

LATEST NEWS

ACER ALUMNI

The ACER Alumni links together people who have worked previously at ACER and current senior staff, through activities that highlight new strategic developments in the organisation.

A twilight event was held in March in conjunction with the ACER Bookshop. The event was well attended both by Alumni and people from outside ACER to hear Abdi Aden, author of the book *Shining*, recount his experiences as a teenager escaping alone from Mogadishu and eventually settling in Melbourne as refugee. The event offered Alumni a chance to catch up, hear an interesting speaker and see the changes in the ACER Bookshop and the newly renovated PHR building.



photo by Abdi Aden

Abdi Aden, author of Shining

Look out for details of our next exciting event later this year.

INTERKULTUR PROJECT, PROVIDING UNIFORMS FOR STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

A slum housing area in the Batavia region of Jakarta

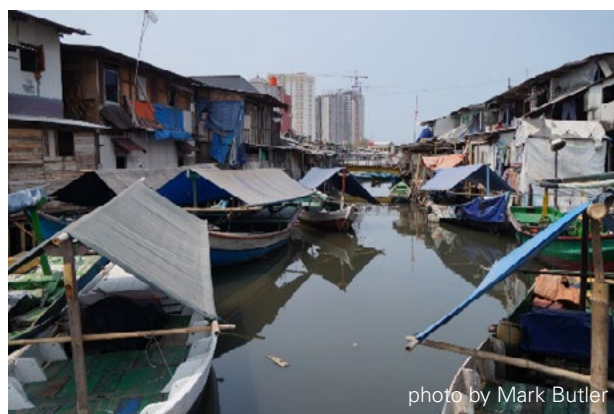


photo by Mark Butler

In 2015 ACER worked with the Interkultur organisation to provide school uniforms to children from Jakarta's poorest areas. Interkultur is a registered charity whose aim is to help Jakarta's poorest residents, particularly in regard to accessing education. Through an initial contact made by Mark Butler in June 2015, ACER Indonesia keeps in regular contact with Interkultur, building a close working relationship.

Interkultur identified 20 children enrolled in nine different local schools and most in need of assistance; ACER provided uniforms and textbooks for these children in October 2015. A total of 14 people expressed interest in supporting this cause, with each person contributing \$100 creating a total of \$1,400 AUD to purchase these items. The regular school uniform was organised through a supplier by ACER Indonesia, with sports uniforms, batik uniforms and textbooks purchased directly from the schools

ACER MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN... LESOTHO

Students line up for afternoon classes at a school in Maseru



photo by Pam Munro Smith

ACER, through the ACER Foundation and with the strong interest and support of staff, is addressing educational disadvantage in international locations through the Making a Difference initiative. ACER's Making a Difference initiative involves committing to a particular location as an organisational priority, for a period of time, initially of two years. The first Making a Difference project is in the Kingdom of Lesotho which is classified as a 'fourth world' country and where a group of ACER staff worked on a project in 2014. Primary school classrooms are not heated, there are no reading books in schools and class sizes vary, up to 198 students in one class. Many children only have one meal a day – the maize meal and milk provided in schools through government funding. During weekends and holidays many children go hungry. About 40 per cent of people live below the international poverty line of USD1.25 a day. One in three children are orphans. Life expectancy is 48.7 years.

ACER's Making a Difference initiative focuses on Makhalong Village, about an hour from the capital Maseru, by building a school library, providing heating in classrooms, and directly funding orphan children to attend high school. A number of staff have also expressed interest in sponsoring one of 33 orphans to complete their high school education.

In July four pallets of *Action Literacy and Numeracy* materials, donated by ACER Press, arrived in Johannesburg and our contact Thabang Pholo arranged for their pick up and distribution to five schools in the village. Project Director, Pam Munro-Smith, will be in Lesotho in August

to meet with the village committee and school board about the library building and furnishings. Thabang, Chair of the village committee overseeing this activity, recently wrote to Pam saying, 'This is the best, greatest thing I have ever done in my entire life.'

Thank you for having trust in me, it makes me feel proud. I promise to do my best to ensure that whatever we started becomes the best initiative the country.'

STEM VIDEO GAME CHALLENGE



Now in its third year, the Australian STEM Video Game Challenge continues to see fantastic growth amongst Australian schools, with more than 3500 students registering to take part in the nationwide competition in

2016. In keeping with the mission of the ACER Foundation to address educational disadvantage in the community and promote values of inclusion and equality, the Challenge in 2016 has had a significant increase in the participation of female students to 37 per cent. This is a rise of almost 10 per cent from 2015, with Western Australia becoming the first state to record a majority of females entering the competition since the Challenge began in 2013.

As has been the case in the past, the Challenge continues to benefit from strong partnerships with industry, with the Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) committing to the position of *Major Partner* for 2016, joining HP Australia, Big Ant Studios, Google Australia and PAX as financial supporters of the Challenge. Overall, the future of the Challenge is bright, as the combination of video games and education continues to help inspire engagement with STEM-related studies amongst teachers, students and, increasingly, entire school communities.



SCHOOL READINESS TELEVISION SERIES



photo by Ned Lander Media(NLM)

The *Little J & Big Cuz* television production is now more than halfway through its 80-week production schedule and will go to air early 2017 on NITV. All scripts and storyboards are complete and voice recording is well underway, including our first look at the series in Aboriginal language with Rebel Films delivering the first few minutes of 'test' footage for one episode in Pitjantjatjara.

Animation teams are working hard at Blue Rocket studios in Hobart, and Media World in Melbourne, and we have begun to receive the first full coloured, close-to-finished animations.

Post production briefings have begun with work beginning shortly on both sound and music.

The Educators resources are well under way, along with the early stages planning for the development of the *Little J & Big Cuz* website. ACER, NITV and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care are heading to GARMA in far North East Arnhem Land to conduct some fireside discussions with community leaders and to begin a very soft marketing launch of the series.

Whilst we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go...



EVALUATION: SCHOOL READINESS TV SERIES



As part of the formal evaluation of the TV series a Literature Review has been completed by the Indigenous Education Team at ACER. The review confirms the findings of the original literature review and highlights the evidence underlying the purpose of the series and its selected content, style and format.

The review emphasises the importance of family, community, school and services in achieving school readiness and notes that improved student-teacher relationships, positive conceptions of school and improved self-confidence are seen as more important for Indigenous students than cognitive skills, literacy skills, social skills and 'fitting in' with school cultural expectations. It is suggested that recognition of culturally valued knowledge also be assessed as a school readiness indicator and that Aboriginal children living in literacy-poor home environments will benefit from watching educational, pro-social content through exposure to what it entails to participate in Western schooling.

TEACHING AND LEARNING MODEL FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS FROM SUB SAHRAN AFRICA



Image ©Shutterstock/Riccardo Mayer

A study by Mary Kimani of refugee university students from Africa who had at least two years of high school education in Australia, and teachers and principals from state schools in Melbourne that have a high concentration of refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa, sought to identify the complex and interrelated conditions that support or undermine positive learning outcomes.

The individual responses from students offer considerable insights into how these students can be supported in reaching their educational goals. The study confirms that refugee students have many odds to overcome, such as low literacy in their mother language and English, and being in a new country with an unfamiliar education system.

Students in the study discussed the kinds of counselling they received when they first arrived in Australia. They observed that counselling mainly focused on helping them to cope with past traumas or experiences, and helping them learn about Australia. As important as this counselling is, this group of students wanted support in learning about the education system and mapping out possible pathways they could pursue to achieve their aspirations.

The study discovered that this group of students was particularly interested in going to university, and considered university education as promising a better life of status and respect. Highlighting challenges in understanding career information provided to them, this group of students wanted more support in making decisions about future pathways.

Students in the study identified the importance of critical teachers for success in schooling. Teachers who had a strong impact on the schooling success of refugee students included teachers who:

- recognised and believed in the student's potential
- were patient and understanding
- provided guidance and support
- broke content into small manageable tasks
- kept communication simple
- taught at a slower pace to accommodate each student's learning pace

- were concerned with students' wellbeing and future aspirations
- checked individual student's understanding of the content at regular intervals, and
- worked in small groups and one-on-one with individual students.

The study highlighted the wealth of knowledge refugee students bring to the learning environment, including resilience, self-efficacy, high career aspirations, family expectations and a high value for education. Recognising and valuing this knowledge could lead to more engagement and participation of refugee students and help to leverage learning experiences and consequent learning outcomes for refugee students from Africa. The study proposes 'a strengths-based model' that validates what students know, offers respect and confirms that they have something to offer within the learning environment.

EVALUATION OF THE KIMBERLEY EDUCATION EXCELLENCE PROJECT

The Wunan Foundation operating from Kununarra in the Kimberley in Western Australia has developed the Kimberley Education Excellence Project (KEEP) to address the lack of educational outcomes for Aboriginal children. The program originally established with partner schools in NSW has expanded to Victoria through a partnership with Mercy College and Parade College, both in Melbourne's north, in 2016. Students are provided with supportive and committed learning environments while they are studying in group accommodation with house parents from the Kimberley.

ACER is contributing to an evaluation of the project, which is being undertaken by Social Compass, the research arm of Wunan, in collaboration with Sam Rothman and Jacyнта Krakouer.

What makes KEEP unique?



Identify the most suitable students, focusing on attitude and willingness



Provide culturally-appropriate family-style accommodation



Ongoing mentoring and support from tutors and house parents



Feeling more connected to home and culture

The research aims to determine the degree to which this model of implementation and support makes a difference across a range of indicators, beyond attendance and academic achievement. It also seeks to test the assumption that boarding school programs are innately good and examines the degree to which the model of education and the schools provide risk or protective factors for educational engagement, attainment and aspiration.

SKYLINE FOUNDATION

Through the ACER Foundation, ACER Professional Resources continues to provide access to computer-based assessments for students in a Skyline Foundation program. ACER assessments are used to assist in the selection of academically able disadvantaged students who are intensively supported by Skyline during the last two years of their senior secondary schooling. In 2015 100 per cent of Skyline students graduated with an average ATAR score of 82 and 100 per cent received university offers in their chosen field of study.



SUPPORTING THE MATHEMATICAL LEARNING OF CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME



Maths is hands-on for Maria at Mackellar Primary School in Delahay, northwest of Melbourne. Photo Karen Wilson © ACER.

Research by Dr Rhonda Faragher and Professor Doug Clarke from Australian Catholic University and Associate Professor Barbara Clarke from

Monash University, facilitated by ACER, is developing new insights into the mathematical development of children with Down syndrome and identifying successful strategies for use by teachers and teacher aides in the context of inclusive classrooms.

A key to supporting the mathematics learning of students with Down syndrome is to maintain a clear mathematical focus so that teaching teams can adapt their approach to meet individual needs. Project Director and Senior Research Fellow, Ray Peck, said that teachers and teaching teams with a clear understanding of the learning and mathematical development of students with Down syndrome are better able to make decisions about when to persist, when to move on and when to make further adjustments. When the students and their teachers have a clear and shared understanding of the focus of a math lesson and its particular phases, they better understand the particular aspects of the lesson.

In presenting the findings, Dr Faragher emphasised the benefits to students in using a calculator as part of the learning process. A further research finding is that the classroom layout and the team-based approach by the classroom teacher, learning support teachers and learning support assistants are vital in supporting students with Down syndrome while enabling them to remain integral members of their class.

The project was funded by Gandel Philanthropy, one of Australia's largest independent family philanthropic funds, with the support of Down Syndrome Australia and was completed in December 2015.

