



Research.Net

Connecting Researchers in Education and Social Work

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Knowledge Society Needs Discipline

What children learn in schools has provided much grist for the media mill in recent years – sensationalized debates about whether or not school children should learn “the basics”, the history wars around different views of Australian colonialism, and the waning interest in learning maths and science are all issues that have rung alarm bells with parents, government and industry.



Creating scientists of the future - schooling needs to identify and develop disciplinary teaching knowledge.

Photo above: courtesy Commack Public Library, N.Y.; Right: DPM, USyd.

Beyond the rhetoric, a more fundamental concern, which is the subject of a major ARC Discovery project led by Professor Peter Freebody, is whether students are learning and able to build upon conceptual knowledge in specific subject areas or discipline.

Disciplinary, Knowledge and Schooling, is a \$360,000 three-year project in collaboration with Professor Jim Martin and Dr Karl Maton from the Faculty of Arts which brings a multi-dimensional approach to the study of how discipline specific knowledge is learned and taught in secondary schools.

They contend that education training and research has gained much from more critical social science accounts of how knowledge is constructed but this

has been at the expense of understanding the distinctiveness of curricula domains.

“Topics such as learning, literacy, numeracy, comprehension, memory, motivation and power relations have sidelined problems relating to disciplinary variations” according to Prof. Freebody. “In this environment, many proposed solutions to educational problems have typically left disciplinary knowledge building out of the picture”.

“We’ve seen some important progress in student-centred approaches to learning, but there is a tendency for the focus to be on ‘knowing’ processes and ‘knowers’ attributes’ rather than on forms of knowledge” Freebody said.

The research will look at the real time communication between teachers and students in classrooms in NSW schools to see what knowledge-building processes are reflected in the teacher-student interactions. The focus on biology, history and music disciplines will amass a corpus of lexico-grammatical, non-verbal and other instructional data which the researchers will draw upon to design in-class approaches to discipline-specific pedagogy and communication.

One aim of the project is to compare

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Discipline Study...

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across the disciplines selected to see which features of teaching and learning knowledge are unique and which are cross-disciplinary.

For example, are there commonalities in the ways teachers and students of biology and history negotiate key conceptual knowledge? A large sample of student work will also be collected to analyse how discipline-based concepts and language are learned and redeployed over time – what the researchers refer to as cumulative learning.

By working with teachers and students to develop their discipline-specific communication the researchers hope to provide immediate outcomes for the teaching profession.

The project will offer educators and policy-makers a compelling evidence base for decisions about curriculum, practice, and policy, relevant at a time when Australian educational authorities are developing a national curriculum. These deliverables will include online-accessible examples of annotated classroom instances of discipline-based practice in each of the curriculum areas, along with links to commentaries and research papers.

Overall, Freebody, Martin and Maton see a broader national benefit in laying groundwork for developing teachers who can not only help train more capable future graduates but also help prepare a more discipline-aware population able to engage more effectively in major debates, such as climate change.

While the information age has given more people more access to vast amounts of information, the skills to build and critique knowledge rely on specific, conceptual learning over time, not just generic competence in accessing and re-deploying that information.



Professor Peter Freebody

Postdoc Study to Focus on Childcare Accreditation System



Dr Karin Ishimine is the Faculty's Ewing Postdoctoral Research Scholarship recipient for 2008-2010. Dr Ishimine is using the opportunity to develop a large scale study into how childcare policy is formulated in Australia. This is an extension of her doctoral work on the variation in quality childcare and the limitations of the national Quality Improvement of Accreditation System (QIAS).

US and UK research has demonstrated that the relationship between the early childhood teacher and the child, along with family participation is the best indicator of social and academic outcomes, Dr Ishimine explained. How to integrate this aspect into the accredi-

tation evidence base for the Australian system is what concerns Dr Ishimine.

Unlike systems in the UK and US, there is little empirical, quantitative data on teacher-child processes to enhance the QIAS. Her plan is to develop a large scale, longitudinal survey that will measure a range of variables impacting on process quality in childcare centres.

Meanwhile, Dr Ishimine is a member of the Early Childhood Framework Community as part of DEEWRS overhaul of early childhood. In June, she will travel to the Frank Porter Graham Child Institute, North Carolina University to analyse the US research approaches to childcare policy formulation.

Research on Domestic Violence Policies

Dr Lesley Laing is commencing a research project on domestic violence funded by a NSW Law and Justice Foundation grant. The project grant of \$17,000 will support a 12 month study to interview around 20 women on their experiences in applying for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO).

ADVOs, introduced in NSW 25 years ago, are the cornerstone of the state's preventative response to domestic violence. Dr Laing is investigating how women access this measure and what barriers exist to obtaining an ADVO, particularly for women in vulnerable domestic and financial situations. A report will be available at the end of the project analysing the effectiveness and limitations of the ADVO process.

Dr Margot Rawsthorne recently won funding to evaluate the Aboriginal Women Against Violence (AWAV) Project which will run from 2008-11 in the Liverpool and Cambelltown regions of Sydney. AWAV aims to build community capacity within the Aboriginal communities to prevent and respond to violence against women and children.

The evaluative research will look at the effectiveness of the (AWAV) Project, implemented by the Joan Harrison Support Services for Women, and will focus on both process and outcome over three years: the role of the Steering Committee and the training program for Aboriginal women. Both of these aspects were central to an AWAV strategy of strengthening social capital.

Dr. Rawsthorne's research aims to contribute to knowledge of violence prevention strategies and the role played by social cohesion and social capital. From the evaluation Dr. Rawsthorne envisages further exploration of the relationship between violence and social cohesion and social capital.

A Lesson in Design

Professor Peter Goodyear, co-Director of the CoCo Research Centre, reflects on his recent ALTC Senior Fellowship on teaching as design.

Competition for the university student market has become increasingly creative in the recent past, with bold statements capitalizing on university league table rankings, and Open Day spectacles mobilised to attract students

But where does quality teaching feature in choosing a University? Few university publicity brochures will highlight the creativity of their lesson plans in science, or the collaboration between researchers to come up with innovative assessment tasks.

“Successful universities now and in the future will be those that find ways of attracting, supporting and retaining academics who enjoy their teaching and are good at it”, says Professor Peter Goodyear of the Faculty’s Research Centre on Computer-Supported Learning and Cognition (CoCo). “This means an appreciation of academics as architects of productive learning environments. What I call teaching-as-design”.

Teaching as design was the subject of Prof Goodyear’s recent fellowship with the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC – formerly the Carrick Institute). Over the last 18 months he has been collecting evidence on academics’ task planning and designs, as well as trying to change the culture of how Universities value teaching.

“Faculties regularly review their course offerings and subject content, often due to bureaucratic imperatives. But understanding exactly how teachers prepare and direct outcomes in class is not systematically programmed or followed up”, explains Prof Goodyear.

“Meanwhile, we expect students to spend more time being active in their

learning as we encourage independent thinking. So my concern is to investigate the quality of student activity set by lecturers and tutors”, he adds.

Prof Goodyear’s conception of learning puts the activity at the centre and the tools, people and type of task designed around this. He cautions against the over-emphasis on individual performativity in delivering a lesson and suggests that the focus of teaching work should be on designing the best approach to the problem or issue.

“This might mean a collaborative approach with colleagues in the same Fac-

“The problem is that university teachers and teaching infrastructure planners don’t have a shared language about design”

ulty, or it might involve specialist learning design staff who work across the university”, Prof Goodyear says. “The problem is that university teachers and teaching infrastructure planners don’t have a shared language about design nor many conversations about putting design into practice. So I’ve been working at the micro level collating and building design ideas for rich tasks, and I’ve been working with teaching and learning management to try and bridge the gaps”, he says.

At the micro level, Prof Goodyear gives an example of designing group work strategies. Drawing on theories around cognitive conflict, he explains that a simple task of grouping certain students together to resolve a problem can have quite different outcomes depending on the design approach.

“If you want to use small group discussions as a way of getting students to see that there can be a variety of views on a topic, then it makes sense to poll their views first, and create mixed groups, within each of which you know there will be differences of opinion. Random assignment is rarely the best design strategy”.

Prof Goodyear is a specialist in the application of technology for learning. He observes from his research that a range



of theoretical approaches to learning often combine when technology is the medium for task or lesson delivery. What is important is that the tools, concepts and methods for educational design need to strike a good balance between learnability and usability in Prof Goodyear’s approach. The critical ingredient, however, is creativity and technology-based tasks and tools have the potential for very creative design.

“Using interactive software for example can make for great design, but the real creativity is in making a task context sensitive and being able to draw on other disciplines. For example, in architecture, design relies on understandings of culture and art history as much as mathematics and engineering”, Prof Goodyear explains. “So too in the architecture of teaching, a task might also draw on cultural knowledge as well as on psychology and sociology. The theories and philosophies in these disciplines may also be highly relevant to designing a task”.

In short, designing a good lesson demands creativity and an environment that supports creative, collaborative research and design for teaching.

Over the period of the fellowship, Prof Goodyear has compiled an annotated directory of existing task designs, which is accessible through the ALTC website. He has also developed two ‘pattern books’, after an engineering idea, one focusing on learning through discussion and the other on learning through inquiry. The pattern books aim to induct the reader into ways of thinking about teaching, learning and educational design from an architectural perspective and include sets of patterns that can guide designs.

One book on the research has been recently published - Ellis, R. & Goodyear, P. (2009) Students’ experiences of e-learning in higher education: The ecology of sustainable innovation, (New York, RoutledgeFalmer). Another is forthcoming later this year - Goodyear, P. & Retalis, S. (Eds.) Technology-enhanced learning: Design patterns and pattern languages, (Rotterdam, Sense Publishers).

Professor Peter Goodyear. Photo courtesy of ALTC.



Invitation

Faculty of Education and Social Work Methodological Colloquia - 2009

Bridging and Blending Disciplines of Inquiry: *Approaching Research and Research Approaches in Education and Social Work*

The disciplines informing Education and Social Work face unique challenges in defining the nature and purposes of research. Both areas have applied research approaches from many, often apparently incommensurable, disciplines of inquiry — psychology, sociology, policy studies, anthropology, history, linguistics, and so on.

The increasing complexity of applied research contexts and heightened expectations concerning the role of research in practice and policy formation have led some commentators to advocate for problem-based, outcomes-oriented, cross-disciplinary research, arguing that mixed approaches are better adapted to the study of practical ill-structured problems. Further, collaboration across disciplines of inquiry is considered an important feature of contemporary and future research agenda. Amid these collections of specialist interests, research designs and analyses must maintain scholarly integrity, robustness and trustworthiness.

The Faculty of Education and Social Work invites you to participate in a colloquia series on contemporary research approaches and inter-disciplinarity across the education and social work domains.

Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Presenter</i>	<i>Respondent</i>
26 Mar 09	Action Research	Susan Groundwater Smith & Jude Irwin	Panel Discussion
30 Apr 09	Design Based Research	Peter Reimann	Richard Walker
7 May 09	Arts Informed Inquiry	Adra Cole (Canada)	Gary Knowles (Canada)
28 May 09	Historical Analysis	Tim Allender	Ruth Phillips
25 Jun 09	Classroom Interaction & Ethnomethodology	Peter Freebody	Paul Dufficy
30 July 09	Digital Knowledge & Educational Research	Lina Markauskaite	Panel Discussion
27 Aug 09	Comparative Analysis	Anthony Welch	Nigel Bagnall
24 Sept 09	Policy Analysis	Sue Goodwin	Phillip Jones
29 Oct 09	Quantitative Modelling	Andrew Martin	Gabrielle Meagher
26 Nov 09	Critical Ethnography & Poststructural Narrative Methods	Debra Hayes	Ken Johnston
03 Dec 09	Closing Plenary	Speaker tbc	Panel of presenters

Next Event

DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH

Presenter: Peter Reimann - • - *Respondent:* Richard Walker

30 April 2009

4:30pm-6:30pm (refreshments on level 2 at 4:30pm for 5:00pm start)

Room 351, Education Building (A35), The University of Sydney

More Information

<http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/inquirymethods>

RSVP

Please email the Research Manager (p.brownlee@edfac.usyd.edu.au). Indicate which sessions you will be attending.

Learning in a New Dimension

With the education revolution promising major technological change in schools, Dr Angela Thomas explores the possibilities in virtual learning.

There is a popular perception that children are much more adept at using multimedia software than their teachers, largely because they spend a lot of time playing computer games and communicating via *facebook* rather than face to face.

Amidst the broader debate about how to capitalise on the popularity of wikis and blogs and social networking media like *facebook* and *twitter*, Dr. Angela Thomas from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, and her colleague Prof Len Unsworth (UNE), are working to find out how sophisticated and innovative school children are in using 3D digital software for learning. They've teamed up with the Australian Children's Television Foundation on an ARC Linkage grant to develop an understanding of the pedagogy required to build digital literacy skills and transformative learning using a standard Australian program called Kahootz.

"We're interested in how students develop the capacities and competencies of innovation with digital resources" Dr Thomas explains. "It is these capacities for boundary pushing which have come to be so necessary for the advancement of globalised technological growth".

"Using digital software is not just about entertainment or as a learning tool in itself", says Thomas. "3D modelling software is used in just about every field

of human endeavour, from medicine, forensics, city planning, athletics and agriculture".

"So, what we're interested in is a thoroughly researched multimedia authoring pedagogy to fully realise leadership potential in renovating literacy pedagogy for the digital multimedia age", Thomas explains.

From these lofty aims, the real focus of their project is in the classroom. Both Victoria and more recently the ACT mandated for Kahootz to be the standard 3D multimedia authoring program for all their schools, so much of the work will be done there.

Thomas and Unsworth have begun by collecting samples on what primary

"Children are not just active creators of multimedia... They are developing values, citizenship and ethics..."

and secondary students currently create in class. They will then select a smaller group of around 50 students to interrogate the learning that occurred through the digital artefacts, as well as interview teachers on their pedagogic approaches and understandings of digital literacy.

The aim is to then jointly develop



projects with a few students that focus on supporting more innovative and deeper learning experiences. "We also want to explore the notion of the 'authentic professional', where students place themselves inside their own online and virtual simulations of their topic areas", says Thomas. "This is where the deeper learning can be encouraged and observed".

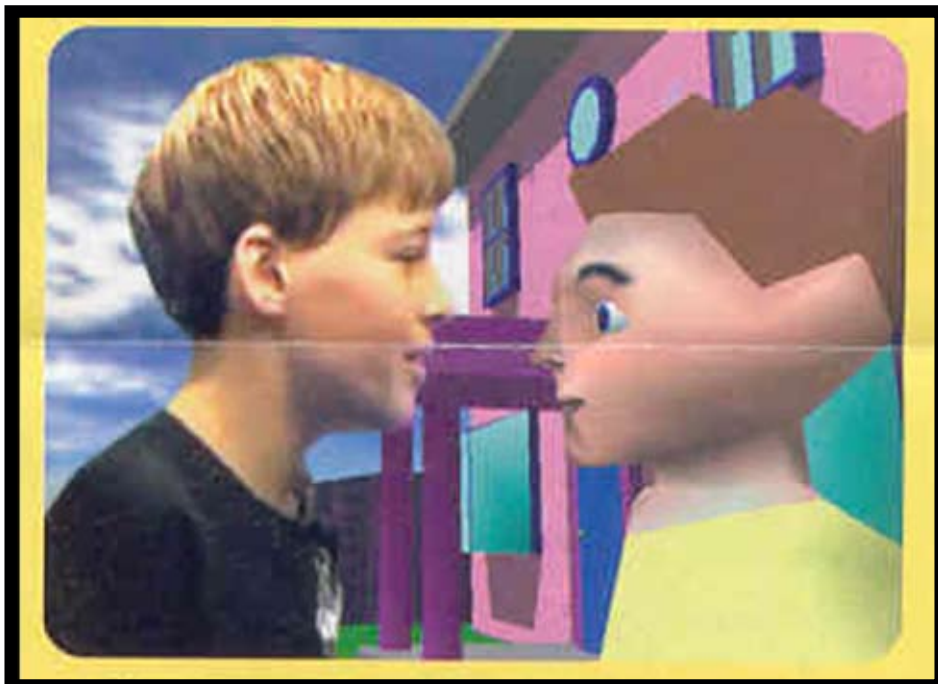
The online and virtual experience has other benefits too, according to the research team. Many children spend hours helping each other to learn the discursive and social practices around online and digital texts, willingly volunteering their time and efforts to help their friends become insiders of the digitally networked communities they create.

"Children are not just active creators of multimedia texts", Thomas adds. "They are developing values, citizenship and ethics through their participation in the communities in which such texts are produced".

In 2006, the Education and Training Committee of the Victorian State Parliament delivered a report entitled *Education in the Net Age – New Needs and New Tools*. Unsworth and Thomas provided a detailed written submission to the report's inquiry, and were cited widely in the report. One concern, quoted in the report, was the role of education in creating an environment where innovation and technological advancement is sustainable, not ad hoc.

"Children need to be apprenticed into the strategic and creative use of sophisticated digital resources", according to the report. "This will provide them with the competencies and skills required to become inventors, designers, producers and storytellers using such 3D multimedia authoring resources".

Dr Thomas and Prof Unsworth's project is likely to be watched closely by the Victorian Dept of Education, given that government's investment in Kahootz for the State's 1700+ schools. The partnership with the Australian Children's Television Foundation, a cross-government NGO, will give the project wider reach to all government education jurisdictions.



Immersed in a Kahootz-generated virtual world - A screen shot of a student's work.

PhD Student Profile: Michelle Knight

Michele Knight is a 3rd Year PhD student in Social Work. Her thesis, entitled *Ways of being: The alchemy of bereavement, grief and engagement with the living dead*, is being supervised by Dr Lindsey Napier. Following is a brief interview about her work:

What is the study about?

It's a qualitative study that explores the natures and meanings of engagement or post-death contact between bereaved adults (the living) and the person close to them who died (the living-dead). The study is psycho-socially positioned within an end-of-life context, particularly communication between the living and the living-dead post physical death.

What inspired you to pursue the topic?

There are a number of threads which when woven together have coalesced into a tapestry to produce this study. The central threads are my own bereavement and experiences of ongoing contact and interaction with those people close to me who died. While I was socialised into death and life after death when a child, it wasn't until I experienced my own bereavement that death became personal. Bereavement and grief are not well understood and many of the bereaved are marginalised and policed by diverse social and institutional responses to their grief. I wanted

to determine why this was the case, and what steps could be taken in order to address the situation.

Have you discovered issues or results that you weren't expecting?

Indeed yes. There are 'themes' that appear to permeate the lives of the bereaved which are directly related to both their personal experiences of grief and wider societal responses to their grief. For example, many bereaved individuals experience paucity of self-understanding and self-knowledge of themselves and of the nature and purpose of grief in their lives. Another, the negative or non-productive experiences that occur between themselves and bereavement support professionals. Yet another is the need for a revised theoretical paradigm in which to understand and contextualise grief, the intent being to inform and enhance the health professional workforce. Another, that bereavement and grief are existential events and psycho-social processes within the life of the bereaved individual which can involve a crisis of

meaning, spirituality, personal identity and relationship to the world in which one lives. And the list goes on.

What has come out of your work to date?

Well, I've had a number of articles written about my research and the work I do, and until this year, I co-ordinated and delivered a bereavement support program out of a local community centre. I've also presented at a number of community forums and local and national conferences, and this year I'm an invited speaker at two international conferences; the International Death, Grief and Bereavement Conference, La Crosse, Wisconsin (May-June) and the Social Context of Death, Dying and Disposal 9th International Conference, Durham, UK (September). Of course, I'm very much looking forward to greater engagement and deeper involvement with the community and those



Michele at work in her office surrounds. working in the field once my PhD is complete.

UC Berkeley Scholar Visits Faculty

Associate Professor Nancy Amy has been a visiting fellow with the Faculty since Sept 08 and will return the University of California-Berkeley at the end of May 09. She has been studying access to health care for obese women to uncover why many don't get optimal care or seek

care. She works both with communities of women affected and with clinicians to change their practices and services.

A/Prof Amy's research on obesity and women led her to work with A/Prof Jenny O'Dea to learn about the genesis eating disorders and obesity in young girls. This has mainly involved analysis of A/Prof O'Dea's extensive database (8000 individual profiles) on obesity and thinness in children. Evidence from that data has shown that the rate of obesity hasn't really changed that much in children over the years. Meanwhile, they have been observing a trends in the height of young people who are considered thin. A/Prof's Amy and O'Dea are jointly looking at the difference between children of different weights in terms of how they think differently about their image.

A/Prof Nancy Amy (left)



Will your research result in changes to practice or policy?

While my research explores a particular aspect of grief, it is inspired and motivated by the need for community education, community development and social change. As a social scientist then with a transpersonal and humanistic twist, this research will advocate for change in contemporary understandings of grief which will build upon and enhance the viability of relevant professional disciplines, the human services workforce, and others, to better support the bereaved through greater awareness and understanding of grief.

So, the answer to that question is yes.



Arts Education: Setting the Stage for Academic Success

Just how much of a difference could art or music make to a child's academic success at school? Faculty researchers have partnered with the Australia Council for the Arts on an ARC Linkage grant to discover the benefits.

While most school children learn some music, drama and art throughout their school lives, the pursuit of arts at school is generally considered a specialist subject area, reliant on particular talents or drive. And as English, Maths and Science take centre stage in concerns about the nation's learning needs, the arts have remained the under-study.

A new project by three Faculty researchers in partnership with the Australia Council for the Arts (OzCo) is set to challenge this complacency, aiming to uncover the broad benefits of studying arts including improved academic achievement.

"There is a general perception that academic rigour and producing highly skilled graduates demands a focus on maths and sciences" says Dr Michael Anderson, one of the researchers on the project. "But what we do know from studies overseas is that a curriculum which actively includes the arts can have a positive effect on a student's overall academic performance".

The project will investigate a range of possible benefits flowing from a strong presence of the arts in school curricula including increasing retention and completion rates, reducing the numbers of disengaged students, empowering young people to be innovative and responsive to change and better grades in other subjects.

"We are interested particularly in the benefits for disadvantaged students or those that might be at risk academically", explains Martin. "Initially, we'll be gathering evidence from up to 25 schools, primary and secondary, with varying socioeconomic circumstances. We should get a comprehensive picture of who's benefitting and where we might be able to do some more focussed work".

The project will be one of the first longitudinal quantitative and targeted qualitative research to examine the precise impact of in-school and out-of-school participation and engagement in the arts on students' academic motivation, engagement and achievement across the curriculum. It will conduct testing to dis-

To get a better picture of what happens in class the researchers will kit out students in 10 select classes with PDAs (digital mobile devices). Dr Robyn Gibson, co-researcher and arts education senior lecturer explains how this will work: "We want to capture the quality of students' learning in real time by getting them to provide us with artefacts from their classroom activity. This might include images of artworks, videos of drama and recordings of music, as well as their own written or recorded reflections".

Students will send their responses on the process and product of their creative work and the relationship between their arts learning and their levels of motivation and engagement. Using PDAs also means the research team get information from students quickly as it will be transferred direct from each PDA to a computer for analysis and sharing amongst the research team.

From OzCo's viewpoint, the research is sorely needed. As a peak advocacy body for the arts, OzCo puts substantial work and resources into supporting arts education. The research should provide them with the information they need to put a sound case for the value of arts in young people's lives.

The national goodwill is already there. In 2007, a National Education and the Arts Statement by the heads of state and territory education ministries (MCEETYA) declared: "The arts are integral to our sense of identity—as individuals, as communities and as a nation. Through the arts and creative cultural expression we learn about ourselves: who we are, where we have come from and what we feel, value and believe... Arts-based enterprises are vitally important to economic success".

With this project delivering large scale and detailed data on how participation in the arts fosters academic motivation, engagement and achievement, government agencies and education sectors should be in a much better position to promote and advocate for the arts more convincingly.

Postsript: Two USyd Honours graduates Jess Chilton and Maryanne Mansour have been awarded PhD scholarships under the ARC Linkage scholarships scheme (APA-I) to work on the project.

One of the PhDs will focus on the quantitative study and will be one of the first arts-oriented PhDs to be trained in large scale statistical modelling.



Source: DET/Dr M. Anderson

"There is a need for research in Australia which can put this to the test", adds co-researcher Associate Professor Andrew Martin, a specialist in large scale quantitative analyses of student achievement.

The three year study, *The Role of Arts Education in Academic Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement* is funded jointly by an ARC Linkage grant and OzCo and worth around \$700,000.

cover what specific cognitive processes are involved in arts-based participation and engagement and whether any of these are also academic processes.

"We will be following the same students over 12 months so we'll be able to look at variations in achievement over time. This part of the study will collect a large amount of data", says Martin.

"We'll track around 5000 high school students and 1500 primary students".



Roundtable Event

Where To Go For Higher Education Overseas? - Choices Facing Senior High School Students In China

Visiting Professor Fan-sing (Frankie) Hung

Thursday 30 April, 3.30 to 5.00pm
Education Conference Rm 551 A35

Overview

In this Roundtable, Professor Hung reports on the findings of a large-scale research project on the choices of senior high school students in China on undertaking higher education abroad. Based on data from a questionnaire survey of 12,961 students in seven cities in Mainland China in 2007, the study compares and contrasts students' preferences for Australia, the US, or UK as their most-preferred country for study abroad, with particular reference to: the students' perceived attractions and difficulties, perceived economic returns to education, intended field of overseas study, academic performance, demographic characteristics, and post-study-abroad plans.

Discussion of the findings will include such issues as the internationalization of higher education, educational demand and student disparity, knowledge transfer, and implications for higher education development.

Inquiries: Professor Phillip Jones
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New Publications 2009

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