Welcome to the first Research eLert for 2010. The Research eLert is a bi-monthly online resource, providing information on the latest research from Australia and overseas. To receive a copy of the Research eLert in your inbox, register ►Here ...

Latest research

Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children

The transition from home to school is a major change in children’s lives and there is clear evidence that a good start to schooling influences later wellbeing. One key influence on children’s school readiness is family financial disadvantage.

This research published by the Smith Family defines school readiness as encompassing multiple facets of children’s development including language development, cognitive abilities, general knowledge, approaches to learning, social/ emotional development, and physical health and development.

The research highlights the extra challenges children from disadvantaged families face when making the transition to school. Challenges at this stage can lead to increasing inequalities in their development.

![Image]

Figure 1: Children from financially disadvantaged (FD) and non-financially disadvantaged families with literacy and numeracy difficulties at 6–7 years

Growing up in Australia

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is a comprehensive large-scale longitudinal Australian study examining children’s cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development during the critical transition period into school. The study has also collected extensive data on children’s home, childcare, preschool and school experiences. ►More ...

Let us know what you think

If you would to share your views on any of the information presented in this edition of the Research eLert, please click ►Here ...
The report concludes that each contributing factor to a child’s school readiness could be dealt with independently but a multimodal approach is required to address the systemic problem – one that combines high-quality early education with parent support.

The report indicates that school readiness is predictive of future outcomes and children who are less ‘ready’, are less likely to excel academically, more likely to have behavioural and emotional problems, and more likely to drop out of school. ►More ...

Engaging students in science through university-school partnerships

The introduction to the Science domain of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards states that a fundamental goal for science education is to ‘stimulate, respond to and nourish’ curiosity about the world. Research shows that students are most likely to achieve in science if they are interested, motivated, and if they have confidence in their abilities to learn science and to tackle new problems. A report by ACER on the participation of Australian students in science, mathematics and technology highlights the correlation between students’ attitudes toward science learning and their levels of achievement. ‘Self-belief’ was shown to be an even stronger predictor of success than ‘general interest’ in the subject.

The In2science peer mentoring in schools program offers university Science students the opportunity to volunteer as a science mentor in secondary schools for about 1–2 hours per week over a school term.

The Centre for the Study of Higher Education (University of Melbourne) recently evaluated the effectiveness of the program in engaging and encouraging students to study science. This study found that In2science promotes students’ interest and achievement in science, and changes their perceptions of science and science learning. Principals noted the positive experience mentors brought to their students. Mentors were ‘much more than an extra pair of hands’ and schools ‘came out in front’ from the partnership. Principals also emphasised the benefit of In2science for professional development of their science staff.

Under the Energising Science and Mathematics Education Strategy (2009) the Victorian Government has increased funding for science and mathematics mentoring initiatives with university partners to $1 million. This funding will target support for schools in remote, rural and low socioeconomic status areas. ►More ...

Hot topics

OECD report: The high cost of low educational performance – The long-run economic impact of improving PISA outcomes

This report uses recent economic modelling to relate cognitive skills – as measured by PISA and other international instruments – to economic growth. The report shows relatively small improvements to labour force skills can largely impact the future wellbeing of a nation. The report also argues that it is the quality of learning outcomes, not the length of schooling, which makes the difference. A modest goal of all OECD countries is boosting their average PISA scores by 25 points over the next 20 years which would increase OECD Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by US$115 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010. In Australia, this is projected to increase GDP by around US$ 2.5 trillion. ►More ...

Learning from the Extremes

Drawing on research undertaken in Brazil, India and Kenya, the report explores innovative approaches to providing learning opportunities to poor communities living in extreme environments. The case studies offer an insight into how social entrepreneurs in these diverse continents are responding to the flux of people accessing education and creating entirely new ways to learn. It provides a lesson in how education worldwide could be reconceptualised. ►More...

‘Different kinds of schools are needed to teach new skills in new ways.’

Charles Leadbeater & Annika Wong 2010, Learning from the Extremes

Going for Growth 2010

The OECD Going for Growth report is an annual publication that provides an overview of structural policy developments in OECD countries from a comparative perspective. The 2010 report released on 10 March suggests that parental and socio-economic backgrounds are major influences on their children’s level of educational, earnings and wage outcomes.
Research partnership update

The Young Learners’ project

The Program Director of the Young Learners’ project, Associate Professor Margaret Brown says: ‘There is evidence that intervention beyond Grade 2 is less effective, so early intervention strategies are critical. Previously there has been a misconception that “real learning” doesn’t start until primary school commences, but this project challenges that notion.’

The University of Melbourne in partnership with the Australian Scholarships Group will investigate how students can achieve learning success before they start school.

The Young Learners’ project addresses a significant need to ensure all children have the necessary early literacy skills to enable them to achieve to their fullest potential. It aims to identify factors in a four-year-old preschooler’s educational program, home life or personal characteristics that are positively associated with the development of strong literacy outcomes in the first year of school education. ►More ...

Research Branch update

Are you interested in reading short research articles and interviews on topics relevant to Victorian education and early childhood development? The Research Branch produces a range of research articles and interviews, now accessible on the Department’s website. Topics include pedagogy, student motivation and engagement, and student assessment.

The Research Branch also interviews parents, teachers, academics and renowned educationalists to share their views on matters of interest to the Victorian community. These research items have appeared in previous editions of the Department’s SHINE magazine, however they can now be easily accessed and downloaded through the Research Branch’s website. ►More ...

Young people’s writing: Attitudes, behaviour and the role of technology

This study explored young people’s views about writing and examined the types of writing they use. Some 3001 pupils aged eight to 16 years-old in the UK completed an online survey in May 2009, with the responses indicating that technology such as Facebook and blogs offer different writing opportunities for young people.

Other interesting findings from the young people surveyed reveal that:
- 75% wrote regularly
- 90% saw writing as an important skill
- the most common reason why respondents thought they were not good writers was that they didn’t write neatly.

Growing, Learning and Thriving

In November 2009, the Victorian Government released Growing, Learning and Thriving: Building on Victoria’s Achievements in Early Childhood Development. This document outlines the Victorian Government’s strategic framework for continued reform in early childhood. As well as highlighting key achievements in recent years, it sets out how Victoria will achieve its vision of increased access to high-quality early childhood health, education and care services for children from 0–8 years of age. There is a strong focus on evidence-based reform, workforce requirements and actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians, as well as proposals for how Victoria can work with the Commonwealth to achieve key policy objectives in early childhood development. ►More ...
Research events

ACEC2010: Digital Diversity (6–9 April), Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Melbourne

The national biennial conference of the Australian Council for Computers in Education explores interactive and creative approaches to ICT in education through a wide range of presentations and workshops. ➤More ...

Understanding Consent in Research Involving Children (30 April), Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne

Intended for those interested in conducting research with children and young people, this workshop will introduce attendees to two resources developed by Dr Merle Spriggs. ➤More ...

iNet Australia Conference: Leading Learning (2–4 May), MCG, Melbourne

Conference workshops will highlight innovative learning programs in Australian schools and explore questions such as How do we lead learning in 21st century schools? ➤More ...

2010 Early Childhood Education Conference (4–5 June), Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne

The conference brings together people from across Victoria and interstate to engage with speakers and network, with a special focus this year on building partnerships. ➤More ...

Research review

Readicide by Kelly Gallagher (2009)

The author draws on twenty-two years experience teaching English to argue that not only are schools in the USA not doing enough to turn students on to reading, but are actually ‘killing’ reading for many students.

He asserts that students are not doing enough reading in schools and are in desperate need of large doses of authentic reading. He quotes statistics such as one in four American secondary school students not being able to comprehend materials in their textbooks. Although he strongly supports the value of teaching classics such as Hamlet, developing reading skills and a passion for reading requires exposure to a large range of texts and students should be immersed in a ‘book flood’. This he believes will encourage students to become recreational readers, helping to develop their knowledge, which he sees as a key to reading success. He argues against the chopping-up of texts, and over analysis of books and likens the heavy emphasis on academic texts as like being fed a diet of only spaghetti for months on end.

Gallagher outlines strategies for practitioners such as increasing silent-reading time and augmenting books with authentic texts, such as newspaper articles. A weakness of the text however is that Gallagher makes little reference to students with reading difficulties, or even students learning English as a second language, and where they fit within his approach. He believes the most valuable thing a school can do is to provide free reading time, with access to high-interest reading materials. He argues that this will encourage students to become lifelong readers, and this he suggests should be the primary focus of reading in schools. ➤More ...

FELS: A conceptual framework for the evaluation of learning spaces

New spaces and technologies disrupt the old modes of teaching and learning as they are often based on a shift from a transmission model to a deliberately flexible, student-centred approach. The aim of this study, funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), in the UK, was to identify and review the methods and tools currently used to evaluate the contribution technology-supported physical learning spaces make to learning and teaching.

One of the biggest challenges for the research project was the presupposition that architecture can improve learning. In reality, there are too many variables involved in any assessment of a learning space to ever assure an intimate relationship between effective learning and any given environment.

The findings suggest that the evaluation of physical learning spaces needs to be built into the whole pre-design, design, build and post-occupancy process. The project team proposed a conceptual Framework for Evaluating Learning Spaces (FELS), intended to offer a common vocabulary for evaluation, based around the interplay of five key factors: intentions, context, practice, designs and procedures. Broadly, it prompts the following questions: Why is the evaluation taking place? What is being evaluated? How will the evaluation be constructed? ➤More ...

Touching the future : Building skills for life and work

In this paper, Johanna Wyn from the University of Melbourne explores the goals of Australian education and how schools should prepare young people for work and life. Wyn concludes that to prepare young Australians for the future, their education should be holistic and flexible, and encompass a commitment to learning for both work and life. In their ‘education for the future’ young people should be provided with opportunities to engage in learning that has meaning to them and in which they can exercise active participation and decision making. ➤More ...