

Case Example



Community - Philanthropy Partnerships in Evidence-based Education

Improving Australia's education outcomes is an imperative for ensuring a strong economic and social future and is in the interests of a diverse range of stakeholders. As such, the Productivity Commission's inquiry and collaborative approach is a welcome and important priority.

A rigorous evidence base should underpin not only policy and practice within the Federal and State education systems, but also the extensive investments made through philanthropic and community work that supplement and support education delivery in Australia, to ensure the outcomes of these additional resources are maximised.

A case example of a successful partnership between the education, philanthropy and community sectors involved a substantial grant over three years by the Macquarie Group Foundation via The Song Room, a national not-for-profit organisation providing arts based programs in low socio-economic and vulnerable population schools. The funding enabled extensive research projects to be conducted by Universities and Research Institutes, such as Educational Transformations, to independently evaluate the effectiveness of The Song Room's educational programs in schools.

The research studies involved thousands of students over diverse cohorts and regions, as well as research designs ranging from qualitative, ethnographic through to quantitative, quasi-experimental studies. Quantitative studies, for example, compared improvements in participating student outcomes to those in matched demographic schools without the program across a range of variables including school grades, NAPLAN scores, school attendance and ACER's Social-emotional Wellbeing Index.

Following the research and related program delivery, funded primarily through non-Government, philanthropic sources, the evidence base was widely disseminated through Australia and in international publications, providing a valuable resource to the education sector. The findings were able to inform policy, funding and practice, and illustrated the impact of such creative learning programs on educational achievement and student wellbeing, specifically for socially disadvantaged populations.

Challenges in conducting the research project, however, included substantial barriers in consistency and access to educational data across State jurisdictions, as well as delays in processing research ethics approval in multiple jurisdictions and education sectors nationally. The quality of the evidence-base established through the research is of a standard that is not typical in the sector given the investment required, however continued barriers are experienced in ensuring such rigorous evidence is applied in policy, resource allocation and practice decisions at macro through to individual school levels.

Recommendations in the Productivity Commission's National Education Evidence Base Draft Report, regarding the collection of data and the application of high-quality evidence, are essential to overcoming such barriers that otherwise limit the scope and benefit of collaborative program delivery and research projects such as this one. Education decision-makers must be equipped to make well-informed decisions about the priorities and programs best designed to improve various student learning outcomes. Principals, increasingly with greater autonomous decision-making in schools, must have accessible and quality evidence to inform their allocation of resources. This is particularly the case for schools in disadvantaged communities where the need to improve educational outcomes is arguably more significant, and to ensure that the additional investment of philanthropic and community sector support can be best leveraged.

Further information on The Song Room's education-focussed research projects can be found at: <http://www.songroom.org.au/media/publications/>

Engaging Young People through Creativity



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