

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

Volume 2 Number 42, 18 November 2008

Having trouble reading this email? Read it on the web at <http://www.acsso.org.au/AED081118.pdf>
Do you know of an event or resource that schools should know about? Email us at letters@acsso.org.au

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HOT TOPIC: FAMILY-SCHOOL & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Supporting Families and Schools to Work Together

Hon Julia Gillard MP, 5 November 2008

The Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, today announced that all Australian schools and parent associations will soon receive a copy of the Family-School Partnerships Framework.

The Family-School Partnerships Framework will help schools build effective partnerships with families and their communities.

The Framework sets out the principles of effective partnerships and highlights strategies that schools and parents can use to guide and develop partnerships.

Families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life and the evidence shows that when schools, parents and communities work in partnership, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and enjoy school more.

The Framework underpins the ideals of the recently established Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau and will complement the work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Productivity Agenda Working Group.

Read more at

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/SupportingFamiliesandSchoolstoWorkTogether.htm>

Download the Framework at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf>

Read more about the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau at <http://www.familyschool.org.au/>

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HOT TOPIC: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Govt warned to rethink education revolution

Nic MacBean, ABC News, Oct 31, 2008

The Federal Government's proposed education reforms could severely damage the education system and would not improve student performance, an international education expert has warned.

Professor Peter Mortimore, a former director of the London-based Institute of Education, said the Government's enthusiasm to embrace transparent reporting of schools' results would simply mirror the mistakes made in England over the past 20 years.

In August Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced plans for education reforms. Part of the plan involves making federal educational funding conditional on agreement from states and territories that they provide information about the performance of schools around the country.

Speaking at the Australian Education Union-sponsored event in Brisbane last night, Professor Mortimore said if school performance was reported and made available to parents then struggling schools would suffer from an exodus of students and standards would drop.

"The trouble is that this transparency has been tested now in England for 20 years and actually the outcome is not good at all. It's not an improved education system, it's actually a very bad system," he said, adding that he was "horrified" to hear of the Government's planned reforms.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/31/2406237.htm?section=australia%20>

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It's wrong to publish league tables

Peter Wilby, UK New Statesman, 17 January 2008

This month saw the publication of the annual league tables for secondary schools in England, showing GCSE and A-level results. All the posh papers publish them, usually accompanied by a dramatic news headline (this year, we were informed, 500,000 pupils were attending "failing schools" that had fallen short of a new government target) and by features on "top-performing" or "most improved" schools. But the main point, to borrow the Times headline, is to allow parents to "find the best school in your area".

Should these tables be published at all? This may seem a peculiar question; we hacks usually try to reveal information, not suppress it. Schools are financed from taxation and, if the government kept details of their performance secret (or didn't collect them at all), newspapers would write indignant editorials. Yet league tables are not published centrally in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, nor in most other European countries.

The main argument against publication is that the tables don't show the "best" schools, even if we accept exam results as a measure of quality. Schools that recruit the brightest and most advantaged pupils - which means fee-charging and grammar schools particularly - are bound to do best. The government has tried to address this problem by publishing, beside the "raw" exam results, "contextual value-added" scores (CVAs). These take account, not only of children's prior attainment when they enter secondary school at 11, but also of background influences, such as eligibility for free meals or lack of spoken English at home. The final score tells us whether a school is doing better or worse than expected, given the pupil intake.

As a tool for parents trying to identify the best local schools, however, the CVAs are close to useless. Even if the background variables are collected and recorded accurately and even if they include the full range of external influences - both of which I doubt - the numbers of pupils in each school are mostly too small to produce statistically reliable comparisons.

Read more at <http://www.newstatesman.com/education/2008/01/schools-tables-parents-cvas>

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Tasmania school improvement reports not about ranking or league tables

Hon David Bartlett MP & Hon Julia Gillard MP, 31 October 2008

Tasmanian Premier and Minister for Education and Skills, David Bartlett today released the most comprehensive set of educational performance data in Australia. Releasing the data with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, Mr Bartlett said School Improvement Reports for all Tasmanian Government schools would be published online from today.

"I'm committed to my Government being open, accountable and transparent and this extends to our Government schools," Mr Bartlett said. "The reports measure each school's performance in the Government's priority areas of early years, literacy and numeracy, student participation, school improvement and equity of outcomes.

"Categories include readiness for school, early literacy and numeracy, student and staff attendance, staff, student and parent satisfaction and outcomes for indigenous students.

School Improvement Reports can be accessed by visiting the Department of Education website at <http://www.education.tas.gov.au> and clicking on Latest News.

Read more at <http://www.media.tas.gov.au/release.php?id=25162>

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INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

\$20m gives indigenous kids a chance, says Kevin Rudd

Patricia Karvelas and Angus Hohenboken, The Australian, October 31, 2008

Indigenous students will be sent to leading boarding schools under a \$20 million plan to address chronic levels of academic under-achievement, and close the education gap between black and white Australia.

The announcement last night by Kevin Rudd of 2000 school places in the next 20 years came after the Prime Minister had earlier signed on to a scheme, championed by mining magnate Andrew Forrest and backed by some of the nation's leading businessmen, that will boost the employment prospects of Aboriginal children.

Under the plan, Aboriginal schoolchildren will also become workplace P-platers as they are provided with work experience, casual employment and school-based traineeships to ensure they never spend a day on the dole.

The P-plater scheme is a key plank of an Aboriginal jobs drive supported by Seven Network boss Kerry Stokes, gambling giant James Packer and News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch.

The business leaders, with a combined fortune of \$20 billion, joined Mr Rudd and Mr Forrest to launch the program, which aims to provide 50,000 jobs to indigenous Australians.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24579437-2702,00.html>

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABC Learning

Transcript, Interview, Sky News, 18 November 2008

JULIA GILLARD: What I would say to parents at ABC Centres, if they go to their centre and they believe there is a problem, they should certainly feel free to contact our child care hotline (180 2003).

Obviously, licensing of child care centres is done by States and Territories, but we will assist and we will immediately pass any complaint on that a mum or dad has about their centre.

But in respect of the comments made by Mr Jones [that "some of the ABC Learning centres are using clerical staff, office staff, to care for kids"], he is a man with a commercial interest involved in a legal contest with ABC Learning about the question of staffing in centres and I would say what he says about staffing in centres should be viewed in that context.

Read more at

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/ABCLearningLocalGovernmentSummit.htm>

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RESEARCH

Expert warns Australia slipping in world education rankings

Emily Power, Herald Sun, October 30, 2008

A new book based on a study of secondary schools and education policies in Australia, the US, England, Wales, China, and Finland, found Australian students could be worse off in the next ten years without urgent improvements.

The research found 80 per cent of Australian schools are high performing, but many others - in an remote areas with Indigenous students or disadvantaged suburbs - are struggling.

Researcher and co-author, Prof Brian Caldwell, said demanding higher qualifications for teachers - on top of rising salaries - would lure better people to the job.

Prof Caldwell, a former Melbourne University education dean, said Australia will keep slipping in world rankings if teachers continue to work in run-down facilities.

"It is critically important to put preparation of teachers on the same plane as the medical profession and follow the lead of Finland, which requires teachers to have a masters degree," he said.

"We have got to provide teachers with really good workplaces, it is an Australia-wide problem, particularly acute in Victoria.

"We really do have to redesign and rebuild our schools to make them pleasant places. The State Government has made a good start here but it has a long, long way to go."

Prof Caldwell said in Finland all students are high performing regardless of the school they attend.

In the book, *Why Not The Best Schools?*, Prof Caldwell and Dr Jessica Harris suggest a ten point plan for Australia, including public schools being rebuilt to bring learning into the 21st century, and less red tape and greater school autonomy to personalise education.

Read more at <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,24575535-662,00.html>

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Futures Focused School

Teaching Australia - Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

School leadership teams - principals, school leaders and parents involved in their school governance - are invited to participate in Futures Focused School workshops.

The Futures Focused School project is a professional learning activity designed to assist schools incorporate futures thinking in their strategic planning. Two day workshops will be held in metropolitan and regional areas around Australia from March to May 2009.

Educational Transformations, led by Brian Caldwell and David Loader, is working in partnership with Teaching Australia to develop and deliver the workshops and supporting resources.

Cost is \$250 per participant. 10% savings apply to registrations received by 31 December 2008 and school groups registering 3 or more people.

For more information about the project and how to register visit www.teachingaustralia.edu.au

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OPINION

Teaching at the Precipice: Strengthening Teacher Retention and Recruitment for the Long Haul

Arthur E. Levine & David Haselkorn

With nearly half of all new teachers leaving their classrooms within five years and as many as a third of the nation's teaching force readying for retirement, some education and political leaders seem to believe that education can solve its human-resource challenge by becoming more like the military: sign individuals up for short-term enlistments, prepare them in intensive boot-camp experiences, and then send them to the front lines.

As with the armed forces (or even higher education), the answer, these leaders propose, is to supply sufficient teachers by supplementing a small, permanent staff with a large corps of short-timers.

The situation reminds us of the Yiddish tale of the wise men of Chelm.

Chelm, an Eastern European shtetl not known for its brilliance, lay at the base of a cliff. After dark, wandering travelers sometimes fell off the cliff and landed, badly hurt, in the middle of Chelm. Following a rash of such injuries, the shtetl's governing group, its wise men, convened to find a solution to this problem. They deliberated intensely for three days and three nights, then announced their solemn determination: They would build a hospital at the bottom of the cliff.

Rather than preventing injuries to travelers, the wise men of Chelm chose to treat the injured. They accepted the problem as immutable.

Read more at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/11/05/11levine_ep.h28.html?tmp=398365625

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Missing in Action: The Non-Role of Research in Education Policy and Practice

Eric Schaps

Despite all the recent rhetoric about the importance of using research evidence to guide education policy and practice, the sad reality is that research has had less constructive influence during the past 10 to 15 years than it did over the previous decade or two.

The many calls for "evidence based" decisionmaking notwithstanding, most of our major policy and reform initiatives have either been launched without any prior research on their efficacy, and without provisions for assessing their intended and unintended effects, or have ignored or misused whatever relevant research evidence was available when they were launched.

Consider the record of policy initiatives in the first category—those that were launched without a meaningful research base.

They include the following:

- High-stakes, test-based accountability systems. These have clearly been the most consequential policy changes of our time. What started in Kentucky and Texas, spread to other states, and morphed into the No Child Left Behind Act at the federal level was never based on supportive research. Moreover, there were no funds in any of the enabling legislation to monitor unintended consequences. The evidence

gathered since then (through other means) shows no clear pattern of effects on student achievement—even in tested subjects—and reveals a host of damaging side effects.

Read more at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/11/05/11schaps.h28.html?tmp=1965331990>

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New York Parents Condemn Klein's Education Policies

Save Our Schools Canberra, 18 November 2008

Reprinted below are three letters by New York parents on the education policies implemented in the New York City public education system under Schools Chancellor, Joel Klein. They present an entirely different perspective on these policies from that indicated by Federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard.

The letters were originally published on the New York Public School Parents Blog on 10 November in response to revelations that Klein is being considered for the position of US Secretary of Education under Barack Obama.

Original letters on NY Public School parents Blog

The Department of Education under Joel Klein has been run like a ruthless dictatorship - with no input from parents or educators, and no thought of how the policies he has imposed on our schools have been destructive to our children and their futures.

He has consistently ignored the crisis of overcrowding in our schools, that in many neighbourhoods has gotten worse because of rampant residential development, as well as his insistence to insert hundreds of new charter schools and small schools into existing, overcrowded school buildings.

In a recent survey, half of all principals say that the overcrowding creates unsafe conditions for students or staff, 29% said that lunch starts at 10:30 AM or earlier, 25% said that they have lost their art or music rooms in recent years, and 18% said they had classrooms with no windows. Thousands of children are being given special services in hallways or in closets.

Read more at <http://soscanberra.com/national-issues/new-york-parents-condemn-kleins-education-policies>

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VIEW FROM ABROAD: USA

Obama Gets to Work on Transition

Education Week, November 7, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama and his team started work this week on a transition that includes searching for the people who will bring to life his agenda of expanding preschool, improving the quality of teachers, and fixing the major federal law in K-12 education.

Within 24 hours of his election, the Illinois Democrat assigned a team of campaign advisers and staff members the task of hiring political hands and policy experts to lead the incoming administration's efforts and to develop a plan to turn campaign ideas into reality.

Mr. Obama, who defeated Sen. John McCain of Arizona in a hard-fought campaign that concluded Nov. 4, has promised to add \$10 billion a year to federal preschool spending, "recruit an army of new teachers," double federal funding for charter schools, and provide scholarships to college students and to professionals from other fields who agree to pursue careers in teaching.

The president-elect also has said he would work to improve the No Child Left Behind Act, building on the law's accountability measures designed to improve student achievement.

With budget pressures driven by deep troubles in the financial markets and in the broader U.S. economy, the Obama administration may have difficulty generating public support for the campaign's ambitious education agenda and the spending that would be required for the programs in it.

Read more at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/11/07/12pres_ep.h28.html?tmp=68253583

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AROUND THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

NSW: Mentor program for new teachers

Blacktown Sun, 31/10/2008

NEW teachers at 11 Blacktown schools will be supported by teacher mentors under a new \$5 million program. These schools are among 90 public schools participating in the Teachers Mentor Program next year.

Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth said this funding would provide the equivalent to employing 50 full-time teachers this financial year to work with schools around NSW with high numbers of beginning teachers.

"Teacher mentors provide new teachers with encouragement and feedback, building their confidence so that they can better work with students and deliver quality teaching programs," she said.

"There are many challenges faced by new teachers as they move from formal study to the classroom in their first years of teaching.

"Teacher mentors give new teachers the benefit of years of experience with students that are not found in University course notes or teacher training text books."

Read more at <http://blacktown.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/blacktown-schools-get-teacher-mentors/1348883.aspx>

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NT: \$350,000 Revitalisation of Batchelor Institute Infrastructure

Hon Julia Gillard MP, 18 November 2008

The Minister for Education, Julia Gillard will announce that the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education will receive \$350,000 for technological infrastructure upgrades which will revitalise teaching and learning at the Institute.

Opening Batchelor Institute's new E-Learning and Research Building tomorrow, the Minister will announce that the Rudd Government's \$500 million Better Universities Renewal Fund will enable the Institute to undertake a significant upgrade to its academic conference facilities.

This is in addition to the Rudd Government's recent allocation of 15 Early Childhood Education places 30 Nursing places at the Batchelor Institute to commence in 2009.

The upgrade will create a superior learning environment for students and include installation of audiovisual and computer based teaching aids designed to facilitate collaboration between students and enhance the collaborative relationship with academic staff.

This facility will house modern video conference teaching capabilities which will allow the institute to further support education in for students in remote areas.

The Better Universities Renewal Fund is part of the Rudd Government's plan to build a modern, productive Australian higher education system to meet the challenges of the future.

Read more at

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/Gillard/Releases/350000RevitalisationofBatchelorInstituteInfrastructure.htm>

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NT: Early Years Learning Framework Consultations - Darwin

Hon Maxine McKew MP, 18 November 2008

Northern Territory early childhood practitioners, parents and other stakeholders will have a unique opportunity to have their say on the future of early childhood education in Australia, through public consultations to be held on 19 November.

The Northern Territory consultation sessions are part of a series of forums to be held in each capital city.

Darwin will host two public consultation sessions on Wednesday 19 November 2008 at The Holiday Inn Esplanade, 116 The Esplanade, Darwin, from 3-5 pm and from 6.30-8.30 pm.

The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, is developing the Early Years Learning Framework to guide the practice of early childhood educators and ensure quality and national consistency in delivery.

Read more at

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/McKew/Releases/EarlyYearsLearningFrameworkConsultationsDarwin.htm>

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QLD: Queensland's greenest and healthiest school named

Hon Rod Welford, November 12, 2008

Crow's Nest State School has been named Queensland's Greenest and Healthiest School for 2008 in an awards ceremony at Parliament House today.

Education and Training Minister Rod Welford congratulated the Darling Downs school and five other winning schools in the annual Keep Australia Beautiful Queensland Awards.

Mr Welford announced the winners and runners-up in the Queensland Green and Healthy Schools 2008 Awards, the Minister for Education's Young Legends Awards and the one-off Let's get Physical Awards.

"Creating a greener, healthier Queensland is part of the Bligh Government's Toward Q2 vision and these awards recognise schools working towards that goal," Mr Welford said.

"Crow's Nest State School is a great example of a school running innovative programs to help their students be green and healthy.

"They include the frog pond and fern house projects, cockatoo friendly gardens, wildlife surveys, recycling, waterwise and Junior Landcare involvement and their 'Run Around Australia' program conducted on the school oval."

Read more at <http://www.cabinet.qld.gov.au/MMS/StatementDisplaySingle.aspx?id=61369>

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SA: Students to learn life & work skills

Hon Jane Lomax Smith MP, SA Minister for Education, 3 November 2008

The State's Year 10 students will learn life, personal and work skills in a new compulsory subject to be introduced next year as part of the new South Australian Certificate of Education.

The Personal Learning Plan - the first subject to be taught under the new SACE - has been given the all-clear to be introduced in all schools from the start of 2009.

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith today announced that about 20,000 Year 10 students in Government, Catholic and Independent schools would undertake the new subject next year.

"This compulsory new subject for Year 10 students will help young people to map out their futures prior to beginning their formal Year 11 and Year 12 studies," Dr Lomax-Smith says. "Students will plan their South Australian Certificate of Education studies and set goals for future education, training or work."

Read more at <http://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=3885>

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TAS: New era in education hailed

Hon David Bartlett MP, 30 October 2008

A new era in Tasmanian education has begun with State Parliament's approval today of legislation to formally establish the State's new post-year-10 education system.

Premier David Bartlett thanked the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council for passing the reforms, which will create the Tasmanian Academy, Polytechnic and the Skills Institute.

"In particular, I'd like to thank members of the Legislative Council who have been diligent in taking the time to understand and become part of something that can really change Tasmania's future for the better," Mr Bartlett said.

"MLCs spent time talking with members of the Tasmanian community and all of them took part in detailed briefings to give them all the facts before debate on the legislation began.

"Students and staff will now be assured that these important new reforms will be able to progress smoothly, ensuring that everything is in place for the start of the 2009 school year."

Mr Bartlett said that the reforms would transform post-year-10 education in Tasmania so that young people would have more options and better pathways to the careers they wanted.

Read more at <http://www.media.tas.gov.au/release.php?id=25150>

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VIC: Teacher shakeup on way

Karen Collier, Herald Sun, October 30, 2008

DUD teachers will be dumped or disciplined more swiftly under new rules to lift performance in state schools.

The move comes amid claims it is taking up to a year to deal with unsatisfactory staff because of drawn out investigations.

Proposed changes before State Parliament also cement plans to put top principals on contracts in an effort to boost results at languishing schools.

The "super" principals will be paid \$127,000 to \$177,000 in performance contracts of up to five years in exchange for working in needy schools.

School performance rankings are being compiled to decide which ones most need intervention.

The Government is still deciding how many executive principals will be appointed. The first, Hume Central Secondary College's Glenn Proctor, was announced in August.

Read more at <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,24573524-661,00.html>

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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANET EARTH 2008

Launch of Treasury Modelling on Climate Change

Hon Wayne Swan MP, Treasurer, 30 October 2008

I am delighted to be here today with Penny Wong, the Climate Change Minister, to launch the Treasury modelling, Australia's Low Pollution Future: The Economics of Climate Change Mitigation.

This is a hard-headed assessment of the challenges and the opportunities proposed by climate change and its impact on our economy. It's a rigorous piece of work. It is a comprehensive piece of work. It is the product of an enormous amount of work that has been done in the Treasury, but also in consultation with, and liaison with, industry.

It's a very important piece of work when it comes to our future economic prosperity and how we, as a country, meet the challenge of dangerous climate change, which does have the potential to have a very big impact on future prosperity unless all the action is taken to protect that prosperity. And what we see here is the modelling from Treasury that shows the path ahead.

Read more at

<http://www.treasurer.gov.au/DisplayDocs.aspx?doc=transcripts/2008/153.htm&pageID=004&min=wms&Year=&DocType=>

Download the report at: <http://www.treasury.gov.au/lowpollutionfuture/>

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Wildflower Declines In Thoreau's Concord Woods Are Due To Climate Changes

ScienceDaily November 1, 2008

Drawing on records dating back to the journals of Henry David Thoreau, scientists at Harvard University have found that different plant families near Walden Pond have borne the effects of climate change in strikingly different ways. Some of the plant families hit hardest by global warming have included beloved species like lilies, orchids, violets, roses, and dogwoods.

Over the past 150 years, some of the plants in Thoreau's woods have shifted their flowering time by as much as three weeks as spring temperatures have risen, the researchers say, while others have been less flexible.

Many plant families that have proven unable to adjust their flowering time have experienced sharp declines or even elimination from the local landscape -- the fate of nearly two-thirds of the plants Thoreau found in the 1850s around Walden Pond in Concord, Mass.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081027174640.htm>

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Methane Gas Levels Begin To Increase Again

ScienceDaily Oct. 30, 2008

The amount of methane in Earth's atmosphere shot up in 2007, bringing to an end a period of about a decade in which atmospheric levels of the potent greenhouse gas were essentially stable, according to a team led by MIT researchers.

Methane levels in the atmosphere have more than doubled since pre-industrial times, accounting for around one-fifth of the human contribution to greenhouse gas-driven global warming. Until recently, the leveling off of methane levels had suggested that the rate of its emission from the Earth's surface was approximately balanced by the rate of its destruction in the atmosphere.

However, since early 2007 the balance has been upset, according to a paper on the new findings published in Geophysical Review Letters.

The paper's lead authors, postdoctoral researcher Matthew Rigby and Ronald Prinn, the TEPCO Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry, in MIT's Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Science, say this imbalance has resulted in several million metric tons of additional methane in the atmosphere.

Methane is produced by wetlands, rice paddies, cattle, and the gas and coal industries, and is destroyed by reaction with the hydroxyl free radical (OH), often referred to as the atmosphere's "cleanser."

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081029141043.htm>

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Climate Change: Pushing Species To The Brink

ScienceDaily Oct. 13, 2008

Thirty-five percent of the world's birds, 52 percent of amphibians and 71 percent of warm-water reef-building corals are likely to be particularly susceptible to climate change, the first results of an IUCN study have revealed.

The report identified more than 90 biological traits which are believed to make species most susceptible to climate change. It found that 3,438 of the world's 9,856 bird species have at least one out of 11 traits that could make them susceptible to climate change.

Albatross, penguin, petrel and shearwater families are all likely to be susceptible to climate change, while heron and egret families, and osprey, kite, hawk and eagle families are among those least likely to be susceptible to climate change.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081013142545.htm>

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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FROG 2008

Ecosystem-level Consequences Of Frog Extinctions

ScienceDaily, Oct. 23, 2008

Streams that once sang with the croaks, chirps and ribbits of dozens of frog species have gone silent. They're victims of a fungus that's decimating amphibian populations worldwide.

Such catastrophic declines have been documented for more than a decade, but until recently scientists knew little about how the loss of frogs alters the larger ecosystem.

A University of Georgia study that is the first to comprehensively examine an ecosystem before and after an amphibian population decline has found that tadpoles play a key role keeping the algae at the base of the food chain productive.

"Many things that live in the stream depend on algae as a base food resource," said lead author Scott Connelly, a doctoral student who will graduate in December from the UGA Odum School of Ecology. "And we found that the system was more productive when the tadpoles were there."

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081016124252.htm>

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Amphibian Diversity Decreases Chances Of Parasitic Disease, Study Shows

ScienceDaily Oct. 22, 2008

A new University of Colorado at Boulder study showing that American toads who pal around with gray tree frogs reduce their chances of parasitic infections known to cause limb malformations has strong implications for the benefits of biodiversity on emerging wildlife diseases.

The experiments showed that when the toad tadpoles were raised in tanks with the parasitic trematodes - tiny worms whose larvae burrow into tadpole limb regions and disrupt normal leg development -- 40 percent of the emerging frogs became deformed, said CU-Boulder Assistant Professor Pieter Johnson.

But when the toad tadpoles were joined in the tanks with gray tree frog tadpoles, parasitic infections in the toads dropped by almost half, said Johnson, lead author of the study.

The study showed tree frog tadpoles acted as "sponges" for the trematode parasites, which were subsequently killed by the immune systems of frog tadpoles, said Johnson. As a result, fewer parasites were available to infect and cause malformations in the toads.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081021185059.htm>

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Global Warming Is Killing Frogs And Salamanders In Yellowstone Park, Researchers Say

ScienceDaily, Oct. 29, 2008

Frogs and salamanders, those amphibious bellwethers of environmental danger, are being killed in Yellowstone National Park. The predator, Stanford researchers say, is global warming.

Biology graduate student Sarah McMenamain spent three summers in a remote area of the park searching for frogs and salamanders in ponds that had been surveyed 15 years ago. Almost everywhere she looked, she found a catastrophic decrease in the population.

The amphibians need the ponds for their young to hatch, but high temperatures and drought are drying up the water. The frogs and salamanders lay eggs that have a gelatinous outer layer—basically "jelly eggs," McMenamain says—that leaves them completely unsuitable for gestation on land. If the ponds dry up, so do the eggs. "If there isn't any water, then the animals simply don't breed," she said.

The disappearing ponds lie in picturesque northern Yellowstone, specifically the lower Lamar Valley, which holds dozens of small fishless ponds where the habitat has been ideal for the breeding and larval development of blotched tiger salamanders, boreal chorus frogs and Columbia spotted frogs. As the world's first national park, it is one of the most environmentally protected areas in the world.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081028184830.htm>

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CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Australasian Computing Education Conference 2009

20-23 January 2009, Wellington, New Zealand

The Eleventh Australasian Computing Education Conference is a conference on research and innovations in computing education in its various aspects, at all levels and in all contexts. ACE2009 is the only Australasian conference devoted entirely to education in computer science, information systems, software engineering and information technology.

Topics of interest for the conference include, but are not limited to: the use of technology in education, course content, curriculum structure, methods of assessment, mobile, flexible, online learning, and evaluations of alternative approaches.

These innovations may be in the context of formal courses or self-directed learning; they may involve, for example, introductory programming, service courses, specialist undergraduate or postgraduate topics, industry-related short courses.

Read more at http://www.cs.rmit.edu.au/conf/ace_2009/

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Positive Education Conference 2009

11-16 January, 18-23 January 2009, Geelong Grammar School, Corio, Victoria

We are delighted to invite you to attend the 2009 Positive Education Training Conference at Geelong Grammar School, led by Professor Martin Seligman and Dr Karen Reivich from the University of Pennsylvania, and supported by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

As teachers, we know from our experience in the classroom that students who have a positive outlook achieve more. Scientific research conducted by Professor Seligman, Dr Reivich and other leading researchers has proven this to be true, and not just at school.

Research results show that people who are optimistic perform better at work, school and sports, are less depressed and less anxious, have fewer physical problems, live longer and have better relationships with other people.

The good news is that the research also shows that there are specific skills which can make a difference and that these can be taught.

Two, six-day residential training conferences to be held in January 2009 are built upon these research findings.

This opportunity follows the outstanding success of the course that Professor Seligman, Dr Reivich and their world leading team of experts delivered in January 2008 to 100 staff from Geelong Grammar School, together with representatives from DEEWR, local government schools and local universities.

Read more at <http://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/index.asp?menuid=200.060>

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BIG Skills Conference

2-5 March 2009 Sydney Australia

The BIG Skills Conference is hosted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, on behalf of the Australian Government.

This is the first major national conference on skills and training hosted at the Federal level in recent times, and it has the support of many organisations and individuals involved in tertiary training and education. It is timely to reinvigorate our tertiary education system and identify how skills and training can help address the big challenges of productivity, participation and social inclusion.

The Conference will be forward looking and it will bring together major national and international players with an interest in skills and training to debate issues, think differently and stimulate change in the Australian tertiary sector.

The Conference aims to:

- Challenge conventional wisdom and get people to think differently about skills for the future in Australia and the wider Asia-Pacific region;
- Compare what works and what needs to be improved by sharing good national and international practice, and learning from experience and evaluation;
- Link national and international research and policy to help inform future decision making;
- Enable national and international networking to increase connections and collaborations on skills training; and
- Provide opportunities for professional development and learning.

Read more at

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/programmes_funding/programme_categories/Conferences/

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Education in a Digital Present: Enriching Rural Communities

8-10 July 2009, Flinders University, South Australia

Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia (SPERA)

Digital information technologies are transforming the way we work, learn and communicate. In this digital revolution are new learning approaches that transform hierarchical, industrial-based models of teaching and learning.

Education in a digital present could be a comprehensive search for strategies and tools for effective online / digital teaching based on the principles of learning as a social process and engaging the advantages of new technologies to support e-learning decision-making, instructional choices, program and course planning and the delivery of curricula.

Additionally, practical advice, real-life examples, case studies and useful resources about structuring and fostering socially engaging learning in an online / digital environment could be topics for discussion.

Call for Papers at <http://www.spera.edu.au/conferences/callforpapers.pdf>

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REMINDEERS

24-26 November - International Conference on Distance Education - Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic - <http://www.icde.org/oslo/icde.nsf/id/05C3211E27B0737DC12573E100405E7F?OpenDocument>

25-28 November - Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future - Geneva, Switzerland - <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/ice.html>

30 November-4 December - Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Conference - Brisbane - <http://www.aare.edu.au/conf2008/index.htm>

7-11 December - World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education - Melbourne - <http://www.wipce2008.com/>

8-12 December - International Consortium for Experiential Learning - Sydney - <http://www.education.uts.edu.au/icel/index.html>

4-7 January - Hawaii International Conference on Education - Honolulu, USA - <http://www.hiceducation.org/>

18-21 January - Summer School For Australian Teachers - Canberra - <http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/freilich/>

15-18 April - International Outdoor Education Research Conference - Beechworth, Vic - http://www.latrobe.edu.au/oent/research_conf_2009.htm

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RESOURCE LISTINGS

Passport to Australia: The Australian Travel Game

Find out more about our amazing country the fun way:

Strap yourself in for a learning adventure like no other with Passport to Australia, the new board game from Brisbane based company Barker Boys (Australia) Pty Ltd

This is a fresh and exciting way for players of all ages to learn about Australia – the ultimate board game that takes players on a funtastic journey to every state and territory

The game is a brilliant way to improve your general knowledge on places that are in our own backyard. Though you hardly notice you're learning because it's so easy to get carried away with the thrill of the chase.

New questions will be added to later editions of the game and supplementary question packs will be available online and through recommended retail outlets.

"Best of all, with every purchase of a Passport to Australia buyers will be contributing to the establishment of a school camp to provide learning and recreational experiences for young people," said Managing Director Bruce Barker.

"Our intention is to continue to create opportunities to share knowledge and learn in fun and interesting ways."

Passport to Australia is available through ABC shops, selected retail stores and online at www.passporttoaustralia.com.

For more information: <http://www.passporttoaustralia.com>

LOTE@HOME – Learning languages at home from the early years

"Children who have grown up learning two or more different languages are better problem solvers"

[LOTE@HOME](http://www.lote-at-home.com.au) is an innovative way for parents to participate with their kids as they all learn a second language.

[LOTE@HOME](http://www.lote-at-home.com.au) packs are not intended to replace formal LOTE lessons, however they are intended to build an "in country environment" in the home that will support the formal learning of a second language.

Devised by a parent who was unable to identify an approach to learning a language other than English that focused on a home, family-based setting, these family-friendly kits are now available in five community languages (including Japanese and Mandarin) with others to follow shortly.

By using the cards, and reinforcing words around the house, kids will learn a new language in exactly the same way they learned English - by immersion and absorption.

Find out more: <http://www.lote-at-home.com.au>

Educational Experience

Educational Experience began its operations in Newcastle NSW in 1977 and today is Australia's leading supplier of educational resources and equipment to child care centres, preschools, OOSHs and primary schools. We remain dedicated to the supply of creative and practical ideas to help children learn and develop and are the Teacher's choice for variety, quality and customer service.

At present **Educational Experience's** product range consists of over 8,500 product lines showcased in our annual Teachers Catalogue. Our speedy delivery is recognised as being the most efficient and reliable service offered in the industry. The products sold by **Educational Experience** are sourced from Australian suppliers where possible or imported from reputable international suppliers. To ensure all our products are of the highest quality and meet safety standards, our suppliers must show product compliance testing to Australian standards.

To view our product range please visit www.edex.com.au

Educational Experience initiated our generous Toys and More fundraiser to help Australian children's education. Early childhood centres and schools who participate in this fundraiser, are rewarded with a credit voucher valued at 20% of the total value ordered by parents and friends and may qualify for additional resources. For more information please visit www.toysandmore.com.au

Educational Experience remains committed to the educational needs of all Australian children.

Educational Experience, PO Box 860, Newcastle NSW 2300

Telephone 02 4923 8222 Fax 02 4942 1991 Toll free 1300 134 211 Email hotline@edex.com.au

Fundraising Directory - www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au Also: www.fetesandfestivals.com.au

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

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ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

- **Australian Education Digest** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/aed.htm> (weekly)
- **International News Roundup** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/roundup.htm> (monthly)
- **Values Education** : <http://www.valuesineducation.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Languages Education** : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Ensemble - Music Education** : <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Public Education Voice** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)
- **Family School Partners** : http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page_id=6 (quarterly)

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