The Futures of Autism Research Conference:

Providing opportunity for support, development, and collaboration

Friday 13th August 2021

This conference has been supported by a state-based conference award provided by Australian Society for Autism Research, awarded to Dr Stephanie Malone, Dr Kate Simpson, and Dr Nicole Dargue

Conference Program

Time	Activity	Details
8:30am	Registration	Presenters, please pass a copy of your slides to Nicole on arrival so they can be saved to the computer ready for your presentation
9am	Welcome address by Professor Andrew Whitehouse and keynote panel discussion	Keynote speakers: 1) Professor Pat Howlin 2) Dr Anna Remington 3) Dr Laura Crane 4) Dr Matthew Bennett
10:15am	Morning tea/coffee	
10:30am	Presentations: *Education and Learning* 12 mins each with 3 mins Q&A	1) Samra Alispahic* 2) Rachelle Wicks 3) Hayley Mitchelson 4) Dawa Dukpa 5) Raechel McLucas
11:45am	Short break	
12:00pm	Presentations: *Future Directions* 12 mins each with 3 mins Q&A	1) Megan Clark* 2) Gilly-Elle McKeown* 3) Tammie Foster* 4) Andrea McGlade 5) Eliane Deschrijver
1:15pm	Lunch	
2:00pm	Presentations: *Mental Health and Well-Being* 12 mins each with 3 mins Q&A	1) Shuting Li* 2) Kirsten Baird-Bate* 3) Kathryn Ambrose* 4) Katy Unwin* 5) Rebecca Jolliffe
3:15pm	Afternoon tea/coffee	
3:30pm	Posters 3 mins each with 2 mins Q&A	1) Cherie Green* 2) Antanita Chrysostom* 3) Lyndel Kennedy* 4) Amanda Karo* 5) Elizabeth Dovenberg* 6) Irina Silva 7) Afifah Muharikah 8) Helen McLennan 9) Lizaan Schwartz 10) Danielle Taylor 11) Libby MacDonald 12) Rebecca Poulsen 13) Callyn Farrell
4:45pm	Presentation of awards	
5:00pm onwards	Drinks at the Ship Inn (at own expense)	

* Presenting via Zoom

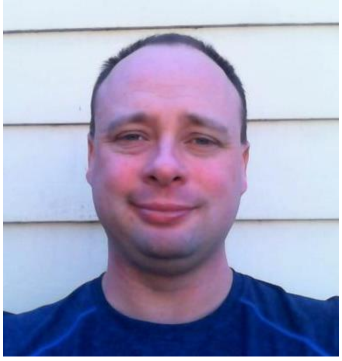
Keynote Panel Speakers

Professor Pat Howlin is a Professor at King’s College London. She is also a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and the International Society for Autism Research. Throughout her career, Pat has published over 200 research articles and has received many awards for research in autism, including the Swiss Society for Research in Autism Spectrum Conditions: Kanner-Asperger medal and Services to Autism from the Autism Association of Western Australia. Pat’s research focuses on understanding the developmental trajectories of individuals on the autism spectrum from childhood to adulthood, and the effectiveness of practices to support longer-term outcomes in autism.

Dr Anna Remington is the Director of the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at University College London (UCL). She completed her Masters and PhD qualifications, along with two postdoctoral positions, at UCL, prior to undertaking a fellowship at the University of Oxford. Her research takes a strengths-based focus by exploring the superior abilities of individuals on the autism spectrum, specifically in the domains of attention and perception. Anna receives many positive comments about her research from the autism community, with her work being described as meaningful and helpful in understanding day-to-day experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum.

Dr Laura Crane is the Deputy Director and Associate Professor at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at UCL. Her research focuses on supporting children, young people, and adults on the spectrum in the areas of education, healthcare, and criminal justice. Her overarching aim is to support the well-being and quality of life of people on the spectrum. Notable achievements in her career include being awarded a British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award in 2017. This enabled Laura to host a one-day engagement event led by autism community members to provide early career researchers with advice and input on their research, therefore ensuring their research meets the needs of the autism community.

Dr Matthew Bennett holds a PhD in Disability Studies from Flinders University, South Australia. His PhD examined the life experiences of adults who live on autism spectrum. Specifically, he has explored the education, depression, employment, and intimate relationships of adults with Asperger syndrome. He has also lectured in Disability Studies at Flinders University, South Australia. Matthew is an active advocate for the rights of people on the autism spectrum.



Education and Learning

Samra Alispahic *Western Sydney University*	Lexically-guided perceptual learning in autistic adults. Human listeners generally perceive the speech of talkers that they have never previously encountered efficiently and effortlessly. Previous studies have shown that when listeners hear an ambiguous speech sound, they are able to disambiguate it using their existing lexical knowledge. This ability to rapidly retune native phoneme categories and adapt to the speech of a novel talker has been extensively documented in neurotypical adults and children. Yet, no studies have examined perceptual learning effects in autistic people, who often show atypicalities in communication relative to perceptual, social and language processing. Here, we employed a classic perceptual learning paradigm (Norris, McQueen, & Cutler, 2003) to investigate perceptual learning effects in Australian English autistic (n = 27) and non-autistic (n = 28) adults. During an initial 'exposure phase', listeners completed a lexical decision task in which they heard spoken words and indicated whether they were words or non-words. Crucially, some of the words contained an ambiguous sound midway between an [f] and [s]. Immediately following the exposure phase, participants were asked to categorise sounds along a continuum ranging from [f] to [s]. Autistic adults were able to successfully discern words from non-words and categorise speech sounds. However, unlike non-autistic participants, they did not show evidence of phoneme category retuning. The present findings have implications for current theories of autistic perception (e.g., Bayesian decision theory; Pellicano & Burr, 2012) relative to speech and language processing by autistic people.
Rachelle Wicks *Griffith University*	Background: Relative strengths in word reading for children with may be linked to atypical attention to print during shared book reading prior to starting school. Research concurrently found pre-schoolers with autism looked more frequently at print during shared book reading compared to peers without autism, which was correlated with higher letter knowledge. However, the contribution that looking at print makes towards later word reading remains unknown. Aim: Investigate whether looking at print during shared book reading predicted word reading assessed 12-18 months in children with and without autism. Method: Participants were 28 children, including 14 with autism (n = 14, M age = 63 months) and peers without autism attending (n = 6, Mage = 70.67 months) and not attending school (n = 8, Mage= 58.75 months). Children’s eye movements were recorded while viewing a digitised, narrated storybook, with eye-tracking data of print areas of interest extracted 12-18 months later. Word reading was assessed (York

	Assessment of Reading for Comprehension). Results: Linear mixed effects models in R found that for the autism group, word reading was significantly related to fixation frequency to print compared to the school (d = 3.14) and no school (d = .27) comparison groups. Non-significant relationships were shown for both comparison groups without autism (p's > .72). Conclusions: Findings provide preliminary evidence that looking at print during shared book reading may positively influence word reading across time for children with autism but not those without. Results provide important avenues for potential literacy learning supports in future research.
Hayley Mitchelson *Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University*	Title: Factors and experiences influencing school mobility for autistic students: a systematic review. Background: Moving schools can be disrupting for any child, but this can be particularly challenging for autistic students who may prefer predictability and therefore find it difficult to adapt to new learning and social environments. Despite this, autistic students are moving schools at a high rate. This systematic review is the first to explore factors influencing the family's decision to move schools for their autistic child. Results: Seven studies met the inclusion criteria, all of which were qualitative interview studies. The three types of mobility reported were: mainstream to mainstream moves, moving between mainstream and segregated schools, and mainstream to home-school moves. Findings revealed that parents' concerns for their child's learning, social experiences, behaviour, and mental health, as well as their own negative interactions with staff, influenced the decision to move to another school. The type of educational placement parents wanted for their child was also a consideration, with parents choosing a school which offered individualised support and/or an inclusive setting. Conclusion: There are child, parent and systemic school-based issues impacting on the educational experience of autistic children. Whilst there were similarities across the studies for reasons to move, there were also differences based upon the types of settings students moved between. This review highlights the importance of understanding experiences leading to school mobility and the need for further research in this area.
Dawa Dukpa *Queensland University of Technology*	Background: It has been well documented that teachers' knowledge of autism can be an important enabler or barrier to effective inclusion and relevant research conducted in Bhutan remains scarce. This paper aims to contribute to this under-researched area by reporting evidence on the knowledge and perceptions of autism in Bhutanese educators teaching in inclusive schools. Method: Following an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, 16 teachers from seven inclusive schools in Bhutan were interviewed and the thematic analysis of their responses guided the development of an online survey completed by 106 Bhutanese teachers. Results: Teachers held accurate knowledge of the key characteristics and aetiology of autism. They tended to agree with the view that Bhutanese

	people perceive autism as being linked with karma. Teachers' knowledge of autism spectrum was found to be positively correlated with their teaching experience in inclusive schools. Significant correlations were also found between teachers' understanding and perceptions about autism and cultural and context-specific factors such as religious beliefs and societal norms, highlighting the need to acknowledge local and cultural contexts in this research area. Conclusions: These findings have contributed to the scant literature on Bhutanese teachers' knowledge and perceptions about the autism spectrum and the implications for future teacher preparation and professional learning in Bhutan are discussed.
Raechel McLucas *Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University*	The presentation of school refusal behaviour in autistic children Background: School refusal can impact upon academic achievement, social adjustment, and adult social and mental health difficulties. While it is the most common reason autistic children miss school, very little is known about the way school refusal presents in autistic children. Aim: To explore the range of school refusal behaviours in autistic children and adolescents and investigate how well these align with Kearney's (2001) non-autistic continuum of school refusal behaviours. Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore presentations of school refusal in autistic children. Participants were seven mothers of autistic school students attending primary or secondary schools. Interviews were analysed using directed content analysis, to compare parent reports with Kearney's (2001) continuum and identify school refusal behaviours which may fall within each category or outside the continuum. Results: Autistic children's school refusal behaviours generally align with Kearney's (2001) continuum; children demonstrated 10-30 distinct behaviours each. Forty-two behaviours occurred while autistic children were physically present at school, as avoidance or non-participation in school activities. These behaviours are not recorded in attendance-based measures of school refusal. Conclusion: This is the first study to qualitatively investigate presentations of school refusal in autistic children. It has important implications for the way school refusal is identified and assessed in research and practice.

Future Directions

Megan Clark *La Trobe University*	Background: Research is working to re-frame the deficit view of disability by adopting a strengths-based focus. The current study explored the positive attributes, interests, and favourite activities of school-aged children on the autism spectrum from two perspectives, the child themselves and their parents to explore alignment between informants. Methods: Sixty-five parent-child dyads participated in the study. Children, aged 6-13 years, responded to the following using free text: “what do you like most about yourself?”, “what are you absolutely best at?” and “what do you enjoy the most?”. Parents responded the following questions about their child: “what do you like best about your child?”, “what does your child do well?”, “what do you like best about your child?”. Results: Parent responses were coded into the pre-existing themes established by Clark and Adams (2020) that documented the strengths, interests and favourite activities of the same children reported here. Three levels of alignment were established: high alignment - responses were within the same subcategory and overarching category, partial alignment -responses were in different subcategories but within the same overarching category and high diversity – responses fell within different overarching categories. Parents and children demonstrated the highest alignment (high level: 43% and partial alignment: 17%) when reporting on children’s favourite activities. Diversity was highest when reporting on children’s positive attributes with 77% of parents and children responding across different subcategories and categories. Conclusions: The findings suggest that children can offer unique information on their thoughts feelings and experiences that may differ to their parents’ perspective.
Gilly-Elle McKeown *University of Tasmania*	Autistic children and adolescents exhibit psychological and physical health benefits when engaging in organised physical activity and sport (Lang et al., 2010). However, they are at greater risk of abuse, inequity and exclusion when participating (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Accordingly, participation rates in organised physical activity for autistic youth are low, which can have a detrimental impact on their health (Gregor et al., 2018). It is therefore pertinent to uncover how participation in organised physical activity and sport can be improved for young autistic people and their families. The purpose of the research was to determine which barriers exist for autistic youth and their families in an organised physical activity setting. The secondary purpose was to ascertain which factors supported their participation. Under a socio-constructionist framework, a narrative approach was utilised to provide a deep insight into the parental perceptions of their autistic children’s experiences

	in organised physical activity and sport, and the experiences of the parents themselves. The preliminary findings have highlighted a range of barriers and opportunities for both the autistic children and adolescents and their parents. Several themes have emerged under each research question. Information regarding the potential long-term positive and negative effects of their experiences was also collected. Additionally, advantageous strategies developed by the parents and coaches to encourage the participation of autistic youth were revealed. These research findings can inform the development of appropriate practice for autistic youth in organised physical activity and sport; ensuring experiences are positive, inclusive, and safe.
Tammie Foster *Flinders University*	Although people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are not more likely to commit crimes, they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. This may, in part, be due to unfavourable interactions with the criminal judiciary. Evidence suggests characteristics of the condition are perceived unfavourably in adjudicative proceedings resulting in harsher penalties. The present study explores whether ASD offenders receive longer sentences compared to data compiled from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for similar offences. Indicators for offender remorse judgments were investigated in addition to how ASD evaluations affect the sentencing calculus relative to sentencing factors and principles. ASD-O appeared to attract longer sentences across all offence classifications. Inferential analyses indicated sexual assault sentences were significantly higher in the ASD-O sample, $Z = -2.214$, $p = .021$, $r = .67$. No significant differences were found for murder, manslaughter, and assault. Interrater reliability achieved moderate to substantial agreement supporting the qualitative analysis procedure for ASD diagnosis effects on factors for sentencing decisions and judgments of offender remorse. The proportion of sentencing factors and principles (moral culpability, ability to withstand prison environment, rehabilitation potential) where the diagnosis was an overall mitigating/aggravating factor in sentencing decisions will be presented. Indicators of remorse judgments failed to achieve interrater agreement on 3 of 4 categories (presentation, plea/cooperation with police, diagnosis, expert evidence) therefore explanations for judgments of offender remorse were unable to be reliably explained. Implications of remorse evaluations of an accused on the autism spectrum throughout the criminal justice process will be discussed.
Andrea McGlade *University of Queensland*	Title: Efficacy of very early support programs for infants at increased likelihood of, or diagnosed with, autism: systematic review and meta-analysis. Method: Five databases were

	searched (January 2021) with inclusion criteria:(i) RCTs where comparison group received treatment as usual, (ii) participants were aged <24 months at entry, (iii) interventions were parent-mediated and/or clinician directed programs, and (iv) outcome measures were either clinician assessed, parent-reported, or neurocognitive assessments (EEG and eye tracking). Results: 17 publications of 12 independent studies (715 infants) met criteria. Clinician-assessed outcomes did not show significant treatment effects: autism symptomatology (standard mean difference (SMD) 0.09, 95%CI -0.08,0.27, p=0.31), cognitive outcome (SMD 0.09, 95%CI -0.10,0.28, p=0.35), and expressive language (SMD 0.00,95%CI -0.17,0.18, p=0.97). Parent reported outcomes showed some significant treatment effects for adaptive skills composite (SMD 0.32, 95%CI 0.05,0.59, p=0.02) and daily living skills (SMD 0.28, CI 0.00-0.57, p=0.05). Neurocognitive outcomes were unable to be combined due to heterogeneity. Findings from individual studies were inconsistent. Conclusion: Support programs for infants at increased likelihood of, or diagnosed with, autism were effective for some outcomes reported by parents, but not clinicians. Neurocognitive measures showed some positive, but inconsistent, evidence. Objective outcomes provide limited evidence for efficacy of very early autism programs to date. Studies are hampered by an absence of theoretical models underpinning the developmental cascade that leads to autism.
Eliane Deschrijver *University of New South Wales and Ghent University*	The double empathy problem reframes social difficulties in autism as following from a disjuncture in thinking between neurotypical and autistic individuals, instead of from a social-cognitive issue specific to the autistic person. It therefore rejects the Theory of Mind hypothesis, which asserts a deficit in mental state representation or ‘mindblindness’ in autism. But will the autistic testimony embodied by the double empathy problem find broader acceptance with academic scholars without providing a nuanced explanation for results in theory of mind tasks? In an attempt to resolve this deadlock, I will juxtapose data and theory from both accounts against the relational mentalising framework: social ease may depend on the alignment between one’s own and others’ thinking after having understood the other’s mental state, facilitated by a neural mechanism for detecting and resolving mental conflict. Autistic individuals may however run into more difficulties relative to neurotypical individuals whenever mental conflict needs resolving, even while their mental representation abilities are unaffected. This theory can account for both the pattern of results in the theory of mind literature, and the notion that autistic individuals experience more social ease when interacting with one another. I will highlight the 3 key

	differences between the three theories, while considering recent empirical evidence in light of these. I will then propose the ‘double-crossed’ experimental design necessary to distinguish all accounts. The neurocognitive relational mentalising account can explain why humans have a proclivity to befriend likeminded others, yielding a dramatically new perspective on fields far beyond that of autism.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Shuting Li *University of Melbourne*	Attention orienting determines where we focus our concentration and is essential to all cognitive processes. It consists of the processes of disengagement, shift, and re-engagement of attention. Atypical attention orienting has been observed in many people on the autism spectrum. Previous experimental investigations, however, have presented inconsistent results on attention orienting in autism. The current study aimed to examine attention orienting in autistic people and investigate factors (alerting levels, age, sex, and cooccurring symptoms) that may be associated with atypical orienting. Twenty-seven autistic participants and 22 TD participants completed an exogenous (stimulus-driven) and an endogenous (goal-directed) Posner task. The results showed that autistic participants were more efficient at orienting to valid exogenous cues and had difficulties in disengaging from invalid endogenous cues. In the exogenous orienting task, attentional disengagement was negatively associated with age and positively associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) traits in both groups, but attentional disengagement was negatively associated with anxiety traits only in autistic participants. In the endogenous orienting task, attentional disengagement was negatively associated with age only in the autistic participants. No effects of co-occurring ADHD or anxiety symptoms on endogenous orienting were observed. Alerting levels and sex did not show differential effects between the groups on exogenous or endogenous orienting. In summary, the current findings suggest that autistic people show atypical attention orienting. Autistic people are easily attracted to unpredictable external stimuli and are slower to voluntarily disengage attention from pre-engaged stimuli. These difficulties may be related to age or co-occurring anxiety traits.
Kirsten Baird-Bate *Queensland University of Technology*	Autism, caregiving, and wellbeing are complex issues that require innovative research approaches to deliver new, more holistic, perspectives. Primary carers play a pivotal role in the lives of children with autism across their lifespan with the effectiveness of supports hinging on the wellbeing of the primary carer. Current understandings of wellbeing within autism spectrum literature tend to be limited within a negative, dyadic, reductionist narrative, yet wellbeing, autism, and caregiving are multidimensional constructs that shift according to context and time. Wellbeing of primary carers may be influenced by many factors not directly associated with caring for a child with autism and rarely has the primary carer been asked what they believe influences their wellbeing experiences.

	This mixed method project explores how primary carers of children diagnosed on the autism spectrum conceptualise wellbeing and the factors that promote / hinder wellbeing outcomes for these primary carers. Phase 1 of the study surveyed n~90 primary carers of children with autism and aged 2-18 years. Phase 2 invited 6 of these participants to take a photograph a day for 21 days before discussing the images in a semi-structured interview. This presentation will reveal preliminary quantitative and qualitative insights and show the dynamic, nuanced, interplay of inter-person, relational, and socioecological factors which shape wellbeing outcomes. The research delivers more complete understandings and, in this way, contributes to the development of reflective, strength-based, family-centric supports and policies for children with autism and those who care for them. The benefits of using innovative methodologies are highlighted.
Kathryn Ambrose *Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University*	The impact of anxiety at school: Reflections of young adults on the autism spectrum. Background and aims: While up to 70% of children and youth on the autism spectrum experience interfering anxiety symptoms, and students on the autism spectrum experience poorer academic and social outcomes, the impact of anxiety for students on the autism spectrum at school is not fully understood. The aim of this study was to ascertain the views of young adults on the autism spectrum regarding the potential impact of anxiety on their school experiences. Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six adults (two males and four females) on the autism spectrum (aged 18-25 years) to explore their perspectives on whether, and if so how, anxiety had affected their experiences when they were at school. Content analysis of interview data was used to describe the most common experiences reported by participants. Transcripts were coded and codes were grouped into sub-categories and categories. Results: All participants reported they had experienced anxiety at school. Anxiety was most frequently reported to impact students' friendships (how friendships occurred, friendship quality, and communication with friends), learning (schoolwork, avoidance, and attendance), and social communication in the classroom (including interactions with teachers). Participants also described social-emotional impacts and reduced participation in broader school activities resulting from anxiety. Conclusion: These findings highlight the additional and wide-ranging impacts of anxiety at school for students on the autism spectrum and the importance of supporting students with anxiety in order to improve their social and academic outcomes.

Katy Unwin *La Trobe University*	Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) are diagnosed when the use of drugs, including alcohol, continues despite negative consequences. SUDs have a devastating effect on individuals' lives and these effects are amplified when SUD co-occurs with autism, negatively impacting health and functioning, as well as heightening risk of mortality. Concurrent SUDs with autism may stem from attempts to self-medicate, using substances to alleviate anxiety, social inhibition and sensory symptoms. Despite this, SUDs are reportedly underdiagnosed in autism, creating a barrier to services and support. There is also limited research in this area, particularly around associations of SUDs within autism that could serve as red flags to support clinicians in the identification or prevention of SUDs. In this study, diagnostic and demographic data from 741 autistic adults and 733 age- and gender-matched clinical controls were extracted from the National Centre for Mental Health database (UK) and analysed. We found higher rates of SUD in the clinical control sample compared to the autistic sample, although the rates of SUD in the autistic sample were higher than those reported for the general population. In the autistic sample, SUDs were associated with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder. In both samples, higher rates of SUDs were associated with Anxiety and Depression. A concurrent intellectual disability was not associated with SUD in either group. These concurrent diagnoses associated with SUD incidence in autism could serve as indicators for either undiagnosed SUD, or the need for preventive strategies against SUD to be put in place.
Rebecca Jolliffe *Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University*	Trait anxiety describes a relatively stable personality trait of anxiety proneness and increased threat perception. Although the concurrent presentation of multiple anxiety disorders is often reported in individuals on the autism spectrum and may indicate trait anxiousness, its study in autism research is ill-defined. Thus, a systematic review was undertaken aiming to summarise the characteristics, methods, outcomes, and quality of research that has investigated trait anxiety in individuals on the autism spectrum, to identify priorities for future research. Systematic electronic searches yielded 1061 records, and 23 studies (19 observational and four interventional) met criteria for inclusion in the review. STROBE and CONSORT checklists were used to assess reporting quality for observational and interventional studies respectively. Approximately half (47.8%) of studies involved children/adolescents. Overall participant characteristics were homogonous; 87.7% of participants were male and all studies reported an absence of intellectual disability in their sample. All studies included a questionnaire self-report measure of trait anxiety, however only two (8.7%)

	also utilised parent-reported measure. Psychometric properties were poorly defined with only two (8.7%) studies reporting data specifically for participants on the autism spectrum. Few (8.7%) studies directly assessed trait anxiety using an objective measure and only two (8.7%) investigated the impact of an intervention on participant trait anxiety. Overall, studies adequately reported on 52.2% of checklist items. Research is needed to analyse psychometric qualities of existing subjective trait anxiety measures in participants on the autism spectrum, testing of prospective objective measures and intervention options, across more heterogenous samples.

Posters

Cherie Green *La Trobe University*	Extensive research has shown elevated mental health difficulties among parents of children with autism compared to other parents. Although several studies have explored factors related to mental health among parents of children with autism, the factors that influence and promote well-being remain poorly characterised. Parents of young, newly diagnosed autistic children may also be particularly vulnerable to stressors that impact mental health and well-being. We examined child-, parent-, and family/socioeconomic factors associated with concurrent mental health and well-being among 136 parents of young children with autism, aged 13-48 months. Mental health was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales and well-being was measured via the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. Between 38-50% of parents reported at least mild mental health difficulties, and self-reported well-being was significantly below population norms. Parental mental health was predicted by both trait negative emotionality (Big Five Inventory – 2nd ed.; BFI-2) and parent-reported child autism symptoms (Social Communication Questionnaire), while well-being was predicted by parent factors alone, including trait extraversion (BFI-2) and mindfulness (Mindful Attention Awareness Scale). Broader child characteristics (e.g., adaptive behaviour, behaviour problems) and family/socioeconomic contextual factors made no significant contribution in regression models. While the mental health and well-being of parents with young autistic children are associated with one another, unique predictors seem to exist. That well-being was uniquely predicted by a modifiable parent characteristic – mindfulness – suggests the potential for early supports to bring direct benefits for parents, in the context of raising a young child with autism.
Antanita Chrysostom *Deakin University*	A major part of child development is play as it enables making connections with people and the environment. Children with Autism generally have limited play abilities, and this can cause difficulties for parents to interact in play with their children. Environmental changes, such as the novel COVID-19 pandemic, added further stress for both children and parents. Consequently, many parents were required to further modify their approaches to play interactions with their children. This study aimed to investigate how the COVID-19 social restrictions impacted the quality of the play interactions between parents and their children with Autism. Parents of children with Autism aged 18 months to five years and residing in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic participated in an online survey. The survey was active from late May to end of June 2020, covering

	the early stages of COVID-19 social restrictions in Australia. A total of 177 individuals accessed the survey and the responses to four open-ended questions relating specifically to the COVID-19 circumstances were analysed from 26 participants. Findings highlighted both the positive benefits and challenging circumstances parents and their children with Autism experienced due to the COVID-19 social restrictions across Australia. Key findings reflected the importance of play and parent involvement, as well the need to manage Autism symptomology. The implications of this study may assist in future service planning and delivery for children with Autism by also actively involving and supporting parents.
Lyndel Kennedy *La Trobe University*	Background: Neurodivergent students are enrolling in higher education (HE) in increasing numbers, but completion rates remain low. Most research focusses on autistic students attending university, while students with other neurodevelopmental conditions, and students attending TAFE are understudied. With estimates of 10-15% of the population being neurodivergent and having multiple neurodiverse conditions the rule rather than the exception, it is timely to investigate the factors contributing to HE success for neurodivergent students in Australia and New Zealand (NZ). The aim of the study is to explore the HE experiences of neurodivergent students, including those with autism and other neurodiverse conditions to discover predictors of success in HE and barriers to accessing HE supports. Method: A quantitative anonymous online survey, developed with feedback from neurodiverse students, was used to capture higher education, diagnostic, disclosure, and support experiences; of current and recent HE (university, TAFE, ITP, or vocational college) students aged 18+ years in Australia and NZ. Measures of autistic and ADHD traits, executive functioning, social support, wellbeing, anxiety and depression symptoms, self-efficacy and sensory sensitivities are also collected. Results: to date, 201 neurodiverse students have completed the survey (mean age 25.71 years, 55% females, 55% born in Australia, 38% NZ, 7% other). Of these, 81 are autistic, 71 have ADHD, 35 have SpLD, 29 have DCD, 20 with tic disorder, and 28 with communications disorder. The majority are attending university (67%) with 19% attending TAFE/ITP and 10% other colleges. Disclosure attitudes and use of supports will be presented and implications discussed.
Amanda Karo *Queensland University of Technology*	The proposed systematic literature review asks: What do social work researchers in English-speaking western countries say about parents of autistic children in the 21st Century? To what extent do they apply critical, anti-oppressive frameworks to their research in line with the disability rights and

	neurodiversity movements? Current autism research is heavily influenced by the positivist bio-medical model, economic rationalism, rehabilitative intervention, integration (assimilation), and in some cases elimination of the "disorder". It follows that the medical model is therefore the background for social work research on and with, parents of autistic children. As critical social work researchers we must remain mindful of the implications of this for autistic children, adults, and their families. Despite social work's stated codes of ethics and practice standards, and the existence of the disability rights and neurodiversity movements, a preliminary literature review shows social workers are yet to apply a critical, anti-oppressive framework to their research with and about parents of autistic children. Valuing lived experience, partnering 'with' community, minimizing intervention, practitioner reflexivity, prioritising cultural safety, conscious navigation of discrimination and oppression (of children and adults) with a commitment to transforming oppressive structures are core to this anti-oppressive approach. Modern social work researchers, with our strongly developed critical theory and commitment to anti-oppressive practice, are perfectly poised to contribute important and progressive research in the field. The proposed systematic literature review, building on the preliminary critical review, will be completed by an autistic researcher and is intended to lay the groundwork for this to happen.
Elizabeth Dovenberg *University of Otago*	Introduction: Autistic individuals are generally less physically active and participate in fewer sports compared to non-autistic individuals. This is due to various factors, including availability of sports programmes and enjoyment of physical activity (PA). As a consequence, autistic individuals may not experience well-known benefits of PA. This research area lacks qualitative investigations, which provide detailed descriptions of personal experiences in naturalistic settings and extend understanding beyond quantifiable outcomes. This proposed study will qualitatively explore the unique contextualised experiences of autistic students attending Wednesday Sport (WS), a weekly PA programme. Method: This case study will utilise ethnographic methods to obtain in-depth information about PA experiences. More specifically, the researcher will observe WS and write fieldnotes describing participants' engagement, behaviour, contextual details, and researcher interpretations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, with questions based on fieldnotes. Interviews will offer participants (and optionally parents) the opportunity to share personal stories about WS and PA. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and shared with participants for corrections and comments. Analysis: Analysis will be guided by a case study framework where

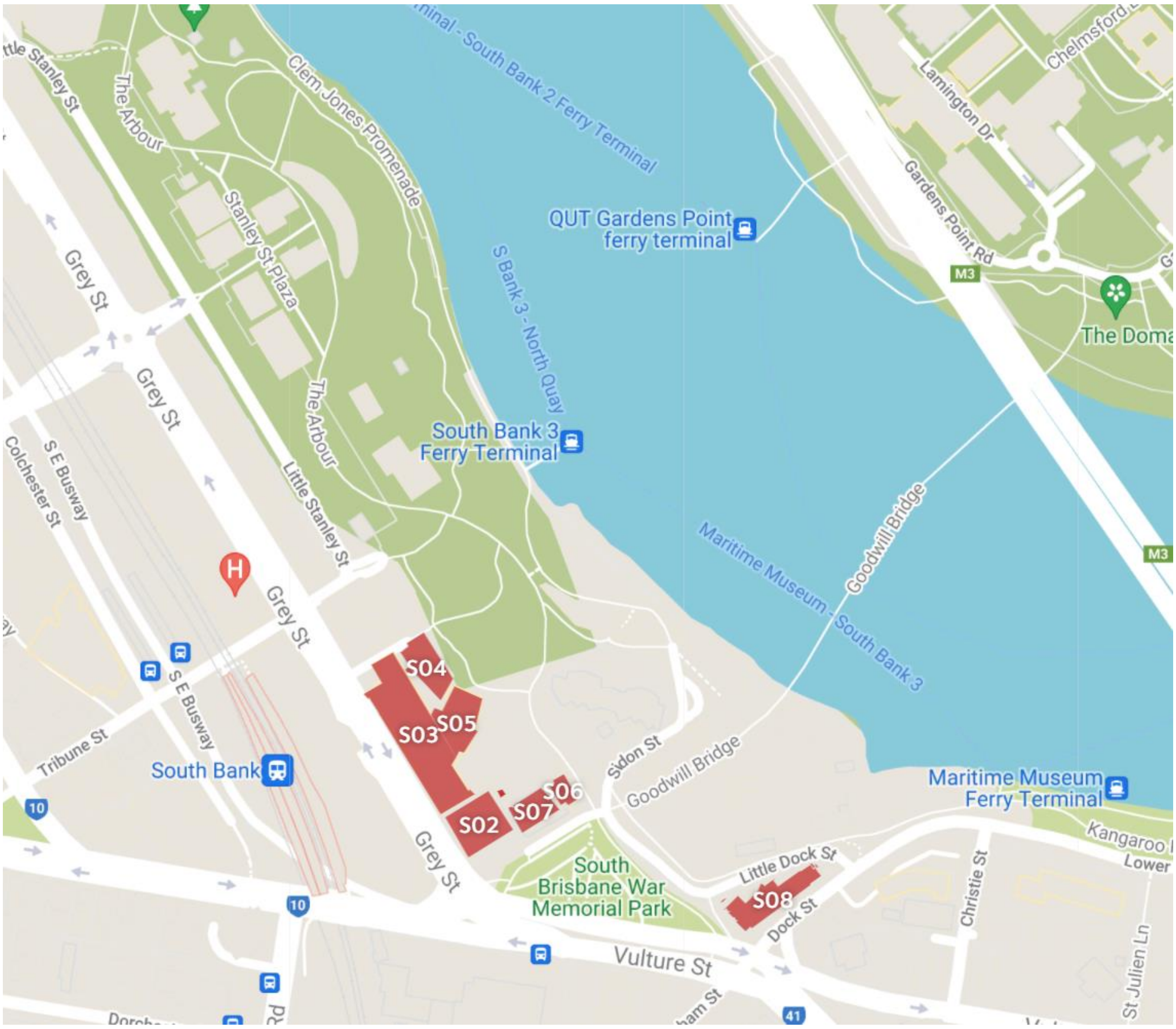
	fieldnotes analysis occurs prior to conducting interviews. Interviews will be analysed using content analysis. Study rigour will be assessed according to trustworthiness, auditability, credibility, and transferability. Conclusion: This study will explore autistic students' WS experiences. Results may describe contributions to their positive or negative PA experiences and may generalise to broader theoretical models of PA (e.g., Environmental Stress Hypothesis). Deeper qualitative understanding on PA and autism may facilitate sustained PA involvement, possibly leading to PA-related benefits.
Irina Silva *Queensland University of Technology*	Digital technology is a common aspect of 21st-century living and generally part of children on the autism spectrum everyday life. Little is known regarding the influence of digital use by individuals on the spectrum during their early childhood years. Additionally, since stay home became the only option for a considerable part of the world, it is urgent to answer the question: How do young children on the autism spectrum use digital technology in their everyday lives? To understand this phenomenon, four families with at least one child on the spectrum, aged between three and six years, living in Brisbane, were invited to participate in this digital ethnographic study. At home, the interactions involving the focus child with digital technology and family members will be video recorded by the participants over three months. According to participants' preferences, regular online meetings will be scheduled, providing opportunities for additional observations, informal conversations to check in, share information, clarify, and support the family's needs. The proposed digital ethnographic study aims to understand the purpose, benefits, and challenges of digital technology use from children's perspective. Respecting children on the spectrum time, ways of seeing, thinking, and routines are strategies to better comprehend their life experiences. Understandings will inform the use of digital technology by children on the autism spectrum in various settings, including family contexts, enlighten practices, future research, early years education and care.
Afifah Muharikah *Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University*	Like most universities in Asia, English is compulsorily to learn in Indonesia to equip its learners with international communication skills. Indonesian autistic students in the tertiary level are not exempted from this course. While these individuals are known to have challenges in social communication, learning communication in a foreign language might offer more challenges for them. Unfortunately, research in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field about teaching English for communication for individuals with communication challenges is scarce. As available studies about interaction involving autistic individuals mostly took place in the language

	perceived as their first language, capturing information about their interaction pattern in foreign language setting might benefit the EFL educators to design a more inclusive learning environment for autistic EFL learners. This small-scale study, which is a part of my doctoral project, aimed to investigate the interaction pattern of autistic students in an inclusive English classroom in an online setting. The study recorded synchronous online interactions of an autistic college student with his five non-autistic peers while doing group works in an inclusive EFL classroom in one public tertiary institution in Jakarta. A 120-minute interaction was recorded, transcribed, and codified. The study captured four issues triggering negotiation during the interaction. Three of the triggers are those often captured in mainstream online EFL classrooms, while the other one is related to the communication traits of the autistic participants. This pilot study might offer a potential hypothesis about the communication traits of autistic individuals in online foreign language settings.
Helen McLennan *Queensland University of Technology*	Professional Learning about Autism Comes from Collaboration and Experience: Reflections from a School Case Study. Various stakeholder groups have identified a need for education staff to have an improved understanding about autism as well as an understanding of good practice in relation to the education of students on the autism spectrum. Professional learning opportunities in schools can take various forms, ranging from information sessions held in staff meetings, to mentoring and coaching in the classroom. Current research on professional learning supports a move beyond standalone lectures about autism that are delivered to a passive audience. This concept is supported by the findings of our case study conducted in an Australian metropolitan Independent Catholic school. One aim of our research study was to investigate the knowledge that was gained by stakeholders actively engaged in a whole-school self-evaluation process relevant to the education of students on the autism spectrum. Following a process of thematic analysis of recorded meetings, one key theme that emerged from the discussion amongst a stakeholder team was an acknowledgement that productive professional learning comes from collaboration with stakeholders, including students. In this conference presentation, this key theme will be discussed, along with provision of an example of the goal that the stakeholder team set following their self-evaluation process. This finding has possible implications for future educational practice and policy. The insight gained from analysis of the stakeholder team discussion adds to the research literature in providing possible direction for planning of professional learning about autism in schools.

Lizaan Schwartz *Griffith University*	Title: Understanding Social-Emotional Reciprocity in Autism: Viewpoints Shared by Teachers. Abstract: Poor social-emotional reciprocity (SER) has been identified as one of the defining traits of autism. It is a key criterion in recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders editions, DSM-IV and DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994, 2013). Yet this difficulty related to socially engaging and interacting with others is poorly understood. The study reported here was a small-scale, qualitative inquiry underpinned by a phenomenological approach in which social-emotional reciprocity (SER) was the phenomenon being studied. Semi-structured interviews with three experienced teachers at an Australian autism-specific school were used to capture their understandings and experiences related to the trait. Interestingly, our teachers found it challenging to discuss SER in isolation from other key autistic traits such as repetitive behaviour and restricted interests. When data were formally explored using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), teacher viewpoints clustered around three interconnected themes: perspectives about SER; relationships and friendships; and impact on teachers. Limitations of this inquiry and recommendations for future research in this area are provided.
Danielle Taylor *University of Wollongong*	Self-determination skills are essential for university students on the autism spectrum, especially if they are to access the necessary adjustments and support they need to succeed in their studies. In spite of this, little is known if and how students on the autism spectrum develop and utilise self-determination skills to access support. This research study was a constructivist grounded theory investigation, which aimed to find out about how students with ASD demonstrate and develop self-determination skills in the university context. Findings from interviews with students, academic staff and significant others indicated that students demonstrated and developed self-determination if certain internal and external needs are fulfilled.
Libby MacDonald *Griffith University*	Practice-based resources for teaching students on the spectrum: The experiences of regional and rural teachers Supporting students on the autism spectrum in regional and rural classrooms involves challenges and advantages that can differ from those experienced by teachers in metropolitan contexts. Access to professional development, support, and resources may be limited in regional and rural areas and teachers can be required to adapt their pedagogy to unique and diverse situations. The contextual factors influencing teaching practice in regional and rural areas are often not accounted for in studies evaluating interventions for supporting students on the spectrum. Intervention research tends to be largely situated

	in metropolitan areas or to present results skewed toward metropolitan contexts with the inclusion of data from relatively small numbers of regional and rural participants. The research to be discussed in this presentation involved the analysis of data from regional and rural areas collected during a larger project examining teachers' responses to models of practice designed to support their decision making with respect to supporting students on the autism spectrum. This presentation will discuss the findings of this analysis with particular attention to the implications for the ways in which practices for supporting students on the spectrum are studied, promoted, and packaged for use in non-metropolitan classrooms.
Rebecca Poulsen *Reframing Autism*	Authentic coproduction: Enacting "nothing about us, without us" in research communities. Recent literature shows Australian autism research does not reflect the priorities of the Autistic population or their families, and does not fully adopt inclusive, co-produced or participatory methodologies to increase Autistic community engagement in autism research. Although some organisations and institutions have pioneered broad Australian commitment to inclusive, co-produced research, the disparity between current research funding and output. For example, the Australian Autism Research Council (AARC) research priorities reports (2019, 2021), indicate there is a disparity between Autistic community research needs and current research and funding. Here, we define and describe authentic Autistic coproduction from the literature. Next, we will review the disparities between the research priorities of the Autistic community and current research outputs and funding. Finally, we suggest future strategies to assist to bridge the gap between these the researchers and the researched. Reframing Autism, an Autistic-led charity, has launched the Autistic Research Network (ARN). The ARN will facilitate an environment where authentic coproduction is standard practice and inclusive of Autistic contributors regardless of support and communication needs. This enables research to be driven by the priorities of the Autistic community and their allies. The ARN will provide support to Autistic researchers and the Autistic community to enable their participation in autism research, through sharing opportunities, tools, and resources within a community-based network. It will equally work with non-autistic autism researchers, to disseminate the message that authentic coproduction increases the impact and translational relevance of research outputs.
Callyn Farrell *University of Queensland*	Purpose: Participation in Organised Extracurricular Social Activities (OESA) can provide unique opportunities and positive outcomes for children. This study investigated whether Australian school-aged children diagnosed with Autism

	Spectrum Disorder (ASD) differ in their participation and experience in OESAs compared to their typically developing (TD) peers. Methods: Parents of TD children (n = 171) and parents of children diagnosed with ASD (n = 35) completed the Organised Extracurricular Social Activities-Experience Questionnaire (OESA-EQ), reporting on factors related to their child's OESA participation and experience. Results: Parents of children diagnosed with ASD reported significantly less OESA participation compared to TD children. Additionally, the reported OESA experience of children with ASD was facilitated less by a child's individual abilities and behaviour, the OESA program's features, and the social environment compared to TD children. Conclusions: The present study not only provides knowledge regarding OESA participation differences for Australian children with ASD; it also offers a uniquely comprehensive insight into why this may be the case. This study underscores a need for programs, policies, training, and interventions that target inclusion, accessibility, and positive OESA participation experiences.



Location: Room 2.02, Building S06 on the South Bank campus of Griffith University, Brisbane

Closest train and bus stations: South Bank

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