

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

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ISSUES IN RURAL EDUCATION

Rates of poverty increase - but worst in rural areas

National Rural Health Alliance Media Release 24 October

Despite unprecedented growth in the Australian economy the proportion of people living in poverty rose from 9.8 to 11.1 per cent between 2003 and 2006. New information released today by Australia Fair shows poverty is generally significantly higher outside the capital cities.

In 2006 the 11.1 per cent figure translated to 2,210,000 people now living in poverty, including 412,000 children.

The latest information is based on those with less than 50 per cent of the median (middle) disposable income. In 2006 this poverty line was \$281 a week.

Analysis for 2003/4 shows that the non-metropolitan areas of New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania had significantly higher proportions of people in poverty than their capital cities. The impact of the mining boom meant this was not the case in Queensland and Western Australia, with slightly higher rates in capital cities. In every state except Queensland a higher proportion of people outside the capital city earned less than 60 per cent of the median income.

Australia Fair today called for both sides of politics to commit to a national plan and set achievable targets for reducing poverty. Australia Fair believes such a plan would receive strong public support, given survey evidence that 91 per cent of Australians believe a fair go for all is an important national value, while a majority of people also support investment in services ahead of tax cuts.

Twenty-two out of 30 OECD nations have national social inclusion or poverty strategies in place to alleviate poverty, but Australia does not. Australia does, however, have the knowledge and resources to follow suit.

Poverty is the single most significant overall determinant of health. National action to reduce poverty would have a beneficial impact on the health of country people, which is why it has the strong support of the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA).

Further information: Gordon Gregory, NRHA, ph 02 6285 4660

Read more at <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au>

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STUDENT TESTING & ASSESSMENT

Aptitude test trial to proceed

ACER Media Release 31 October

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been contracted to conduct stage one of the Federal Government's pilot Student Aptitude Test for Tertiary Admission (SATTA). ACER will use uniTEST, which was developed in conjunction with Cambridge Assessment, during the trial.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) will subsidise universities' participation in the trial by providing funding for universities to test up to 20,000 students, as well as providing up to \$10,000 to each participating Australian university to promote the scheme.

The pilot of uniTEST will provide universities with additional information on prospective students and provide alternative pathways to university for some students who may otherwise have not gained a university place.

uniTEST assesses candidates' generic reasoning and thinking skills, which are considered necessary for successful university study. The candidates' results may then be considered alongside their academic achievement scores to help determine their suitability for university study.

ACER's chief executive Professor Geoff Masters says the test is not designed to replace the current university admission system, but to complement it. A high uniTEST result is not a guarantee of a university offer but a supplementary opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability.

Read more at http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/MR_071031-uniTEST.pdf

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOLS

Barnardos: Help us help our kids...

... a new program for disadvantaged children is being launched to schools around Australia

Barnardos, one of the nation's leading children's charities and OfficeMax, one of Australia's leading education material providers, have teamed up to help disadvantaged kids right around the country get a better education.

With the support of their key suppliers Artline, BIC, Duracell, Educational Colours, Pritt and Tork, OfficeMax® has pledged a minimum of \$125,000 towards a new small grants program called Max e Grants.

The Max e Grants program is open to schools and kindergartens that are working with disadvantaged children who are struggling to fully participate in the education system. The grants will assist individual children with basic yet important needs such as school books, tutoring, uniforms and equipment.

The grants can be applied for online at www.bmaxe.com.au

For more information please contact:

OfficeMax: Bernadette Stanley, National Marketing
Tel: 03 9518 5877 Email: bernadette.stanley@officemax.com.au

Barnardos: Karen Dawson, PR & Communications Manager
Tel: 02 9218 2344 Email: pr@barnardos.org.au

Read more at <http://www.bmaxe.com.au/html/>

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RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS, PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Kluwell Publications

Literacy and other support resources for students, families and teachers

Kluwell Publications is an Australian Company formed in 1998, with a core focus on producing high quality educational products that meet the learning and development needs of students in Australia's primary schools.

The two Directors both have a combined primary / elementary teaching background of over 50 years.

The R.E.A.D. I.T. Home Reading Series of books have been used very successfully across K-6 since first released in 1996. These products have a proven track record with teachers and parents, in developing, sustaining and rewarding regular reading habits for young children. Students find these home reading resources help improve their reading skills, and build positive attitudes to reading.

All of these products have been developed by teachers, based on their experience and understanding of the needs of students and families in the Australian context. Each is designed as a simple, innovative and practical aid for students, parents and teachers.

Enquiries info@kluwell.com. Phone: 61 3 5441 1379 Fax: 61 3 5444 0469.

Read more at <http://www.kluwell.com>

"Up Downs: a fun and practical way to introduce reading and writing to children aged 2-5"

Author Michelle Neumann was in contact with ACSSO during the development of this book, whose simple, practical, engaging and interactive activity based approach is totally consistent with that of the ongoing ACSSO-APC initiative "Literacy - Parents Make the World of Difference" - So it is particularly satisfying to be able to report that this extremely valuable "resource and ideas kit" for parents of young children has now been published by Finch Publishing, a firm based in Sydney, and is readily available.

New parents of young children (pretty much all of us at that point in our lives) exist in a state of nervous uncertainty and well-meaning anxiety about the best things to do to promote and support their children's literacy skills development in positive and useful ways. The good news for parents is that if they follow through the sorts of activities outlined in "Up Downs" they cannot go very far wrong - and should go very right!

They will not only reassuringly discover what works - but, even more reassuringly, why this simple fun activity-based approach works so effectively, in terms of the range of available research.

The internationally respected work of Dr Fraser Mustard demonstrates the ways in which the young brain is wired with the languages learning potential from very young age; and that "experience-based brain development in the early years - conception to age six - sets pathways in brain development that affect learning, health and behaviour through the life cycle." Positive interactive experiences that build a reinforcing framework of interest and confidence in reading, writing and reasoning - literacy skills development - are shaping up long term positive life experiences and outcomes. "We can safely predict that those individuals who can read and write (and numerically calculate) are most likely to be long-lived healthy individuals who will enjoy a good life on this planet and contribute positively to society."

Howard Gardner's exploration of the concepts of multiple intelligences highlights the extent to which we each approach learning through a range of "learning styles" and the value of shaping learning experiences in a multi-sensory way that are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The celebrated Haringey study in London (1982) demonstrated the ways in which and extent to which parental (and grand-parental) involvement achieves positive outcomes - children who read with and to their parents made significantly greater progress in reading than those who did not engage in this type of literacy sharing. More significantly, the results showed that the positive development of young

children who worked with their parents in these ways, was far greater than results achieved by children working in small groups with a qualified professional tutor. As recognised in the Adelaide Declaration on the Goals of Schooling for the 21st Century, parents and families have an essentially important role as the first and continuing educators of their children - a role that they are uniquely well placed to carry out.

"Up Downs" is an accessible and valuable resource kit that will assist all parents of young children to carry out that vital role effectively and successfully. It is available for purchase online.

Read more at

http://www.finch.com.au/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?art_id=260&nav_cat_id=220&nav_top_id=70

"Little Ears: Poems and Stories for Children"

Research around the world into young people's literacy skills development demonstrates the centrally important role of parents (and grandparents) in this process.

The key activity is to read to young children, read with them, and let them read to you as an interactive and fun experience, from their earliest years and through the early years of schooling.

Families then need a supply of suitable reading materials, preferably with strong and engaging visual presentation to catch children's interest and imagination.

A new publication seeks to meet this need: "Little Ears: Poems and Stories for Children".

Their first issue earlier this year (Australian Education Digest 24 July) was a great success! The second edition will issue 7 November 2007.

Read more at <http://www.LittleEars.com.au>

Early childhood resources to support literacy and numeracy

Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Education, Science & Training October

Earlier this month, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, announced new Early Childhood Learning Resources to support parents, carers and practitioners in nurturing and supporting children's literacy and numeracy skills.

"The early years are critical to developing foundation literacy and numeracy skills. They make children's transition to school easier, and also have a direct and positive impact on future educational, employment and health outcomes," Minister Bishop said.

The Australian Government has provided \$950,000 for a range of high quality, informative and practical materials that will support early literacy and numeracy development of children from birth to five years.

The materials include:

- Early Childhood Literacy and Numeracy Cards, designed for use by families, carers and educators to enhance young children's literacy and numeracy development;
- Building Good Practice, a booklet for use by professional practitioners in preschools and childcare centres; and
- A DVD targeted at professionals running early childhood education and care courses, which provides expert advice and PDF versions of the booklet and the cards

"A consortium of Monash University, the University of Melbourne, Curriculum Corporation and Early Childhood Australia developed these innovative resource materials which reflect good practice and will help parents, carers, preschool and child care professionals create stimulating environments for children," Minister Bishop said.

[These resources were developed under the guidance of a national advisory committee which included representatives of both national parent representative organisations, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) - and they are strongly endorsed by both ACSSO and APC]

Read more at <http://www.dest.gov.au/earlylearningresources>

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AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

\$14.6 Million for Pastoral Care in Public High Schools

ACT Government Media Release 26 October

Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Barr, today announced the ACT Government will invest over \$14.6 million over the next four years in a range of pastoral care and student welfare initiatives for ACT public high school students and their families.

Mr Barr said the funding will ensure students in every high school have access to a dedicated pastoral care co-ordinator, as well as support from non-teacher professionals such as social workers, community nurses or disability workers.

"Adolescence is a very difficult time for many students and their families, and can lead to students disengaging from their education and their school community," Mr Barr said.

"Every student has the right to be safe and supported at school and this funding will ensure our students and their families have access to pastoral care and other supports to assist in keeping students engaged with their learning and their school.

"Every high school will, from 2008, have a dedicated pastoral care teacher who will coordinate whole school student welfare as well as pastoral care programs. This coordinator will run early intervention programs and will be proactive in promoting and maintaining student welfare."

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SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Food Suppliers to Learn About New Canteen Rules

Hon Jane Lomax-Smith News Release 24 October

The Rann Government's plans to ban junk food in school canteens from next year will be outlined today to businesses that supply food and drink to the State's schools and preschools.

The industry briefing will be held at Allan Scott Park from 9.30am. The Rann Government is investing \$1.55m phasing out junk food in canteens and promoting healthier eating by children.

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith says suppliers will learn how they can work with schools to provide healthy menu options for school students.

"We want to work together with the food industry to help the State's school students to make healthy food and lifestyle choices," Dr Lomax-Smith says.

"Schools and preschools are helping to lead the way to a healthier community by offering children food and drinks that are healthy.

Read more at <http://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=2323>

SA Students Recognised with health Awards

Hon Jane Lomax-Smith News Release 26 October

Students who are using drama to promote healthy eating to hundreds of their peers are among those to be recognised today with a Children's Week award.

Year 9 drama students from Gawler High School will be presented with a Minister for Education and Children's Service Award for writing and producing a play which promotes healthy choices and aims to reduce obesity in junior primary students.

Students developed the play, Detective K Saves the Day, with their teacher Julie Martin and in partnership with Gawler Health Service.

Students have presented the play at a national health conference and are performing to 650 students at five schools in the Barossa and Gawler regions during Children's Week.

Read more at <http://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=2346>

South Australia Teachers 'Top of the Class'

Hon Jane Lomax-Smith News Release 26 October

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith has welcomed new research that shows South Australian teachers are more likely to stay in the profession and build new skills that benefit children.

Released to coincide with World Teachers Day today, a recent national survey by the Teachers' Registration Board of South Australia shows that of South Australian teachers surveyed:

- 83% intend to continue teaching, compared with a national average of 78%.
- 94% have gained extra skills to teach children by taking part in professional development activities outside school in the last year, compared with a national average of 83%.

"Our teachers demonstrate a passionate commitment to helping children gain skills from reading and maths to languages and science," Dr Lomax-Smith says.

"The State Government is backing that commitment by enabling teachers to spend a full week every year to improve their skills by undertaking professional development.

Read more at <http://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=2352>

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LOOKING FORWARD: 2008 CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

NSW Federation of Parents & Citizens Associations State Conference

Albury, 25-27 July 2008

Further details will appear on <http://www.pandc.org.au/>

Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) National Education Conference

Brisbane, 20-21 October 2008

Further details will be published at <http://www.acsso.org.au>

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REMINDERS - 2007 EVENTS

21st Century Curriculum: Taking Bearings - Curriculum Corporation 14th Annual Conference - Sydney - 12 & 13 November
<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/conference/2007/conference.asp?id=19468>

ACOSS National Annual Conference – Adelaide – 22 & 23 November
http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/events/3125_ACOSS%20Draft%20Conference%20Program.doc

RESOURCES

Fundraising Directory - www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au and www.fetesandfestivals.com.au

Drug Awareness Website - www.drugawareness.com.au/

Australian Schools Directory - www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au

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