

Achieving self-determined teaching and learning at ACU: a teaching- research nexus project for professional learning.

Aim and Significance

This project aims to exploit the significant impact of ACU research in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) on teaching and learning across sectors by embedding the approach across the university establishing a 'signature', intellectually original pedagogy. This models the teaching research nexus required by TEQSA of our university in applying research-based evidence to our practice.

Alignment with ACU Education and Student Success Plan (ESSP) 2033

This project aims to integrate established ACU IPPE research evidencing the benefits of adopting self-determination theory (SDT) for learners and teachers across the higher education curriculum through professional learning. SDT promotes autonomy-focused motivational teaching that brings the learner's personal interests, goals and psychological needs into the learning experience to engender holistic personal growth (Reeve 2026). The *ACU ESSP 2033* emphasises educating the whole person and prioritising student wellbeing in a learning journey that provides work-life balance. Loneliness, anxiety and mental health issues are increasingly experienced across student cohorts in higher education (Ruo-Ning et al., 2026; Crisp et al. 2024). SDT demonstrates that students need to feel relatedness, autonomy and competence to thrive and that these factors need to coexist. When student motivation is sparked and they engage in learning that they find personally relevant, supportive and satisfying, teachers also benefit extensively (Reeve 2026).

Teaching in an autonomy-focused, motivational model is a shift in practice for many teachers in higher education and requires reflection on a default sector model of teaching and learning that measures learning success by metrics rather than holistic measures. IPPE has provided ACU with a successful, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning that can engage with the holistic person and enable our Mission that is committed to human flourishing.

Research Focus

Question: How can ACU teachers be supported to develop a consciously autonomy-focused pedagogy? Our team is a partnership between principal researcher in SDT, Prof Marshall-Reid, professional learning specialists and learning designers drawn from across ACU Faculties/Directorates and current students from different degrees/awards. Through a consultative process of focus group discussions and online survey, the team will explore SDT applications in different disciplines and with differing student cohorts.

Intended Outputs

Informed by the findings, the team will design and develop asynchronous professional learning resources for ACU teaching staff delivered via CEI Canvas platform as a short course with optional accreditation pathway to GCHE. These resources can be linked to existing 'New Teacher Induction' resources and processes and may be recommended by supervising staff. Resources will include UDL formats of case studies, exemplars, short videos, interactives, and a BLOG for engagement and community of practice building.

Digital badging will allow staff to record completion as part of their annual scholarship activity. Examples of teaching transformations in applying SDT as a result of this professional learning will be disseminated regularly as new links to the professional learning resources themselves, at HELTA events, Faculty seminars, external forums and in scholarly publications.

ACU-wide impact

Professional learning resources will:

- Enable ACU teaching staff to adapt their teaching to a SDT model generating improved learning and teaching experiences for students and teachers;
- Share strategies and examples for practising Autonomy-supportive motivational teaching across different disciplines in face to face and technologised contexts;
- Develop supporting GenAi resources and applications;
- Model UDL for inclusive learning and teaching;

Timeline

November-December: 2026 complete ethics application, recruit RA for 2027, develop schedule of group development & evaluation meetings over project

January-March: recruit students, complete interviews and survey, purchase transcription license.

April-June: analysis of data compiled into project report recommending design features of resources per discipline; resource design completed for LXD development

July-October: build and pilot resources

November-December: evaluate and amend resources for final versions; develop scholarly publication and internal dissemination strategies.

Budget Overview: Total: \$8229.50

Research assistant: transcript analysis and summary reporting, ethics application if required, focus group interviewing \$88.45ph x 70 (\$6191.50)

Transcript license: Otter AI Pro (\$150)

Student consult remuneration: (\$59p/h pp x 1 x student from PhD, PG, UG, Diploma, international, Equity, Indigenous, LGBTQI (#8) for 4 hours (\$1888)

In kind: CEI LXD, AD, Studios production, BLOG maintenance and relevant assessment RPL.

Team Members

Prof Johnmarshall Reeves (IPPE); A/Prof Alison Owens (CEI); A/Prof John Mahoney (CEI)

Dr Susan Brooman-Jones (CEI); A/Prof Jodi Sita (FHS); Prof Bhavani Sridharan (FLB); FTP representative (TBC); FTP representative (TBC); (LXD (CEI TBC); Student consulting group.

Ethics required? Yes

References

Li, R.-N., Folk, D., Singh, A., Ungar, L., & Dunn, E. (2026). Is a random human peer better than a highly supportive chatbot in reducing loneliness over time? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 125, Article 104911. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2026.104911>

Crisp, D., Albrecht, S., & Rickwood, D. (2025). Comparing the mental health of Australian university students with that of young people who are not in higher education. *Higher Education*, 90(6), 1731–1742. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-025-01401-7>

Reeve, J (2026) Engaging through supporting motivation. Oral Presentation, HELTA ACU, Feb 19, 2026.