



Institute for Social Science Research

# SOCIAL SCIENCE OF EDUCATION

## WHAT WE DO

The Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) works to support the conditions for children, young people and mature learners to achieve their educational and life potential. We aim to provide social-scientific foundations and evidence in education that will lead to the building and sustaining of positive life trajectories.

Our researchers seek to understand and improve quality, practice and access in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. Using social science, cognitive and developmental science, ISSR research influences policy, workforce and funding models. We are advancing new knowledge about how ECEC contexts and the practice of educators impact on early life experiences, with consequent effects on relationships, behaviours, learning and health.

ISSR researchers are developing new knowledge about aspirations, participation, achievement and attainment in primary and secondary schools, and higher education. Parental engagement in education settings and child and student learning are important for positive educational outcomes, and our researchers are looking at new ways to engage and support parents to take active roles in their children's education.

Our work in education has a strong focus on educational equity, identifying the enablers and barriers to effective engagement and educational success for people from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Our work leverages cutting-edge, innovative statistical and data analytic methodologies, and has a strong focus on practice through evaluating major educational initiatives and trialling new interventions.



THE UNIVERSITY  
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AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

## OBJECTIVES

- Achieving equity in opportunities and improving outcomes
- Informing effective education policy and practice
- Understanding education in the social context

## IMPACT THEMES

- Equity in educational opportunities
- Innovations and learning futures
- Student experiences and transitions
- Parent and community engagement
- Learning analytics and evaluation

## LEAD RESEARCHERS

- Professor Karen Thorpe
- Professor Simon Smith
- Associate Professor Wojtek Tomaszewski
- Associate Professor Jenny Povey
- Dr Sally Staton

# PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



## Evaluation of a pilot parent engagement toolkit and training course for school staff and parents from socially disadvantaged schools

*Toolkit and training course development funded by the Queensland Department of Education (2016-2019) through Horizon Grant. Pilot (2019-2020) funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course.*

Research shows that engaging parents in the education of their children at home and at school has a direct impact on student outcomes. But parents from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to face barriers when it comes to forming partnerships with schools and engaging in their child's learning. ISSR researchers are conducting a feasibility study on the effectiveness of a pilot parent engagement toolkit and training course, developed for staff and parents from socially disadvantaged schools. The research team conceptualised the project and sought funding through an Education Horizon grant from the Queensland Department of Education. The toolkit and online training comprise 34 parent engagement strategies presented across four modules. A pilot to assess whether the toolkit and training course successfully engage parents was subsequently funded by the ARC Life Course Centre. Eight socially disadvantaged schools are trialling the course and an additional two socially advantaged schools were included in the trial to test the fidelity of the course for these schools. School leaders are facilitating the course with staff and parents adapting and trialling these strategies for their school context. Data analytics will be used to monitor the uptake of the toolkit by schools with the potential to link this data to administrative data to assess the effectiveness of the toolkit. Early findings show positive uptake of the toolkit and course but that additional resources could further increase the uptake of these strategies. The research team are currently working with the department to develop these resources.

## Improving communication and language approaches with young learners

*Social Ventures Australia, 2019*

ISSR early childhood education experts worked with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) on the Evidence for Learning (E4L) initiative, to improve the quality, availability and use of evidence in the sector. Building rigorous and relevant research on early learning approaches increases the body of knowledge that educators can draw on in making their decisions to support all children to make the best progress possible.

"Communication and language" is identified as one of the 12 key approaches in the E4L Early Childhood Education Toolkit, as it consistently show positive benefits for young children's learning. Given this significance, ISSR was commissioned to develop oral language resources which provide evidence-informed strategies to support rich conversations with young learners.

The researchers conducted a systematic review, gathering current evidence for programs and strategies that support educators, helping them to foster rich conversations and sustain shared thinking and dialogic interactions with young children in ECEC settings. This included a range of study designs including intervention studies, observational studies, cross-sectoral studies, qualitative studies and single case reports. The evidence gathered from the review was translated into free to download resources for educators, and is publicly available via the E4L website.



## Evaluation of the Beyond the Broncos Girls Academy Program

*Brisbane Broncos Rugby League Club Limited, 2019-2020*

Beyond the Broncos Girls Academy is an in-school program aimed at supporting female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students in Queensland and New South Wales. The program's emphasis is recognising the vital role that young Indigenous women play in influencing the next generation, and the provision of culturally appropriate support for these future leaders to ensure their success at school and beyond. The aim of the program is to empower young Indigenous females to not only achieve academically, but also make their mark in society.

A team of ISSR researchers is working to determine the overall effectiveness of the program on student school attendance, year 12 completion rates, school disciplinary actions, and in-class behaviour, effort and achievement scores across program schools using 'Queensland Education longitudinal administrative data'. By treating the evaluation of the Beyond the Broncos Girls Academy program as a natural experiment, educational outcomes of students exposed to the program were compared to the outcomes of a synthetically generated control group (a similar group of students who did not attend the Beyond the Broncos Girls Academy program).

CRICOS Provider 00025B