



Education

SUITABLE FOR MASTER OF RESEARCH

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SUITABLE FOR MASTER OF RESEARCH OR PHD

Innovative and Alternative Learning Environments to Foster Engagement, Connectedness and Wellbeing

Professor Tonia Gray: t.gray@westernsydney.edu.au

Supported by: Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman and Dr Christina Curry

Research area: Nature-based solutions, Health, Wellbeing

The outdoors is an engagement vehicle for innovative and alternative learning environments. Supported by theories such as biophilia and ecological systems the restorative capacity of the outdoors has long been known. Strong empirical evidence for the benefits of spending time outdoors and around nature is currently being amassed, which include biological (e.g., physical health and stress), psychological (e.g., mood and cognition), cognitive and intellectual capacity (e.g. academic scores); social (e.g., connectedness with others), resilience, (e.g. tenacity and grit); healing from trauma; body image and spiritual (e.g., interconnectivity and life purpose). As this evidence-base grows, so have the number of interventions incorporating OL to support these outcomes in educational settings. In addition, COVID-19 has further prompted an influx of interventions to relocate outdoors as a way of ensuring innovative and alternative learning can continue in safe educational spaces.

The integration of educational programs in the outdoors is not new and has brought with it significant opportunity for enhancing its provision. However, some areas of ambiguity that require further examination and coherence. Issues facing practitioners include how best to adapt educational models, interventions and practices that were originally intended for indoor application, as well as further understanding the impact of change in context has on intervention content, processes and outcomes. The overarching aim of this research project is to promote pedagogical practice when recontextualising educational interventions in the outdoors.

In support of this aim, we are seeking transdisciplinary knowledges to embed the cross-fertilization from interventions situated in a range of geographical locations and



settings, such as marginalised populations, health promotion strategies, mainstream education, and allied fields within the social sciences.

Gender and Sexuality Diversities in Educational Spaces

Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman: j.ullman@westernsydney.edu.au

Supported by: Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja

Research area: Equity, Social inclusion, Education

Gender and sexuality diversity is a critical equity issue across all levels of education. Increasingly, young people are identifying as not necessarily heterosexual, yet in schools, this reality is often silenced and invisible.

The inertia around such diversity is perceived across all aspects of the educational experience, including but not limited to, curriculum, policy, educational practices and approaches, as well as teacher pedagogy.

Equity, Social Inclusion and Education

Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja: t.ferfolja@westernsydney.edu.au

Supported by: Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman

Research area: Equity, Social inclusion, Education

Associate Professors Tania Ferfolja and Jacqueline Ullman are leading Australian researchers in the area of gender and sexuality diversity (GSD). Their research focuses on GSD in a range of educational spaces and organisations. It includes explorations of interpersonal relationships, curriculum, policy, pedagogy and practice as well as questions of institutional and social discrimination and marginalisation. Each has a strong publication record and both have been awarded large, competitive Category 1, 2 and 3 grants, including their current Australian Research Council grant exploring parents' perceptions of GSD-inclusive curriculum nationally, and the ways that parents of GSD children navigate the schooling terrain for their child.

While their own work focuses on GSD and schooling, Ullman and Ferfolja have supervised higher degree research students exploring topics more broadly in the field, including topics related to gender (gender norms; gender "policing"; gendered violence; gender and power in social relationships) and GSD topics outside of educational spaces.

Additional related fields of study might include, but are not limited to:

- GSD diverse families and parenting
- GSD pre-service and inservice teachers



- Community in/visibility of GSD identities
- Workplace inclusion/discrimination related to gender/sexuality
- Curriculum and policy analysis related to gender/sexuality
- LGBTQI+ Social Movements (e.g. marriage equality)
- GSD identities in educational institutions (including primary/secondary schooling; tertiary and post-school options)

We welcome contact from students who are interested in these or similarly affiliated areas to discuss future research support possibilities.

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