Quality and equity through evidence-based practice

Geoff Masters AO
Australian Council for Educational Research

Abstract
Over the past two decades, a number of countries have attempted to drive improved outcomes and to close achievement gaps in schools using strategies adopted from the world of business, including: setting explicit expectations and targets for improvement; developing better measures of outcomes; increasing transparency; giving employees autonomy to find local solutions; imposing performance cultures in which individuals are held accountable for improved results; and implementing results-based incentive schemes (rewards and/or sanctions) to promote greater effort. At least some of these strategies have clearly not improved performances in schools. In Australia, performance levels have either flat-lined or declined over the past decade, and there has been little or no reduction in Indigenous or socioeconomic gaps. This presentation will argue that ‘macro’ strategies of these kinds often are ineffective because they fail to change practice on the ground. They underestimate the importance of capacity building, the creation of collaborative learning cultures and the implementation of proven teaching and leadership practices. In short, improved quality and equity depend on evidence-based ‘micro’ reform.