



Closing the Disadvantaged Gap: Self-Beliefs and Task Value as Drivers of Educational Choices During the Post High School Transition

In Australia there remains a gap in educational achievement, university entry, and graduation for young people from disadvantaged groups. This gap has resulted in a wastage of talent and diminished Australia's international competitiveness due to declining numbers of people with a tertiary degree (Bradley et al, 2005). Empirical research suggests that education is the key to both protecting young people from long-term economic disadvantage and for helping economies gain a competitive advantage. Helping individuals to maximise and attain their full potential in terms of educational, occupational, and status attainment is important for maintaining a competitive Australian labour market given growing international demand for highly educated workforces. Indeed, the movement of many lower-skilled manufacturing jobs offshore means that it is more important than ever for young people to remain in education, maximising their productivity potential and protecting themselves from long-term economic disadvantage.

However, despite considerable investment, there is an under-representation of disadvantaged groups in higher education in Australia including those

from low socio-economic, Indigenous, and rural backgrounds. This may be because successful interventions typically increase the gap between youth, with advantaged students benefiting more.

Whilst most efforts focus on test scores, evidence suggests that non-cognitive outcomes (self-concept, task value, motivation, social context) are critical in closing the gap. This project will test these predictions for successful educational transitions by disadvantaged students, using an innovative blend of multiple large-scale primary and secondary school data sources, and new/evolving statistical models.

This project builds on the recently developed concept of phase adequate engagement, with a specific focus on the post-secondary-school transition and non-cognitive predictors. This model views the transition from secondary school as one of the most critical developmental periods for young people where they face a confluence of major developmental tasks; asking them to drastically modify or adapt their self-conceptions. Further, phase adequate engagement focuses on processes that link personal characteristics, the influence of significant others, and contextual structures in influencing the outcomes of this transition. It is the premise of this project that phase adequate engagement is the key to cultivating capability of disadvantaged youth to produce more equitable long-term outcomes.



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