

## Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) response to the National Education Evidence Base Draft Report

Productivity Commission, 2016

### Introduction

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) offers the following response to the *National Education Evidence Base Draft Report*. This response builds on the public submission submitted by ACER in response to the *National Education Evidence Base Issues Paper*.

In this submission, ACER would like to highlight the following unique national resources held by ACER that inform Australia's education evidence base:

- [Australian Education Index](#); and
- [Learning Ground Indigenous Education Research database](#).

ACER would also like to highlight that should a national agency be established to house national data, there are likely to be a number of existing contractual arrangements that will have to be taken into account. These existing arrangements could include the commissioning of research and evaluations that are currently released by the Australian Government through the *Refreshable Panel for Research and Evaluation Services*, managed through the Department of Employment.

### Australian Education Index

Appendix C, (Box C.4) of the *National Education Evidence Base Draft Report* records that ACER's Cunningham Library forms part of Australia's education data and evidence base. Since 1930, ACER has collected the published research literature on Australian education, and this literature is made available by the Cunningham Library. Since the 1950s ACER has indexed this research in its entirety, in the Australian Education Index (AEI). The AEI is recognised as the definitive source for locating and accessing Australian educational research. It is an essential resource in an evidence-informed education sector, aggregating Australia's educational research output in one place and describing it in a consistent manner so that future research activity and funding can be targeted and built on previous knowledge.

The AEI is a growing database of 211 000 entries relating to Australian educational research, policy and practice, built over 58 years. It is curated and indexed by education metadata specialists in ACER's Cunningham Library. Production of the Index involves identification of authoritative research, and acquisition of books, articles, conference papers, theses, reports, grey literature and legislation from publishers. Where permissible, paper-only sources are digitised to make this information accessible to researchers.

A key use of the AEI is to provide ready access to Australian education research for the purpose of researching and developing evidence-based policy and practice. Education department policymakers and researchers and independent researchers providing contracted research services to education systems use the AEI to identify and collect the relevant research and evidence base. Research organisations and academics also use the AEI to inform the development of independent policy statements which support system- and school-level discussions and decision making, and schools use the AEI to research an evidence base for school practices and to support teaching staff undertaking continuous professional development and further qualifications.

## **User base**

The user base of the AEI is as follows:

- education departments
- school leaders
- researchers
- policy makers
- consultants
- higher education institutions
- initial teacher education students
- teachers undertaking further study and professional development
- national, state and public libraries

## **Use of AEI**

In 2016, the AEI has supported literature reviews in diverse projects across early childhood education, Indigenous-transitions, online assessment, digital technologies, teacher quality, initial teacher education, students with special needs, learning and teaching in higher education, and transnational research patterns.

In the past 12 months, educators and researchers accessed over 270 000 journal articles from the journal titles indexed in the AEI. A list of the most accessed journals is attached (Appendix 1). Terms added to the Australian Thesaurus of Education Descriptors in 2015-16 show areas of research in which an increase in the number of publications warranted inclusion of a major descriptor (Appendix 2).

In 2016-17 the AEI will continue to focus on professional and research literature of relevance to teachers, leaders, researchers and those developing evidence-based policy and practice. The ACER AEI team recognises the increasing availability and value of datasets related to education, and aims to investigate data curation in addition to research reports and conference proceedings.

Topic-based translational research services that provide a selected set of readings are invaluable for time-poor practitioners and policy makers. While the AEI currently provides a comprehensive, longitudinal and in-depth knowledge base, its content can also support curated, snack-sized alerts to keep teachers and leaders engaged in professional reading. Topics identified as having particular importance across sectors include Indigenous education, digital technologies, innovation, STEM education, teacher quality, assessment and students with special needs.

## **Learning Ground Indigenous Education Research database**

The Learning Ground Indigenous Education Research database provides an example of a specialised topic-based service using the AEI infrastructure. The Learning Ground is a gateway to the latest publications focusing on Indigenous education. The Learning Ground provides access to research data and resources which span early childhood, post school education, adult learning, and encompasses areas such as cultural diversity, parent and community engagement, wellbeing, identity and oral language.

There are over 9100 searchable books, articles, conference papers and reports on Australian Indigenous education. The Learning Ground provides a convenient single point of reference for policy makers, educators and graduate students. Learning Ground also enables researchers to disseminate their work to national and international indigenous and non-Indigenous education communities.

See <http://opac.acer.edu.au/ierd>

## **Appendix 1: Most downloaded professional journal titles**

The following journals which regularly receive over 1000 article downloads per quarter provide a snapshot of the priority areas of users.

- *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*
- *Practically Primary*
- *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*
- *Australian Journal of Education*
- *Every Child*
- *Professional Educator*
- *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*
- *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years*
- *Australian Educational Leader*
- *Special Education Perspectives*
- *Social Educator*
- *Australian Journal of Career Development*
- *English in Australia*
- *Australian Mathematics Teacher*
- *Scan (NSW Department of Education)*
- *TESOL in Context*
- *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*
- *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*

## **Appendix 2: Areas of research warranting new topic headings**

Terms added to the Australian Thesaurus of Education Descriptors in 2015-16.

- Education systems
- First language teaching
- Global citizenship
- Identity formation
- Large scale assessment
- Private universities
- Psychology education
- Subjectivity
- Value adding