



Engaging Students During the Early Years of Secondary School: A Scalable and Sustainable Teacher Professional Learning Intervention

The Institute of Positive Psychology & Education (IPPE) at Australian Catholic University is undertaking a research project that focuses on how teachers can increase the engagement of early secondary school students from low socioeconomic status areas in order to improve their achievement at school.

Research tells us that education is a powerful enabler for improving life chances. Students who do well in school are more likely to go on to a successful career and financial security. In contrast, those performing poorly in school are more likely to drop out and become unemployed. The greatest decreases in students' interest and effort occur when they transition into secondary school, with students from low socioeconomic communities at greatest risk of disengagement.

Teachers have been identified as having the capacity to strongly influence students' motivation, engagement, and achievement. The way that teachers motivate students from their first year at secondary school to engage with the school community and curriculum represents a critical point of leverage for producing positive change in students. Students who are actively connected with school tend to perform better academically and are more likely to complete their high

school education. Providing students with choices and rationales about the activities they complete during a lesson enhances their engagement with the topic.

When compared with their peers from wealthier schools, students from low SES areas are less engaged and thus more likely to underachieve in significant school subjects, including mathematics and physical education (PE). Notably, low SES students score lower on standardised mathematics tests and are less physically active. Not only do these students have a bleaker employment outlook, this would suggest that they are also not achieving the PE learning outcome of developing lifelong physical activity habits.

The study will consist of an observation and intervention phase. During Phase I researchers will conduct an observational study across one year that will identify teachers' motivational behaviours that have the greatest impact on student engagement and achievement. In Phase II researchers will develop and test the effectiveness of a web-based intervention designed to support teachers' implementation of these behaviours in everyday practice. The project also aims to increase the impact of the intervention through a sustainable and accessible design that enables dissemination on a national scale.



Project Title: Engaging Students During the Early Years of Secondary School: A Scalable and Sustainable Teacher Professional Learning Intervention

Start Date: 1 January 2016

End Date: 31 December 2019

Funding Body: Australian Research Council Discovery Project

Contact: Chris.Lonsdale@acu.edu.au