomes. There is also growing recognition of the very important role that institutional leaders play in creating environments for improved educational performances. Research has clarified what it is that highly effective teachers and leaders do – the knowledge, skills, dispositions and practices that typically characterise outstanding teaching and leadership. Efforts have been made to capture these understandings in statements of professional 'standards' for teachers and leaders at different stages in their careers (eg, graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, lead teachers). Routine staff performance appraisals and decisions about whether standards have been met for initial registration or for certification as a highly accomplished practitioner depend on the availability of valid and reliable assessments of professional knowledge, skills and performance.

ACER has expertise in assessment that we are now applying to the assessment of teaching and leadership capabilities. Assessments potentially include written tests of content and pedagogical content knowledge; diagnostic and self-assessments; and judgements of assembled evidence of successful practice for individuals, institutions and systems.

Developing Professional Capabilities

Professional learning is a career-long process. Highly effective teaching depends on sound understandings of the material being taught (content knowledge) and high levels of knowledge about how students learn, and the best ways to teach, that material (pedagogical content knowledge). Teachers also require skills in classroom management, the identification of learners with special needs, and the assessment and monitoring of student learning over time. The development of expertise in teaching and school leadership is facilitated by opportunities for teachers and leaders to work together and to learn from each other's day-to-day practice, particularly when there is a focus on analysing and discussing student work and collaborative efforts to improve student learning. Strategies for developing professional capabilities include coaching and mentoring programs, further study, and attendance at seminars, conferences and professional development programs.

ACER offers a range of seminars, conferences, workshops, professional development programs and published and online resources to support the learning and development of educators at all levels. We place a high priority on professional learning activities based in research evidence.

3 Places of Learning

GOAL

every learning community well resourced and passionately committed to improving outcomes for all learners

Evaluating Organisational Performances

Dependable information about the performances of educational institutions is required by institution leaders, system managers and prospective students and their parents. Information is required about areas of institutional strength and weakness in forms that enable performances to be benchmarked against, and compared with, those of other institutions. Reliable measures of institutional output, including academic results and evidence that students are being prepared with attributes and skills needed for life and work, are essential to informed decision making. Ideally, these measures will provide information about the value that institutions add in the form of measured student progress. Other important evidence is provided by indicators of institutional culture (eg, pastoral care, absence of bullying); student attitudes; staff qualifications and capabilities; resources and facilities; and the quality of the institution's external relationships and extra-curricular offerings.

ACER provides a range of instruments for evaluating the quality of learning in institutions, including measures of academic achievement, attitudes and values, and graduate employability skills. We have also developed more general frameworks for auditing teaching and learning practices within institutions.





Enhancing Organisational Performances

Research shows that highly effective educational institutions tend to have a number of features in common. They usually have strong leadership teams focused on driving a continuous institution-wide agenda to improve outcomes for all students. These leaders establish high expectations, set goals and targets and systematically monitor progress in achieving goals. The institution is organised and resources are allocated in the pursuit of the central leadership focus – improved learning. The institution provides a learning environment that is safe, caring and reflects values of respect, tolerance and inclusion. A high priority is placed on recruiting, developing and retaining excellent teachers, and leaders work to create strong professional learning cultures in which teachers collaborate to improve their teaching. Partnerships are formed with other agencies and community organisations that can assist in addressing student needs and improving outcomes for all students.

ACER undertakes research and provides practical support to educational institutions working to enhance their performances. Our work includes disseminating information about exemplary institutional practices and supporting partnerships with local communities to improve outcomes for students.



4 A Learning Society

GOAL

a society in which every learner experiences success and has an opportunity to achieve their potential

Monitoring Educational Outcomes

Governments and education systems require good information about the quality and equity of educational provision across entire societies. A key consideration is the extent to which all young people are being prepared with the fundamental skills required for life and work. These skills include, but are not limited to, basic literacy and numeracy. Governments and education systems take a particular interest in the educational progress of traditionally disadvantaged groups of students, including Indigenous students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Dependable data are required to evaluate the impact of programs and initiatives to improve quality and equity and to monitor progress in closing achievement gaps. Governments and education systems also seek reliable information about what is being achieved in other countries and systems as a basis for evaluating their own progress and establishing what is possible and what has worked elsewhere.

ACER plays a leading role in the collection and analysis of data on educational outcomes. This work includes state-wide, national and international surveys of student achievement and evaluations of government programs and initiatives to improve outcomes for particular groups of students.

Improving Educational Outcomes

A major goal of educational research is to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness and impact of educational policies and programs. Governments and system leaders require dependable information about the best ways of addressing the challenges they face – for example, information about effective ways of addressing the needs of underachieving populations of students; raising literacy levels; preparing and supporting school leaders; improving pre-service teacher education; building the skills of existing teachers; reforming assessment processes and examination systems; reforming curricula to provide skills and knowledge for the future; driving a stronger improvement agenda in schools; reforming funding arrangements; and encouraging innovation. Governments and systems require good research-based information about what works in practice and what it is that high performing education systems already do.

ACER undertakes research and works directly with education systems in Australia and internationally to identify, implement and evaluate effective system-wide programs and initiatives. Our goal is to work with governments and systems to improve educational quality and equity internationally.

ACER Values

Expertise

producing high quality, innovative research and research-based services and materials to improve learning

Independence

providing advice and commentary that is informed through research, is authoritative, and non-aligned

Innovation

taking a creative, flexible and bold approach to the development of knowledge, services and materials

Integrity

being ethical, honest and trustworthy in all our relationships and interactions



Responsiveness

anticipating, understanding, meeting and exceeding client and customer expectations

Reflection and improvement

being self-reflective and listening to and learning from others in order to improve the quality of our work, our efficiency and productivity

Positive relationships

creating an organisational environment characterised by respect, fairness, openness and support of physical and emotional wellbeing

Individual fulfilment

encouraging personal contribution and achievement, and the pursuit of excellence



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