

MEDIA RELEASE

Good evidence supports school improvement

ACER Research Conference 2012

27 August 2012: Effective use of data by teachers is the crux of school improvement, Dr Michele Bruniges will tell delegates to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) annual conference.

More than 1200 teachers, policymakers and researchers are gathered in Sydney today for the 17th annual ACER Research Conference. Addressing the theme *School Improvement: What does the research tell us about effective strategies?*, the conference covers not only what schools can do to improve outcomes for students but also how they can do it most effectively.

The conference features four keynote addresses and 17 concurrent sessions. A number of these sessions address how evidence-based approaches to planning support school improvement.

In her address tomorrow, Dr Michele Bruniges from the NSW Department of Education and Communities will argue that while data is one of the most important diagnostic tools for teachers and schools it has become entangled in the ideological debate about school accountability.

“The significant risk of this is that data per se become devalued, particularly in the eyes of teachers. This is a danger because data is – and always has been – at the heart of the educational process,” Dr Bruniges said, speaking ahead of the conference.

By way of example, ACER’s Dr John Ainley will today tell delegates how results from international comparative studies of student achievement, such as the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), provide perspectives on potentials for improving learning outcomes among Australian students.

According to Dr Ainley much, and possibly more, can be learned from studying changes over time as from studying high achieving countries. He highlighted a decline in average achievements in Australian lower secondary-level reading and mathematics over recent years, and said this indicates that improvement initiatives in Australia need to be broadly based.

Also at the conference, Dr Kathryn Glasswell from Griffith University will tomorrow report on research that shows how teachers in professional learning communities are using assessment data to make evidence-based decisions about what to teach, to which students and how. Dr Glasswell will tell delegates that using data in meaningful ways means a commitment to ‘keeping it real’.

“When teachers see data as providing critical information about individual students, they engage with it differently and are keen to learn more about what it means and how they might best use it,” said Dr Glasswell.

The ACER Research Conference 2012, on the theme *School Improvement: What does the research tell us about effective strategies?*, takes place in Sydney from 26 to 28 August.

Further information is available from www.acer.edu.au/research-conference

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