

# UNDERSTANDING STEM EDUCATION FOCUSED ACADEMICS' CAPACITY FOR SELF-DETERMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Pauline Ross

Presenting Author: Pauline Ross ([pauline.ross@sydney.edu.au](mailto:pauline.ross@sydney.edu.au))  
School of Life and Environmental Sciences, The University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia.

**KEYWORDS:** Education focussed academics, Self-determination theory, autonomy, competence, relatedness

Education focussed STEM academic roles that unbundle or separate teaching from disciplinary research are rapidly increasing across Australia and internationally. Understanding the experiences of education focussed STEM academics is critical if we are to deliver on educational excellence and improve the quality of the student experience. A Self-Determination Theory (SDT) lens and the three central tenets of autonomy, competence and relatedness and semi structured 90-minute interviews were used to understand the experiences of eight STEM education focussed academics in research intensive higher education institutions in Australia. This study found education focussed STEM academics had the agency and autonomy to take on a role that they valued and to which they believed they could effectively contribute. The reality of the role was restricted autonomy and uncertainty about competence and expertise. All education focussed STEM academics expressed the view of the importance of relatedness in the role through building communities which were commonly external to their school and institution and involved education focussed STEM academics in other disciplines and higher education institutions. Self-determination theory is a powerful heuristic for education focussed academics to use so they have adaptive capacity and the resilience to persist and deliver on expectations of improved STEM education.

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, The University of Western Australia, 28-30 September 2022, page 60, ISSN 2653-0481