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Project Title 10: Mapping comprehensive sexual education across Australia: Policy, curricular documentation and departmental framing.

Supervisory team: Dr. Jacqueline Ullman

Contact information for Supervisor:
Dr. Jacqueline Ullman (02) 4736 0270 j.ullman@uws.edu.au

Project Description

The Australian educational landscape has undergone a structural shift in recent years in the move from state and territory based syllabus documents to a new, national curriculum which, to date, some states and territories have taken up without adjustments and other states and territories have amended to suit state-based stakeholders and localised needs. This project is particularly concerned with the Health and Physical Education (HPE) key learning area and, more specifically, K-12 education related to sexuality, sexual health, relationships and families. Of key interest are both the current (2014) framing of these topics by each state and territory as presented publicly through current policy, syllabi and state-branded curriculum support documents, as well as any available information on state-based amendments in light of the new national curriculum for 2015-onwards (e.g. full syllabus revisions or ‘bridging plans’).

This project extends the supervisory team’s analysis of departmental policy, syllabus and curriculum support resources in the state of New South Wales and will provide a set of document resources to assist in national ‘mapping.’ The collection of this information has great import, in part due to the influence of school-based comprehensive sexual education on increasing students’ protective behaviours, awareness and knowledge around STI prevention, and delaying sexual behaviour. This has special significance in light of recent increases in sexually-transmitted infections at the same time that the proportion of sexually active teenagers has increased in Australia. Furthermore, in line with the social sustainability cross-curricular focus area of the Australian National Curriculum, HPE curriculum content is meant to be inclusive of diverse family structures and relationships - an examination of state and territory documentation will provide evidence of how each locality has met this requirement.

This internship will be situated within the Equity Strand of the Centre for Educational Research (School of Education), given centre membership of the supervisory team.
Project Aims

This project has two distinct aims:

1. To introduce the successful student to research culture, specifically with regards to online document searches, organisation and preliminary analysis and,
2. To generate an annotated database of policies, syllabus documentation and curricular resources related to sexual education for each state and territory of Australia.

Project Methods

The successful student will conduct online searches through state/territory Department(s) of Education to locate existing curricular documentation for the Health and Physical Education key learning area (referred to as ‘PDHPE’ in NSW), both in current (2014) use and for use 2015 onwards, where applicable. Searches will focus on content related to comprehensive sexual education (STIs, relationships, sexual health) and diversity with regards to sexuality and gender expression, highlighting states’ and territories’ framing of these issues in terms of articulated curriculum content, policy, constraints, and available/suggested resources.

The Student will form a database of:

1. Current syllabus documents (primary, secondary and senior secondary);
2. Current policy related to content within comprehensive sexual education, including sexual and gender diversity and the support of diverse students (e.g. ‘Controversial Issues in Schools’ policy in NSW; ‘Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools’ policy in VIC); and,
3. Current curriculum support documents linked to departmental sites (e.g. sample lesson plans or other resources provided by the state/territory).

Further the student will:

1. Engage in a critical reading of the documents that they locate, keeping an electronic log with daily findings, key excerpts of interest and critical responses to the material;
2. Use the NVivo software package for document organisation, annotation and preliminary analysis;
3. Create an Excel spreadsheet for each state/territory identifying located documents by title and their URL source; and,

Use Dropbox for document storage and ongoing file sharing with the project’s supervisory team.
Opportunities for Skill Development

This skill set will support future research study at either the Honours or HDR level, as well as provide an introduction to research culture as an important facet of academic employment. The student will be provided with an NVivo-equipped computer and workspace on Bankstown Campus.

Students are required to have the following skills to apply

The successful student will have strong computer literacy skills, particularly with regards to using Microsoft Word, Excel and Adobe (for annotating/highlighting .pdf documents), and be able to confidently navigate a Windows-based computer. The successful student will also need to have good online research and formal communication skills. An interest in education, particularly in the area of health and physical education, as well as an interest in teaching for social justice and equity, will be strong asset. Training will be provided in the basics of using NVivo and Dropbox for document organisation.
Project Title 11: Elucidating the role of parents and teachers in promoting youth school engagement.

Supervisory team: Dr Danielle Tracey; Dr Katrina Barker

Contact information for Supervisor:
Dr Danielle Tracey (02) 9772 6105 d.tracey@uws.edu.au

Project Description

It is well recognised that a young person's engagement with school is significantly related to their long-term educational and occupational outcomes. Students who are engaged with their schooling perform better academically, exhibit higher school completion rates and obtain better jobs. This predicates the importance of enhancing school engagement for disadvantaged youth in order to improve life opportunities.

The current project builds on the work of a three year ARC-Linkage project Staying On, on which Dr Barker is a Chief Investigator. In the study, 1966 students responded to an annual survey over a three year period that included psychometric scales measuring their levels of engagement. The project’s data analyses utilising Structural Equation Modelling revealed that teachers and parents were instrumental to influencing young people’s decisions to either stay on or leave. What we don’t know however, was what is it about these relationships with teachers and parents that render young people liable to either leave school early or stay on.

The current project seeks to interrogate the extensive longitudinal narrative interview data available for 55 students over a three year period where their engagement with schooling either increased (n= 23), decreased (n= 19), or remained unchanged (n= 13). This rich data set has the potential to inform future research and practice by identifying how parents and teachers can effectively enhance school engagement, and the changing nature of this role across the developmental period of adolescence.

The aims of the project align with the key research areas of the School of Education as it seeks to optimize educational engagement and participation, and address issues of equity for disadvantaged young people. The student will be based at Bankstown campus.

Project Aims

The project aims to capitalize on the extensive field work that has taken place and ensure that knowledge and practice is advanced through the analysis and dissemination of the study data.

The project aims to:

1. Construct a literature review depicting the influence that teachers and parents
have on the school engagement of youth. This will include a review of empirical investigations, intervention programs and theoretical models.

2. Interrogate the extensive qualitative data available to elucidate how parents and teachers do and can positively impact upon young people’s school engagement. Importantly, of the 55 students who were interviewed over a three-year period, survey results indicate that 23 (or 42 percent) of these 55 students became more engaged over the three years, for 13 (24 percent) there was no substantial change, and for the remaining 19 (34 percent), their responses to the survey indicate that they became less engaged over time. These differential journeys provide an opportunity to investigate what happens over time for students with different trajectories of school engagement.

3. Introduce the student to the strong research environment in the School of Education and cultivate their research skills. In particular the student will be introduced to NVivo, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and thematic analysis (Langridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009) to facilitate them to identify patterns and themes of patterns. It provides an opportunity for them to demonstrate their research skill and possibly foster further interest in research.

**Project Methods**

The student will be based at Bankstown campus within the School of Education where there is a depth of research expertise, research resources, productivity and dissemination. The student will have access to both the UWS library and the NVivo project data file in order to accomplish the aims and specific tasks of the proposed project.

**Schedule of work:**

**Week 1 to 3:** Construction of a comprehensive literature review about the role of parents and teachers in influencing the school engagement of youth. This will include a review of key empirical studies published in scholarly databases, (e.g. PsychInfo, ERIC), intervention programs and theory, in order to identify key drivers of engagement, the role of parents and teachers, and the differential impact as young people move through adolescence.

**Week 4 to 8:** The objective for our RA is to examine the NVivo coded Teacher and Parent interactions with the purpose to identify key aspects of the relationship that could be responsible for the young person’s decision to leave or stay. The key research questions to be examined using the narrative interview data are:

How do teachers and/or parents influence young people to become more engaged with school over time? (using the interview data for the students who changed their minds about wanting to leave school early) and How do teachers and/or parents influence other young people to become more disengaged with school over time.
(drawing upon interview data for students who were initially disengaged with school in 2009 but become more disengaged by 2011). We would also request that they similarly look at these interactions for the 13 disengaged participants whose opinion remained stable across three years. Is there an explanation for why these young people who were identified as disengaged at the commencement of the study remained disengaged for three years of their High School?

Opportunities for Skill Development

Through completion of the set tasks, the student has the opportunity to develop the following skills:

1. literature review
2. writing style
3. APA 6th Edition referencing
4. working in NVivo software
5. conducting qualitative analysis through their engagement with constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis.
6. Develop an understanding of the advantages of longitudinal narrative interviews as a methodology for research.

The supervisors will support the development of these skills through demonstration, modelling, regular feedback sessions, and setting self-directed learning tasks.

Students are required to have the following skills to apply

Students in their final year of an Education or Psychology degree would be well suited to the project given their degree would have provided them with expertise to conduct the literature search, referencing and some knowledge already of factors that influence a young person’s engagement with learning/school. We are seeking a student with strong verbal and written communication skills who is able to take initiative and complete self-directed learning. They must have demonstrated skill in conducting key word searches in research databases, and writing a literature review with APA 6th edition referencing. A basic understanding of qualitative research analyses is desirable, however, students will be provided with training and support to develop these skills.
Project Title 12: Using Mobile Applications (Apps) in Teacher Education Programs

Supervisory team: Dr Maree Skillen; Dr Catherine Attard

Contact information for Supervisor:
Dr Maree Skillen  (02) 9772 6174  m.skillen@uws.edu.au

Project Description

New learning technologies have brought a series of additional challenges to pre-service teachers and University teacher educators. Whilst some Schools are moving towards implementing 1:1 technology initiatives and BYOD programs, others are supporting classroom learning experiences through the purchase of mobile devices including iPads and tablets. Given the original game-based nature of mobile devices they have over time attracted interest from the educational community, and are used to engage learners in tasks that are quite often open-ended, and involve problem-solving. Through the use of mobile devices learning opportunities are becoming more interactive and can promote collaboration between learners in different ways. Cognitive and affective processes are enhanced through the interactive capacities of devices and applications. By using mobile devices as a tool in the classroom, new experiences are provided for both the teacher and student. Pre-service teachers need to be familiar and prepared to support traditional methods of teaching with the integration of appropriate and effective uses of technology which may include mobile devices and software applications (Apps). This means that teacher education courses need to integrate and support students to develop their awareness, understanding and skills of using technology, and appropriate selection of mobile applications to supplement their classroom teaching and the learning experiences for students.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the use and relevance of mobile applications (Apps) that are being incorporated into teacher education programs. The incorporation of mobile applications (Apps) into the delivery of unit content to support the blended learning is a focus that the University of Western Sydney has adopted. This study will provide some background on the uptake of mobile applications within course units, the types and focus of Apps being selected by educators, and how these Apps are used in teacher education courses to support the knowledge and skills of pre-service teachers.

Project Aims

The aims of the research study will involve the student by:

- working on and completing a literature review under guidance; and,
- assisting in the development and construction of survey instruments, questionnaires, and interview questions.
Project Methods

**Methods Used to Conduct the Research**

A mixed methodology approach will be utilised to gather data for this research study. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative measures is important in supporting the research process and data analysis. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.14) support this stating that “the goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either of these approaches but to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies”.

*Instrumentation:* The instrumentation for this study will consist of curriculum materials, supported by a variety of mobile applications to be used with mobile devices including iPads.

*Quantitative* measures will include questionnaires to survey teaching staff on the mobile applications that they incorporate into their course unit. *Qualitative* techniques will include online survey evaluations; and, a post-questionnaire. Apps will be evaluated using an online tool developed for the purposes of this study.

**Student Engagement in the Process**

The student will undertake a comprehensive literature review. This will involve them being engaged in the research and compilation of relevant sources to be used in the writing of a comprehensive literature review. The student will work under guidance on the development of survey and questionnaire tools. These tools will be published and accessed online to gather responses from participants, as part of a future research project that this study will link with.

**Opportunities for Skill Development**

The student will:

1. Develop skills in the construction of surveys, questionnaires, and interview questions to be used as
2. Qualitative and quantitative measures for gathering data.
3. Develop an awareness of, and skills in, the use of online resources useful for publishing surveys and questionnaires.
4. Have the opportunity to develop and refine their research skills to support the writing of literature reviews, reports and articles for publication.
5. Be involved with the proof reading and preparation of journal articles for publication.

The student will develop a greater awareness of the use of mobile applications (Apps) in teacher education courses. They will develop their knowledge about the contribution Apps can make to the learning and teaching environment with pre-service teachers. An awareness and appreciation will be developed for effective ways to use and integrate Apps into different learning and teaching situations with pre-service teachers.
Students are required to have the following skills to apply

The student will need to have the following skills to support them in being a successful member of this project team:

1. Strong skills in ICT with particular emphasis on the setup and management of online survey instruments, and the ability to competently use Microsoft applications.
2. Competent in completing online research to support a review of literature for the area of study.
3. Good time management and organisational skills.
4. Good oral/written communication and interpersonal skills.
5. Good literacy skills to support the development of survey instruments, and writing of reports for publication.

A third year student or someone in 1st or 2nd year who is competent and has highly developed ICT and research skills is encouraged to apply. The successful applicant will be supported by experienced researchers to assist them in their skill development and application for a postgraduate research degree, or to complete a research unit at undergraduate level in readiness for possible postgraduate study.

Students applying for this project should have an interest in mobile technologies and their application to teaching and learning across a range of subject areas.