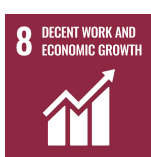




UNSW
Gonski Institute
for Education

2023 Annual Report



UNSW
SYDNEY

Acknowledgement of Country

The Gonski Institute for Education is located on the unceded territory of the Bedegal people who are the Traditional Owners of the lands where the Institute is based.

We pay our respects to the Bedegal people of the Eora nation who are the Custodians of this land.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share, and pay respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

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Aunty Maxine
Ryan, a
Dharawal woman
and Cultural
Resident in four
Sydney schools, and
her students.

About the Gonski Institute for Education

Our history

In 2010 the Australian Government commissioned a panel to review school funding arrangements in Australia. Chaired by David Gonski AC, the panel received over 7,000 written submissions and met with hundreds of professionals and stakeholders in the school education community. In the *Review of Funding for Schooling—Final Report*, the panel shared several concerning findings:¹

- The performance of Australian students had declined at all levels of achievement over the previous decade in comparison to international benchmarks.
- There was a significant gap between Australia's highest and lowest performing students.
- A concerning proportion of Australia's lowest performing students were not meeting minimum standards of achievement.
- There was an unacceptable link between low levels of achievement and educational disadvantage, particularly among students from low socioeconomic, regional, remote, and Indigenous backgrounds.

The aspirations of this 'Gonski report' remain unrealised. Universities are at the heart of the global knowledge system that shapes our future, and UNSW Sydney plays a key role. In response to the findings of the *2011 Review of Funding for Schooling* report, UNSW Sydney created the Gonski Institute for Education: a new interdisciplinary institute focussed on educational access and excellence.

Our mission

We exist to address inequity in Australian education and improve access to high-quality education for all students, wherever they might go to school.

We're committed to addressing the sources of inequity at all levels, from individual learners and their families, to schools and other educational institutions and their communities, through to systems and policies.

Our members are marked their commitment and capacity to lead dialogue and debate in education reform by translating high-quality research into practical strategies and policy recommendations.

Why is this important?

Australian kids have the longest compulsory education in the world,² but their performance in international student achievement tests has been falling for over twenty years.³

Australian kids deserve an education that accommodates their needs and empowers them to reach their fullest potential: **nothing** should get in the way of their future.

Australian parents deserve to feel confident about their kids' education at the local government school: as a nation we spend more on private schooling than almost any other country,⁴ but student outcomes continue to decline.

Australia deserves a quality education system, and a more prominent place on the world stage.

Equality vs. equity

What is the difference between equality and equity?

Equality



Equality means treating everyone the same, but sometimes this can create levels of disadvantage where some people benefit more than others.

Equity



Equity means that for people to achieve the same outcome (e.g. realising their full potential) different levels and types of support might be needed.

Equity is important so that all people can fully participate in society. Some examples of treating people differently in order to create a fairer society are differentiated tax rates and means-testing for social benefits.

Australia needs an equitable education system. Equity is the hallmark of excellent education systems – the countries with the greatest equity also have better educational outcomes and achievement. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* promotes excellence and equity in Australian schools, highlighting the need to: ⁵

- Provide all students with access to high-quality schooling free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location;
- Ensure that Indigenous status and socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes; and
- Reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness.

Equity means removing barriers and overcoming background factors that are currently behind the significant gap between Australia's highest and lowest performing students by raising the attainment of disadvantaged students while continuing to support high attainers to excel.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

We are proud to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

By reducing inequalities and ensuring access to quality education, we can help to create cities and communities that are safe, inclusive, and sustainable. Positive economic growth means more work opportunities, better infrastructure, and more opportunities to innovate and grow as a country, and as a global community. Tomorrow's workers need an education that will empower them to each take advantage of increasingly skilled jobs and contribute fully to building the society we all want.

Each new publication from the Gonski Institute for Education will clearly define which of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals it relates to through the use of coloured logos.



From our Director, Professor Kim Beswick

Welcome to the first annual report from the Gonski Institute for Education. This report celebrates our achievements and impact in 2023, and highlights some future directions for 2024 and beyond.

I am especially pleased to announce that I will be taking on the Director role for the Gonski Institute for Education on a full-time basis in 2024. The commitment to the Institute on the part of the UNSW Sydney Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture (in which the Institute sits) and that of UNSW Sydney more broadly signals promise of the enhancement of our work and to societal impact. It represents a further step in the maturity of the Gonski Institute for Education.



There are some exciting things on the horizon for the Institute in 2024, and we're already busy planning our first major event of the year, the Rural and Regional Education Roundtable, where we'll map out a plan for definitively improving rural education with stakeholders from around Australia. I look forward to being able to share the outcome of this event with you.

As you read this report and perhaps delve into more detailed documents behind the summaries presented here, I trust that you will be motivated and inspired to do what you can to further educational equity. We'd love to hear your ideas, and we offer a range of ways to work with us and support our mission. You can find more information about this on page 28.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Beswick'.

Kim Beswick
Director, Gonski Institute for Education

Our 2023 engagement

Media



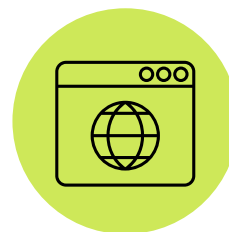
317
media
mentions



15,324,700
audience reach
via media



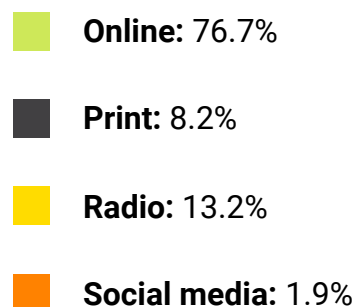
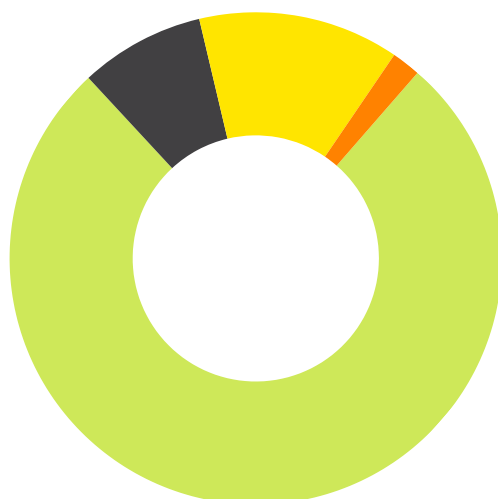
46,887
audience reach
via e-newsletters



22,545
unique website
visitors

Our audience reach via media **increased** in 2023 by **5,775,500** from 2022.

Media mentions by type, 2023



Impact



28
collaborating
organisations



18
new
publications



21
research
partners



58
EdD
students

Project reach



144 schools

36,000 students

**3,000 school
practitioners**

5 States

2 Territories

Our research

Our research addresses the sources of inequity at all levels, from individual learners and their families, to schools and other educational institutions and their communities, through to systems and policies.

Themes



Examining **systems and policies** to determine how to provide the very best learning experience to students of all backgrounds.



Working with **schools and their local communities** to find out what creates a strong culture of education and learning, and how this might be shared with other communities.



Learning about **teachers, classrooms, students, and their families** to understand how to best empower every student to reach their fullest potential.

Grant funding




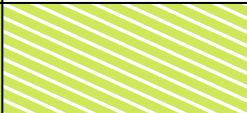

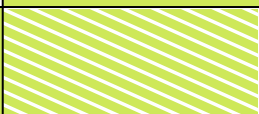
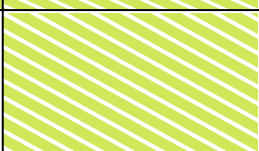





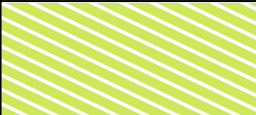

We pursue research opportunities that support our mission to address inequity in Australian education and improve access to high-quality education for all students. We have been awarded over two million dollars worth of grants from the NSW Department of Education following competitive tender processes and strong bids from other universities and a range of private consultants. Our reputation, proven track record, and the strength of our research fellows and progressive partnerships have enabled us to secure grant funding for:

- The Rural and Regional Education Project
- The NSW Ambassador Schools Research Centre
- The Country Universities Centre Evaluation

- Reasonable adjustments to maths for students with intellectual disabilities
- Housing Affordability & the Teacher Shortage (HATS)
- Building data infrastructure
- Improving school systems through systemic design
- Steiner and Montessori School Provision Dashboard

These projects are profiled in the following pages. You can explore how these projects align with our themes in the table below.

Research projects theme matrix

	Research themes		
Projects	Systems and policies	Schools and their local communities	Teachers, classrooms, students, and their families
The Rural and Regional Education Project			
The NSW Ambassador Schools Research Centre			
The Country Universities Centres Evaluation			
Reasonable adjustments to maths for students with intellectual disabilities			
Housing Affordability & the Teacher Shortage (HATS)			
Building data infrastructure			
Improving school systems through systemic design			
Steiner and Montessori School Provision Dashboard			



Primary theme



Secondary theme

The Rural and Regional Education Project



Project
commenced
2020

There is a pressing need to find ways to improve educational outcomes for students in rural and regional communities: nationwide education assessments have shown that Australian students in rural areas are almost two years behind metropolitan students in reading, mathematics, and science.⁶

About the project

The *Rural and Regional Education Project* was funded by the New South Wales Department of Education. We collaborated with our research partners, the University of Canberra and Social Ventures Australia, to identify how the NSW Department of Education could help to improve educational outcomes in rural and regional schools.

Between 2020 and 2021 we collected and synthesised survey, interview, and focus group data from principals, teachers, students, and parents in 17 schools, as well as members of their local communities and relevant department personnel.

Key findings

Our work revealed the unique challenges of teaching and school leadership in rural and regional schools, and how important it is to balance each distinct local community's idea of success at school with high national academic expectations.



Schools and the community

- The local school is hugely important to rural and regional communities, and can be the last government institution left when a community is in decline.
- Parents and community members are acutely aware of, and concerned about, the reputation of the local school.
- The schools involved in the study had been experiencing negative

enrolment growth and a widening of socio-educational disadvantage, with an average Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 873.



Teachers and school leaders

- Being a principal or teacher in a rural school is more complex and constant than elsewhere.
- Principals and teachers are expected to integrate into the community, which is seen as evidence of respect.
- Teaching in rural and regional schools requires specific classroom practice and community engagement skills to build community connections and connect the curriculum to the local context.



Students

- Students in focus groups were aware of the economic vulnerability of their communities, with personal experience of parents losing jobs and needing to move away to find work.
- Vocational rather than academic pathways are more likely to be seen as achievable for students in rural and regional schools compared with students in metropolitan schools

Read the report

The *Rural and Regional Education Project: Final Report* was released 7 July 2023, and provided practical policy advice that will make a real difference to educational outcomes for students in rural and regional communities.

Ensuring that students in rural and regional communities receive the same education as city-based students will require the cooperation of both federal and state governments, and a refusal to accept any situation in which a student's postcode determines their educational opportunities and outcomes.

Beswick, K., Roberts, P., Eacott, S., Holden, R., Alonzo, D., Downes, N., Mularczyk, L., Loughland, T., Cridge, S., Corbyn, E., & Bedford, M. (2022). [*Rural and Regional Research Education Project: Final report*](#). Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute for Education and School of Education.



NSW Ambassador Schools Research Centre



Project
commenced
2022

Ensuring access to equitable high-quality education for all students is the key to Australia's future. But what makes a school a high-performing school?

About the project

The NSW Department of Education created the Ambassador Schools program in 2021 as part of its School Success Model. Ten diverse and high-performing NSW public schools were chosen as 'Ambassador Schools' to take part in a study to understand their effective practices and identify how they could be shared with other NSW public schools.

Funded by the NSW Department of Education, the Ambassador Schools Research Centre (ASRC) was created to carry out this study. We worked in partnership with the University of Canberra and Charles Sturt University to develop a comprehensive and rigorous research base about the practices of Ambassador Schools that have had the greatest impact on student achievement in their unique context.

We worked with principals, teachers, students, and caregivers from 26 schools – including the ten Ambassador Schools – to collect and synthesise interview, focus group, survey, classroom observation, and shadowing data. We also conducted a review of research literature on effective teaching and learning and leadership practices so that we could build upon what is already known about effective practices and identify what is distinctive about how these practices were implemented in Ambassador Schools that made them so effective.

Key findings

We discovered ten specific teaching and learning practices that contribute to the success of the Ambassador Schools.

Key practices of Ambassador Schools

Instructional support & leadership	Focus on student wellbeing
Growth orientation	Data-informed practice
High expectations	Explicit teaching
Positive teacher/student relationships	Classroom management
Whole school vision/approaches	Teacher & student agency

We found that these practices are connected to enabling conditions that exist within the schools, and are closely tied to school context and culture.

Importantly, these practices are found in many schools. Their effectiveness is greatest when they are implemented across the whole school in a consistent and coherent way in the context of the enabling conditions.

Read the report

The *Final Report, Stage 1, Ambassador Schools Research Centre* was released November 2023. As an important and ground-breaking investment by the NSW Department of Education to enhance educational outcomes for all students in NSW public schools, the report's insights will be used to inform the support provided to schools across the state.

The [Ambassador Schools Research Summary report](#) and the [Literature review: Ambassador Schools research program](#) are available on the NSW Department of Education website.

Beswick, K., MacDonald, A., Roberts, P., Anson, D.W.J., Bartos, K., Bedford, M., Brown, M., David, K., Deehan, H., Durksen, T., Fenton, A., Grover, P., Holden, R., Lee, P., Loughland, T., Martin, K., Mularczyk, L., Pino-Pasternak, D., Tyagi, S., Winslade, M., Zhou, F. (2022). [Final Report, Stage 1, Ambassador Schools Research Centre](#). UNSW, Sydney.



Country Universities Centre Program Evaluation



Project
commenced
2022

Australians in regional areas participate in higher education at half the rate of people in metropolitan areas.⁷ The Country Universities Centre (CUC) program was created to provide quality higher education opportunities for students in regional, rural, and remote areas. It's been ten years since the program started – is it effective?

About the project

The NSW Government supported establishment of Country Universities Centres in NSW, and recently allocated an \$8 million grant to the CUC program to establish new centres in regional locations. An evaluation of the NSW CUCs was required as part of this grant, and we partnered with the Social Policy Research Centre to conduct an independent evaluation to assess the program outcomes and see whether its aims have been met.

Our evaluation was conducted March 2022-December 2023, and involved the assessment of the CUCs currently operating in NSW. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, with a cost efficiency evaluation component. We sourced data primarily from CUC stakeholders, and used secondary data from datasets held by CUC Central and the ten CUCs, and external sources like ABS regional demographic data. This included:

- Quantitative data in the form of annual reports, audited financial statements, information from the CUC registered client database, and survey data.
- Qualitative data, including interviews and focus groups conducted with CUC staff, CUC students, local high school staff, and local community stakeholders including CUC Board members, local elected representatives, and employers.
- Observations from site visits at each of the CUCs, each taking 2-4 days.

Key findings

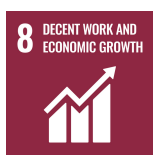
We found that CUCs are helping people who would otherwise likely struggle to engage in, and complete, university study without support.

- CUC's offer 616 unique courses at 171 universities and other institutions across Australia and the world, and produced 560 graduates 2019-2023.
- CUCs are supporting a diverse range of students: 79% of students identify as female, and 9% of students are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.
- All NSW CUCs have had an upwards trajectory of first-time student registrations over the last five years (2019-2023).
- 89% of CUC students indicated they are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help they received from the CUC (CUC Central, 2023).

Read the report

The *Country Universities Centre Program Evaluation: Final Report* has been submitted to the NSW Department of Education and we anticipate it will be made available in 2024.

Blunden, H., Hoenig, J., Tani, M., Baker, S., and Beswick, K. (2023). *Country Universities Centre Program Evaluation: Final Report*. Report submitted.



Ongoing projects

Reasonable adjustments to maths for students with intellectual disabilities

Reasonable adjustments to secondary mathematics – parents want it, students need it, the Australian law requires it – but how do teachers achieve it?

The aim of this project is to find ways to adjust, teach, and assess secondary mathematics for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The significance of this study is in solving a problem facing teachers who are required by law to teach mathematics without evidence informed approaches.



We've partnered with the University of Queensland and the University of Tasmania for this research project, with the project being administered by University of Queensland. Expected outcomes are an evidence-base for reasonable adjustments to secondary mathematics and approaches and strategies for teachers for inclusive practices. If ways for teaching year-level mathematics to learners with intellectual disability are developed, many more students may benefit.

The objectives of this three year Australian Research Council funded Linkage project (LP200300740) are to:

- Conceptualise 'reasonable adjustment' of learning, teaching, and assessment of mathematics for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities such as Down syndrome and Autism through integrating teacher perceptions and practices with legal definitions.
- Identify the attitudes, views, intentions, and behaviours of teachers as well as practices that enable or limit the application of Year Level Adjusted Curriculum (YLAC) in mathematics for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Co-design and determine the effects of a whole-of-department teacher professional learning program regarding reasonable adjustments in secondary mathematics for students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities on:
 - teacher beliefs and classroom practices
 - student behaviour for learning and outcomes with respect to YLAC mathematics performance

Watch for preliminary findings in the second half of 2024.

Housing Affordability & the Teacher Shortage (HATS)



On a global scale, education systems are struggling to staff schools. While there are many factors that impact the attractiveness of teaching as a profession, one under-explored issue is how the affordability of housing within commuting distance to schools impacts staffing.



The objective of this research is to develop an improved and expanded data-driven approach to the relations between housing affordability and teaching salaries. With new teacher particularly vulnerable to housing cost pressures, this work is crucial to developing important failsafe mechanisms to ensure the equitable provision of schooling irrespective of postcode.



Building data infrastructure

Where you live or what your parents do should not determine your educational outcomes - but research consistently shows that it does.

This project, undertaken in collaboration with the City Futures Research Centre, focuses on building data infrastructure that links education data, social/community data, and housing data to study the provision of education over time.

We are particularly interested in the differentiation of provision and variance of outcomes within and across communities. This work is fundamental for informing policy making and reforms targeting factors outside the school gates and influential for schools and system looking to establish new schools or campuses.



Improving school systems through systemic design



Schools are seen as the catalyst for more equitable and inclusive societies, and many reforms target improving schools and educators to improve student outcomes. But no school is an island: the full social and economic potential of schooling cannot be harnessed through a singular focus on schools and educators.



This project concerns the development of systemic design principles as a genesis for assessing the relevant costs and benefits of initiatives for government and system designers. This work is crucial for the provision of a more principled, and data-driven, way of prioritising the competing demands on public investment in education.



Steiner and Montessori School Provision Dashboard

This collaborative project with the City Futures Research Centre and industry partners Steiner Education Australia, Montessori Schools and Centres Australia, and Montessori Australia, built the [Alternative School Providers Dashboard](#): an interactive map of the provision of Steiner and Montessori schools throughout Australia. Users can search for schools and explore key features such as enrolment and number of staff.



Our publications

Peer-reviewed journal articles

Beswick K (2023). Segregating students in NSW is exacerbating inequities and damaging achievement: We need to change the public discourse. *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, 156, pp. 146 - 153.

royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/156-1-F-20-Beswick.pdf

Eacott S (2023). The principled principal: the case of Australian Steiner schools.

International Journal of Educational Management. doi.org/10.1108/ijem-10-2022-0411

Eacott, S. (2023). Schooling for equitable excellence: principles of systemic design.

Journal of Educational Administration, 61(3), 304-321. doi.org/10.1108/JEA-10-2022-0173

Eacott, S. (2023). The systemic implications of housing affordability for the teacher shortage: the case of New South Wales, Australia. *The Australian Educational Researcher*.

doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00621-z

Eacott, S., & Wainer, C. (2023). Schooling on the margins: the problems and possibilities of Montessori schools in Australia. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 1-16.

doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2023.2189228

Lee, J.-S. & Stacey, M. (2023). Fairness perceptions of educational inequality: The effects of self-interest and neoliberal orientations. *The Australian Educational Researcher*.

doi.org/10.1007/s13384-023-00636-6

Lee, J.-S., Lee, J., & Stacey, M. (2023). Attributions for underachievement among students experiencing disadvantage and support for public assistance to them. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 00, 1–19.

doi.org/10.1002/AJS4.266

Lee, J., Lee, J.-S., & Ellis, N. (2023). Public opinion about national large-scale student assessment: A case of NAPLAN. *Educational Assessment*, 28:3, 137–155.

doi.org/10.1080/10627197.2023.2215977

Lee, J., Lee, J.-S., & Lawton, J. (2022). Cognitive mechanisms for the formation of public perception about national testing: A case of NAPLAN in Australia. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 34, 427–457.

doi.org/10.1007/s11092-022-09398-8

Strnadová, I., Dowse, L., Lowe, K., Danker, J., Classen, S. A., Tso, M., & Xavier, A. (2023).

Primary to high school transition planning for students with disability: A systematic review.

International Journal of Educational Research. doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102188

Commissioned reports

Beswick, K., MacDonald, A., Roberts, P., Anson, D.W.J., Bartos, K., Bedford, M., Brown, M., David, K., Deehan, H., Durksen, T., Fenton, A., Grover, P., Holden, R., Lee, P., Loughland, T., Martin, K., Mularczyk, L., Pino-Pasternak, D., Tyagi, S., Winslade, M., Zhou, F. (2022). [*Final Report, Stage 1, Ambassador Schools Research Centre*](#). UNSW, Sydney.

Beswick, K., Roberts, P., Eacott, S., Holden, R., Alonzo, D., Downes, N., Mularczyk, L., Loughland, T., Cridge, S., Corbyn, E., & Bedford, M. (2022). [*Rural and Regional Research Education Project: Final report*](#). Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute for Education and School of Education.

Blunden, H., Hoenig, J., Tani, M., Baker, S., and Beswick, K. (2023). *Country Universities Centre Program Evaluation: Final Report*. Report submitted.

Conference presentations

Eacott S (2023, 27-30 November). *Housing and transport affordability for school staff and its impact on systemic workforce planning* [Conference presentation]. Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Eacott S (2023, 27-30 November). *Systemic design for equitable excellence: testing the New South Wales context* [Conference presentation]. Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Research Briefs

New for 2023, our Research Brief series delivers accessible summaries of recent research that responds to the questions of policymakers and the general public. All research reported is conducted by Institute-affiliated researchers.

Lee, J. (2023). "[*NSW public opinion about NAPLAN \(No 2023.1\)*](#)." Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute for Education.

Eacott, S. (2023). "[*Housing affordability and teacher salaries \(No 2023.2\)*](#)." Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute for Education.

Beswick, K. (2023). "[*Linking schools and their communities \(No. 2023.3\)*](#)." Sydney: UNSW Gonski Institute for Education.

Our partners



Our people

2023 Advisory Board

We are guided by an Advisory Board that includes senior members of the UNSW Sydney community, leaders of industry, business, government and philanthropy, and school practitioners and leaders.



Ian Narev

Chair, Gonski Institute for Education Advisory Board

Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer, SEEK



Professor Claire Annesley

Dean, Arts, Design and Architecture, UNSW Sydney



Professor Kim Beswick

Director, Gonski Institute for Education

Head of School, School of Education, UNSW Sydney



John Bush

Head, School Age Learning, Paul Ramsay Foundation



Professor Scott Eacott

Deputy Director, Gonski Institute for Education

Professor of Educational Leadership, UNSW Sydney



Malcolm Elliot

Fellow, Australian Council for School Leadership



**Professor Sarah
Maddison**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Education & Student
Experience, UNSW Sydney



Chris Shaw

Director Educational
Leadership, Mooki
Principals Network, Rural
North School Performance
Directorate, NSW
Department of Education



Mary Teague

Director (Access, Equity &
Inclusion), UNSW Sydney



Danielle Toon

Director of Evidence for
Learning, Social Ventures
Australia



Dr John Vallance

Deputy Chair, Gonski
Institute for Education
Advisory Board

State Librarian and Chief
Executive, State Library of
New South Wales



**Dr Meera
Varadharajan**

Research Fellow, Centre
for Social Impact, UNSW
Sydney



**Associate Professor
Bruce Watson**

Pro Vice-Chancellor
Inclusion, UNSW Sydney



Eddie Woo

Leader, Mathematics
Growth Team, NSW
Department of Education

Professor of Practice,
Sydney School of
Education & Social Work,
University of Sydney

Our students

Doctor of Education (EdD) program

We partnered with UNSW Sydney to create the Doctor of Education (EdD) program for education professionals working in schools and systems. Students are co-taught by world-class researchers conducting high-impact work and highly experienced educational leaders, and receive rigorous scholarly training in a range of research methodologies, and conduct high-quality research that has a powerful and lasting impact on research, policy, and professional practice.

The first intake of the EdD program was in 2019, and there are currently 58 students enrolled in the program. Some of our students' abstracts are highlighted below.

Parents from refugee backgrounds' involvement in and perceptions of special education provision in New South Wales public high schools: Four stories

Research on the benefits of parent involvement in education is abundant. These benefits are recognised nationally and at state policy level in New South Wales schools, where the present study is set. The Disability Standards for Education, 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) take it further by mandating parent involvement for students with disability. Despite this commitment, evidence suggests that schools are 'struggling' to meet the needs of students from refugee backgrounds and involve their parents in the types of partnerships articulated in these policies (Watkins, et al., 2018).

Whilst refugee communities are different across groups in society, it is well documented that refugee students and their families have distinct needs. Notably, these families must additionally navigate a challenging special education system. There is incredible complexity around the provision of special education for these students and their families, which is made more complex by the lack of related information on it. A problem arising from this lacuna is an incomplete understanding of the lived experiences of these parents at various phases of the special education continuum.

In response, this qualitative phenomenological study used an intersectional lens to explore ways that four refugee parents with children with diagnosed disabilities were involved in their children's education. Using in-depth interviews, it also considered how schools implemented mandates to involve them in decision-making processes. Preliminary findings indicate that parent involvement depends on their understanding of Australian education systems, as well as how they perceive their roles within them. The need for schools to address the intersection

of disability and refugee identities through improved communication practices that give voice to parents and acknowledge their past experiences was also found.

Enacting culturally nourishing schooling: understanding Country, developing relational responsiveness and transforming practice

What: How does participation in sustained Aboriginal-led professional learning develop teachers' critical consciousness and does it help them enact culturally nourishing pedagogies and practices?

Where and how: This qualitative research study took place in two schools, one urban school in inner Sydney, and one regional school in suburban Wollongong. The teachers participated in five strategies over the course of a year (or two years because of covid) with the aim of them deepening their understanding of the local Aboriginal community and the meaning of Country; the western model of schooling; deficit beliefs in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and relational pedagogies and practices in schools.

Main findings:

1. A deeper understanding of Country and the place of this in the lives of Aboriginal communities can be transformational for both students and teachers. This includes an understanding of kinship systems, spirituality, relationality and the importance of place to the local school context.
2. New understandings of the local community and relationships with community members gave teachers increased confidence to include new pedagogies and practices.
3. The centrality of relationships – with students, families and place – resulted in transforming classroom practices with relationality at the centre.
4. Teachers' ongoing development of critical consciousness and understanding of systemic oppressions and structural injustice and the ways these affect the lives of their Aboriginal students.

These findings are a result of multiple interviews and informal conversations with ten teachers and Aboriginal staff, plus participation in professional learning conversations and workshops over the course of two and a half years. Teachers were able to shift their understanding of the ways in which building meaningful relationships with their students and their students' families is key to improving the school experience of Aboriginal students. When combined with ongoing development of critical consciousness and commitment to understanding Country, we can see clear evidence of changed classroom practices, deeper relationships with students, and more connection with their families and the local community.

Enablers and barriers of transition to primary school for students with developmental disabilities: Perspectives of parents, early childhood teachers, and primary school teachers

The number of students with disabilities transitioning to primary schools in NSW has significantly increased over the past 20 years. This has resulted in a societal shift in awareness and understanding of inclusive ideologies, and the analogous value of participation, access, and engagement in education for all students. The purpose of the current study was to understand the transition to primary school for students with developmental disabilities through the investigation of the critical interface with parents, early childhood, and primary school teachers. A qualitative approach comprising of semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers of students transitioning to primary school was employed. Thematic analysis revealed the enablers and barriers that impact the success of the transition to primary school for students with disabilities. The results also highlighted the complexity of this critical point in time for a student with a disability. Despite recommended legislation, policy, and frameworks, a lack of integration was evident, and parents' and teachers' experiences reflected a hybrid of inconsistent and substandard transition practices and processes. The results were used to design recommendations to improve transition processes and practices. These include cross-sector collaboration, funding models that are needs-based, disability specific professional development for teachers, and education programs to support parent capacity and involvement.

How innovative and traditional schools, coped with the educational disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

I focused on the educational challenges and opportunities experienced by school principals and teachers during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 and the changes to principal leadership and teacher pedagogy during this time. I investigated six New South Wales government secondary schools and interviewed the principal and five teachers from each school and analysed school documents. Three of the schools were identified as innovative and three as traditional or regular schools, where the criteria for innovativeness/regularity was a feature of this research developed from the literature. Each innovative school was paired with a similar sized regular school located in the same demographic area.

For many students, interrupted schooling and its associated inequities are far from unprecedented. Chronic health issues, suspensions, natural disasters, housing insecurity and migration all impact on student learning, and many education systems have been unable to accommodate even these small-scale schooling disruptions effectively. So, while the COVID-19 disruption is frequently described as unprecedented, it is probably more accurate to characterise the pandemic as all too preceded.

My research found that innovative schools successfully dealt with educational disruption when compared to their traditional counterparts and further I provide five recommendations for

teachers, principals, and systems in the areas of technology, pedagogy and professional learning, communication, principal leadership, and student wellbeing, that could future proof schools experiencing educational disruption.

Philanthropy and equity in NSW rural schools

For most NSW Public school leaders, teachers and students in NSW, Philanthropy is seen as something that sits outside the school gates, particularly in Rural Schools (Anderson & White, 2011). Yet, Philanthropy is highlighted as one way to bridge the 'Equity' gap that exists in rural education and manifests in underachievement for rural student to meet in some cases the minimum outcomes of educational outcomes. Internationally and nationally philanthropy has been identified as playing inside the school gates toward addressing equity as it manifested and evidenced in the lower achievement of learning outcomes for students who attend rural schools in NSW (NSW Department of Education and Communities et al., 2020).

Through 4 case studies of school leaders in public primary/secondary schools from rural NSW, who were recipients of philanthropic support, and alongside interviews, of educational philanthropic organisations and their CEOs/representatives, in which focussed questions on understanding, articulating, and enlivening equity in this qualitative research project.

The multi perspectives in understanding the notion of what equity is and how it is represented and how it addressed was unclear, in purpose and intended outcome. What was also discovered is the motive and understanding of equity, from both schools and philanthropic support has some misalignment and inconsistencies in purpose and intended outcome.

2023 Student Meetup

On 29 July 2023, we held an on-campus meetup for our Doctor of Education (EdD) students. The keynote address was presented by Dr Sheridan Dudley, who is the first graduate of the program. Entitled *Politicians as policy makers in large scale education system reform: Research findings and reflections on my EdD journey*, it was an especially uplifting experience for all who attended.



Dr Sheridan Dudley giving her keynote address at the EdD student meetup.

Gonski Summer Vacation Scholarship Program

We recently established the Gonski Summer Vacation Scholarship Program: a unique mentoring opportunity for promising Education researchers.

Designed for undergraduate and honours students, the program runs full time for six weeks during the UNSW Sydney summer term. As the perfect stepping stone for students considering a higher degree research program in Education, awardees join a small collaborative research project and learn skills such as how to:

- Accurately define research objectives and scope
- Conduct literature surveys
- Establish research methodology
- Prepare a research plan
- Prepare research findings for a final report
- Publish research findings in a peer-reviewed journal

The inaugural program awarded a scholarship to a student who exhibited a clear passion for educational equity and furthering their research skills. We look forward to sharing the outcomes of their project.



Work with us

A quality education has the power to do much more than cultivate a productive economy: it is the lever that lifts vulnerable young people out of disadvantage and opens up a world of opportunity.

We believe that every student deserves a high-quality education. There is a lot of yet to be done to address inequality in Australian education – and you can help us do it. [Email us](#) if these opportunities resonate with you.



Research partnerships

Partner with us to conduct research, test potential solutions, and contribute to policy. We work with governments, school systems, schools, educators, community groups, parent associations, and organisations to design targeted and tailored research projects.



Research collaborations

We forge strong relationships with highly motivated and talented researchers who believe in our mission and contribute to furthering our cause. We work to broaden our networks for knowledge sharing and collaboration to enact systemic change in education equity.



Public presentations

Invite one of our inspiring speakers to your event to share their experience and expertise.



Educational resources

Progress your career and revitalise your school with our research-based and practical professional learning offerings. We offer both short workshops and degree programs in Educational Leadership, including the Doctor of Education program.



Support us

We invite you to partner with us to ensure all Australian students receive a quality education. By donating to the Gonski Institute for Education, you can empower us to create opportunities that break cycles of disadvantage.

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