At a ceremony at the University of Newcastle on Tuesday 25th August, Emeritus Professor Sid Bourke was conferred Honorary Life Membership of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). The award was presented by Professor Martin Mills, President of AARE.

The award was conferred to honour Professor Bourke’s long and outstanding career as an educational researcher and illustrious academic. Following the presentation, the gathering of friends, colleagues and former students showed their appreciation with a heart-felt standing ovation.

Below are a selection of photos from the event followed by the nomination.
Nomination for Honorary Life Membership of the AARE

Emeritus Professor Sid Bourke

We propose that the Australian Association for Educational Research confer life membership on Emeritus Professor Sidney Bourke to honour his long and outstanding career as an educational researcher.

Sid Bourke started his career as a high school mathematics teacher. He then became an education officer in the Australian Army. He was seconded from the Army Staff College at Queenscliff (as Lt-Col S.F. Bourke) to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on 2 June 1975. In response to an approach to ACER from Race Mathews, Chairman of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties, Sid was appointed as Project Director to undertake the first Australia-wide survey into literacy and specific learning problems in schools.

Volume I of the *Australian Studies in School Performance* by Keeves and Bourke (with assistance from R. Lewis and K.N. Ross) was published as ERDC Report No 8 by AGPS, Canberra 1976. Volume II was published as ERDC Report No 9 by AGPS, Canberra 1976. Volume 3 was completed in May 1977. Sid became Chief Research Officer at ACER after the death of Dr Radford, Director of ACER, in December, 1976. He graduated with a PhD from La Trobe University in 1985.

During his 11 years at ACER, Sid worked on projects in literacy, numeracy, and oracy. *Oracy in Australian Schools* (Sid Bourke, Milton Clark, Diana Davis, and Faye Holzer) was published as ACER Research Monograph No. 9 in 1980. This was a novel assessment of speaking and listening (oracy) tested in Australian samples of 10-year-old and 14-year-old students. Results from the second Australia-wide survey of literacy and numeracy were published in *Performance in Literacy and Numeracy* (Bourke, Mills, Stanyon & Holzer) in 1981 (AGPS, Canberra).

One of Sid’s major research contributions has been his interest in students’ perception of the quality of their lives in schools. Schools are not just about formal measures of achievement. It is important that students should enjoy their school experience. Are they happy with their teachers? Are they happy with their peers? Do they enjoy their learning experiences? Do they think they have opportunities to grow?

*The Quality of School Life* (QSL) questionnaires were developed by Trevor Williams and Margaret Batten of ACER as part of the Survey of School Leavers study, 1978-81. These questionnaires were published in ACER Research Monograph 12 in 1981. Margaret Batten and Sue Girling-Butcher refined the instruments for a case study of schools and students published in ACER Research Monograph 13 in 1981.

From 1982 to 1984 Sid was responsible for the Australian component of the *International Classroom Environment Study*, identifying teaching practices that were related high student achievement. Through that study he was instrumental in bringing new developments in path modelling of effects on student achievement and affect to Australian educational research and extend his interest in affective aspects of schooling.

In fact, throughout his career, Sid has embraced innovative approaches to research areas and research design. For example, during his time at ACER, Sid contributed to new methods including criterion-referenced assessment, path modelling of effects on student achievement and affective outcomes, and new fields of research including oracy, classroom environments, affective aspects of schooling, and students’ perceptions of schools.

In 1986 Sid joined the University of Newcastle as Professor of Education and remained there till his retirement in August 2013 (now Emeritus Professor Bourke). He taught courses in research methodology, particularly quantitative approaches to educational research. He has supervised well in excess of 30 PhD students (and assisted many other RHD students without formal credit as a supervisor). His expertise, kindness, and sanguine presence endeared him to students and co-supervisors alike.

Sid challenged his students to use the most rigorous research methods available. He trained many of them to undertake sophisticated statistical analyses to answer important research questions. Many of these
students have become independent researchers who now mentor the next generation of researchers. Working with interesting and talented students has always been a source of stimulation for Sid.

In 1990, with Lorin Anderson, Sid published Assessing Affective Characteristics in the Schools (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, a second edition published in 2000), a book about the development and use of questionnaires in educational research, with an emphasis on the development of valid and reliable affective scales. Their motivation in writing the book was to help researchers with little expertise in measurement to interpret quantitative data correctly. Sid continued to refine statistical approaches to help his colleagues and students, moving to structural equation modelling and the inclusion of scale development in multilevel regression analyses.

Sid has been an active member of the AARE since the 1970s. He served as its President in 1993 and was a member of the Executive Committee from 1987 to 1994. Over the years, Sid has acted as an expert consultant to many government departments at national, state, and regional levels.

In 2000, a group of researchers at the University of Newcastle established a centre for the Study of Research Training and Impact (SORTI). A major focus of SORTI has been PhD and research masters theses. How do examiners assess the quality of theses? In an early study, Sid and his colleagues looked at the relationships between the characteristics of more than 800 PhD candidates and the examiners’ reports (more than 2100 reports) on their theses.

Sid and his colleagues, including his partner Professor Allyson Holbrook, conducted a study commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs which looked at the nature of educational research and its impact on schools, universities, and associated bodies. One finding was the extent to which educational research in Australia depends on research students in universities – more than half the research in Australia. Another finding was the role of postgraduate students as initiators and mediators of research and research applications in schools. Because many PhD candidates in Australia simultaneously are teachers or administrators in schools, the research link between universities and schools is strong.

Since 2004, Sid and his colleagues have received external research funding in excess of one million dollars, the major funding agency being the ARC. Sid has published extensively in leading journals over his career (the SORTI link at the University of Newcastle website provides a list of his many publications).

With great generosity of spirit, Sid has mentored and collaborated with new researchers. Working with younger and novice researchers often is harder and more challenging than getting on with the work oneself. Sid has collaborated in a way that has instilled confidence and given skills to new researchers. Sid remained a leader in the field of quantitative research at a time when numbers were viewed in a dim light by many in educational research. Sid’s own work, research partnerships, and teaching have helped to establish and grow the mixed methods paradigm in Australia, now so much a part of contemporary educational research.

Dr Jennifer Archer, School of Education, University of Newcastle
Dr John Ainley, Australian Council for Educational research
Professor Max Smith, School of Education, University of Newcastle
August 4th, 2015