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## SOCIAL INCLUSION

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## Table of Contents

Editorial .....	1
Social Inclusion – Context, Theory and Practice .....	6
Dr Jennifer Gidley, Gary Hampson, Dr Leone Wheeler, Elleni Bereded-Samuel	
Regional Australians taking responsibility for health care and promotion.....	39
Mary Holmes, Paul Holmes, Kate Warren and Bronwyn Ellis	
Daruganora: modeling new practice for sustainable, collaborative research led learning and teaching relationships between schools and universities. ....	64
Kristina Everett, Trudy Ambler, Eloise Hummel, Melissa Collins, Rhonda Davis, Natalie Humphries, Corrinne Franklin	
E-commerce in Regional Small Businesses: A Service Learning Approach .....	90
Dr Nina Evans, Dr Janet Sawyer	



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## Editorial

In the 'foreword' to the document "A Stronger, Fairer Australia", the Australian Government describes its plan for achieving social inclusion as one that 'aims to make sure every Australian has the capability, opportunity and resources to participate in the economy and their community while taking responsibility for shaping their own lives' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Further to this report, the Australian Government has since established a Social Inclusion Board and a series of initiatives aimed at implementing this agenda. These include The Family Support Program, which works with families with children at greatest risk, to support and nurture family life in an attempt to enhance these children's life opportunities. The Family Centred Employment Project is specifically targeted at assisting jobless

families with children to move into education and employment.

A focus on a 'place-based approach' complements these whereby select communities in specific places are targeted for micro implementation of these macro-level programs. The Federal Government also established programs to address homelessness, people with disability or a mental illness, indigenous Australians and a volunteering strategy, which will come into operation in 2011 to coincide with the United Nations' Year of Volunteers.

In its more recent Budget Statement, the Federal Government announced a series of further initiatives aimed at bolstering the Social Inclusion Agenda. These include tax cuts, a boost for child care, more than \$660 million in training, apprenticeships and



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adult literacy and numeracy through Skills Australia, over \$200 million over four years to train job seekers, and a commitment to provide greater access to quality training for the attainment of higher education skills.

‘Education’ appears to lie at the core of the Government concern, given the statement that ‘education is fundamental to achieving a fairer and stronger Australia and for many provides a pathway out of disadvantage’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, see “Poor Educational Outcomes”). In the report “A Stronger, Fairer Australia” (2009), statistics and observations that we have been aware of for some time are reiterated to illustrate the correlation between education and social exclusion, for instance, that those who don’t complete Year 12 or an equivalent non-

school qualification, are 18 per cent less likely to be in the workforce than people who do. Significantly, the unequal status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as education recipients was highlighted with reference to statistics indicating that while 84 per cent of non indigenous Australians between 20-24 years completed Year 12 or Certificate 11, only 47 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had done so.

However, just as there are statistics and reports that support the claim that certain sectors of the Australian community are socially excluded, there exists yet another body of statistics and reports which confirm that there may be a problem in drawing on ‘education’ as a strategy to minimise social exclusion and enhance social inclusion. That is, despite repeated initiatives,



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participation rates of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Australia remain at approximately 16 per cent, while access for regional and remote students has fallen since 2003 (Heagney, 2009). Heagney (2009) points to underfunding of the tertiary system, reduced levels of student income support, taxation of student supplementary income, ineffective entry pathways between the vocational education training sector and higher education, and finally what is described as a 'piecemeal approach to outreach programmes' as being amongst the causes for this status quo.

Thus, there are a number of challenges in 'Responding to Social Inclusion' for educational institutions. This edition of the journal contributes to the debate on social inclusion by bringing

together both research and applied endeavours from the University sector that are attempting to respond to this challenge. Gidley and Wheeler provide a reflective essay that includes an overview of 'social inclusion' in the literature and draws on two case studies of social inclusion initiatives by RMIT and Victoria University to illustrate the importance of university-community engagement in 'delivering' social inclusion initiatives. Holmes, Holmes, Warren and Ellis provide an in depth case study that seeks to illustrate the real change that has happened in local community lives as a result of the partnership between the University of South Australia and the local community in the provision of health care. Everett from Macquarie University describes the Daruganora project, which is designed to support indigenous students to attend university by



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working with students while still in high school. Finally, Evans and Sawyer focus on the use of the Internet in enhancing the productive capacity of small to medium enterprises. This is an illustration of how engagement with this medium is a resource in responding to the challenge of social inclusion with different community groups.

However, whilst not formally reported here, there are examples of initiatives by other Universities to the challenge of 'social inclusion' that complement the spectrum of engagement presented here. One is the 'Centre for Social Impact' an initiative by four universities, the University of New South Wales, The University of Melbourne, Swinburne University of Technology

and the University of Western Australia to work with government, public service, private sector organisations, community benefit organisations and philanthropists in an endeavour to teach and research in the field of social innovation and entrepreneurship. In addition, a number of Australian universities sponsor SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) chapters. This is a student-driven initiative whereby students are assisted to formulate and implement projects aimed at meeting community needs. Many SIFE chapters also specifically work with communities and groups considered high risk on programs ranging from financial skills literacy to social entrepreneurial activities.

De-institutionalising social exclusion requires institutional responses. As the articles in this edition illustrate, a key



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component in this response is the university-community partnership. Harnessing this partnership is one route to effectively address this challenge.

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## Social Inclusion – Context, Theory and Practice

Dr Jennifer Gidley, RMIT University; Gary Hampson, RMIT University; Dr Leone Wheeler, RMIT University; Elleni Bereded-Samuel, Victoria University

### Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on social inclusion in Australia and provides an overview of the current situation regarding university/community engagement. Social inclusion is a contested term in both academic and policy literature entailing a range of interpretations. The paper will argue that there is a spectrum of ideological positions underlying theory, policy and practice. The broad theoretical construct put forward regards social inclusion in relation to areas (who is to be included?) and

degrees (ideologies) of inclusion. Possible areas of inclusion are socio-economic status, culture (including indigenous cultures), linguistic group, religion, geography (rural and remote/isolated), gender, sexual orientation, age (including youth and old age), physical and mental health/ability, and status with regard to unemployment, homelessness and incarceration. Degree of inclusion comprises a nested threefold schema incorporating a spectrum of ideologies involving—from narrowest to most encompassing—the neoliberal focus on access and economic factors, the social justice focus on community participation and the human potential focus on personal and collective empowerment stemming from positive psychology and critical/transformational pedagogies.

Contemporary Australian social inclusion policy is related to UK



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policy. While policy rhetoric indicates a broad interpretation of social inclusion, concerns are raised that a dominant economicist agenda favours corporate and national economic interests over social and psychological ones. Questions are also raised about the privileging of some areas of inclusion over others and the possibility that reductive interpretations of social inclusion are forms of cultural assimilation. Social inclusion in practice is addressed both in relation to degrees of inclusion and through case studies. The paper provides an overview of examples of social inclusion interventions, including a review of two initiatives of RMIT University and Victoria University focussing on industry/community partnerships. The paper concludes with some challenges and issues for further research on social inclusion including a proposed in-depth survey and

consideration of literature on integrative phenomena such as ecological sustainability, and contextualisation of social inclusion within broader movements of global socio-cultural change.

### **Keywords**

Community participation, economicism, human potential, ideologies, social justice



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## Introduction

This paper addresses social inclusion in contemporary higher education, focusing on Australia, with supplementary regard for the UK. It firstly constructs a broad theoretical framework regarding social inclusion. This includes the identification of types, areas, and degrees of inclusion. Secondly, it discusses recent policy. Thirdly, it addresses social inclusion in practice—both with respect to interventions from the perspective of degrees of inclusion, and through two case studies. The intention of the paper is to act as an *opening* to a broader and deeper conversation, rather than convey a comprehensive account.

## Theoretical indications

### *History*

The notion of social inclusion can be dated back at least to the nineteenth century sociologist Weber and regard for the importance of social cohesion. In terms of more recent history, the term is more readily identified through its counterpart, *social exclusion*. This can be traced to the 1970s French notion of *les exclus*—those excluded from the social insurance system (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008). The concept spread through Europe and the UK throughout the 1980s and 90s. Its surfacing in Blair's government, culminating in a Social Exclusion Unit, catalysed Australian usage, first in South Australia in 2002 and more recently via the Rudd government's Social Inclusion Board inaugurated in 2008.



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## Areas of inclusion

Social inclusion can pertain to a variety of areas of social groupings. These include demographic differentiation with respect to

- socio-economic status;
- culture and primary language, including indigenous groups, and those for whom English is not a first language;
- religion;
- geography, including those in regional, rural and/or remote areas;
- gender and sexual orientation;
- age, including youth and senior groups;
- health, including physical and mental disabilities;

- unemployment;
- homelessness; and
- incarceration.

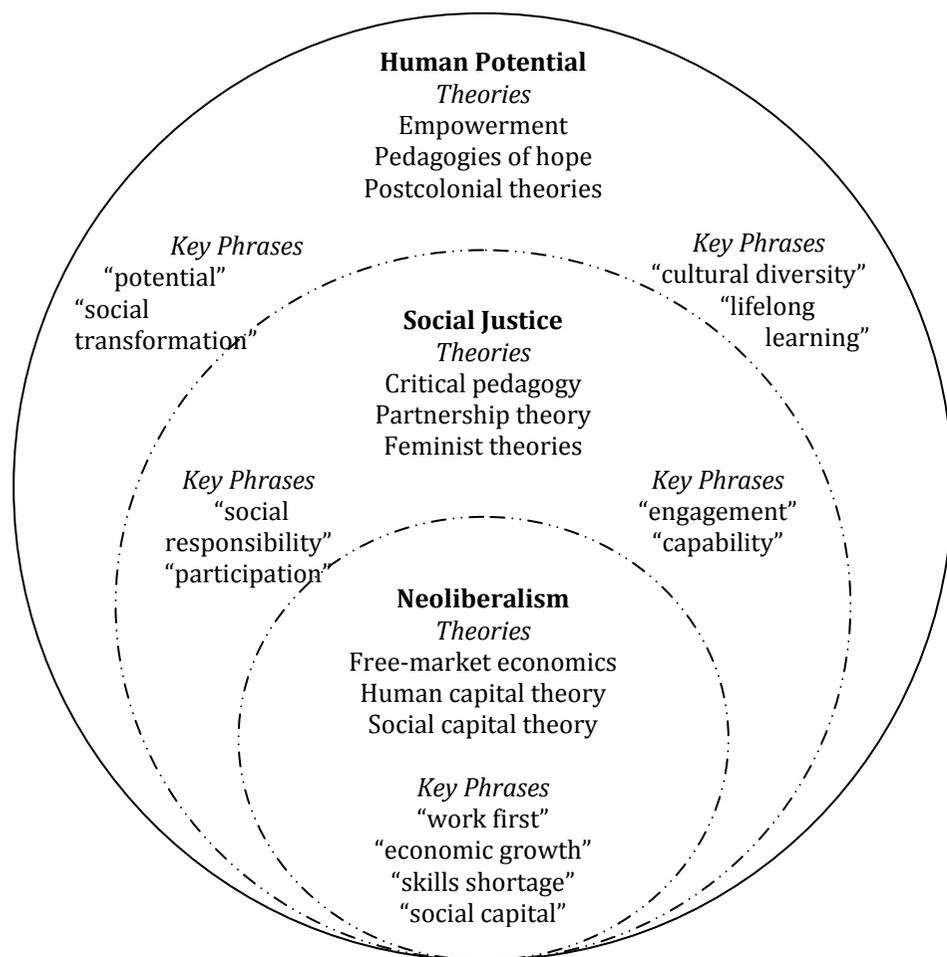
## Degrees of inclusion

Social inclusion can be understood as pertaining to a nested schema regarding degrees of inclusion. The narrowest interpretation pertains to the neoliberal notion of *social inclusion as access*; a broader interpretation regards the social justice idea of *social inclusion as participation*; whilst the widest interpretation involves the human potential lens of *social inclusion as empowerment* (see Figure 1).



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**Figure 1: Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy**



### Neoliberal access

The narrowest interpretation of social inclusion is linked to the ideology of neoliberalism which began to take hold in the 1980s. From the perspective of neoliberal ideologies, increasing social inclusion is about investing in human capital and improving the skills shortages for the primary purpose of economic growth as part of a nationalist agenda to build the nation's economy in order to better perform in a competitive global market. Political scientist Manfred Steger describes neoliberalism's central tenets as including

*The primacy of economic growth, the importance of free trade to stimulate growth, the unrestricted free market, individual choice, the reduction of government regulation, and the*



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*advocacy of an evolutionary model of social development anchored in the Western experience and applicable to the entire world (Steger, 2005, p. 8-9).*

Neoliberalism can be differentiated from classic liberalism in its interest in the state *enforcement* of liberalism—an *illiberal* manoeuvre.

Within higher education theory and policy one of the ways that this ideology may appear is through the notion of *social capital*.

The original concept of social capital, as put forward by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, addresses “the reproduction of social class divisions and inequalities of power” (Bexley, Marginson, & Wheelahan, 2007, p. 11). However, the currently

popular neoliberal appropriation of the concept, as exemplified by Putnam’s usage, instead forces nonmercantile community resources into “a quasi-market framework, where assets such as networks of trust, expertise and social support can be subjected to various forms of social accountancy.” (Bexley, Marginson, & Wheelahan, 2007, p. 10-11)

An associated concept is that of *access* to higher education. From a neoliberal perspective, access may be regarded as a sufficient expression of social inclusion due to the neoclassical economic conceptualisation of human beings as autonomous rational decision makers free from social power imbalances.

Exemplifying this perspective would be the idea that social *exclusion* pertains to “restriction of access to opportunities and



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limitations of the capabilities required to capitalise on these” (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008, p. 9).

Somewhat akin to the axiom of mainstream economics pertaining to *scarcity* of resources, this perspective on social inclusion works from models of *deficiency*. It can also be reductive in the sense of promoting a dominator hierarchy *homogenising* “that which is included.” The reduction of social explanation to economic factors is an example of *conceptual* reductive integration, whilst *lifeworld* reductive integration would be exemplified both by cultural assimilation and stakeholder dominator hierarchies. The latter, for instance, might involve corporate interests or government attempting to marginalise the interests and agendas of community voices such

as those of indigenous, homeless, disabled, gay, youth or elderly groups (or their advocates). Critical apprehension of differences between rhetoric and reality may also be elicited. For example, a discourse that refers to *social justice*, *social responsibility* or *fair go* may nonetheless mask economic intent regarding merely *skills shortages* and/or *economic growth*.

### **Social justice participation**

A more inclusive interpretation of social inclusion is identified through social justice ideology. From the perspective of social justice ideologies, increasing social inclusion is about human rights, egalitarianism of opportunity, human dignity, and fairness for all. It may or may not be linked to economic interests, but its primary aim is to enable all human beings to



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participate fully in society with respect for their human dignity. Here, acts of community *engagement* and *participation* are foregrounded. This can also be linked to notions of community *sustainability* (Langworthy, 2008, p. 57) and contextualised within *paradigmatic* conceptions of participation (Eisler, 1987, 2001). Exemplifying the participatory perspective is the idea that social inclusion pertains to the ability to “participate in the key activities in the society in which they live” (Saunders, Naidoo, & Griffiths, 2007, p. 17).

The university can play a key role in participatory social inclusion via university-community partnerships. Boyer’s schema comprising four major types of scholarships valorises such a notion: it includes the scholarship of application or

service which is conceptualised as a two-way process of inquiry and learning between university and community. Such “partnership synergies” are furthered by Kenworthy-U’Ren and U’Ren’s research regarding such theoretical constructs as *linkage complexity*, *learning theory*, *network embeddedness*, and *participatory action research* (Kenworthy-U’Ren & U’Ren, 2008, p. 89) under the rubric of shared interests, privileges and responsibilities. Such university *engagement* can also be analysed in relation to processes of “collaboration, complexity and contract” (B. Thompson, 2008, p. 46), involving such features as *authentic learning*, *academic service learning*, *experiential education*, and *constructivist teaching* (B. Thompson, 2008, p. 42-43). In contrast to reductionist forms of integration promoted by neoliberalism, social justice interpretations of



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social inclusion comprise *complex* integrations involving participatory *dialogue* arising from the full ecology of interests regardless of power. Such participatory complexity is further enhanced within human potential ideologies.

### **Human potential empowerment**

From the perspective of human potential ideologies, increasing social inclusion goes beyond merely justice and human rights and seeks to maximise the potential of each human being.

Employing models of possibility instead of models of deficiency, human potential approaches centre on the interpretation of *social inclusion as empowerment*. Among other things, Jayne Clapton from Griffith University claims that empowerment involves “the moral imperative of working with the *complexity* of

humanity” (added emphasis) (Olsson, 2008, p. 9)—a form of *complex* integration (as identified above). Such a perspective foregrounds the notion that *all* human beings (whether mainstream or marginalised) are *multi-dimensional* beings, who have needs and interests that go well beyond their role in the political economy of a nation. Here, social inclusion valorises difference and diversity, pointing to collective individualism. Through this, education can be understood as *transformative*, facilitating one’s potential for “a life of common dignity” (Nicholson, 2008, p. 2 of 4).

Discourses inspiring such perspectives include adult developmental psychology theories that propose higher stages of human reasoning {Commons, 2002 #1336; Cook-Greuter,



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2000 #901; Sinnott, 1998 #1040}, critical and transformative pedagogies that reverse the focus on disadvantage and deficit and look towards positive development, lifelong learning and empowerment (Bassett, 2005; Hart, 2001; Montuori, 1997), postcolonial development theories that resist the westernisation and homogenisation of diverse cultures (Jain & Jain, 2003; Jain, Miller, & Jain, 2001) and discourses regarding multicultural histories, and positive futures visioning (Gidley, 2001, 2005). The general understanding identifies that:

*When a person's pathways thinking is enhanced, and they become more able to generate effective pathways to their goals, it is likely that they will then become more motivated to follow these routes. Conversely, when a*

*person becomes more motivated to pursue their goals, it is likely that they will thus be more energised to think of workable routes to their goals." (Egan, Butcher, & Ralph, 2008, p. 35)*

### **Policy indications**

The term *social inclusion* is in increasing usage in Australian policy. Promoted by the Rudd/Gillard leadership, it appears poised to replace terms such as "access and equity" which reflected earlier policy iterations regarding disadvantaged groups in higher education. The new policy also indicates a reference to similar orientation in the UK. It is notable that the term makes an important linguistic shift from the negative framing of "poverty", "disadvantage", "deprivation" and



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“exclusion” to the more positive framing of “inclusion.” It is to be hoped that this marks the beginning of a directional shift in attitude from models of *deficiency* to human potential models of *possibility*. Indeed, policy rhetoric often includes reference to social and psychological dimensions in addition to economic ones. For instance, the Bradley Report includes recommendations regarding “awareness of higher education,” “aspiration to participate,” and “educational attainment to allow participation” (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 40). Policy statements by Julia Gillard MP also address “community resilience” and the issue of minority groups getting “their voice heard” (Gillard, 2008b).

Despite social and psychological inclusion, however, an economist bias can be discerned: for instance, in the Bradley Report, five of the eight recommendations regarded increasing *funding* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 40). A fair proportion of Gillard’s language also pertains to the economic agenda. For instance, in her launch of the Bradley Review of Higher Education she spoke of the challenge for Australian universities to ensure they are “globally oriented, competitive, and socially inclusive”; she noted that these characteristics were “linked to the needs of the Australian economy and labour market.” Economic metaphors in her languaging: “social *capital*” and “*investing* in children” (added emphasis) (Gillard, 2008a) tilt towards neoliberal human capital theory. In general, both *purpose* of social inclusion and *process* involved in seeking social



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inclusion tend to be framed economically. Purpose centres around both individual employment opportunities and national economic growth, whilst process is primarily discussed in terms of monetary cost. Moreover, even where languaging appears to be more inclusive, practice may not follow suit. Indeed, the reality may be closer to the reverse—an appropriation of normative social policy by market-driven neoliberal economic values. Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Tony Nicholson, for instance, has concerns that social inclusion rhetoric is largely a rebadging of old values and policies and is not being taken seriously by either the community sector or government bureaucracy. A case study of “dimensions of social inclusion” in a post-1992 British university, for instance, cautioned about approaches that claim to be about economic

factors *and* social justice, but where the dominant mode of inclusion was economic in nature. This study found that *the structures and attitudes reflected an instrumental view of higher education, in which the goal of higher education became that of obtaining employment and maintaining economic viability throughout the university experience (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003, Abstract).*

Questions can also be raised in relation to how adequately policy addresses *areas* of inclusion. Within the policy literature of the current Australian government, the predominant emphasis is on the following groups: disadvantaged geographic areas, indigenous Australians, and those living with homelessness, joblessness, disability, health and/or mental health issues



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(Gillard, 2008a); and there has been a subsequent focus on particular localities, even postcodes, within both urban and rural settings (Vinson, 2007). But this leaves numerous gaps between practice and the theory identified above which would supplement this policy orientation with diversity in relation to such groupings as culture, language, religion, age, incarceration status, gender and sexual orientation. With regard to the last of these, for instance, it is notable that whilst Australian social inclusion literature remains silent on inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, the UK's policy on social inclusion specifically identifies this group as a category of concern, noting, for instance, that there are a number of factors that make young LGBT people vulnerable to sexual exploitation,

mental health problems, alcohol and drug misuse, and undue risk-taking (NCSS<sup>1</sup>).

Finally, a critical question can be raised regarding the danger of inclusion as inferring *assimilation*. In this regard, a senior manager at Relationships Australia, Mandy Flahavin, points out that “ethnic and Indigenous minorities are particularly wary of the term social inclusion because of its implicit connotations of cultural assimilation” (Flahavin, 2008, Abstract). Wurundjeri woman, Sue Anne Hunter, manager of the Community Outreach

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<sup>1</sup> The National CAMHS Support Service (NCSS) is sponsored by the Department of Health (DH) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with the aim of offering additional capacity to support the implementation of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The NCSS is part of the Care Services Improvement Partnership Children, Young People and Families national programme, which is delivered in the regions of England.  
<http://www.csip.org.uk/~cypf/camhs/national-camhs-support-service-ncss.html>



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Unit of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency furthers elucidates that

*Social inclusion must be framed from the perspective [of] dealing with the unfinished business of the reconciliation process and respect for the rights of Aboriginal communities as First Peoples. ...Without such a conversation Aboriginal people will continue to be subject to covert and overt forms of neo-colonialism (Hunter, 2008, Abstract).*

## **Practice indications**

### **Introduction**

The Bradley Review of Higher Education identified and analysed the higher education participation rates from 1989 to 2007 of

six groups perceived to be under-represented (while noting that the groups were not all mutually exclusive). The data demonstrated that while the participation of students with disabilities appears to have doubled from 2% to 4%, all other groups have either remained static or declined in participation (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 28, Figure 2):

*During the last 15 years there has been a long term failure to increase the rate of participation of low socio-economic status, indigenous and regional and remote students. This has happened at a time where some other nations have begun to see results from their social inclusion initiatives. (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 149).*



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In relation to low socio-economic status, a major Universities Australia-commissioned study by Centre for the Study of Higher Education concurs:

*the share of university places for people from low SES backgrounds – approximately 15 per cent of places, compared with a population reference point of 25 per cent – has remained virtually unchanged for 15 years despite the overall expansion of access to higher education during that period (R. James, 2008, p. 2).*

Indeed, even with regard to disability, the participation of students with disabilities in 2007 still only represents half the

proportion of their representation in the general population (ibid. p. 28, Table 4).

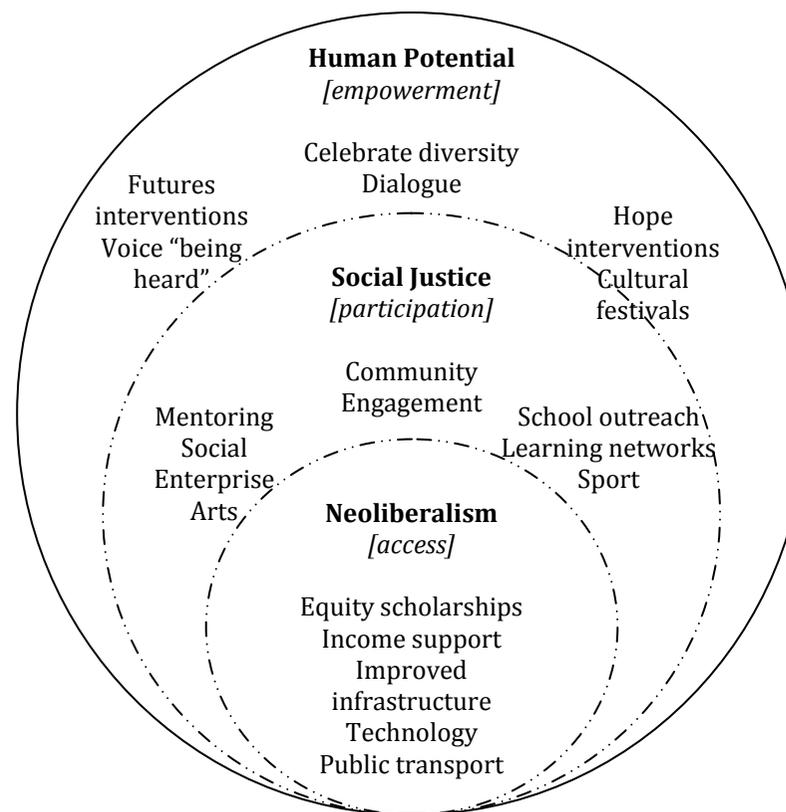
Additionally, a case study of “dimensions of social inclusion” in a post-1992 British university... the dominant university response to diversity reflects a *deficiency* model, where non-traditional students have many “needs”; but, there is not much evidence that diversity is regarded as a resource or a source of social transformation.” (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003, Abstract)

### **Interventions**

Social inclusion interventions can be identified with respect to their apparent ideology and disciplinary focus: interventions which focus on the economic benefits of social inclusion are

**Figure 2: Social Inclusion Interventions Nested within Ideological Underpinnings**

generally underpinned by neoliberal economic theory; those which focus on social justice tend to be grounded in sociology and/or critical social theory; whilst human potential interventions are often grounded in positive psychology or transformative pedagogies foregrounding psychological and spiritual values (see Figure 2). The following section indicates these three directions through brief reference to a few representative examples.





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### **Neoliberal access**

The following list exemplifies social inclusion as pertaining to the neoliberal agenda of *access* to higher education; these can be regarded as first stepping stones to the more inclusive understandings of social justice and human potential interventions:

- more equity scholarships for low SES groups;
- better income support for low SES students;
- improved regional infrastructures, including better public transport and technology access for rural and isolated and particularly indigenous students;
- physical and architectural modifications for students with disabilities;

- additional teaching assistance and translation assistance for students with learning disabilities or from CALD backgrounds; and
- better counselling and health services for students with mental and physical health challenges.

### **Social justice participation**

In recent years there seems to have been a gradual increase in the number and range of social justice oriented social inclusion interventions in Australian universities. These include the following.

*Partnerships*—The notion of partnerships has become almost ubiquitous in social inclusion literature. Indeed, in October 2008 an entire conference was devoted to Partnerships



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for Social Inclusion at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Public Policy. Many of the examples below were presented as papers at this conference.

*Social Enterprise*—The notion of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is emerging as a way “to tackle deep-rooted issues in the areas of regeneration, community empowerment, long-term unemployment ... and improving public service delivery” (Robbie, 2008, Abstract).

*Mentoring*—The value of mentoring for building a sense of community among young people in regional areas has been reported in a study where a Network Partnership Model was used (Broadbent & Whitehead, 2008). A student peer mentoring program has also been reported to assist new university students from under-represented schools by matching them

with continuing university students who attended the same school; the mentor would organise activities for their mentees in their first month of university (R. James, 2008, p. 66).

*Sport*—The role of sport in increasing the social inclusion of newly arrived and refugee young people in Melbourne has been highlighted in a project that created a partnership between the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Australian Football League (AFL). It was found that “participants of the Program are increasing their social and civic participation within their local communities” (McGill, 2008, Abstract).

*School Outreach*—School outreach programs include partnership with the Smith Family's Learning for Life Program; academic assistance in schools; and academic enrichment and



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university orientation {Universities Australia, 2008 #1835, pp. 60-61}. School outreach can also assist with negotiation of special entry programs. These may include: teacher recommendation systems; portfolio entry; bridging courses; and TAFE/VET pathways. RMIT has a school outreach program called *Schools Network Access Program (SNAP)*, which aims to increase “the access and participation of low SES students in the geographical regions to which RMIT has a commitment... Participation ratios of Indigenous and disability students through SNAP are comparable to the total student population” (Fels, 2008, p. 6). Griffith University *Pathways to Prevention* focuses on prevention by intervening in the early years transition from home to school (Olsson, 2008).

*Arts*—Two recent studies report the value of engagement in the arts to facilitate social inclusion. The first was a project whereby people with disabilities, their families and carers could access and participate in arts and cultural programs over four stages: “reflect, connect, create and celebrate” (A. Thompson, 2008, Abstract). Another project took the idea of arts for social inclusion even further reviewing two major research and evaluation reports on the significance of arts in strengthening communities, concluding that this occurred in several ways:

- “Engaging socially excluded population;
- providing new career pathways and work opportunities;
- providing a creative focus for communities to explore issues and aspirations;



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o developing confidence, pride and a sense of belonging in participants; and creating new and diverse artistic work and cultural experiences.” (Grinblat & Kershaw, 2008, Abstract)

### **Human potential empowerment**

The following interventions *deepen* social justice interests through emphasising empowerment and the encouragement of individual potential. The potential of the “pathways” may paradoxically correspond to their apparent indirectness.

*Voice “being heard”*—The importance of having “voices heard” is one of Gillard’s criteria for social inclusion, yet how is this actually enabled? Irish researcher, Chris McInerney, focuses on the underlying politics of governance in partnering

institutions such as universities and how the processes in so-called democratic institutions can be quite exclusive and in need of reconstruction with respect to decision-making processes and the redistribution of power (McInerney, 2008, Abstract). The notion of voice has also been the focus of social inclusion interventions with Indigenous people. A recent Victorian government initiative to give voice and representation to Indigenous Australians involves community networks and integrative frameworks “designed to address the multi-dimensional nature of Indigenous disadvantage” (Callaghan & Moser, 2008).

*Dialogue*—Addressing *voice* enables dialogue to emerge. Anglican Archdeacon, Philip Newman, for instance, has taken up the issue of *interreligious* dialogue as a pathway to increasing

social inclusion (Newman, 2008), whilst Professor Ashok Gangadean (co-founder of the Global Dialogue Institute, Philadelphia) has identified the significance of the role of *intercultural* dialogue (Gangadean, 2006).

*Futures*—If social inclusion interventions are to be effective as ways to create long-term improvements then it is advantageous to undertake some form of long-term future planning and/or envisioning of preferred futures scenarios with respect to particular under-represented groups. In a New Zealand initiative—the *Long Term Council Community Plans* project—local councils have been mandated to undertake community strategic planning, to “articulate economic, social, environmental and cultural well-beings which then influence the level and mix of services delivered by councils and contribute to

the achievements of community outcomes” (Reid, 2008, Abstract). The significance of taking a long-term view in planning and social interventions has been stressed for decades by futures researchers. Furthermore, the psychological and hence pedagogical value of interventions that assist young people to envisage positive futures has been highlighted in various Australian studies (Eckersley, Cahill, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2007; Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2006; Gidley, 2001; Gidley & Inayatullah, 2002; Stewart, 2002).

*Hope*—Interventions addressing young people’s views and visions of their futures are closely connected with interventions aimed at facilitating hope and empowerment (Gidley, 2004, 2005). In this regard, a range of theoretical perspectives can be drawn on. For instance, educational



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philosopher Henry Giroux states that we need to “educate students to work collectively to make ‘despair unconvincing and hope practical’ by refusing the role of the disconnected expert, technician, or careerist and adopting the practice of the engaged and transformative intellectual” (Giroux, 1992, p. 105).

Additionally, Paulo Freire’s pedagogical theories and practices of working with oppressed people in Latin America can be aptly utilised to facilitate social inclusion through creating pedagogies of hope rather than hopelessness (Freire, 1970, 1995). An intervention that gives hope to incarcerated women is operated by internationally acclaimed Brisbane advocacy and human rights organisation, *Sisters Inside*, which provides pathways to higher education as a means of rehabilitation (Olsson, 2008, p. 6).

*Cultural festivals*—One of the best ways to facilitate the deeper feelings of social inclusion that align to engagement and empowerment (in contrast to having access but still feeling disempowered) is for people to be able to express their own cultural values in ways whereby they are fully honoured. Indian researcher Ashis Nandy has written extensively on the significance of the categories of knowledge that we live by, and the need to make transparent the power that lives in these dominant categories of knowledge (Nandy, 2000). Professor Denise Bradley makes a similar point in reference to the issue of deepening the social inclusion of Indigenous people:

*Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff.*



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*It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students and staff have unique knowledge and understandings which must be brought into the curriculum for all students and must inform research and scholarship (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 32).*

A similar point could be argued for any group that experiences social exclusion, whether they be Indigenous, non-English speaking, gay, physically/mentally unwell or elderly. The inclusion of culturally diverse voices in the broadest possible interpretation in educational curricula and processes is surely a way forward to increase not just access, but participation, engagement and human potential.

## **Case studies**

### **RMIT Learning Community Partnerships Group**

The Learning Community Partnerships Group, located within the College of Design and Social Context, brokers learning and research opportunities at the Hamilton Centre and through learning partnerships in northern metropolitan Melbourne. The group has over 10 years experience of community engagement work that involves collaboration and management of cross-sectoral partnerships with industry, schools, other education and training providers and government.

Currently, the group runs significant partnership projects which focus on raising the aspirations of youth and increasing awareness of young people to higher education and other



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training opportunities. For example, *Career Connections RMIT*, a federally funded program, facilitates school and industry partnerships including structured workplace learning opportunities and a range of activities, including “Hands on Health” and “Try a Trade,” which introduce 13-19 year olds to the world of work. In addition, programs such as Linking Young People to Employment and Training provide mentoring to youth at risk of leaving school.

Program Director, Dr Leone Wheeler {Wheeler, 2004 #327} addressed the university management of such community engagement projects as part of her doctorate, using an action research approach to investigate the operational framework of a sustainable learning network (RMIT LearnLinks) over three

funding cycles from mid 1998 until 2002. A framework of operations was developed based on principles of action research, involving a cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection as well as an understanding of the lifecycle of the project—is it time to establish, expand or exit? The learning from each cycle is pooled into the knowledge base and used to plan the next cycle; it is also used to select other projects. Over the 10 years of the life of the Learning Network program, it touched the lives of over 7000 learners in community settings. As our partners taught us, it is about local people meeting local needs with local solutions. This action reflection approach still forms the basis of an operational framework for managing partnership programs.



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## **Victoria University Community Engagement Activities**

The Community Engagement Coordinator (CEC) is housed in the Victoria University Office for Industry and Community Engagement and is directed by Elleni Bereded-Samuel. The CEC is accountable for planning, developing and implementing strategies to increase the scope of the university's community engagement, especially with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, through the development of existing and new community engagement relationships. This is achieved through the following key processes.

*Identifying Community Needs*—developing relationships with communities from migrant/refugee background and relevant service providers. A particular model has been developed by Bereded-Samuel at Victoria University to build the

trust of the communities from migrant/refugee background that students belong to. The process includes: making initial contact with community leaders; attending the community's celebrations and functions, to assist with understanding the cultural context; identifying community needs through dialogue with the community at grass root level; and facilitating meetings with community leaders and Victoria university staff to assist with designing and implementing education and training to suit that particular student/community. The value of such an approach was recognised in the 2007 Business/Higher Education Roundtable Award for outstanding University-Community Engagement activities.

*Clear Contact Point for communities from Migrant and Refugee background*—providing both a clear first contact point



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and also ongoing personal support for students. Having a dedicated, culturally sensitive person to facilitate the course decisions and enrolments of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds—and to provide ongoing support and advocacy when necessary—improves student access to the institution and supports their ongoing participation in learning.

*Advocacy and Information Dissemination*—providing information and advocacy about the needs of particular communities from migrant and refugee backgrounds to local, state, and federal governments, and other service providers. Through the above-mentioned processes the CEC is able to act as a resource for cross-cultural information so that many organisations can be better informed about the needs and status of communities from migrant and refugee background. The

development of engagement is a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between the university and the community. It also builds the capacity of the community members to navigate their way in the system.

### **Toward further research**

This paper acts as an *indication* of theory, policy and practice regarding social inclusion. Further research could take more account of international research. Also further research could comprehensively survey Australian universities to ascertain what initiatives they are undertaking to ensure that social inclusion of under-represented groups becomes a reality in the not too distant future. Indeed, it would be valuable if a longer-



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term futures approach could be taken to the next phase of research in this area.

With regard to time, for example, a multifaceted challenge arises. Firstly, social inclusion interventions take time to design, implement and evaluate. The kinds of individual and social change that we are proposing here might take years, decades or even generations to unfold. Secondly, regarding community partnership, there may be “tension between partners’ time commitments and the need to commit time to achieving partnership goals” (S. James & Mallett, 2008, Abstract). Thirdly, different people, groups and cultures have different senses of time. Whilst university staff and government bureaucrats may embrace the industrial clock-time of modernity, other cultures

may have a sense of time that is more linked to seasonal cycles or cultural ceremonies. Sensitivity towards such diverse time-senses is currently under-researched yet may well impact on the success of social inclusion programs.

Finally, much of the social inclusion and university-community engagement literature points to the need for more integrated and holistic approaches, yet little of the research on social inclusion appears familiar with the extensive literature on integrative-integral-holistic perspectives, such as postformal and ecological (sustainability, planetary) approaches. Going beyond “either/or” thinking to “both/and” possibilities, such perspectives have the opportunity of linking social inclusion to bigger picture concepts of inclusion. As such, social inclusion can



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form part of 21<sup>st</sup> century paradigmatic change rather comprising merely a bureaucratic add-on.

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## Regional Australians taking responsibility for health care and promotion

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### Abstract

The In Our Hands Health Information and Resource Centre Inc. is an independent organisation that traces its origins to a federally funded project relating to chronic disease self-management (Sharing Health Care). The Centre was set up in 2002, originally in a shop-front location, and operated under the guidance of the project until June 2005 when it became an incorporated body. Originally funded by the project and later receiving continuation funding, the Centre is now based at

Whyalla Hospital, and continues to provide an example of collaboration and cooperation between community and university, with mutual benefits evident. Our paper provides some background information on the Sharing Health Care project and the needs that the Centre seeks to address, before describing the goals and ongoing operation of the Centre. The benefits that it has provided over the past seven years and continues to provide to its volunteers and clients are outlined, as well as wider community benefits. These include increased community awareness of the value of self management, lifestyle changes and the social aspect of healthcare, as well as providing community members with a means of obtaining consumer health-based information. The relationship between the Centre and university personnel is explored. University links include



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an international connection as well as collaboration with the local university presence. The advantages that these relationships have for all parties are outlined, including support and guidance and some practical and financial help from the university for the Centre, training opportunities, information sharing, input into university courses, and reinforcing and extending community and university linkages. There has been enhanced understanding by university staff of some of the practical realities for volunteers working in the Centre. The relationship has contributed to breaking down barriers between university and community and building new bridges. Directions for future development, including offering activities at an additional site, are indicated.

**Key words:** chronic disease self-management; health promotion; peer education; volunteers



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## **Introduction**

Our case study illustrates how a project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing led to the establishment of an incorporated, independent organisation, namely, the In Our Hands Health Information and Resource Centre Inc. (IOH). The project, based around chronic disease self-management (CDSM), involved university researchers from the Spencer Gulf Rural Health School (SGRHS) (University of South Australia and The University of Adelaide) and community members. The Centre receives encouragement and other support from university staff and also contributes in various ways to university activities. The capacity-building that has occurred has benefited individuals involved and had a flow-on effect to others in the community. Lessons learned from the

Centre's operation and the engagement with university staff are identified.

We begin by providing background information about the original project from which IOH arose. An overview of some of the recent literature relating to health promotion and CDSM is followed by an outline of the mission, operation and activities of IOH. The main focus of the paper is on the ongoing partnership of IOH and university personnel and mutual benefits from this relationship.

## **The Sharing Health Care project**

The aims of the original project, Sharing Health Care (SHC), were to explore various CDSM models that could be suitable for the



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Australian health care system. The South Australian project was based across three rural centres, Port Lincoln, Whyalla and Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta. The first two authors, previously involved in Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development (PHC-RED) projects and a diabetes support group, were approached to be part of an advisory group, and subsequently became volunteers. In South Australia the project was called 'Our Health in Our Hands in Our Region'. The IOH Centre was set up in 2002 as part of the project and continues to provide peer health education and other services all based around chronic disease health care and lifestyle changes (In Our Hands, 2008). (For the final national evaluation report, see Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2005.) A number of reports and journal and conference

publications have focused on the Sharing Health Care project (e.g. Fuller, 2004; Harvey, 2003; Harvey, Battersby and Lawrence, 2004; Harvey, Battersby and Misan, 2003; Harvey and Blue, 2003; Harvey, Fuller, Gentle, and Misan, 2003; Harvey, Mills, Misan and Warren, 2003; Harvey and Misan, 2003; Harvey, Misan, Battersby and Warren, 2003; Misan and Harvey, 2003; Misan, Harvey, Warren and Cayetano, 2003; Warren, Norman and Holmes, 2004).

### **Background**

While some of the participants in IOH activities are younger, the majority are over fifty. Hence it is appropriate to consider factors relating to the health status of older age groups. The *National Health Survey* (ABS, 2006) indicated that, while the



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majority of Australians rate their health as 'very good' or 'excellent', the numbers rating their health as 'fair' or 'poor' increased as they aged. In the case of long-term medical conditions, 'the prevalence of most conditions increased with age, to the extent that nearly all people aged 65 years and over had at least one long term condition' (ABS, 2006). The age of the population is increasing and expected to continue to do so, with the proportion of those over 65 increasing from 13% of the population in 2007 to 23-25% in 2056, and the proportion of those aged over 85 expected to increase from 1.6% to between 4.9 and 7.3% over the same period (ABS, 2008; see also AIHW, 2007). Hence, managing chronic health conditions is an important aspect of positive ageing, and it is important that people with a chronic condition are empowered in self-

management (Lorig, Holman, Sobel et al., 2006). This empowerment enables individuals to be more proactive and have greater control over decisions that affect them (Baum, 2002; Harvey, Petkov, Misan et al., 2008).

Social isolation, which may affect older people particularly, has been shown to have a relationship to illness as well as to general quality of life (Gray, 2006), whereas social support networks can have 'a protective effect' as well as assisting in recovery (Baum, 2002, p. 465). Social relationships are an important part of health and ageing well (Harvey, 2006; Vaillant, 2002) – if we can combine health promotion activities with the possibility of forming friendships, their effectiveness is likely to be enhanced. Health promotion strategies need to be committed to seeing that



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the needs of older adults are met, ensure that what is learned is relevant, take into account individual experience and differences, and involve the participants in planning and setting measurable goals (Hussain, Mariño and Coulson, 2005).

Volunteering is a crucial component of the health promotion activities described in this paper (Fuller, 2004). While, for many, volunteering can be a part of their whole life, retired people may find that they have more time to devote to voluntary service activities. The report *Seniors and Volunteering* (National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre, 2005) found that participation rates in volunteer activities were greater in non-metropolitan areas, with women participating more than men.

*Volunteer Management: An Essential Guide* (Noble, Rogers and Fryar, 2003) is a useful resource.

Peer education is increasingly playing a role in health promotion (Turner and Shepherd, 1999). In the region in which our case study is set, it has been used effectively in a program (Shape up for Life) focusing on metabolic syndrome (Warren, Pettman, Misan and Misan, 2007), as well as in IOH activities (Harvey, 2007). An organisation that makes considerable use of peer education is COTA Seniors Voice; its Seniors Connect division's programs include a CDSM course run by volunteer peer leaders trained by SGRHS Master Trainers (COTA Seniors Voice, 2008). CDSM is seen as an intervention on a medical care plan for people with chronic diseases – at IOH, the coordinators and



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other leaders offer this and then provide feedback to GPs on the people who have attended (Fuller, Harvey and Misan, 2004).

### **In Our Hands Health Information and Resource Centre Inc.**

#### *Funding sources*

At the conclusion of the SHC project (2004), IOH received some continuation funding from the Federal Government. It has always enjoyed rent-free status, first in a shop in a small but busy shopping centre at the western end of the city, in premises donated free of charge by a local GP, and, when that site was no longer available, in a room at the Whyalla Hospital, to which it relocated late in 2008. IOH is run and managed entirely by volunteers. Other support is generally in-kind (Whyalla Hospital and Health Services, Department of Health and Ageing, Eyre

Peninsula Division of General Practice, and Country Health SA).

This includes help in applications for grants to assist in maintaining and developing services within the scope of the Centre. Client support in the form of donations helps maintain the Centre's day to day expenses. All activities are provided at no cost but clients are encouraged to donate by gold coin if they feel able.

#### *Mission and goals*

The IOH mission is to provide health-related information, support and education to the Whyalla community and surrounding communities, promote primary health care by encouraging the community to adopt a health-promoting



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lifestyle, and assist people with chronic condition(s) to better understand and manage their condition(s) and improve their quality of life via education, group support and partnerships with their health-care providers.

### *Activities*

IOH provides training for volunteers, a range of health-based programs, activities, and opportunities for informal sharing of health issues and socialising. Hospital in-patients are also invited to attend. The Centre has designed and runs its own website which has a world-wide following. The site continues to promote the ideals of the Centre's work in a simple, easy-to-read format and provides links to other health related organisations. (See [www.inourhands.com.au](http://www.inourhands.com.au) for details.) A new development

this year has seen hospital clients / patients referred by clinicians, including occasionally doctors, and by staff such as the out-of-hospital strategy coordinator, to the 'Moving Towards Wellness' courses and all other activities in the IOH program of events.

Activities currently run by the volunteers are in some cases new ones, but many from earlier times are also included. Since relocating to the Whyalla Hospital the volunteers have taken on new ideas more in keeping with the new location. Peer education programs include chronic disease self-management. Participants are also exposed to other health concepts, such as the need for exercise. Once their knowledge and information have been expanded, pamphlets are available to help them be a



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bit more proactive. There has been a progression towards focusing on wellness.

The Centre is open five days per week from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. and aims to have some activity available each day. All activities are open to anyone. A typical program is as follows:

- Monday: Craft session – aimed mainly at in-patients who are able and would like to do simple crafts away from their hospital bed
- Tuesday: Tai Chi (approx 1 hour, morning); Sharing our Health Group (lunch-time health-related discussion group); two afternoon exercise groups (Move It Or Lose It Group)
- Wednesday: Tai Chi (morning); afternoon Relaxation group (exploring a variety of relaxation methods)
- Thursday: Lunch with the patients – patients who are able are encouraged to have their lunch in the Centre with the volunteers, with tables etc. set up to make it a

homely and social environment; afternoon exercise session (Move It Or Lose It Group)

Friday: Tai chi (morning).

IOH also facilitates a number of other programs – all based around healthy living and lifestyle changes. These programs are run by the peer leaders at regular intervals or on a request basis; some of these programs have been developed by the peer leader group themselves. Current programs are:

Moving Towards Wellness Course (Stanford CDSMP) – the Centre aims to run at least two of these per year. A development stemming from this is the adaptation of this program for use with Indigenous communities.

Falls prevention courses – a series of talks / discussion sessions based on all aspects of falls prevention and what to do if you have had a fall. This program is available on request.

Know your medicines – this is a peer led program developed by the National Prescribing Service (<http://www.nps.org.au/>)



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There is current IOH involvement in the Chronic Disease Self Management Internet Trial (CDSMIT) (Healthier Living with Ongoing Health Problems), which is being carried out by Country Health South Australia in partnership with Stanford University (California, USA) (Government of South Australia SA Health, 2009; see also Lorig, Ritter, Dost et al., 2008.)

### *The people involved*

There are 15 volunteers rostered on set days. The age range is 38 to 78 years, with most in their 50s and 60s. There are 4 men (27%). The volunteers make an impressive contribution. In the past some of them did it as a means to an end – to qualify for Centrelink benefits – but now they are beginning to take on leading roles. Succession planning for the future of IOH is seen

as an important step in the Centre's evolution; without it the future may be in doubt, as not all volunteers are prepared to take on a leading role. This may be due to perceived lack of confidence, lack of skills or simply lack of time. The coordinators, wherever possible, delegate tasks while they are unavailable, and then encourage those delegated to maintain those roles from then on, if they feel comfortable doing so. Volunteers have changed the way they think about the Centre as they gain new skills. For many this may be the first time in their lives that they have become involved with a health-based organisation. Many see the training as helpful in overcoming their fears in such matters as public speaking, interaction with health professionals and working face to face with the public.



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When IOH operated in its community premises it was more of a public drop-in centre: its location had a high number of people passing by each day and this enabled them to call in at any time on a casual basis. Despite this, few were actual walk-ins looking for information – most attendees were there to take part in activities. Hence most of the 4000 total attendances over that time were at classes.

This has changed slightly with the new location. The number of walk-ins is gradually increasing as the Centre's new location is recognised. Approximately half of those who come in are staff enquiring about services that IOH could give a client/patient. Patients are encouraged to come for information, or a chat and 'cuppa' if they feel able enough to do so. Moreover, there is a

direct referral path now, as mentioned above. Some referrals come from the Fit for Surgery program run by the local orthopaedic surgeons; this caters for people on the two-year, 200-person waiting list for surgery such as hip and knee replacements, and its aim is 'to engage the patients to promote exercise and good dietary habits with a goal of improving surgical outcomes' (Country Health SA, 2008, p. 3). Many Fit for Life participants are referred to IOH for fitness and lifestyle changing courses. Others are referred by other health professionals and hospital staff.

Ages of the participants range from 21 up to the eighties. Ninety per cent are over 50, predominantly female (20-25% male). As a successful class (CDSMP) needs 15-20 participants, recruiting



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takes up a lot of time. The original project referred people, but when the volunteers started recruiting they were at first seen as lacking credibility; also some people would register, but not follow through by attending, as they did not perceive any pressure on them to do so. The volunteer coordinators' recent experience has been that most of those who drop out have not been referred, whereas people who are referred and enthusiastic about self-care gain in confidence and have their efforts affirmed. In the latest Moving Towards Wellness course, 50-60% were referred, and only two people dropped out. In general, for the six-week course there has been 30% full attendance, with 70% attending for four weeks or more (four weeks being the length of involvement considered necessary for health benefits to be obtained).

Table 1 provides some figures (up to mid-April 2009) indicating the impact of IOH since it began seven years ago:

**Table 1: Some IOH facts and figures**

Volunteer hours	19,318
Days open	1,593
Clients through the door	16,449
Attendances at activities	4,798 (Tai Chi) 704 ('Move it or lose it' exercise group) 1,070 (Moving Towards Wellness courses – 23 courses run)
Leaders trained (in partnership with SGRHS – 8 leader training courses)	118 (Moving Towards Wellness) 57 LIFE (Living Improvements For Everyone) – Indigenous focus



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### *Benefits of the Centre*

The existence of IOH has brought a number of benefits: for those involved, for the community and for the hospital. For the coordinators and other volunteers it has contributed to giving purpose in life, building up skills and developing new ones, and provided encouragement and friendship. It has enabled the passing on of skills to community members, helping people to improve and maintain health and well-being. It has provided an important social outlet. Its activities have resulted in considerable savings for the federal government, resulting in long-term changes to the way some aspects of primary health care are developed in Whyalla. There has been the saving of the equivalent of 1.8 salaries from the way IOH is run, with untold financial and other benefits arising from clients' increased well-

being. The current partnership with the hospital is what was envisaged seven years ago. Whyalla Hospital and Health Services has an obligation connected with its funding to provide peer (CDSMP) education (e.g. in chronic disease self-management), but resources are limited – IOH has been doing this: visiting the hospital wards, strictly on an invitation basis (from hospital staff or from patients via the staff), and interacting with patients one to one, as well as with former IOH clients.

### *Other links*

Along with other community representatives, IOH has a place on a hospital committee, the Consumer Advisory Work Group, with



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which there have always been close working links, providing lots of support. A TAFE arrangement has Enrolled Nursing students regularly visiting IOH for a 30-hour community service placement; one of these students produced a valuable diabetes education resource (a PowerPoint presentation) and others have contributed by producing pamphlets and short activities all with a health focus. There is a relationship with COTA Seniors Voice (formerly the Council on the Ageing) – IOH has run their Maturity Blues program, dealing with depression in older people. COTA signed up and provided a Strength for Life Program (gym-based) for seniors at the local recreation centre, and IOH was actively involved in the lobby group that helped get it to Whyalla. There was IOH representation on the Stay On your Feet falls prevention project and the Taking Action Whyalla

group. Recently an over fifties exercise group that had lost access to a venue at the university when the space was required for offices was taken in by IOH, and came under its umbrella so that it could use an IOH exercise room.

### **University Relationships**

IOH continues to have links with the Spencer Gulf Rural Health School (SGRHS), an initiative of the University of South Australia and The University of Adelaide. SGRHS has as one of its aims the building, encouragement and maintenance of community capacity. As those who have received training from SGRHS pass on skills, so there is a direct link from SGRHS to every volunteer. Volunteers are encouraged in due course to get to know SGRHS; this is important for both sides. IOH houses a small collection of



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reference books that comprises the Whyalla Hospital and Health Services and SGRHS joint library.

IOH also has a link with Stanford University (California, USA), using its model of chronic disease self-management (Lorig, Holman, Sobel et al., 2006) in face-to-face situations and the online version currently being trialled. Two of the Centre volunteers have recently been trained to moderate this course and have successfully completed two courses to date. The first three authors have all been involved in this training for the Internet version of the Stanford Online version. When the Trial is complete and evaluated it is hoped that the program will be implemented State wide and that more community / peer leaders will be involved in the future. The first two authors are

both Master Trainers (Trainers of course leaders) of the Stanford CDSMP, the third author is a T Trainer (Trainer of Master Trainers) and all three work in partnership with SGRHS in providing course leader training for both health professionals and peer leaders. This training is done on a commercial basis, with the fee payable to the IOH trainers being paid directly to IOH, and has provided much needed income for a number of years.

### *Benefits for IOH*

The guidance, encouragement and other support from SGRHS helped IOH to develop readiness for independence. SGRHS was a consistent source of information and training and continues to provide encouragement and advice. SGRHS empowered those



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involved in IOH to operate professionally, in a more businesslike way, with more skills and confidence. While the Centre could conceivably have continued to operate without SGRHS input, it would probably have been much less effective.

Some financial benefits have also been provided, such as funding for regular articles and advertorials in the local newspaper, presenting health information in accessible language. Other practical help has been given, such as arranging temporary storage space for some materials when the Centre needed to shift to the hospital from its earlier accommodation. A SGRHS researcher found grants that the Centre could apply for to secure ongoing funding. Help was also given with applying for a PHC-RED seeding grant.

For IOH volunteers, there has been considerable growth in both skills and confidence. One major impact has been the up-skilling of the peer educator group; community members have undertaken many training opportunities offered by SGRHS. The university links have led to other things for the people involved; for example, one is now involved in the panel assessing applicants for the John Flynn scholarship that funds rural placements for medical students (ACRRM 2009).

While a trip to the United States for one of the coordinators for training at Stanford University was federally funded (originally to be funded from the Sharing Health Care project, but with the federal Department of Health and Ageing eventually providing separate funding), SGRHS was also involved in supporting him



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to get there, making bookings and other arrangements. SGRHS has also supported the coordinators to attend conferences, as part of the project, and has provided information and encouragement.

#### *Benefits for the University*

The input of IOH coordinators in an advisory capacity has provided a reality check for SGRHS concerning feasibility of planned approaches, choice of language and practical issues: IOH has pointed out that some academic language, and university goals and policies, etc. are not necessarily understood in the wider community. Pertinent questions have been asked, and assumptions have been challenged that non-university people (for example, pensioners) involved in projects can just

pay for things and claim reimbursement. UniSA Nursing students have benefited from presentations by the Centre; SGRHS multi-disciplinary health students have gained an insight into how organisations like IOH can fit into and complement mainstream health services. For the University, this engagement is a conduit to further community engagements.

#### *Benefits to both partners*

Providing training in CDSMP (Stanford model) to peer leaders and other volunteers and health professionals has brought much needed funds for both partners and increased the profile of both in the health community, leading to SGRHS and IOH becoming highly trained and accredited in the CDSMP field within South Australia. Development of an Indigenous version of the CDSMP



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in conjunction with Stanford and consequent training of some of the volunteers has opened up another path for both the IOH and SGRHS. (See Warren, Coulthard and Harvey, 2005.)

SGRHS sponsorship of IOH personnel to give presentations has benefited both parties: disseminating university research outputs and broadening the experience of the volunteers. In particular IOH research on why people volunteer received a seeding grant from PHC-RED; the presentations at PHC-RED conferences on this process have acted as a showcase for the seeding grants, showing that they are not only available to university people.

### *The Stanford Connection*

IOH has provided Stanford with a continued window on how a community-based organisation utilises the CDSMP in an ongoing manner. Stanford has supported IOH in many ways, such as reduced licence fees etc. and training opportunities, for example for the online trial in South Australia. The first three authors, as Master Trainers, are able to access the Master Trainers list serve on the Stanford University website, enabling them to keep up to date and be in contact with other trainers around the world, asking questions and seeking guidance, and exchanging ideas, opinions and success stories.



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## **What we have learned**

We have learned that effective networking with local, state and federal health service providers is crucial to the Centre's effectiveness. A sense of community ownership is also essential (Taylor, Wilkinson and Cheers, 2008). The relationship that we have described of IOH personnel with local university staff has been invaluable and had advantages for both parties. Such a partnership can combine 'the perspectives and strengths of people from different backgrounds, different cultures, and with different knowledge and skills' (Baum, 2002, p. 499). Having an international university partnership with Stanford has also enhanced the Centre's operations and given access to current issues and developments in the CDSM field.

IOH could not continue to exist without the absolutely necessary contribution of many volunteers, who provide peer health education. As we have seen, this plays an important role in health care. The success of activities such as those conducted by IOH can be attributed to the fact that peer leaders / educators empathise with their clients in a way that may not be achievable by health care workers. The fact that in this case all the IOH volunteers have chronic health problems means that they understand first-hand how it feels to have one or more conditions. This is not to belittle the health care workers, who provide the care and treatments needed from a clinical perspective; peer leaders complement this work by providing ongoing support and incentive to continue to make the lifestyle changes the client may have been advised to make in a more



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social setting. Clients feel happier taking part in activities where they are with their “peers”; they are able to share experiences, compare notes and in general support each other as they very quickly realise that they all share the same problems, emotions and very often symptoms too. Some of these people do in time become so interested in what the Centre does that they become volunteers and peer leaders themselves, thereby adding their experiences to the sustainability of the Centre.

Based on IOH experience a guide, *Implementing a Community-based Chronic Disease Self-Management Support Centre*, (In Our Hands, 2008) has been produced to assist in the implementation of similar projects. The university relationship continues to

allow the dissemination of what has been learned and continues to be learned from the IOH operation.

### **Future steps**

An envisaged formal evaluation of IOH would provide further evidence to back up claims of success and sustainability and support ongoing funding applications whilst adding to the Centre’s credibility and profile in the community’s eyes. Such an evaluation should take into account the partnerships involved in health promotion and the level of community participation (Baum, 2002).

While the Centre’s current location at the hospital provides many opportunities for collaboration with the hospital, if time



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and circumstances permitted it would be good to have an additional base in the community again. Plans are afoot to use the community shed at a day centre (catering to elderly people and people with a disability, providing respite for their carers) for set activities open to both the patrons of that centre and IOH clients.

### **Conclusion**

IOH is a unique vehicle for promoting primary health care and satisfying real individual and community needs. Its benefits for those involved include: finding purpose in life, encouragement, and friendship, and having opportunities both to improve and to pass on skills. It continues to be a social outlet for many. Its operation has helped break down misconceptions about the

value of research and universities. IOH has helped people improve health and well-being, by showing them that implementing small lifestyle changes, with accompanying education about their condition, can have big effects. Thus it has contributed to reducing long-term health-care costs, and changing the way some aspects of primary health care are delivered in Whyalla. It has been a real success story with regard to community engagement, achieving sustainability.

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## **Daruganora: modeling new practice for sustainable, collaborative research led learning and teaching relationships between schools and universities.**

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...in schools (districts) across the United States, often in partnership with colleges and universities, there are many localised pedagogical revolutions where communities of educators are theorising from practice and creating educational arrangements 'from the ground up' that are more conducive to the fuller potentials of their students. This collective work may be education's best hope. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, P. 340)

### **Abstract**

This paper describes the processes involved in establishing and conducting the pilot and initial phase of a research led learning and teaching project that is designed to facilitate and support collaborative working relationships between schools and universities. This particular project prioritises Indigenous high school students and high schools designated 'low socioeconomic' but it is envisaged that such an approach could be generalised to many other contexts.



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## Introduction

This paper is the first of a series which will track the processes involved in establishing a new model for sustainable, collaborative research led learning and teaching relationships between schools and universities. As this paper is about the establishment of a new community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) it is descriptive rather than theoretical. The development of the project is grounded in theorising our own practice as well as the literature on student engagement, current learning and teaching practice, and curatorial practice, but we intend to engage more with the relevant literature and develop new theoretical frameworks in future papers.

The Macquarie University: Daruganora project (abbreviated to Daruganora forthwith) is funded by a Macquarie University Learning and Teaching Fellowship awarded to Dr Kristina Everett in 2010. The land on which Macquarie University is built is the traditional Aboriginal Country of the Darug people and the word Daruganora is Darug language meaning Darug Land.

The main aim of the Fellowship project is to establish on-going collaborative relationships with schools in the Sydney metropolitan area which are designated 'low socioeconomic' and which have high populations of Indigenous students. Indigenous people continue to be under-represented in higher education nationally (The Indigenous Higher Education Council (IHEAC, 2008). More particularly, this pattern is evident at



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Macquarie University. According to Craven and Marsh (2004) Indigenous high school students are both less likely to know what their education and training options are post-secondary school or to aspire to attend university. This barrier to Indigenous student participation in higher education suggests that there is considerable room for improvement in the information provided to Indigenous students whilst at school.

The Daruganora project is designed to facilitate establishment and then to support maintenance of on-going, productive research led learning and teaching relationships between schools and Macquarie University. These relationships will then support students from diverse backgrounds, especially Indigenous students, to attend university. A project aim is to

raise the aspirations of Indigenous students by familiarising them with our campus and staff, and by demonstrating to them, their non-Indigenous peers and teachers that the university values, respects and honours Indigenous students and cultures.

The first phase of this project was developed from a research led 'school experience' programme, piloted in 2009, involving bringing school students on campus for a three hour interactive learning experience which we will describe in more detail below. The school programme, although important in itself for providing school students with an authentic experience of university, is primarily the vehicle for initiating contact between the schools and the university.



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The programme consists of a half hour, multi-media lecture in a tiered lecture theatre where Aboriginal art and identity are introduced as research topics. Students are then presented with two research questions to focus their thinking while they embark on the next part of the programme.

After the lecture the students are divided into groups led by Macquarie undergraduate Indigenous Studies students and Macquarie staff. School staff also participate as we tour some of the campus' Indigenous sculptures and a purpose built Indigenous art exhibition.

The two groups are then taken to a large class room and evenly grouped on six tables, with a Macquarie undergraduate student

as a 'scribe' at each. They are given five minutes at each table to 'brainstorm' answers to their research questions, after which they all participate to disseminate their learnings to the group. This dissemination process is called a 'World Café' (Brown & Issacs, 2005).

Lunch is provided after the 'World Café' and school students, school and Macquarie staff, undergraduate students and some Indigenous and non-Indigenous Macquarie Student Mentors mingle to talk about the programme, students' ambitions, and what life at Macquarie is like.

The second phase of the project will involve a research project where focus groups with students and interviews with teachers



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are conducted to collect data on what they already know about pathways to university and on students' aspirations to attend university in years 8, 9 and 10. At the time of writing this paper we have nearly completed Phase One of the project.

The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) argued that universities are not doing enough to attract the enrolment or secure the retention of Indigenous students. The literature emphasises that Indigenous students often feel isolated and alienated at university (Page, 2007; Craven & Marsh, 2004). IHEAC (2008) argues that there is a general lack of representation of Indigeneity on university campuses and this is a significant contributor to Indigenous student alienation. This programme seeks to address this in an academically rigorous,

research led way using the rich resources already available within the university. These include its extensive collection of Indigenous art and an adaptation of the already established Macquarie Experience Programme. One of the project's key aims is to make Macquarie a more welcoming and inclusive culture for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, increasing their sense of belonging and engagement by research led outreach activities (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2009) involving interaction with university staff, the campus itself, and the campus' Indigenous art collection. This will be done through a holistic approach to student engagement (Coates, 2005) which honours Indigenous cultures and their representations on campus. This is not only an economic priority but also a social justice issue. This project is not only driven by policy, but by the



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imperative to develop Australia's social fabric to be more inclusive, diverse and fair. Bradley (2008) recognises that if universities are going to offer more, different and broader pathways to all groups in Australian society they will need to develop strategies to support the students who are on those pathways and the teachers who develop and maintain them.

The project is designed to address the need of the university to build a more diverse student population over time by encouraging the prioritisation of Indigenous students. It is recognised that the term 'low socio-economic' is one that is commonly used in policy documents and although the term will be used here for consistency, it will be challenged as part of the research as a perpetuation of a deficit social model rather than

an embrasure of diversity and a valuing of the strengths that people from different backgrounds can contribute to the university and the community.

### **The Pilot**

Drawing on already established infrastructure and resources at the university including the Indigenous art collection, The Macquarie Experience Programme and Macquarie's marketing team we designed an interactive, three hour research led learning programme as a pilot for the Daruganora Project.

The pilot was conducted in 2009 with a local high school and a group of third year Indigenous studies undergraduate students.

The themes of the pilot programme were developed using the



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New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW, DET) Aboriginal Studies curriculum for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and were designed to dove-tail with the Macquarie undergraduate curriculum in Indigenous Studies. This allowed Macquarie students to reflect on their own learning by communicating their knowledge to others (Boud & Walker, 1998). An assessment task was not linked to the experience for the pilot, but Ambler and Everett agreed that it would be valuable to design the next undergraduate unit so that the learning outcomes of participating in the program could be aligned (Biggs, 1999) with an assessment task and learning outcomes for the unit. This was done for the Daruganora programme.

Thirty high school students and two teachers visited Macquarie for the pilot. The Macquarie undergraduate students acted as research leaders, guides and mentors for the school students and fielded questions about what it is like to be a Macquarie student.

The Macquarie undergraduates engaged with the school students through all three phases of the programme, but it was fed back that the 'World Café' especially provided an opportunity for them to assess how they integrated and reflected on their own knowledge from their Indigenous Studies unit and how they communicated their learning to the school students. The 'World Café' also provided a practical way for the school students to demonstrate their ability to reflect on and



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disseminate their research findings. The pilot provided evidence that both school and Macquarie students actively engaged with key issues in Indigenous Studies during the programme through the generation of their own data, their reflections on their learning and the dissemination of these (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998).

The pilot provided the foundation to formulate the Daruganora project. It also allowed us to see how the project would work in practical terms. We learnt a great deal from our own participation in the pilot and from the feedback we received from the Macquarie undergraduates and the school students.

Formal and informal student evaluations can provide a range of rich and valuable feedback for university teachers (Murray, 1997; Smith, 2008). This became evident to us when we engaged with students during the various aspects of the program. The students' feedback was scattered through the different learning and teaching activities that we developed. Use of the question "What do you know about Aboriginal art?" in the short lecture generated glimpses of the students' prior learning. Talking to the students as we toured the campus viewing the Aboriginal sculptures provoked important insights into the students' experiences of the immediate environment. Lively discussions in the 'World Café' also taught us a great deal about the kinds of things the students had learnt during the visit. In addition to this informal feedback from students we also received some very



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revealing insights about our teaching and the program through the use of a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was developed in an online product called 'Survey Monkey'. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to the class teacher a day after the campus visit and this was then emailed by the teacher to the students. Questionnaire responses were anonymous as it is not possible to identify who submits a response through Survey Monkey. An analysis of the questionnaires which we were able to complete using Survey Monkey's various analysis tools, combined with the students' informal feedback and our own critical reflection, provided a platform of understandings that we were able to take into the development of the Daruganora project.

We learnt from the school students about the programme and ourselves. We learnt that the students valued a friendly, helpful and welcoming approach from Macquarie staff, but they also expected staff to be knowledgeable, interesting and informative. In relation to the Macquarie campus the key features they noticed were the large grounds and the general atmosphere of what some students referred to as a community or even a 'town'. Students were not surprised when they were told that Macquarie has its own post code, post office, shops and services including doctors, dentists and hospital. This, and the observation that Macquarie students and staff seemed to blend into 'citizens' of this community, contrasted with their notion of school, making university, as some school students commented, seem radically different to their school experience. The students



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also commented on the style of teaching and illustrated a preference for the opportunity to express and discuss their views. Interacting with undergraduate Indigenous Studies students was also something that school students fed back to be something that was appreciated and enjoyed.

### **The Research Team**

It was recognised by Everett and Ambler, from as early as the fellowship application stage, that if the outcomes of this project were to be sustainable in developing and supporting long term and on-going relationships between schools and the university then a highly collaborative team focused on the project needed to be established at the university. Indeed, Ambler, as Faculty of Arts Director of Learning and Teaching at Macquarie, was a

great support to Everett in writing the application and conceptualising the project, raising questions about individualised fellowships and prizes when little, if any, of our work in research, learning and teaching is ever entirely that of an individual (Brew, 2001).

Everett employed research assistants, Eloise Hummell and Melissa Collins as soon as the \$45,000 fellowship funds were released. As well as these research assistants, Everett employed a final year Education undergraduate student at Macquarie, Natalie Humphries, who participated in the pilot as an undergraduate research leader. Humphries has also worked with the Macquarie undergraduate students involved in the Daruganora programme to help prepare them for the



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experience. Everett then contacted those who were main supporters of the pilot programme, Rhonda Davis, Chief Curator of the Macquarie Art Gallery, Caroline Taouk, co-ordinator of the Macquarie Experience Programme Corrinne Franklin, Indigenous Support Officer, Kylie Flood, Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme Officer, and Ross McGhee, Marketing Director for the Faculty of Arts. These supporters have all become key team members of the Daruganora project.

Hummell and Collins contacted schools and co-ordinated logistics of the programme including catering and transport for the school students. Hummell, Everett and Ambler prepared ethics application documents for both Macquarie and the NSW DET. Taouk managed the logistics of booking appropriate spaces

for the programme and advised, from long experience, on the practicalities of managing groups of school students on campus. Franklin visited schools with Everett and provided support and advice on how Indigenous students can be better accommodated at every stage of the project. McGhee worked closely with Everett to produce brochures, posters and to plan promotional activities for the project. Davis manages the installation and other curatorial aspects of the central focus of the programme, the Indigenous art exhibition which we have needed, as we will explain below, to purpose build for the project. Everett and Ambler work together to co-ordinate the entire project including the up-coming research.



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Most of these tasks have occurred synchronously. For the purposes of clarity in writing, however, it is necessary to divide them into discrete sections. It is important that the reader realise, however, that although we are firstly going to describe the processes and politics involved in creating the art exhibition, we were also contacting schools, visiting schools, creating marketing materials, working with undergraduate students to prepare them for their role in the project, designing the research and preparing the ethics application, and managing the logistics of the schools programme including transport and lunches at the same time.

### **The Art Exhibition**

Research has shown that the architecture of art museums continue to discourage lower socio-economic groups' entry into the space. This is often due to the lack of friendly physical access. Art museums' entrances can be intimidating and disorientating, especially for these groups (Gale et al., 2009).

An important aspect of the Daruganora project is to trial alternate methodologies in generating a lasting and meaningful learning engagement. It is more about students generating their own knowledge (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) and disseminating it to each other than it is about teachers imparting or presenting knowledge (Shuell, 1986). Research within the museum context has found that:



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*Learning is no longer seen simply as being at the receiving end of the transmission of knowledge and information: rather it is a process which requires the participation of the learner, which people approach in a variety of different ways, and which is linked to improving the quality of people's lives. (Weil, 2007, p.198)*

Moving outside the conventional white cube space of the gallery environment the Indigenous art collection for the Daruganora project has been installed within the spaces of a Faculty of Arts building. Formerly, the Australian Film and Television School, the building has been refurbished for the Department of Media, Music and Cultural Studies to create more informal learning spaces that encourage interaction and discussion. The entrance

into the building is far less austere than that of the University Art Gallery, thus allowing students a different way of encountering the art on the walls. The collection has been curated to transform the space in a way which facilitates the immersion of the viewer into the exhibition. The art experience is not viewed as a separate entity but becomes integral to our everyday working and learning spaces.

Student engagement within a different learning space is critical to the project. The art exhibition has been designed to be an experience that encourages interaction, stimulates and promotes inquiry, broadens perceptions and perspectives in a supportive non-threatening environment.



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Aspects of the collection were selected to illustrate the diversity of Australian Indigenous identities through art. Walking together as a group through the space provides the initial orientation that is akin to encountering a friendly domestic environment. Moving together in a spontaneous fashion heightens the drama of searching and looking at art. The questions or 'hooks' posed to the students become easier to formulate as students begin to relax and engage. Bringing the students to the art through a live guide improvisation is important in building their confidence through questioning and group analysis. This form of art experience provides a tangible way of introducing discourse to the students rather than using a prescriptive measure for learning. The visual lexicon of art is introduced intermittently to provide students with the skills and

confidence to approach the art. The sense of connection to place and community inherent within the paintings is emphasised throughout the research session of the Daruganora programme to instill the idea that Macquarie is also part of a strong community that enriches and improves the quality of one's life. Working with these ideas outside the conventional art gallery space brings emphasises the nexus between art, space, place and people.

By combining the elements described above, the exhibition and the Daruganora project aims to provide students with a sense of connectedness to Macquarie, a space to be experienced as a community, that is nurturing and supportive of their individual needs and future aspirations.



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## Contacting the Schools

After Hummell and Collins' appointment as part-time research assistants in January, 2010, one of their first and primary tasks was to make contact with relevant staff in nine schools in Sydney's Western suburbs. These schools were all designated as having low socio-economic status by the NSW Government and most had a relatively high Indigenous demographic.

Initial contact with schools via telephone, email and fax was time consuming (and somewhat frustrating), especially in identifying the appropriate staff member with whom to liaise. Some schools did not have Aboriginal Liaison Officers employed. Often we were liaising with several different staff members whose responsibilities were quite varied within the school.

Telephone calls were primarily through the main school switchboard, as many staff did not have a direct line, or were not able to provide this information. The slow progress was exacerbated by the busyness of schools during the first few weeks of first term 2010.

Our communication problems have largely been solved since we identified the most appropriate staff member at the schools and there has been a high level of interest and enthusiasm about the programme. Of the nine schools contacted, four booked dates to participate in the first programme. The main reason other schools gave for an inability to commit to the programme was a full calendar of events for the year. The lack of advance notice was a central issue for these schools, and provided one of our



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key learnings from this experience. Schools need to be contacted and communication maintained for the following year's diary of events well before the end of the previous year. In May 2010 we started addressing this by sending out promotional material to schools for the 2011 Daruganora programme.

Each school that declined to participate asked to be notified about future programmes run by Macquarie University, and thus a productive ongoing contact has been established with these schools. These contacts will be regularly followed up with more information on programmes, promotions, research, school visits by university careers advisors and student mentors, video-conferencing on topics of interest and collaborative support for teachers.

The programme was originally targeted at years 9 and 10 students, but quickly expanded to include year 8 students. This alteration to the targeted program participants was due to two main reasons, firstly the concerns from some schools that they would not have enough students to invite from only years 9 and 10. Secondly, ideas expressed in "Interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students" a report commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Gale et al. (2009) recommended that university outreach programmes to schools include students in earlier years than the commonly targeted year 10. Effective programmes were those that engaged and supported students over a longer period



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of time. It was decided to begin the Daruganora programme by inviting 8, 9 and 10 students to participate with an open view to extending this range over time.

Daruganora was also initially targeted at school students enrolled in Aboriginal Studies. This was subsequently broadened to include students nominated by the schools themselves after school staff expressed an interest in inviting students enrolled in other subjects, especially Indigenous students, to participate in the program.

The schools that were eager to commit to the programme quickly identified concerns about transport, both logistical and economic. We were asked several times if we were able to

organise the transport. This cost was not originally anticipated within the project budget but the importance of this issue resulted in Everett deciding to reallocate funds so that transport for this preliminary running of the programme would be provided. This decision was met with great relief and appreciation from the schools. As the students were to be away from school for a period of over 5 hours it was also agreed that we would provide morning tea and a light lunch. The provision of both transport and refreshments demonstrated to the schools that the Daruganora team and Macquarie University were aware of their logistical and economic concerns and willing to assist. The sharing of food with school students at the end of the programme has also resulted in an added dimension in relationship building and information sharing between the



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school students, Macquarie undergraduate students, school teachers and Macquarie staff. It was such a successful opportunity to respond to school students' questions regarding studying at Macquarie that it was decided after the first run of the programme that Macquarie Student Mentors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will be available at this stage of all future programmes to help answer students' questions.

Several schools requested that the chief researcher, Everett, visit the school prior to the programme to make a presentation to the Principal and relevant personnel. Everett, accompanied by Franklin, visited and discussed the programme in person, which proved invaluable for securing support for the project and for

discussing future opportunities for engagement between schools and Macquarie.

The discussions at the schools with staff including teachers, principals and Aboriginal Liaison Officers provided insight into the social environments of the schools, the range of diversity amongst the school students, and the types of challenges the schools and the students face on a day to day basis. After meetings at two schools, we decided it was imperative that we physically visit each of the schools involved in order to gain firsthand experiences of the students' environment and to obtain vital clues from their teachers as to their future aspirations.



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Hummell and Collins have maintained meticulous records of all contact with each school. This has been highly beneficial for a number of reasons. These reasons include keeping the Daruganora team up to date with contact progress; enabling both Hummell and Collins to follow up conversations with each school staff member; and linking concerns or questions expressed by different schools. It also provides a history of the project for future use by researchers and those who want to maintain, expand or replicate the project. Sustainability has been another key concern of the team.

Important contacts with nine schools have been established and now the challenge of maintaining these new relationships is high on the agenda. It is anticipated that through sustained contact

and enhanced relationships schools will choose to diarise the Daruganora experience programme and other events at Macquarie for future years.

### **Research Design and Ethics**

The research aspect of the project is to be conducted in September, 2010. It will involve running a special session of the Daruganora programme, followed by conducting focus groups with the school students participating in the programme and interviews with teachers. Topics and questions will explore students' aspirations to attend university, why they might or might not want to go to university and what they know about how to get to university. We decided to give a different title to this element of the project to accentuate its separation from the



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Daruganora programme. It is called the '*Alternative Pathways Research Project*'.

When developing the research we needed to meet both the requirements of the ethics guidelines required by Macquarie University and the NSW DET. It was in the process of fulfilling the ethical requirements for research stipulated by these two groups that we became more acutely aware of the complexities in our project. The nature of the research meant that it was inextricably linked to the Daruganora experience programme, yet was not the same. This blurring of the lines between programme and research required particular protocols to be evident in the ethical framework. These protocols made an

impact not only on the research but also on the design and staffing of the whole project.

The research component could not be explained by divorcing it from the programme. The motivation and rationale, the contact with schools, the participating students and the university space are elements of the Daruganora experience programme that are shared with the research. The programme is the vehicle through which we made contact with the schools, thus enabling invitations to participate in the research. The research's areas of exploration are not linked to the topics and activities involved in the programme, yet are stimulated by students being in the university space. The research could not be explained to the Macquarie ethics committee, therefore, without outlining the



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programme and how the two are interrelated. The difficulty lay in ensuring the research was distinct enough from the programme.

In its original conceptualisation the grey area between the programme and the research was not only confusing for the Daruganora team, but would be especially confusing for those school students and teachers we would invite to participate. We understood that if individuals do not understand what the research is about and their role in it, the chances for misunderstandings and reluctance to participate increases. The ethics process became an opportunity for us to conceptualise the project overall and to consider the research as a vital

element that is not embedded in the programme, but rather, a separate aspect to the larger project.

It was necessary to distinguish the research from the programme for a number of reasons. These included clearly explaining the research component to the ethics committees; explaining the project to school students, staff and parents, and Macquarie undergraduates; running the programme without the research in Semester One; and ensuring that school students can participate in the programme without choosing to volunteer for the research.

Separating the two sections of the project into Phase One (programme) and Phase Two (research) within the ethics



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application was a suggestion made by staff from the Macquarie University Research Office who proved to be of enormous help and support in developing the ethics application. Thorough, thoughtful feedback on our original applications from Macquarie's Human Ethics Committee and from the NSW DET's SERAP review committee was invaluable in assisting us to refine and develop the over-all project.

After considering feedback from the committees mentioned above, other colleagues and after our own critical reflection, every aspect of the project and what it was designed to achieve became very apparent. Phase One encompasses the interactive Daruganora programme that introduces years 8, 9 and 10 students to some of the key issues in Indigenous Studies while

providing them with an experience of university. Phase two involves conducting the programme and afterwards running short focus groups with students and semi-structured interviews with school staff about educational goals and aspirations, knowledge of tertiary education opportunities, levels of support, and effective learning and teaching strategies. Phase Two has distinct aims and outcomes, including generating knowledge about the anticipated opportunities and obstacles students believe are involved in further study; and guiding universities in the process of creating new and broader pathways for a more inclusive student body. The research is a bi-product of the fellowship project, offering the possibility to develop closer collaborative relationships with some schools,



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while aiming to benefit all schools and universities through dissemination of research out-comes.

The process of completing and submitting the Macquarie University ethics application, followed by the NSW DET form (called SERAP) lasted 10 weeks. The original target date for submission had to be delayed one month due to the realisation of the high degree of complexities involved in both the project and the approvals processes (at time of this article's submission, we are still awaiting final approval from the NSW DET).

Closely considering each element of the research, and subsequently how it related to the running of the programme, resulted in multiple changes to the framing and logistics of the

over-all project. This included alterations to the use of photography, the duration of the programme, the number of research participants, the topics explored in the focus groups, the use of evaluation surveys, and the type of continued support offered to schools.

The extended processes involved in preparing the research applications for approval by both Macquarie University and the NSW DET required the development of skills including research design, critical reading and questioning, understanding forms and application processes, synthesising information, ensuring consistency between documents, and audience appropriateness. The preparation of this project's research ethics applications has



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provided a valuable learning experience for research assistants and experienced researchers alike.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is an introduction to what the Daruganora team believe will be an on-going and valuable new mode of collaborative practice between schools and universities. It will also, in time, result in a more diverse student body in Australian universities.

It can be surmised from what is written above, that our team has been extraordinarily busy and dedicated over a short period of time. We have established relationships with schools; developed relationships with other key supporters in our institution and

beyond; created a purpose built art exhibition; developed an undergraduate programme to incorporate the project and enhance the learning experience of our students; developed promotional materials for the project; run the programme for three schools; recorded our learning for the benefit of those who come after us; and begun the process of dissemination by writing this paper.

In our next paper we will report on our experience of finishing Phase One and we will consider some key questions relating to the sustainability of the project.



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## **E-commerce in Regional Small Businesses: A Service Learning Approach**

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### **Abstract**

The Internet offers opportunities for electronic communication and trading in the global market place and as such it can provide substantial benefits to a business. Regional small businesses often do not realise the value of using the Internet and e-commerce and are reluctant to use the Internet or adopt technology that might enhance their operations. The rate of adoption of this technology by small and medium-sized

enterprises (SMEs) in Australia has also been slower than anticipated. According to the Whyalla Economic Development Board (WEDB) many small businesses in the Whyalla region in South Australia have been losing market share and there is a need to provide information to raise awareness of the advantages of using the Internet and to provide practical assistance in the design, implementation and maintenance of a web presence. The University of South Australia (UniSA) can play an important role to determine and increase the awareness and technical know-how of small businesses in regional South Australia through research and student service learning projects. The university is currently optimising the capabilities and use of the Internet in two retail businesses by developing a web presence and empowering them to maintain their own web



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site. Students from the School of Computer and Information Science (CIS) at UniSA are executing service learning projects involving requirements specification, iterating through different prototypes, setting up a website, training and documentation.

**Keywords:** E-commerce, Small Business, Regional areas, Service Learning.



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## Introduction

The phenomenon of the Internet has forced businesses and organisations to examine their existing business practices and adopt new methods of working. E-commerce has emerged as an important business strategy, providing substantial benefits to many businesses as it offers a range of services for electronic trading with both existing and potential customers (Shiels, McIvor & O'Reilly, 2003). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) definition, an e-commerce transaction consists of the sale or purchase of goods or services between businesses, households, individuals, governments and other public or private organisations, conducted over the Internet. The goods and

services are ordered over the Internet, but the payment and the ultimate delivery may be completed either online or off line.

Smaller firms have been described as the 'mainstay' of national economies (Drew, 2003), a 'powerhouse of economic potential' (MacGregor & Vrazalic, 2006) and it is argued that small businesses might 'become an even more important engine' in the future (Tse and Soufani, 2003: 306). In Australia small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are generally considered to be the 'backbone of the desert economy' (Desert Knowledge CRC, 2009) as they constitute approximately 95% of commercial organisations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).



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Various authors (Chapman *et al.*, 2003; Chau, 2003; Pease & Rowe, 2003; Fillis, Johannson & Wagner, 2004a; Laudon & Laudon, 2007) believe there is a link between the use of the Internet and small business success. The online environment is one of the very few places where small businesses are able to effectively compete with their bigger rivals. Hsieh and Lin (1998) comment that sites on the Internet are equal and small businesses can launch complex sales programs and implement effective globalisation strategies on the Internet just like the bigger companies. Increasingly the tools of e-commerce can enable electronic transactions to occur, but they can also transform internal systems and help build relationships with customers, suppliers, business partners and competitors by direct communication, sensitivity to customer needs,

information dissemination, brand development, larger market penetration, added flexibility and reduced costs (Chau, 2003; Fillis, Johannson & Wagner, 2004a; Simpson & Docherty, 2004). The businesses can trade and receive payments non-stop and the business is always open; therefore customer and supplier satisfaction is improved.

Poon and Swatman (1999) developed a matrix of benefits of smaller firm e-business adoption. Short-term direct benefits include savings in communications costs and generation of revenues while short-term indirect benefits were potential business opportunities and marketing. Long-term direct benefits include the ability to secure returning customers and develop



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business partnerships while long-term indirect benefits include the transformation of the way in which business is carried out and the identification and implementation of new business initiatives. Matthews and Healy (2006) refer to the capabilities of internationalising even SMEs to open up international markets which changed the 'once slow and cumbersome process of advancing the firm's product into international markets' (Matthews & Healy, 2006: 1). In the long run this will create more social, economic and environmental prosperity for both the business and society (Haynes, 1998; Hearn, 2004).

Whyalla is an industrial city, with a population of approximately 23 000, located on the upper Spencer Gulf, South Australia. The

city is currently undergoing considerable change due to developments in the mining and resources sector in the region and while small businesses in Whyalla can look forward to taking advantage of new opportunities, they also face a number of risks and challenges. Competition from large multi-national companies, enhancing the skills of their employees and attracting more customers are important challenges (Arndt, 2006). In accordance with the opinion of Pease and Rowe (2003) the competitive nature of business should force small firms to develop and sustain any possible source of advantage and Castleman and Coulthard (2001) suggest that strategies required for the development of the Internet and e-commerce in regional areas should focus on SMEs.



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## **The Internet and e-commerce in small businesses**

Although access to the Internet is relatively inexpensive and readily available, smaller enterprises have been slow in using the Internet for electronic commerce. Managerial perceptions and attitudes are identified as specifically important to the adoption and implementation of technology in a small business, given that the owner/manager is the most important decision-maker in these businesses (Martin and Matlay, 2003; Spence & Rutherford, 2001; Sweeney, 2007). Condon (2004: 57) noted that some SME owner/managers lack the 'strategic mindset' that regards changes in the business environment as opportunities and a source of potential advantage, rather than as an additional burden on the firm.

A number of studies have focused on the use of the Internet in SMEs in regional Australia (Blackburn & Athayde, 2000; Darch & Lucas, 2002; Fillis, Johannson & Wagner, 2004b, 2000; Hearn et al., 2004; Lawson et al., 2003; Pease & Rowe, 2003; Ramsey, Ibbotson, Bell & Gray, 2003). They found that these businesses do not use the Internet to its full capacity due to a lack of awareness of the benefits and dynamics of the Internet; lack of IT expertise of managers and staff; lack of understanding and training of small business managers and employees to implement online solutions independently; poor knowledge of the Internet start-up process; technology 'phobia' amongst proprietors; cost of implementation; lack of time; lack of business opportunities; concern about security and privacy; lack of suitable software standards; lack of easily accessible, the



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availability and cost of advice and consultants; electronic authentication issues; and bandwidth capacity and infrastructure issues. Castleman and Coulthard (2001:38) indicate that regional towns and cities are characterised by a number of different social dynamics and that small businesses in these regions have marketing difficulties due to the lack of profile, logistical support difficulties. Regionally based businesses often find it difficult to break into urban markets because their location is often taken 'to indicate of inferiority by urban markets, regardless of the quality of their products'.

According to the Small Enterprise Telecommunications Centre (SETEL) 'simplification' and 'demystification' are required to

address the fears and improve the acceptance of e-commerce. In communicating the virtues of e-commerce, the focus needs to be placed on the benefits to the business rather than the benefits of technology itself (Brown, 2002: 18). Simpson and Docherty (2004) refer to the need of owner/managers of SMEs for assistance as they often feel isolated and alone. It is useful to bring external experience into such a firm and provide impartial advice.

The information on websites in small businesses is often not up-to-date. Updating a website usually refers to the update of contents and not the actual layout or 'look and feel' of the website. In many cases firms lose the business of a potential



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customer due to incomplete information. Paying a web development firm for each update is always a costly affair and business owners/managers often prefer to update their own sites, or allow their staff members to maintain different areas of the website. Due to this demand of staff being able to manage the contents, various Content Management Systems (CMS) have become available. The website developer would use a preferred CMS to develop the site and leave it to their clients for updating the site afterwards. Some advantages of using a CMS are that the business is no longer dependent on the web designers making to make changes, changes can be made any time they are needed, day or night, the technical details are handled by the CMS, allowing anyone to manage and update the site, multiple staff can keep the site up to date, the CMS ensures that all the pages

are consistent in design, and will build all the menus and other navigation for the business. (Robertson, 2003).

However, using some of the readily available, feature-rich CMSs requires an understanding of the contents and the layout, which is normally more than the managers/owners would be able to do. Also most of the CMSs have further settings and menu items that confuses the not-so-technology-oriented staff who have to update the contents. The user will therefore have to go through a short training on how to update the contents, which is different in each CMS. For this a bottom-up approach can be used - the knowledge and experience within the business is evaluated and then a CMS is developed based on this experience, with minimum features so that the user is not confused with too many options. Only limited features are required, as a web



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developer can build most functionality into the code. The layout of website is defined in CSS and ASP files and hence is totally independent of the contents. When the user starts making changes, what they see is only the contents and nothing related to the layout or other settings, making the update process really easy (Robertson, 2003).

### **Collaborative Research on the needs of small businesses in Whyalla**

The Whyalla Economic Development Board (WEDB) is a State government-funded organisation established for the purpose of 'strengthening the economic base of Whyalla' (WEDB, 2006: 4). Its mission is to 'facilitate business growth in Whyalla' and one

of its objectives is to 'foster an enterprise culture by assisting small and medium businesses to prosper and expand' (WEDB, 2006: 5). The University of South Australia's positional statement is 'Educating professionals, creating and applying knowledge, engaging the community' (UniSA, 2008). The university therefore has an important responsibility to empower people.

Research was conducted during 2007 and 2008 by the Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE) at UniSA, in collaboration with the WEDB, to investigate the Internet usage by small retail and services businesses in the Whyalla region with the ultimate



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purpose of developing technologically aware and capable local businesses through support programs. The research aimed to:

1. Investigate the current awareness, capability and commitment to the use of the Internet in these businesses and address issues such as the experience of managers and employees in using the Internet, whether the business has a web presence as a means to increase market share and expand their operations and whether they use the Internet to buy, market and sell their products and services;
2. Determine how e-commerce awareness, capability and commitment can be increased through active collaboration between the WEDB and the local university.

Both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted as part of an interventionist research project. Interventionist research means that the researcher directly intervenes in practice, usually as part of a mixed practitioner-academic team effort to change a current situation or solve a problem. Interventionist research implies an active engagement, but the practical involvement needs to lead to theoretical contributions in order to qualify as research instead of consulting. Interventionist research can involve 'weak intervention' and 'strong intervention' with the interventionist researcher as part of a joint team (Argyris, Putman & Smith, 1985; Jönsson & Lukka, 2005). The weak intervention used in this research project involved a low level of participation by the researcher through questioning and dialogue with small business owners to



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determine future intervention opportunities for the WEDB and the local university. The findings of this research provide useful evidence-based information to the WEDB and University as they develop plans for supporting small businesses in the region.

Potential research participants were identified from the WEDB database using the criteria that the business is located in Whyalla, is from the retail and services sector and has fewer than twenty employees. In a small firm most of the decision-making and control is in the hands of the owner/manager.

Therefore, the motivation of the owner/manager is a determining factor in the attitude towards the use of the Internet and whether they view technology as an opportunity for business development. Nineteen small business owner/managers were included in the final sample. The

owner/managers were asked to indicate their personal level of experience with using computers in their business, as well as the experience of the majority of their employees. The ability to send and receive e-mails and access and browse the Internet received the highest proportion of responses. The owner/managers have far greater experience with using the Internet than their employees, although their ability to create a web page and knowledge of how to set up an e-commerce site is very limited.

Despite the lack of technical knowledge, the majority of owner/managers use the Internet to buy and/or sell their products.

Supporting the opinion of Blackburn and Athayde (2000) it was



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found that most small businesses use the Internet for communications (email) and searching (getting product information before purchasing). Most business managers believe that e-commerce will be beneficial for increasing profits and improved marketing and that the security threat would not deter them from creating a web presence for their business. It is noteworthy that 35% of the owners were planning to establish a new website for their business. Suitability of the product for sale via e-commerce was mentioned as a prerequisite for success and that some firms provide products or services that are unsuitable for selling via the Internet. This does not mean, however, that these services and products cannot be advertised via a web presence. The most important reason for not having a web presence was a lack of time and/or knowledge - most of the

respondents mentioned some aspect of time pressure during the interviews.

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of support mechanisms that would help them to deploy e-commerce in their business. There is a demand for information in relation to the value and use of e-commerce, as well as assistance to develop and maintain a web presence and e-commerce capabilities (Table 1).



**Table 1** Number and percentage of Respondents reporting demand for Support Mechanisms

Item	N	%
An information session about the value and use of e-commerce	11	58
Practical assistance with the creation of a web presence (design and implementation)	11	58
Assistance to maintain a web presence	11	58
Assistance to develop and maintain e-commerce capabilities	12	63

Although some of the businesses are planning to commence business online, their knowledge of the potential benefits offered by e-commerce is only superficial. The challenge is to stimulate interest among small business owners who do not have a web presence to encourage them to evaluate the possible use of e-commerce. However, small businesses are often managed by busy and practical people who want instant answers to their problems. They need more than a campaign to raise awareness; they need someone to create a web presence and e-commerce site for their business and empower them to be self-sufficient from there onward. These owners have been targeted for initial intervention strategies and support projects by the university and WEDB.



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## **Service learning at UniSA**

Service learning is a particular application of practice based learning. More specifically, it is an educational philosophy that promotes active learning by involving students in community projects. On the UniSA website (2008), the University includes service learning as part of its Teaching and Learning strategy as the university believes that 'the benefits of an individual's education in civilised societies are not simply those of self-interest, but admit an element of mutuality; a recognition that the societal support of higher education for some carries an expectation that the community as a whole will benefit'.

Students learn by doing a project in the community, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of society. The amount students learn is directly proportional to their level of involvement in the learning process, and is linked to a number of active learning strategies, especially collaborative learning and problem-based learning. Service learning requires a relationship based on mutuality - the student and the community both benefit. As business owners are assisted to seek solutions to their problems and to discover new ways of using the Internet to enhance their business, they take ownership of the initiatives. The experience of service learning benefits students in many ways: it builds their resume, builds their self-confidence, provides valuable lessons in citizenship by exposing students to societal issues they might never have encountered before, and it



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connects students to the community outside the university in a way that benefits all stakeholders (Sanderson & Vollmer, 2000).

The responsibility for implementing service learning lies within the various Schools of the university. The process of assisting small businesses with developing a web presence is driven by the university's metropolitan-based School of Computer and Information Science (CIS). Assessment of student performance is a crucial part of a service learning program. The students' accomplishments are assessed on a number of activities, e.g. discussing requirements, iterating through different prototypes, setting up the website, training personnel and documentation (UniSA, 2008).

As was evident from the research, most business managers believe that e-commerce will be beneficial for increasing profits and improved marketing. While almost all the businesses in Whyalla use computers, the majority have Internet connections that they exclusively use for e-mail and only a small number are involved in transaction processing. Although some of the businesses are planning to start doing business online, their knowledge of the potential benefits offered by e-commerce is only superficial and they indicated that they will need assistance to create a web presence and e-commerce site for their business. The Australian Electronic Business Network (1998) agree that businesses should be assisted to establish a web presence for information exchange and marketing purposes, and to implement e-commerce in the cases where it would enhance the



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business. Business development officers within the WEDB and university staff and students with the technical knowledge and skills would be very suitable to play this role.

Stockdale & Standing (2006) found that SMEs have significantly different attitudes towards going online and they cannot be regarded as a homogenous group for e-commerce initiatives. Therefore, specific targeting would enhance participation and lead to more effective use. The underlying problem with business web sites is the focus on technological issues amongst designers and the inevitable lack of online business experience of managers. Designers need to consider the usability of the site, its design and its ability to meet the business goals of the client

(Thelwall, 2000). The challenge is to identify small business owners who do not have a web presence, determine their technical knowledge and skills and then assist them to develop and maintain a web presence to address their specific business needs.

### **Case studies**

Two clients of such service learning projects are i) a boutique that sells women's clothing and accessories to clients of all ages, mainly based in Whyalla and the rest of South Australia and ii) a scuba diving business that provides services in two distinct areas, namely recreational and commercial diving. Whyalla is the only place in the world where cuttlefish are known to



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congregate in large numbers to perform a mating ritual and the recreational diving is focused around this unique phenomenon. This includes diving training and certification, excursions, information sessions and boat charters. The commercial diving activities include underwater work such as welding, cutting, repair work and fish farming.

Small businesses such as these usually approach a web-design and development firm to design and maintain their websites, which could be very costly. In this case the work is done by two Information Technology students of the School of CIS at UniSA. The projects involve the design and implementation of an online payment system that is linked to the existing web site of the

boutique and a brand new web presence for the diving business. These businesses were selected because the owners wish to enhance their businesses through a professional web presence. Both business owners also indicated that they prefer to update and maintain their own web sites to be up to the minute, rather than having to rely on an outside party. Furthermore the client requirements were that student should never assume that the person reading the manual has prior knowledge ( keep language simple and make sure that all steps are clear), give opportunity for techno-savvy people to be more creative, explain the 'why' in many processes and enable the backup of data and maintenance of the health of the equipment.



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The projects require the students to work closely with the small business owners/managers to gather information on their business models, the different products and services, the image of the business, the required functionality of the website, et cetera. In order to address important maintenance issues, the students remain in close contact with the owner for two months after installation to support them with the effective initial management of their web presence.

The clients were extremely pleased with the final product and found it easy to update and maintain the website. Some comments were:

*'This website is a very important business tool for me. I need it for my business to grow and in order to take it to the next step.'*

*'I think it is a great collaboration between the uni and small businesses, because we need help to be competitive.'*

*'The students came up to Whyalla to show me everything. I had a very big headache at the end of the day!'*

### **Lessons learnt**

From the service learning experience, a number of lessons were learnt, of which the major two were that



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i) different people have different understanding and views about the technology.

*'Many business owners in regional areas do not know what technology can do for them. Instead of asking them questions in technical terms, students should put themselves in their shoes and come up with a solution to meet their requirement.'*

(Student)

ii) clients should realise the value of the product being developed and how it could help them in shaping their business.

*'The university should ensure that business clients are really interested in the project and that it is something that they need desperately.'* (Student)

Student reflection is an important aspect of service learning process and the students each had to produce a reflection report. Some of the comments in the reports were:

*'Two different solutions designed for two different types of clients worked and it proved that if we are able to smartly design the solution, business owners are eager to maintain it.'*

*'The concept of service learning is great. The desire to do something for the community was achieved.'*

*'We were able to put the small businesses in regional areas on a global map. Although we will have to wait for another year to see the effect in terms of increase in sales, the whole idea of empowering small businesses in*



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*regional areas to optimally use technology was really satisfactory.'*

## Summary

E-commerce can provide substantial benefits to a business as it enables electronic trading with existing and potential customers. Small business owner/managers in regional areas have specific issues to deal with in their day-to-day running of their businesses, such as lack of technical knowledge within the business, time constraints which limit the optimal use of technology, lack of technical support and an inability to further expand their business within their geographic regions.

Research done by the University of South Australia and the Whyalla Economic Development Board investigated the Internet usage and technical abilities of small businesses in the Whyalla region to determine how the university can assist the owner/managers to develop and maintain a web presence to address their specific business needs. Owners/managers often prefer to update their own web sites, or allow their staff members to maintain different areas of the website by using a simple Content Management Systems (CMS). Training in the maintenance of a web site is therefore an important part of the process, enabling business owners to be self-sufficient after the design and implementation of the web site has been completed. Students from the School of Computer and Information Systems are given the opportunity to do a service learning project in the



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Whyalla business community. Both student and the community benefit from this approach and the process could be used in future to assist other small businesses in Whyalla.

The strength of the approach described by this paper is that collaboration is established between regional small businesses and the local university, not only through research to identify business needs, but also by addressing the needs as expressed in the research findings in a practical way. This approach creates a win-win situation for both businesses, university staff, students and the WEDB and has opened up many opportunities for future collaboration between different stakeholders from both regional and metropolitan areas.

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